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Alexander Cockburn and Jeffrey St. Clair

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THE THIEVES OF THE GREEN ZONE

BY PATRICK COCKBURN

Baghdad.

Soon after the fall of Baghdad last year, an Iraqi working for a US organisation found that the private American security company under contract to the Pentagon to protect him showed decreasing interest in his safety. He discovered the reason was that his guards had become arms dealers. The Iraqi, a returned exile, was living in a house in the Green Zone, the heavily fortified US headquarters in the centre of Baghdad. It was formerly Saddam Hussein's headquarters. The security company guards had discovered caches of valuable high-quality weapons abandoned by his presidential guard.

"They were taking the weapons and storing them in our house before selling them," complained the returned exile. "There were so many explosives there that I did not even dare smoke in the house and I am a chain smoker."

He and a companion took photographs of the heaps of weaponry and later showed them to officials in the Pentagon but they were not interested. Baghdad is awash with stories of the corruption, cronyism and incompetence of the US-led Coalition Provisional Authority, which was dissolved at the end of June. Many of its officials were in Iraq because they were ideological neo-conservatives or were simply well connected to the Republican Party or the White House.

Some were paid astonishing salaries. Ahmed al-Rikaby, in charge of re-establishing Iraqi television, discovered that he was to be assisted by three Iraqi-American media advisers paid \$21,000 (lbs11,600) a month. He recalls: "They
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Presidential Elections

Not as Big a Deal as They Say

BY ALEXANDER COCKBURN

Freshets of creativity and excitement pulsing into the nation's bloodstream, improvements in the general quality of life, have nothing to do with the presidential elections rolling around every four years, which rouse expectations far in excess of what they actually deserve. As registers of liberal or conservative political potency, American presidential elections seldom coincide with shifts in the tempo of political energy across the country. As vehicles for the ventilation of popular concerns, they are hopelessly inadequate, and should be severely downgraded on the entertainment calendars.

Take a couple of profound changes in the quality of life over the past thirty years. You can now buy good coffee, shoulder to shoulder at the coffee stand with a construction worker with hair in a ponytail and a tactful gold ring in his ear, anywhere in America from Baltimore to San Pedro, Key West to Michigan's Upper Peninsula. No American political party ever wrote a commitment to better cappuccino into its platform. At the level of "policy", the World Bank, dominated by the US, threw billions at Vietnam a few years ago to grow bad coffee and undermine what progress has occurred. From the late 60s on, the hippies roasted Arabica coffee beans. Then, when Communism foundered (a collapse that owed nothing to Ronald Reagan) and Uncle Sam had no need to buy the loyalty of its Latin American allies with the guaranteed prices scheduled under the International Coffee Agreement, the market changed, and new coffee growers nosed into the market. The quality of life went up markedly.

The bread's got better too and so have the vegetables, thanks once again to the

hippies, organic farms, farmers' markets and community-supported agricultural networks. No thanks here to party platforms, or presidential candidates, or Congress people, all of whom are in the pay of the big food companies, which have killed more Americans than the Pentagon by a factor of hundreds, and which, having failed to outlaw genuinely organic food, have now captured its name and altered its meaning. Over the past thirty years the meat's got worse, as small wholesale butchers have gone to the wall, bankrupted by the coalition of food regulators and big food processors, the latter industry now dominated by two vast meatpacking combines, Tyson and Smithfield.

You want to see fascism in action in America? Look beyond the Patriot Act, engendered in the Clinton era with the Counter-Terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act of 1996, and consummated by bipartisan agreement after 9/11, 2001. Try your local health department, bearing down on some small business. Better still, visit family court. No candidate goes out on the hustings and pledges to reform family courts so that their actions have some detectable linkage to the US Constitution and the Bill of Rights. No Republican or Democratic platform committee has ever devoted a paragraph to family courts. Yet there, day after day, week after week, relationships are destroyed, children severed irrevocably from parents and extended kin, fathers forbidden access to their children, their wages garnished, their bank accounts looted, staggering fines levied, without the possibility of challenge. (And no, this is not the defeated whine of a
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(**Green Zone** continued from page 1)

had no expertise and never helped me or anybody else.” They got the jobs because they had influential friends in the Pentagon. US officials were extraordinarily arrogant. Few things mattered more to American credibility in Iraq than restoring the electricity supply. Ordinary Iraqis are infuriated by the continuing blackouts. They repeatedly ask why the nation which could send a man to the moon cannot supply Baghdad with more than 12 hours of electricity a day.

“The Americans tried to do everything themselves and they failed,” says Raad al-Haref, the deputy Electricity Minister. “We had to renegotiate with all our foreign suppliers through American companies and this took about eight months.”

Iraqis often say they were astonished by the level of cronyism in Washington’s appointments. Privatisation was a high priority for the US administrator, Paul Bremer. But his chief aide in developing the private sector was a Republican businessman from Connecticut called Thomas Foley who was an assiduous fund-raiser for his party but otherwise had little experience useful in Iraq. The CPA might also, given the political background of its senior members and their ideological commitment to private enterprise, be expected to have encouraged the reopening of the Baghdad stock exchange. In fact it re-

mained shut for over a year at the insistence of the CPA, though an Iraqi stockbroker Hussain Kubba said: “There was no reason it should not have opened soon after the war.”

One of the main reasons the stock exchange, which used to employ 5,000 people, stayed shut could be that the CPA had appointed a 24-year-old Republican to oversee it. He had originally applied for a political job at the White House and had, so far as the Iraqis who dealt with him could see, very limited knowledge of stock exchanges.

Mr Kubba says that what happened to the Baghdad stock exchange “shows the miserable performance of the CPA as a whole and how brilliantly Iraqis can do things when they are allowed to”. He adds proudly that as soon as Iraqis were put back in control they were able to reopen the stock exchange in a few weeks.

Many CPA officials spent short but remunerative tours in Iraq. Others, surprisingly, have returned, evidently smelling money still to be made. Mr Kubba says: “They think they can use the connections they built up before and the fact that they are Americans.”

COULD JOHN DOAR HAVE SAVED CHANEY, GOODMAN AND SCHWERNER?

BY DAVID KOTZ

This is the text of Kotz’s remarks at the at 40th Commemoration of the Killing of James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner held at Mt. Zion Church, Longdale, Neshoba County, Mississippi on June 20, 2004.

In June 1964 I attended the first orientation session for Mississippi Summer Project volunteers in Oxford, Ohio. At that session I was selected to work in Meridian for the summer. On June 19, eight of us left for Mississippi in a station wagon: Jimmy Chaney, Andy Goodman, Micky Schwerner, myself, and 4 other summer volunteers.

We arrived in Meridian on June 20, 1964. The next morning Chaney, Schwerner, and Goodman left to go to Neshoba County to investigate the burning of Mt. Zion Church, which had occurred while we were in Ohio. When the three did not return by 4 P.M., the designated return time, we began making phone calls. We had been trained about what to do in such a situation and we acted based on our training.

Shortly after 4 P.M. we called the Jackson COFO office, and they asked us to phone the local jails in Neshoba County. When we called the jail in Philadelphia, we were told that the three civil rights workers had not been seen, but that was a lie, since in fact at that moment the Deputy Sheriff was holding the three in his jail.

A short while later we phoned the Justice Department in Washington and we spoke with John Doar, who was in charge of Civil Rights enforcement. (Mr. Doar later became nationally prominent as the chief attorney for the Watergate Commission.) We asked him to instruct the FBI to call the local jails to inquire about the three missing civil rights workers. He refused to do so, stating that he could not act until 72 hours had passed, since that was the time that must elapse before a missing persons report can be filed. We told him that this was not a case of someone walking out after a marital dispute, but that three civil rights workers were missing in a part of Mississippi known to have a lot of Ku Klux Klan activity. We begged him to order the FBI to call the local jails. He continued to refuse.

Had John Doar done what we requested, and had the FBI called the jail in Philadelphia, it is possible the Deputy Sheriff Price would have gotten cold feet and not carried out his plan of taking the three civil rights workers out and murdering them. We will never know.

From these events, I learned that the system of racial segregation in Mississippi, and in the rest of the South, with its racial injustice, economic injustice, and violence, was not based just in Mississippi and the South. It was part of the system of power in the U.S. John Doar’s refusal to order the FBI to make those phone calls was a reflection of the fact that the national power structure was reluctant to intervene in the segregationist system, because of the tie between the Southern Democratic Senators and the national Democratic Party.

The sacrifice made that summer forty years ago by the three murdered civil rights workers, together with the example of the African American people of Mississippi rising up against their oppression, inspired me, and many of my generation, to dedicate our lives to ending racial injustice, economic injustice, and violence. These problems have continued to fester in our country and our world, from the Vietnam War up until today. This job is not over. We still need to work to build a different world of racial equality, economic justice, and peace. CP

Editors
ALEXANDER COCKBURN
JEFFREY ST. CLAIR

Business
BECKY GRANT

Design
DEBORAH THOMAS

Counselor
BEN SONNENBERG

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CounterPunch

PO Box 228

Petrolia, CA 95558

1-800-840-3683 (phone)

counterpunch@counterpunch.org

www.counterpunch.org