INTRODUCTION TO GUEST ARTICLE

Project Censored has covered election fraud on several occasions over the past four years. Censored #6, in 2005, reported on the close ties between the electronic voting machine companies and key players in the Republican Party. Censored #3 in 2006 covered the eight million-vote discrepancy between the exit polls and the results of the 2004 presidential election. Additionally, we covered the voter purges in Florida in 2000. Updates on election fraud were completed in the 2007 yearbook. As Larry Beinhart describes below, the corporate media is still deliberately covering up election fraud in the US.

New York Times Perpetuates the Myth that George Bush Won the 2000 Election

by Larry Beinhart

They buried the truth about the 2000 election, and they’re still burying it today.

“In 2001, painstaking postmortems of the Florida count, one by the New York Times and another by a consortium of newspapers, concluded that Mr. Bush would have come out slightly ahead, even if all the votes counted throughout the state had been retallied” (Alessandra Stanley, New York Times, May 23, 2008, in a review of the HBO television movie Recount).

That’s not true.

The New York Times did not do its own recount. It did participate in
a consortium. Here’s what the consortium actually said: “If all the ballots had been reviewed under any of seven single standards, and combined with the results of an examination of overvotes, Mr. Gore would have won, by a very narrow margin” (Ford Fessenden and John M. Broder, *New York Times*, November 12, 2001).

Why did Ms. Stanley make such an important and fundamental error?

It is a common piece of misinformation. Many, many people believe it. Now a few more do, as a result of Ms. Stanley’s review. It is not a trivial matter. Because that misinformation was created by one of the most bizarre, and still completely unexplained, journalistic events in modern times.

Here’s what happened.

George Bush appeared to have won Florida, and therefore the presidency.

The law in Florida was actually quite simple and direct:

\[ f(4) \text{ If the returns for any office reflect that a candidate was defeated or eliminated by one-half of a percent or less of the votes cast for such office . . . the board responsible for certifying the results of the vote on such race or measure shall order a recount of the votes cast with respect to such office or measure.} \]

That is one of the simplest and most clearly written bits of legislation I’ve ever seen anywhere. The Florida court thought so too, and ordered a recount. Then the United States Supreme Court stepped in and shut the recounts down. Bush was left as the victor and became the president. But, presumably, the whole world wanted to know who actually did get the most votes. It would make a great and important story. But getting the truth was too time-consuming and expensive for any single news organization, so a consortium was formed. It consisted of the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, the Tribune Company, the *Washington Post*, the Associated Press, the *St. Petersburg Times*, the *Palm Beach Post* and CNN. It took almost a year and cost more than a million dollars. All the news organizations had the same information: Al Gore got more legal, countable votes than George Bush. Here are the headlines:
If you were still interested after the headlines and bothered to read the stories, it didn’t get much better. I read the *New York Times* article. I missed the key paragraph, until I saw it pointed out in an article by Gore Vidal. The *Times* spent the first three paragraphs supporting the headline, and they explicitly stated that Bush would have won even with a statewide recount. Finally, in the fourth paragraph—if you got that far—was the statement quoted above:

> If all the ballots had been reviewed under any of seven single standards, and combined with the results of an examination of overvotes, Mr. Gore would have won, by a very narrow margin.

There it was. A very simple statement. Al Gore got more votes in Florida than George Bush. It is also very well buried. After reading the statement, I went back and read all the coverage of the study. The *Times* was the worst in terms of active misdirection. It had arcana about chads on both sides of it. Even so, as if in a panic to make sure that nobody might think that it mattered that Al Gore got more votes than George Bush, the *Times* dismissed what the consortium had spent a million dollars to find out: “While these are fascinating findings, they do not represent a real-world situation. There was no set of circumstances in the fevered days after the election that would have
produced a hand recount of all 175,000 overvotes and undervotes.” That would seem to be a fairly obvious interpretation of the law, and it is what was found when someone actually did sit down and count the votes.

The rest of the story detailed a variety of other possible recounts, all partial recounts—these counties, but not those counties—that the Gore lawyers or the Bush lawyers asked for at various times. Bush would have won all of those variations; he just didn’t get the most votes in Florida. Not that the all variations mattered much. The Florida court had ordered a statewide hand recount.

The news story spinners hung their hat on a technicality.

Florida law, as affirmed by the courts, says a vote must be counted if there is “a clear indication of the intent of the voter.” When the questions and lawsuits started, they were about undervotes. An undervote is when a voter has tried to vote but for some reason the counting machines fail to accept it. In Florida, the most common cause was the punching system’s failure to consistently make clear holes in the voting cards. This resulted in hanging, broken, and dented chads. While the machines couldn’t discern the “intent of the voter,” the human eye often could. If only the undervotes were counted, by some standards of judging them, then Bush would have won.

But the consortium recount came across something else: overvotes. An overvote is when someone punches in the name of the candidate, and then, just to make sure, writes their name on the ballot. The machines could only read that the ballots had been marked in two places, and so threw them out.

But a human being could see that the place to vote for Gore had been punched and that Gore’s name had been written in, and could easily determine the intent of the voter. The reporters for the consortium kept track of overvotes, too, and found out that Gore actually won.

Did the people inspecting the votes in the actual recount also notice overvotes? Did they also ignore them? The answer appears to be yes.

Newsweek has uncovered hastily scribbled faxed notes written by Terry Lewis, the plain-speaking, mystery-novel-writing state judge in charge of the Florida recount just hours before the US Supreme Court issued its order, showing that Lewis was actively considering directing the counties to count the so-called “overvotes”: 
Judge, if you would, segregate ‘overvotes’ as you describe and indicate in your final report how many where you determined the clear intent of the voter,” Lewis wrote in a note to Judge W. Wayne Woodard, chairman of the Charlotte County Canvassing Board on the afternoon of December 9, 2000. “I will rule on the issue for all counties, Thanks, Terry Lewis” (Newsweek, “The Final Word?” by Michael Isikoff, November 19, 2001).

That leaves us with a big question.

The largest, most prestigious news organizations in the United States— pretty much in the world—discovered a great and exciting story: The wrong guy was president of the United States. Also, that the Supreme Court of the United States had interfered in an election to frustrate the actual will of the voters. (Justice Antonin Scalia wants us to get over it.) Why did they so distort the story—by using misleading headlines, burying the lead, fostering fog and confusion around the subject—that almost everybody who read or heard the story walked away with the false impression instead of the truth?

There is no hard, on-the-record answer to that. None of the editors or publishers have come forward and said, “This is why we spun the story the way we did, even if it meant pissing away the million dollars we spent to get it.” Nobody has, and nobody can, sue them for gratuitous misinformation and malfeasance and put them in the witness box under oath to get to the bottom of it. There is only speculation.

The story is dated November 12, 2001, just two months after September 11, 2001. We can imagine that they universally felt it was not the time to announce a pretender was on the throne and that the system was rotten, right to the top. But I sure would love to know how they all got on the same page about it. That would make a terrific story. Not as great as the one they threw away, but good enough.

I wrote to the Times and suggested a correction. As of the time that I submitted this update, none has appeared. However, the Gray Lady did correct an article that appeared the same day about the number of its television seasons on Sex and the City. You have to know when accuracy is important.

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LARRY BEINHART is the author of Wag the Dog, The Librarian and Fog Facts: Searching for Truth in the Land of Spin, all available at nationbooks.org. His new novel, Salvation Boulevard, will be published in September by Nation Books. Responses can be sent to beinhart@earthlink.net.

Censored #1 2008

No Habeas Corpus for “Any Person”

In Censored 2008, Project Censored reported on the Military Commissions Act (MCA), signed by George W. Bush on October 17, 2006. Ushering in military commission law for US citizens and non-citizens alike, the MCA effectively does away with habeas corpus rights for “any person” arbitrarily deemed to be an “enemy of the state.” The judgment on who is deemed an “enemy” is solely at the discretion of the President. Robert Parry writes: “Under the cloak of setting up military tribunals to try al-Qaeda suspects and other so-called unlawful enemy combatants, Bush and the Republican-controlled Congress effectively created a parallel legal system for ‘any person’—American citizen or otherwise—who crosses some ill-defined line.” In one of the most chilling public statements ever made by a US Attorney General, Alberto Gonzales opined at a Senate Judiciary Committee hearing on January 18, 2007, “The Constitution doesn’t say every individual in the United States or citizen is hereby granted or assured the right of habeas corpus. It doesn’t say that. It simply says the right shall not be suspended.” (See Chapter 5 for an analysis of habeas corpus in the news.)


Update by Sarah Maddox:
Senator Arlen Spector of Pennsylvania introduced the Habeas Corpus Restoration Act of 2007 (S.185) in January of 2007. The proposed legislation would have repealed provisions of the Military Commissions Act of 2006 that stripped US civilian courts from jurisdiction to hear or
consider applications for a writ of habeas corpus filed by aliens detained as enemy combatants. In September of 2007, the bill was defeated with a vote of 56–43. Of the forty-three votes against the bill, forty-two were Republican and the remaining vote was cast by an Independent, Senator Joe Lieberman of Connecticut. Additional bills were introduced into the House of Representatives in 2007 by Representative Jerrold Nadler of New York, including the Restoring the Constitution Act (H.R.1415) in March, and the Habeas Corpus Restoration Act (H.R.1416) introduced in June. Both of these bills have been referred to Subcommittees.

On June 12, 2008, The Supreme Court ruled that foreign terrorism suspects held at Guantanamo Bay have rights under the Constitution to challenge their detention in US civilian courts. In its third rebuke of the Bush administration’s treatment of prisoners, the court ruled 5-4 that the government is violating the rights of prisoners being held indefinitely and without charges at the US naval base in Cuba. The court’s liberal justices were in the majority.

Justice Anthony Kennedy, writing for the court, said, “The laws and Constitution are designed to survive, and remain in force, in extraordinary times.”

Sources

Censored #2 2008

Bush Moves Closer to Martial Law

On October 17, 2006, President Bush signed the John Warner Defense Authorization Act of 2007. One of its goals was the revision of the Posse Comitatus Act of 1878, which constructed strict regulations for the use of military troops as domestic law enforcement. The new Defense Authorization Act gave the President the ability to order military troops to any place in the country, without the permission of any state governor or local authorities, in order to “suppress public disorder.” The following are listed as justifiable events for the invocation of
martial law: natural disasters, epidemics/serious public health issues, terrorist attacks, or any time domestic violence occurs to the extent that the state or local authorities can no longer in control the situation. Senator Leahy was one of the few to speak out against this legislation, stating “There is good reason for the constructive friction in existing law when it comes to martial law declarations. Using the military for law enforcement goes against one of the founding tenets of our democracy. We fail our Constitution, neglecting the rights of the States, when we make it easier for the President to declare martial law and trample on local and state sovereignty.”


**Update by Sarah Maddox:**
There were two significant updates to this story in 2007-2008. The good news is that in January 2008, President Bush signed into law the annual defense authorization bill that included the Leahy-Bond National Guard Empowerment reforms introduced into the Senate in 2007. In addition to the reforms being passed, Leahy also achieved repeal of the so-called “Insurrection Act Rider,” attached to the 2006 defense policy bill, which had made it easier for presidents to take control of the National Guard from governors and to use the US military for domestic law enforcement. In 2007, in a Senate Judiciary Committee hearing organized by Leahy, key national military and law enforcement officials testified against the 2006 policy change. The nation’s governors also unanimously supported the Leahy-Bond bill to repeal the Insurrection Act changes.

There was bad news as well, however, in the form of a new document entitled “National and Homeland Security Presidential Directive” (NSPD-51/HSPD-20) which was released on May 9, 2007. In the National Security Presidential Directive, Bush laid out his plan for dealing with a “catastrophic emergency.” It defines a “catastrophic emergency” as “any incident, regardless of location, that results in extraordinary levels of mass casualties, damage, or disruption severely affecting the US population, infrastructure, environment, economy, or government function.” The document emphasizes the need to ensure “the continued function of our form of government under the Constitution, including the functioning of the three separate branches of
government.” It continues: “The President shall lead the activities of the Federal Government for ensuring constitutional government.” The document is vague about the need to work closely with the other two branches, saying there will be “a cooperative effort among the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of the Federal Government.” However, this effort would be “coordinated by the President, as a matter of comity with respect to the legislative and judicial branches and with proper respect for the constitutional separation of powers.”

Sources

Censored #3 2008
AFRICOM: US Military Control of Africa’s Resources

In February 2007, the White House announced the formation of the US African Command (AFRICOM), a new unified Pentagon command center in Africa, to be established by September 2008. This military penetration of Africa is being presented as a humanitarian guard in the Global War on Terror. However, critics charge that the real objective is the procurement and control of Africa’s oil and its global delivery systems.

The most significant and growing challenge to US dominance in Africa is China. An increase in Chinese trade and investment in Africa threatens to substantially reduce US political and economic leverage in that resource-rich continent. The political implication of an economically emerging Africa in close alliance with China is resulting in a new cold war in which AFRICOM will be tasked with achieving full-spectrum military dominance over Africa.

From the Censored 2008 update by Bryan Hunt:
By spring 2007, US Department of Energy data showed that the United
States now imports more oil from the continent of Africa than from the country of Saudi Arabia.

The DOD states that a primary component of AFRICOM’s mission will be to professionalize indigenous militaries to ensure stability, security, and accountable governance throughout Africa’s various states and regions. Stability refers to establishing and maintaining order, and accountability, of course, refers to US interests. This year alone, 1,400 African military officers are anticipated to complete International Military Education and Training programs at US military schools.


**Update by Carmela Rocha:**
After the White House announced the formation of the US Africa Command (AFRICOM) in February 2007, the National Conference of Black Lawyers (NCBL) decided to take a closer look at its mission and goals. After a year of inspection, NCBL has concluded that AFRICOM violates the sovereignty of African nations by interrupting international law standards that protect rights to self-determination and that prohibit unprovoked military aggression. It suggests that the current administration is more likely interested in working through AFRICOM to push forward three primary goals. First, it wants to open Africa as another front in the Administration’s war on “terrorism.” Second, it intends to protect and expand US access to African oil; mineral wealth; and other raw materials. Third, it wants to put the US in a better military position in order to compete with China for domination of Africa’s resources.

According to Gerald LeMelle, executive director of Africa Action, an organization in Washington DC that supports peace and development in Africa, “neither African governments nor the UN were consulted on the announcement of AFRICOM.” One of the purposes of AFRICOM is to identify and develop African governments that will function as US surrogates. So far the concept of AFRICOM has been received with skepticism and hostility by significant African governments. The only country that has expressed a clear willingness to provide a location for AFRICOM headquarters is Liberia. This is said to be the result of a quid pro quo in which the US is willing to cover Liberia’s financial debts.

 Currently, the amount of oil imported by the US from the Persian
Gulf is about 16 percent of its total imports. By the year 2015, it is projected that 25 percent of US oil imports will be from West Africa. The two largest oil producers on the continent, Nigeria and Angola in West Africa, receive the most US aid.

Sources

Censored #4 2008
Frenzy of Increasingly Destructive Trade Agreements

The Oxfam report, “Signing Away the Future,” revealed that the US and European Union (EU) are vigorously pursuing increasingly destructive regional and bilateral agreements, outside the auspices of the WTO. These agreements are requiring enormous irreversible concessions from developing countries, while offering almost nothing in return. During 2006, more than 100 developing countries were involved in Free Trade Agreement (FTA) or Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT) negotiations. “An average of two treaties are signed every week,” the report says, “Virtually no country, however poor, has been left out.”

Double standards in the intellectual-property rights chapters of most trade agreements are glaring. As new agreements limit developing countries’ access to patented technology and medicines—while failing to protect traditional knowledge—the public-health consequences are staggering. The US-Colombia FTA is expected to reduce access to medicines by 40 percent and the US-Peru FTA is expected to leave 700,000 to 900,000 Peruvians without access to affordable medicines. New rules also pose a threat to essential services as FTAs allow foreign investors to take ownership of healthcare, education, water and public utilities.

From the Censored 2008 update by Laura Rusu of Oxfam international:

In the United States, the new Democratic leadership in Congress recently negotiated changes in the areas of labor, environment, and intellectual property in regard to access to medicines that are to be...
incorporated into the completed FTAs awaiting Congressional ratification. The US Administration hopes to bring FTAs with Peru, Panama, Colombia and Korea to a vote this year, although it remains doubtful whether there would be sufficient Congressional support to move the latter two.


Update by Kat Pat Crespan:
The trade agreement with Peru passed in November 2007 in Congress with a vote of 285–132. It is likely that this ratification will ease the passage of other FTAs in Latin America. The ultimate goal is to have a US-dominated Free Trade Area of the Americas while blocking the development of any alternative agreements in Latin American countries. According to Amazon Watch, passage of this agreement permits oil companies to drill in the Peruvian Amazon, which may cause massive deforestation and road construction, failing to protect endangered species. US corporations that stand to benefit include Hunt Oil, ConocoPhillips, Occidental Petroleum and Newmont Mining.

As for the Colombian FTA, Oxfam America has called upon Members of the US Congress to reject the deal since it will “undermine development in Colombia and national security interests here at home.” Though the bill was supposed to help the local communities, it has only further subjugated them. Poor farmers who cannot compete with US exports to sell their food crops, such as corn and rice, will have few other options to survive. Calling on the US Congress to reject the Colombia Free Trade Agreement, Oxfam said the deal would stall development and fail to reduce poverty, affecting women, indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities. Instead, it says, the US needs a new trade policy that will expand economic opportunity for the poor and be inclusive of the most economically disadvantaged nations.

In Costa Rica, the United States campaigned to pass the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA). A delegation from the US-based Alliance for Responsible Trade and the Stop CAFTA Coalition said the passage is an example of dirty campaigning aimed at undermining publicly-run utility, phone, and health care systems. “We are not accepting the results of the referendum because of the way in which
the Costa Rican and US governments behaved during the final three days of the referendum,” said Jorge Arguedas Mora, President of ANTTEC union electrical and telephone workers and coordinator of the No CAFTA campaign. “Both violated laws regulating the referendum, the constitution, and even existing international agreements. The media colluded in the government manipulation and unfortunately the Supreme Electoral Tribunal looked the other way.”

Throughout Africa, regions have continued to say no to agreements such as the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) proposed by western countries. While the World Trade Organization argued that the trade agreements are necessary at the EU-Africa summit in late 2007, the president of Senegal, Abdoulaye Wade, refused to sign and stormed out of the meeting. South Africa’s Thabo Mbeki supported his stand, as did the country of Namibia. This was a bold move, considering that an increase in EU customs duties would make it impossible for Namibia to export or continue to produce beef. The African countries’ refusals were met with support from French President Nicolas Sarkozy, saying he was in favor of globalization but not the despoilment of countries that have nothing left. Ultimately, the summit ended in failure when social movement and trade union organizations joined in the mutiny against the proposed EU agreements.

As of June 2008, the South Korea FTA is still in the negotiations process and waiting for approval before the end of 2008. Former President Roh Moo-hyun was hoping for ratification on February 26, 2008, when the nation’s National Assembly took place, but that did not happen. As of April 22, 2008, President Lee Myung-bak was confident the US Congress would ratify the free trade agreement with South Korea later in 2008. He was convinced after hearing that “several opponents in the US Senate and House are expected to change their position toward the FTA on account of the envisioned benefits for the United States.” While the deal has not yet been ratified by either country, Lee’s administration hopes to have it ratified before the end of Bush’s term in January 2009.

Sources
Human Traffic Builds US Embassy in Iraq

The US embassy in Iraq will be the most expensive and heavily fortified embassy in the world—and it is being built by a Kuwait contractor repeatedly accused of using forced labor trafficked from South Asia under US contracts. By using bait-and-switch recruiting practices, thousands of citizens from countries that have banned travel or work in Iraq are being tricked and smuggled into brutal and inhumane labor camps, and subjected to months of forced servitude—all in the middle of the US-controlled Green Zone.

On April 4, 2006, the Pentagon issued a contracting directive following an investigation that officially confirmed that contractors in Iraq, many working as subcontractors to Halliburton/KBR, were illegally confiscating worker passports, using deceptive, bait-and-switch hiring practices, and charging recruiting fees that indebted low-paid migrant workers for many months or even years to their employers. However, the Pentagon has yet to announce, any penalty for those found to be in violation of US labor trafficking laws or contract requirements.

The problem of labor abuse has been found to be “widespread” among contractors in the theater of war in Iraq. Unfortunately, not one contractor has been penalized; in fact, many are being rewarded with new US-funded contracts.


Update by Melissa Willenborg:
Nicknamed “George W.’s Palace,” the US Embassy in Iraq is likely to become an enduring symbol of the worst excesses of the Bush administration. Initially scheduled to launch in January 2007, opening of the Embassy was delayed until June, then September, and now vaguely sometime late in 2008. Yet there has been no public explanation for these continued postponements.

The embassy will occupy 104 acres. It will be six times larger than the UN complex in New York. It is ten times the size of the new US
Embassy being built in Beijing, which, at ten acres, is America’s second-largest embassy.

In December 2007, a senior State Department official certified that embassy construction was “substantially complete,” but department inspectors found “major deficiencies” at the unoccupied embassy, according to their inspection report. “It appears that the State Department is concealing from Congress basic information about the status of the embassy project and the activities of officials and contractors involved. This continued intransigence is inappropriate,” wrote Rep. Henry Waxman, who threatened to call the State Department official before his panel.

The White House originally requested $1.3 billion to build the compound, but Congress allotted $592 million for the project in 2005. Now, according to documentation provided to Congress by the State Department, an additional $144 million is needed for completion and the embassy may cost as much as $1 billion each year to operate.

In addition, construction has been complicated by a dispute between Ambassador to Iraq Ryan Crocker and James L. Golden—the top Washington-based official charged with the project’s oversight. Golden has been barred from Iraq by Crocker for allegedly destroying evidence in the case of an embassy worker’s death.

After the death of the embassy worker, and the possible violations of other workers, attorneys Andrew Kline and Michael J. Frank in the Justice Department’s civil rights division were charged with investigating allegations of labor trafficking. On September 18, 2007, Rep. Henry Waxman, chairman of the Oversight and Government Reform Committee, wrote a fourteen-page letter to Howard Krongard, inspector general at the State Department, requesting Krongard’s cooperation with an investigation into allegations regarding his conduct. Howard Krongard was subsequently removed from the State Department at the end of January, 2008.

The embassy in Baghdad represents a sea change in US diplomacy. While it is larger in scope than other US embassies opening around the world, it is hardly unique. Since al Qaeda bombed the American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998, the State Department has been aggressively replacing obsolete or vulnerable facilities with ones designed under a program it calls Standard Embassy Design. The United States opened fourteen newly built embassies in 2007 alone, and long-range plans call for seventy-six more, including twelve to be completed in 2008-09. The result will be a radical redesign of the diplo-
matic landscape—not only in Baghdad, but in Bamako, Belmopan, Cape Town, Dushanbe, Kabul, Lomé, and elsewhere.

If architecture reflects the society that creates it, the new US embassy in Baghdad makes a devastating comment about America’s global outlook.

Sources

Censored #6 2008
Operation FALCON Raids
Under the code-name Operation FALCON (Federal and Local Cops Organized Nationally), three federally coordinated mass arrests occurred between April 2005 and October 2006. In an unprecedented move, more than 30,000 fugitives were arrested in the largest dragnets in the nation’s history. The operations directly involved over 960 agencies (state, local and federal) and were the brainchild of Attorney General Alberto Gonzales and US Marshals’ Director Ben Reyna.

Operation FALCON II, carried out the week of April 17-23, 2006, arrested another 9,037 individuals from twenty-seven states, mostly west of the Mississippi River. Operation FALCON III, conducted during the week of October 22-28, 2006, netted another 10,733 fugitives in twenty-four states east of the Mississippi River.

From the Censored 2008 update by Mike Whitney:
Operation FALCON presents the first time in US history that all of the domestic police agencies have been put under the direct control of the federal government. The Operation serves little purpose but to centralize power and establish the basic contours of an American police state. It is not an effective way of apprehending criminals.

Update by Darcy Newton:
According to the US Marshals’ official web site, “The emphasis centered on gang related crimes, homicides, crimes involving use of a weapon, crimes against children and the elderly, crimes involving sexual assaults, organized crime and drug related fugitives, and other crimes of violence.” As of June 2008, Operation Falcon has largely consisted of arresting 36,516 minor criminals and continues on a regional basis. According to the Operation Falcon web site, “FALCON 2007 continued to promote these important efforts, but took on a more focused, long-term approach by targeting twenty-seven cities and regions experiencing elevated levels of criminal activity. Working in conjunction with the Department of Justice, the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, and other agencies, the US Marshals’ Service identified and targeted the communities most in need of assistance. The Marshals then reached out to their many partners in federal, state, and local law enforcement to coordinate a sustainable push designed to safely apprehend the maximum number of violent predators.”

**FUGITIVES ARRESTED**

FALCON I* (April 4–10, 2005): 10,340
FALCON II (April 13–17, 2006): 9,030
FALCON III (October 22–28, 2006): 10,733
FALCON 07: 6,406

**TOTAL ARRESTED: 36,516**

**BREAKDOWN OF FUGITIVES ARRESTED BY AGENCY**

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* Operation covered entire United States

**Source**
In a May 2, 2008 press release, Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton joined a coalition of her colleagues in calling on the Senate Appropriations Committee to provide funding for the Adam Walsh Act to strengthen the United States Marshals Service (USMS) and aid their programs to apprehend child predators and other dangerous felons. Clinton’s release stated, “Operation Falcon is a successful national fugitive apprehension initiative, which has resulted in the collective capture of more than 36,500 dangerous fugitive felons.” (States News Service, May 2, 2008 Friday)

The AP reported on November 26, 2007 that Washington State’s Governor Chris Gregoire and law enforcement in five counties were launching Operation Crackdown to catch dozens of sex offenders who are back on the streets, but haven’t registered with authorities. The state program was patterned after the US Marshals’ Operation Falcon. The cost, including overtime, could reach $100,000.

Source

Censored #7 2008

Behind Blackwater Inc.

As was well-covered in the latter part of 2007, Blackwater Inc. is the largest of the three US private military companies. The company is headed by Erik Prince, a neo-conservative ex–Navy Seal. Created in 1996 as a private military training facility, last year it boasted approximately 20,000 soldiers, a fleet of twenty military aircraft and is considered to be the most powerful mercenary group in the world.

Private contractors currently constitute the second-largest “force” in Iraq. At last count, there were about 100,000 contractors in Iraq, of which 48,000 work as private soldiers, according to a Government Accountability Office report. These private contractors, including Blackwater, have operated largely without any oversight as it is unclear if they should fall under civilian or military law. This means that Blackwater soldiers can do as they please without fear of legal retribution.

As of 2007, the privatization of the US military was well underway. The Center for Public Integrity reported that since 1994 the US Defense Department has entered into contracts worth $300 billion with twelve private military contractors. These contractors do everything from peeling potatoes to fighting on the front lines.
Update by Luke Plasse:
Blackwater has had a busy year. Reports filed by the company exposed 195 “escalating force” incidents in which Blackwater admitted to firing shots in Iraq. In 80 percent of these incidents, Blackwater said that they fired the first shot despite their contract saying that they can only use defensive force. In many such cases, Blackwater contractors fired from moving vehicles and did not take the time to assist the wounded or check for civilian casualties.

In one case, a drunken Blackwater contractor shot and killed the guard of Iraqi Vice President Adil Abd-al-Mahdi. Within thirty-six hours of the shooting, Blackwater was allowed to transport the contractor out of Iraq in order to avoid any consequences. It was recommended that Blackwater make a payment to the man’s next-of-kin in an attempt to quiet the situation. Charge d’Affaires recommended that $250,000 be given to the grieving family but the Department’s Diplomatic Security Service thought that this was too much. They warned that such an amount could result in Iraqis trying to get themselves killed. In the end, $15,000 was given to the family.

On September 16, 2007, Blackwater personnel reported killing a number of armed Iraqi civilians including a mother and son. Blackwater claims to have acted in self-defense, only returning fire after being fired upon by armed Iraqi civilians. An investigation was launched after discrepancies were found in Blackwater’s report. The investigation uncovered another version of the September 16 eventsthat directly opposes Blackwater’s account of what happened that day. According to reports, Blackwater personnel were attempting to clear a path for their convoy when a Kia sedan began slowly driving towards them on the wrong side of the road. The car did not heed yells or warning shots fired by the Blackwater mercenaries. The men then opened fire on the car, killing the occupants, including a mother and her son. Following this, Blackwater began using non-lethal stun grenades to clear the area. Mistaking the stun grenades for real grenades, nearby Iraqi Army Soldiers began to fire on the Blackwater men. Reports differ, but approximately seventeen Iraqi civilians were killed in the resulting gunfight.

Crimes committed by US contractors operating in a war zone still
fall into a gray area. Any soldier who is part of the US armed forces is subject to a code of laws that is separate from civilian law. These laws are appropriately called military law and they govern such things as what a soldier can and cannot do when acting in a war zone. The problem arises when deciding which set of laws to apply to Blackwater, who are not part of the armed forces, but are not quite civilians either.

**Costs to the Taxpayer**

The cost of a Blackwater mercenary is significantly higher than that of an analogous army officer. According to contract documents, Blackwater bills the United States government $1,222 a day for one individual security specialist. That works out to around $439,920 annually. The jobs these individuals do would usually be done by army sergeants whose pay ranges between $140 and $190 per day. On an annual basis, the salary, housing, and subsistence pay of an Army Sergeant ranges from $51,100 to $69,350 per year.

Despite the significantly increased cost of hiring Blackwater over the use of the US Army, Blackwater’s contracts continue to grow larger and larger. In 2001 the US paid $736,906 in Blackwater contracts. In 2006 the US paid $593.6 million in Blackwater contracts, an 800-fold increase. In total, Blackwater has received over a billion dollars from the federal government during the years 2001 to 2006. Of this total, 51 percent of the money was rewarded in the form of no-bid contracts, discouraging even cursory competition between Blackwater and its rivals.

Questions are being raised about whether there is a benefit to using Blackwater contractors that justifies the extra expense. Some people in congress see it as a misappropriation of taxpayer money and maintain that this reason alone is enough to put a stop to the use of Blackwater contractors.

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**Censored #8 2008**

**KIA: The US Neoliberal Invasion of India**

Farmers’ cooperatives in India are defending the nation’s food security and the future of Indian farmers against the corporate invasion of genetically modified (GM) seed. When India’s Prime Minister Singh met with President Bush in March 2006 to finalize nuclear agreements, they also signed the Indo-US Knowledge Initiative on
Agriculture (KIA), backed by Monsanto, Archer Daniels Midland (ADM), and Wal-Mart. The KIA allows for the acquisition of India’s seed sector by Monsanto, of its trade sector by giant agribusiness ADM and Cargill, and its retail sector by Wal-Mart.

Over the past decade, with the involvement of Monsanto, ADM and Cargil in India’s agriculture sector, as many as 28,000 Indian farmers have committed suicide as a result of debt incurred from failed GM crops and competition with subsidized US crops.

Through the KIA, Monsanto and the US have asked for unhindered access to India’s gene banks, along with a change in India’s intellectual property laws to allow patents on seeds and genes, and to dilute provisions that protect farmers’ rights. KIA has also paved the way for Wal-Mart’s plans to open 500 stores in India, starting in August 2007, which will compound the outsourcing of India’s food supply and threaten the livelihoods of fourteen million small family vendors.


**From the Censored 2008 update by Vandana Shiva:**
The Indo-US Knowledge Initiative on Agriculture impacts 650 million farmers of India and 40 million small retailers and it is redefining the relationships between people in the two biggest democracies in the world.

A new movement on retail democracy has begun in India that is bringing together small shopkeepers, street hawkers, trade unions and farmers’ unions. On August 9, 2007, which is Quit India Day, the movement organized actions across the country, telling Walmart to Quit India.

For more information, visit our website at www.navdanya.org.

**Update by Michele Salvail:**
Anuradha Mittal writes in Earth Island Journal Spring 2008, “After years of speculation, the figure is now official: Between 1997 and 2005, nearly 150,000 farmers in India committed suicide, according to data from the National Crime Records Bureau. Many farmers’ organizations
believe the number of suicides to be even greater. The number of farmers whose livelihoods have been devastated by debts, crop failures, government indifference, and skewed global trade policies is possibly much higher. Every five hours, one farmer commits suicide somewhere in the country,” Devinder Sharma, a food and trade policy analyst based in New Delhi, writes in an e-mail. “Farmers are failing because of the anti-farming policies that are being propagated. The tragedy is that the hand that feeds the nation is being deliberately chopped off.”

Mittal goes on to say, “the free trade system continues to expose Indian farmers to lopsided global trade rules under which poorer countries are forced to open their markets while richer countries are able to maintain lavish export subsidies. At the same time, the WTO and World Bank agreements have allowed multinational corporations, such as Monsanto, to penetrate the Indian seed market; the sophisticated marketing of genetically modified seeds and other expensive inputs has dramatically raised Indian farmers’ costs even as they try to survive amid harsh new competition.”

Privatization of America’s Infrastructure

Over twenty states have enacted legislation allowing public-private partnerships to build and run highways. Investment firms including Goldman Sachs, Morgan Stanley, and the Carlyle Group are lobbying states to sell off public highway and transportation infrastructure. Investors, most often foreign companies, are charging tolls and insisting on “noncompete” clauses that limit governments from expanding or improving nearby roads.

On June 29, 2006, Indiana’s governor Mitch Daniels announced that Indiana had received $3.8 billion from a foreign consortium made up of the Spanish construction firm Cintra and the Macquarie Infrastructure Group (MIG) of Australia. In exchange the state handed over operation of a 157-mile Indiana toll road for the next seventy-five years. With the consortium collecting the tolls, which will eventually rise far higher, the privatized road should generate $11 billion for MIG-Cintra over the course of the contract.

Across the nation, there is now talk of privatizing the New York Thruway to the Ohio, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey turnpikes, as well
as of inviting the private sector to build and operate highways and bridges from Alabama to Alaska.

The Bush Administration and private contractors plan to build a huge ten-lane NAFTA Super Highway through the heart of the US along Interstate 35, from the Mexican border at Laredo, Texas to the Canadian border north of Duluth, Minnesota, financed largely through public-private partnerships. The Texas Department of Transportation will oversee the Trans-Texas Corridor as the first leg of the NAFTA Super Highway, which will be leased to the Cintra consortium as a privately operated toll road.


**Update by Peter Phillips:**
The continuing effort by private corporations to acquire public infrastructure was in the news in 2007-2008:

The *Boston Herald* reported on September 11, 2007 that Governor Deval Patrick was launching a detailed examination of options for leasing the state’s cash-starved bridges and roads to private companies.

The *Dallas Morning News* June 27, 2007, detailed efforts by the Texas Transportation Commission to overrule a local commission regarding the privatization of State Highway 121 in a deal with the Spanish company Cintra. On August 23, 2007, the Texas Transportation Commission rescinded and terminated the comprehensive development agreement with Cintra to develop SH 121 (see [http://www.txdot.gov/services/texas_turnpike_authority/sh121_prop_files.ht](http://www.txdot.gov/services/texas_turnpike_authority/sh121_prop_files.ht)).

After the August 1, 2007 collapse of the Interstate 35W Bridge in Minneapolis there were some efforts to privatize the bridge after reconstruction (*Star Tribune*, August 15, 2007).

*Democracy Now!* covered the issue on August 3, interviewing Daniel Schulman and James Ridgeway on the privatization issues after the Minneapolis bridge collapse. Ridgeway and Schulman claimed that efforts to prevent increasing taxes are a deliberate attempt to force the selling off or our public infrastructures.

Bloomberg.com reported on May 19, “Pennsylvania officials said a
$12.8 billion bid from Citigroup Inc. and Abertis Infraestructuras SA won an auction to lease the state’s only toll road (the Pennsylvania Turnpike) in what would be the biggest agreement of its kind in the US. New York-based Citigroup, the biggest US bank by assets, and Barcelona-based Abertis, which operates toll roads in Europe and Latin America, topped two other offers. The next-highest bid was $12.1 billion by New York’s Goldman Sachs Group Inc. and Transurban Group, Australia’s second-largest toll-road operator” (see http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=20601103&sid=aa7Keg1ckcgE&refer=us).

The claim by author Jerome Corsi that the Bush administration supports a NAFTA Superhighway, while true from a private interests perspective, have been somewhat discredited by an article in The Nation magazine, by Christopher Hayes August 9, 2007. According to Hayes the NAFTA Superhighway story became a hyper-conservative conspiracy theory of mythic proportion. However, as with many theories, there were some elements of truth. The North America’s Super Corridor Organization (NASCO) does exist and proudly claims that they “assisted in the lobbying effort to bring hundreds of millions of dollars to the NASCO Corridor since 1994. The group’s efforts resulted in High Priority Corridor designated status for all 1,500 miles of I-35 from Laredo, Texas to Duluth, MN in 1995, and inclusion of same within the National Highway System under the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA).” NASCO has in fact received some money from the US Government (see http://www.nascocorridor.com/commondetail.asp?id=2168).

However, the US government denies supporting the NAFTA super highway. In a State Department press release April 22, 2008, Walter Bastian, Deputy Assistant Secretary for the Western Hemisphere, US Department of Commerce; Alfonso Martinez-Fonts, is quoted as saying,

Are we as a federal government planning a NAFTA super highway? No. . . . Have we been transparent in the process? I think the answer is absolutely yes, even though we’ve been accused of holding meetings with our Canadian and Mexican counterparts behind closed doors, private meetings. [Inaudible] from the private sector. . . . Let me add to that, however, that there are a number of communities, community leaders,
governors and mayors out there that see business development and job creation as a good thing. Surprising, huh? They are very happy, recognizing the benefits of trade, trade to their communities, jobs, doing everything they can, one to attract foreign investment in there; two, to attract foreign business in there.

Censored #10 2008

Vulture Funds Threaten Poor Nations’ Debt Relief

Vulture funds, under the guise of “distressed-debt investors,” have been taking aid money from poor countries through a loophole in the law. Vulture funds are western companies that buy debts from investors at a fraction of the cost, and then sue the debtors for the original amount owed. This business practice, which typically liquidates assets of defaulted companies, has recently been extended to reap the money developing nations reclaim through debt cancellation initiatives. In February 2007, Donegal International (owned by American Michael Sheehan and based in the US Virgin Islands) sued Zambia for $40 million, a debt it bought for $4 million, and was awarded $15 million by the English High Court.


Update by April Pearce:
Following the English High Court’s ruling, and Greg Palast’s reporting, members of the British Parliament and the US Congress voiced opposition to vulture fund investing in developing countries. Recognizing Donegal International exploited British law, eighty-five members of British Parliament demanded Gordon Brown change it to prohibit vulture fund activities in poor nations. Across the Atlantic, US Congress members John Conyers and Donald Payne, angered by the misappropriation of African development funds, confronted George Bush. They took him to task on the issue including his relationship with the largest vulture fund owner: Paul Singer, his largest financial donor. Legislators from both countries urged their leaders “to close the legal loopholes
that allow ‘Vulture Funds’ to flourish,” at the G-8 summit later in the year. No direct action was taken at the Summit to halt vulture fund activities.

In May 2007, a British Court ruled that Zambian President Chaluba must pay back $46 million that he stole from Zambia’s Treasury. At this time the US Government started to look into whether Michael Sheehan violated the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act because he admitted money he donated to President Chaluba’s charity (upon Chaluba’s acceptance of Zambia’s debt to Donegal) might have been used in a corrupt manner.

The Jubilee Act for Responsible Lending and Expanded Debt Cancellation, H.R 2634/ S. 2166, was introduced to Congress in June and to the Senate in October of 2007. The Jubilee Act increases the number of countries eligible for debt cancellation and stipulates accountability and transparency from creditors and debtors. The House of Representatives passed the Act, by 285-132, on April 16, 2008. The Senate Committee on Foreign Relations held hearings on The Jubilee Act April 24, 2008, and as of June 2008, it is in committee. Under current debt relief policies, established at the G-8 Summit of 2005, eighteen of the forty countries eligible for relief do not receive it due to their unwillingness to implement harsh economic conditions, including privatizing basic services, to qualify for debt cancellation. The Jubilee Act extends debt cancellation to all of the sixty-seven countries that need it to reach the Millennium Development Goals, without imposing such conditions.

Sources

Censored #12 2008

Another Massacre in Haiti by UN Troops

On December 22, 2006, eyewitness testimony confirmed indiscriminate killings by UN forces in Haiti’s Cité Soleil community. Reports on the ground indicated that this was a collective punishment against the community for a massive demonstration of Lavalas supporters in which about ten thousand people rallied for the return of President Aristide in clear condemnation of the foreign military occupation of their country. According to residents, UN forces attacked their neighborhood in the
early morning, killing more than thirty people, including women and children. Footage taken by Haiti Information Project (HIP) videographers shows unarmed civilians dying as they tell of extensive gunfire from UN peacekeeping forces (MINUSTAH). Frantz Michel Guerrier, spokesman for the Committee of Notables for the Development of Cité Soleil based in the Bois Neuf zone, said “It is very difficult for me to explain to you what the people of Bois Neuf went through on December 22, 2006—almost unexplainable. It was a true massacre. We counted more than sixty wounded and more than twenty-five dead, among [them] infants, children, and young people.”

“We saw helicopters shoot at us, our houses broken by the tanks,” Guerrier told IPS. “We heard detonations of the heavy weapons. Many of the dead and wounded were found inside their houses. I must tell you that nobody had been saved, not even the babies. The Red Cross was not allowed to help people. The soldiers had refused to let the Red Cross in categorically, in violation of the Geneva Convention.” Several residents told IPS that MINUSTAH, after conducting its operations, evacuated without checking for wounded.


**Update by Sarah Maddox:**
The situation in Haiti has become increasingly oppressive as political tensions multiply. Riots erupted in April 2008 over high food and fuel prices, which left at least six people dead and augmented the continuing plea to have Aristide returned to the Haitian people. The Miami Herald reported in February 2008 that five thousand supporters of Aristide marched through Port-au-Prince to demand the return of their president. Chanting Aristide’s name and waving signs, marchers took their protest to the gates of the US Embassy in Port-au-Prince and Haiti’s National Palace to remind President Rene Preval—a one-time supporter of the former priest now living in South Africa—that Aristide’s Fanmi Lavalas party helped elect him two years ago. “I believe he heard us,” said marcher Jean-Michel Porfil, thirty-two. “The people . . . are hungry. They don’t have work, but they protested because their president isn’t here. We are asking for him to be returned.”
In April 2008, an article in The Guardian of London reported that the United Nations peacekeepers fired rubber bullets and used tear gas to control mobs rioting over rising food prices in Haiti. Food prices have risen 40 percent on average since the middle of 2007, causing unrest around the world, with riots seen in countries such as Burkina Faso, Cameroon and Egypt. For months, Haitians have compared their hunger pains to “eating Clorox [bleach]” because of the burning feeling in their stomachs. The World Food Programme (WFP) made an emergency appeal for donations for Haiti. “Riots in Haiti underline the additional need for lifesaving food assistance,” said WFP executive director Josette Sheeran. “At this critical time, we need to stand with the people of Haiti and other countries hardest hit by rising food prices.”

The situation in Haiti was thrown into further confusion on April 12, when the Haitian parliament passed a vote of no confidence against then–Prime Minister Jacques-Edouard Alexis, led by rightists in Haiti’s parliament. President Preval, following controversial UN-sponsored elections in 2006, had appointed Alexis as Prime Minister. Alexis served for an administration touted as a coalition government, backed by the United States and the international community, that included members of the so-called opposition that forced former president Jean-Bertrand Aristide into exile in 2004. Alexis’ administration gave the final appearance of a legal veneer to the ouster of Aristide and his political movement known as Lavalas by co-opting former grass-roots leaders into his government.

But observers fear that the proposed alternative may be worse. On May 25, after some political shuffling, Préval nominated his long-time friend and close advisor Robert “Bob” Manuel to be Haiti’s next Prime Minister. Manuel’s political arc has brought him from the left to the right, and perhaps now the extreme right. Sources who have worked closely with Manuel over the years, report that he is now deeply distrustful and dismissive of popular demands and fiercely opposed to the return of former President Aristide from exile in South Africa. “One thing is for sure,” said one well-placed former Haitian government security source, “If Manuel becomes Prime Minister, Aristide will not be returning to Haiti while Préval is president.”

Sources
“Haiti’s PM Nominee #2: A Contradictory History: Preval’s Friend & Aristide’s Foe Bob Manuel,” Haiti
Immigrant Roundups to Gain Cheap Labor for US Corporate Giants

The National Campesino Front estimates that between 1994 and 2005, two million farmers were displaced by the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), in many cases related to the increase in US imports. Between 2000 and 2005, Mexico lost 900,000 rural jobs and 700,000 industrial jobs, resulting in deep unemployment throughout the country. Desperate poverty forced millions of Mexican workers North in order to feed their families.

This combination of unemployment in Mexico, the huge gap between salaries in the United States and Mexico, and US demand for cheap labor to compete on global markets has created a demand for undocumented labor in the US economy which is structural unlikely to be temporary. It is not just a few companies seeking to cut corners. These are not just jobs that “US workers won’t take.” Migrants work in nearly all low-paying occupations and have become essential to the US economy in the age of global competition.

In the wake of 9/11, Immigration Customs Enforcement (ICE) has repeatedly conducted workplace and home invasions across the country in an attempt to roundup “illegal” immigrants. ICE justifies these raids under the rubric of keeping the homeland safe and preventing terrorism. Critics charge that the real goal of these actions is to disrupt the immigrant work force in the US and replace it with a tightly regulated non-union guest-worker program. Immigrant rights organizations have noted that the crackdown has led to serious human rights violations. Families are separated. Hearings are slow, and often families do not know for long periods of time where their loved ones are being held.

From the Censored 2008 update by David Bacon:
US immigration law is being transformed into a mechanism for sup-
plying labor to some of the country’s largest corporations. Immigration law is creating a two-tier society, in which millions of people are denied fundamental rights and social benefits, because they are recruited to come to the US by those corporations on visas that condemn them to a second-class status. Those guest workers face increased poverty and exploitation, and their status is being used to put pressure on wages, benefits and workplace rights for all workers.


**Update by April Pearce:**
While the workplace and home ICE raids continue, rights advocates are working to protect the children, citizens, and lawful permanent residents who have suffered from such raids. The National Commission on ICE Misconduct and Violations of 4th Amendment Rights, a privately convened commission of labor and immigration advocates, began a series of nation-wide hearings February 25, 2008 to publicize allegations that US immigration officials routinely violate constitutional protections against unreasonable search and seizure during workplace raids. During large-scale raids, ICE often detains all employees, some of whom are citizens or lawful permanent residents, to seek out those without documentation. The Commission will publish a report when the scheduled hearings have been completed.

On April 25, 2008 one hundred and fourteen US citizens and lawful permanent residents filed claims for damages with the Department of Homeland Security and Immigration and Customs Enforcement alleging that they were illegally detained and harassed during a large-scale raid at Micro Solutions Enterprise in Los Angeles on February 7, 2008. Armed ICE agents sealed off the company and issued orders directing everyone where to go and did not allow those detained to use their phone or computer. Of Micro Solutions’ over 700 employees, 130 were detained in this raid.

The Committee on House Education and Labor Subcommittee on Workforce Protections heard testimony, May 20, 2008, on the impact of immigration enforcement on children. Included in the testimony was a report the National Council of La Raza commissioned the Urban
Institute to conduct based on a study of the three communities where large-scale work site raids occurred in 2007. The study documented the challenges that children face as a result of immigration enforcement actions. The report, released in October 2007, confirmed the inevitability of hardship to children resulting from an immigration raid. There are approximately five million children in the US with an undocumented parent; the vast majority are US citizens under ten years old. The report found that for every two immigrants detained as a result of work site raids, approximately one child is left without a parent. The Urban Institute also found that our nation’s social institutions—such as school and child welfare agencies—that are tasked with protecting and nurturing children are playing the role of first responders in the aftermath of a raid.

There is also growing alarm about ICE’s engagement in intimidation and enforcement tactics near public schools and Head Start programs. ICE agents have been seen parked near schools and Head Start centers during drop-off and pick-up times. Schools have reported extremely high absence rates following ICE sightings.

**Censored #20 2008**

**Terror Act Against Animal Activists**

The Animal Enterprise Terrorism Act (AETA), signed into law on November 27, 2006, broadens punishment present under the Animal Enterprises Protection Act (AEPA) of 1992. One hundred and sixty groups, including the National Lawyers’ Guild, the Natural Resources Defense Council, the League of Humane Voters, Physicians’ Committee for Responsible Medicine, and the New York City Bar Association, oppose this Act on grounds that its terminology is dangerously vague and poses a major conflict to the US Constitution. The broad definition of an “animal enterprise,” for example, may encompass most US businesses: “any enterprise that uses or sells animals or animal products.” The phrase “loss of any real or personal property,” is elastic enough to include loss of projected profit. Concerns deepen as protections against “interference” extend to any “person or entity having a connection to, relationship with, or transactions with an animal enterprise.”

Hoch and Wilkens explain that in spite of the fact that one hundred and sixty groups opposed its passage, the House Judiciary Committee
placed AETA on the suspension calendar, under which process, bills that are non-controversial can be passed by voice vote. The vote on the bill was then held hours earlier than scheduled, with what appears to have been only six (out of four hundred thirty-five) Congresspersons present. Five voted for the bill, and Dennis Kucinich, who said that “[t]his bill will have a real and chilling effect on people’s constitutionally protected rights,” voted against it. Kucinich went on to say, “My concern about this bill is that it does nothing to address the real issue of animal protection but, instead targets those advocating animal rights.”


**Update by Sarah Maddox:**

When five mansions caught fire in March of 2008, the FBI and the mainstream media immediately said this was more than a simple case of arson: it was terrorism. To be exact, it was eco-terrorism by the infamous “Earth Liberation Front” or ELF. Three houses were gutted and two were damaged, creating a total cost of $7 million in damage. These $2 million, 4,500 square foot homes were promoted as being “green” homes. Left at the scene was a large spray-painted bedsheets reading: “Built green? Nope black. McMansions in RCDs r not green.” It was signed “Elf”—the Earth Liberation Front.

The Seattle Joint Terrorism Task Force, working with the FBI and the US Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, said in April that they were indeed working on the theory that it was “eco-terrorism,” carried out by a cell of environmentalists using the catch-all title of the Earth Liberation Front. According to the FBI, “eco-terrorism,” or “ecotage,” is now the number one domestic terrorism threat in the US, greater than that of rightwing extremists, anti-abortion groups and animal rights organizations, and on a par with al-Qaida. The US building industry, rightwing political groups and the mainstream media all leapt to condemn the ELF after the arson.

But the jury on the McMansions arson is very much out. Although
rightwing commentators and libertarian bloggers have used the attack as ammunition in their ideological war against environmentalists and the left, few others think it is so simple. The more anyone looks into the arson, the more they suspect that it has probably got more to do with fraud or political smearing and dirty tricks than with terrorism.

The case for the McMansion fires being ecotage is weak, because this form of radical protest has all but died out. While animal rights extremism has continued, in the past seven years, the FBI admits, there have been only a handful of attacks on property that could have been committed by environmentalists. The silence is said to be partly as a result of ELF groups voluntarily giving up arson as a tactic following an undefined “mistake.” But activists say 9/11 had the most chilling effect of all.

The attack on the twin towers led directly to the draconian Patriot Act, which created a new category of domestic terrorism and allowed the FBI to expand its domestic and international powers. Many actions previously considered vandalism (with sentences of two to four years) could now be classed as major acts of terror, and life sentences could be given. The new terror laws have also allowed the FBI and federal government to target people it had given up on years before and use new surveillance methods.

Civil liberty groups expect the green scare to worsen. The Animal Enterprise Terrorism Act now raises any attacks against the profits of any animal-based industry to the level of terrorism, and a little-known bill making its way through US Congress with virtually no debate is expected to lead to a new crackdown on any dissident activity, under the guise of fighting terrorism.

The Orwellian-sounding Violent Radicalization and Home-Grown Terrorism Prevention Act, passed by an overwhelming 400-6 vote in March 2008, will soon be considered by the Senate. Rather than seeking to criminalize “extremist” acts, it targets beliefs, or what many people are calling “thought crimes.” “It proposes initiatives to intercede before radicalized individuals turn violent. It could herald far more intrusive surveillance techniques, without warrants, and has the potential to criminalize ideas and not actions. It could mean penalties for a stance rather than a criminal act,” the American Civil Liberties Union and the Centre for Constitutional Rights have jointly said.
Feinstein’s Conflict of Interest in Iraq

Dianne Feinstein—the ninth wealthiest member of Congress—has been beset by monumental ethical conflicts of interest. As a member of the Military Construction Appropriations subcommittee (MILCON) from 2001 to the end of 2005, Senator Feinstein voted for appropriations worth billions of dollars to her husband’s firms.

From 1997 through the end of 2005, Feinstein’s husband Richard C. Blum was a majority shareholder in both URS Corp. and Perini Corp. She lobbied Pentagon officials in public hearings to support defense projects that she favored, some of which already were or subsequently became URS or Perini contracts. From 2001 to 2005, URS earned $792 million from military construction and environmental cleanup projects approved by MILCON; Perini earned $759 million from such projects.

In 2000, Perini earned a mere $7 million from federal contracts. After 9/11, Perini was transformed into a major defense contractor. In 2004, the company earned $444 million for military construction work in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as for improving airfields for the US Air Force in Europe and building base infrastructures for the US Navy around the globe. In a remarkable financial recovery, Perini shot from near penury in 1997 to logging gross revenues of $1.7 billion in 2005.

From the Censored 2008 by Peter Byrne:

In March 2007, right wing bloggers by the thousands started linking to and commenting upon these stories, agitating for a Congressional investigation of Feinstein. In just two days, the stories got 50,000 online hits. Michael Savage and Rush Limbaugh did radio segments on my findings. I declined to appear on their shows, because I do not associate with racist, misogynist, homophobic demagogues. Fox News’ Bill O’Reilly invited me to be on his national TV show, but quickly dis-invited me after I promised that the first sentence out of my mouth would frame Feinstein as a neoconservative war-monger just like O’Reilly.

As the storm of conservative outrage intensified, Joe Conason, from
The Nation Institute, which had commissioned the Feinstein investigation, asked to have the tag thanking The Nation Institute for funding removed from my stories because, he said, Katrina vanden Heuvel, the Nation’s Editor & Publisher, did not want the magazine or its non-profit institute to be positively associated with Limbaugh. I told Conason that not only was I required to credit The Nation Institute under the terms of our contract, but that The Nation’s editors should be proud of the investigation and gratified by the public reaction.

The backstory to that encounter is that, in October, vanden Heuvel had abruptly killed the Feinstein story, which had been scheduled to run as a cover feature before the November 2006 election in which Feinstein was up for re-election.


Update by Darcy Newton:
Peter Byrne’s controversial expose, “Feinstein’s Conflict of Interest in Iraq,” confirmed that while US Senator Diane Feinstein served as the chairperson of the Military Construction Appropriations subcommittee, her husband, Richard Blum, received multi-million dollar defense contracts. Although Byrne’s report established that Feinstein and Blum had been profiting from The War on Iraq, the article has been largely dismissed by the corporate media and has unleashed a flurry of bipartisan media criticism. Byrne stated that after his article came out, right wing and left wing bloggers and talk show hosts attacked the Feinstein story, and Feinstein’s office sent Byrne a twelve-page letter refuting his claims. While Feinstein has resigned from the MILCO subcommittee, she continues to deny any unethical behavior.

However, the implications of Byrnes’ article are far reaching and are being revived in the media. Marcus Stern reported on Feinstein’s denial of any wrongdoing in the San Diego Tribune in July 2007, and the San Francisco Bay Guardian made the story visible again in “Project Censored: The Byrne ultimatum” in September 2007. And in December 2007, Judicial Watch ranked Senator Feinstein as one of Washington’s “Ten Most Wanted” Corrupt Politicians for 2007 based on Byrnes’ solid investigative work.

In 2007, Investigative Reporters and Editors, Inc. (IRE), a non-profit organization committed to excellence in journalism, recognized Peter
Byrne for his outstanding investigative work on the Feinstein story. Byrne says that it was gratifying to get the IRE award because it is a validation of good reporting and confirmation that his assertion that Feinstein had a conflict of interest in Iraq was correct.

Sources