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The Anti-Empire Report

by William Blum

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Arguing Libya

On July 9 I took part in a demonstration in front of the White House, the theme of which was "Stop Bombing Libya". The last time I had taken part in a protest against US bombing of a foreign country, which the White House was selling as "humanitarian intervention", as they are now, was in 1999 during the 78-day bombing of Serbia. At that time I went to a couple of such demonstrations and both times I was virtually the only American there. The rest, maybe two dozen, were almost all Serbs. "Humanitarian intervention" is a great selling device for imperialism, particularly in the American market. Americans are desperate to renew their precious faith that the United States means well, that we are still "the good guys".

This time there were about 100 taking part in the protest. I don't know if any were Libyans, but there was a new element — almost half of the protesters were black, marching with signs saying: "Stop Bombing Africa".

There was another new element — people supporting the bombing of Libya, facing us from their side of Pennsylvania Avenue about 40 feet away. They were made up largely of Libyans, probably living in the area, who had only praise and love for the United States and NATO. Their

theme was that Gaddafi was so bad that they would support anything to get rid of him, even daily bombing of their homeland, which now exceeds Serbia's 78 days. I of course crossed the road and got into arguments with some of them. I kept asking: "I hate that man there [pointing to the White House] just as much as you hate Gaddafi. Do you think I should therefore support the bombing of Washington? Destroying the beautiful monuments and buildings of this city, as well as killing people?"

None of the Libyans even tried to answer my question. They only repeated their anti-Gaddafi vitriol. "You don't understand. We have to get rid of Gaddafi. He's very brutal." (See the [CNN video of the July 1 mammoth rally in Tripoli](#) for an indication that these Libyans' views are far from universal at home.)

"But you at least get free education and medical care," I pointed out. "That's a lot more than we get here. And Libya has the highest standard of living in the entire region, at least it did before the NATO and US bombing. If Gaddafi is brutal, what do you call all the other leaders of the region, whom Washington has long supported?"

One retorted that there had been free education under the king, whom Gaddafi had overthrown. I was skeptical of this but I didn't know for sure that it was incorrect, so I replied: "So what? Gaddafi at least didn't get rid of the free education like the leaders in England did in recent years."

A police officer suddenly appeared and forced me to return to my side of the road. I'm sure if pressed for an explanation, the officer would justify this as a means of preventing violence from breaking out. But there was never any danger of that at all; another example of the American police-state mentality — order and control come before civil liberties, before anything.

Most Americans overhearing my argument with the Libyans would probably have interjected something like: "Well, no matter how much you hate the president you can still get rid of him with an election. The Libyans can't do that."

And I would have come back with: "Right. I have the freedom to replace George W. Bush with Barack H. Obama. Oh joy. As long as our elections are overwhelmingly determined by money, nothing of any significance will change."

Postscript: Amidst all the sadness and horror surrounding the massacre in Norway, we should not lose sight of the fact that "peaceful little Norway" participated in the bombing of Yugoslavia in 1999; has deployed troops in Iraq; has troops in Afghanistan; and has supplied warplanes for NATO's bombing of Libya. The teenagers of those countries who lost their lives to the US/NATO killing machine wanted to live to adulthood and old age as much as the teenagers in Norway. With all the condemnation of "extremism" we now hear in Norway and around the world we must ask if this behavior of the Norwegian government, as well as that of the United States and NATO, is not "extremist".

The Berlin Wall — Another Cold War Myth

The Western media will soon be revving up their propaganda motors to solemnize the 50th anniversary of the erecting of the Berlin Wall, August 13, 1961. All the Cold War clichés about

The Free World vs. Communist Tyranny will be trotted out and the simple tale of how the wall came to be will be repeated: In 1961, the East Berlin communists built a wall to keep their oppressed citizens from escaping to West Berlin and freedom. Why? Because commies don't like people to be free, to learn the "truth". What other reason could there have been?

First of all, before the wall went up thousands of East Germans had been commuting to the West for jobs each day and then returning to the East in the evening; many others went back and forth for shopping or other reasons. So they were clearly not being held in the East against their will. Why then was the wall built? There were two major reasons:

1) The West was bedeviling the East with a vigorous campaign of recruiting East German professionals and skilled workers, who had been educated at the expense of the Communist government. This eventually led to a serious labor and production crisis in the East. As one indication of this, the *New York Times* reported in 1963: "West Berlin suffered economically from the wall by the loss of about 60,000 skilled workmen who had commuted daily from their homes in East Berlin to their places of work in West Berlin." ¹

In 1999, *USA Today* reported: "When the Berlin Wall crumbled [1989], East Germans imagined a life of freedom where consumer goods were abundant and hardships would fade. Ten years later, a remarkable 51% say they were happier with communism." ² Earlier polls would likely have shown even more than 51% expressing such a sentiment, for in the ten years many of those who remembered life in East Germany with some fondness had passed away; although even 10 years later, in 2009, the *Washington Post* could report: "Westerners say they are fed up with the tendency of their eastern counterparts to wax nostalgic about communist times." ³

It was in the post-unification period that a new Russian and eastern Europe proverb was born: "Everything the Communists said about Communism was a lie, but everything they said about capitalism turned out to be the truth." It should also be noted that the division of Germany into two states in 1949 — setting the stage for 40 years of Cold War hostility — was an American decision, not a Soviet one. ⁴

2) During the 1950s, American coldwarriors in West Germany instituted a crude campaign of sabotage and subversion against East Germany designed to throw that country's economic and administrative machinery out of gear. The CIA and other US intelligence and military services recruited, equipped, trained and financed German activist groups and individuals, of West and East, to carry out actions which ran the spectrum from juvenile delinquency to terrorism; anything to make life difficult for the East German people and weaken their support of the government; anything to make the commies look bad.

It was a remarkable undertaking. The United States and its agents used explosives, arson, short circuiting, and other methods to damage power stations, shipyards, canals, docks, public buildings, gas stations, public transportation, bridges, etc; they derailed freight trains, seriously injuring workers; burned 12 cars of a freight train and destroyed air pressure hoses of others; used acids to damage vital factory machinery; put sand in the turbine of a factory, bringing it to a standstill; set fire to a tile-producing factory; promoted work slow-downs in factories; killed 7,000 cows of a co-operative dairy through poisoning; added soap to powdered milk destined for East German schools; were in possession, when arrested, of a large quantity of the poison

cantharidin with which it was planned to produce poisoned cigarettes to kill leading East Germans; set off stink bombs to disrupt political meetings; attempted to disrupt the World Youth Festival in East Berlin by sending out forged invitations, false promises of free bed and board, false notices of cancellations, etc.; carried out attacks on participants with explosives, firebombs, and tire-puncturing equipment; forged and distributed large quantities of food ration cards to cause confusion, shortages and resentment; sent out forged tax notices and other government directives and documents to foster disorganization and inefficiency within industry and unions ... all this and much more.⁵

The Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, of Washington, DC, conservative coldwarriors, in one of their Cold War International History Project Working Papers (#58, p.9) states: "The open border in Berlin exposed the GDR [East Germany] to massive espionage and subversion and, as the two documents in the appendices show, its closure gave the Communist state greater security."

Throughout the 1950s, the East Germans and the Soviet Union repeatedly lodged complaints with the Soviets' erstwhile allies in the West and with the United Nations about specific sabotage and espionage activities and called for the closure of the offices in West Germany they claimed were responsible, and for which they provided names and addresses. Their complaints fell on deaf ears. Inevitably, the East Germans began to tighten up entry into the country from the West, leading eventually to the infamous Wall. However, even after the wall was built there was regular, albeit limited, legal emigration from east to west. In 1984, for example, East Germany allowed 40,000 people to leave. In 1985, East German newspapers claimed that more than 20,000 former citizens who had settled in the West wanted to return home after becoming disillusioned with the capitalist system. The West German government said that 14,300 East Germans had gone back over the previous 10 years.⁶

Let's also not forget that Eastern Europe became communist because Hitler, with the approval of the West, used it as a highway to reach the Soviet Union to wipe out Bolshevism forever, and that the Russians in World War I and II, lost about 40 million people because the West had used this highway to invade Russia. It should not be surprising that after World War II the Soviet Union was determined to close down the highway.

We came, we saw, we destroyed, we forgot

An updated summary of the charming record of US foreign policy. Since the end of the Second World War, the United States of America has ...

1. Attempted to overthrow more than 50 governments, most of which were democratically-elected.⁷
2. Attempted to suppress a populist or nationalist movement in 20 countries.⁸
3. Grossly interfered in democratic elections in at least 30 countries.⁹
4. Dropped bombs on the people of more than 30 countries.¹⁰
5. Attempted to assassinate more than 50 foreign leaders.¹¹

In total: Since 1945, the United States has carried out one or more of the above actions, on one or more occasions, in the following 69 countries (more than one-third of the countries of the world):

- Afghanistan
- Albania
- Algeria
- Angola
- Australia
- Bolivia
- Bosnia
- Brazil
- British Guiana (now Guyana)
- Bulgaria
- Cambodia
- Chad
- Chile
- China
- Colombia
- Congo (also as Zaire)
- Costa Rica
- Cuba
- Dominican Republic
- East Timor
- Ecuador
- Egypt
- El Salvador
- Fiji
- France
- Germany (plus East Germany)
- Ghana
- Greece
- Grenada
- Guatemala
- Honduras
- India
- Indonesia
- Iran
- Iraq
- Italy
- Jamaica
- Japan
- Kuwait
- Laos
- Lebanon
- Libya
- Mongolia
- Morocco
- Nepal
- Nicaragua
- North Korea
- Pakistan
- Palestine
- Panama
- Peru
- Philippines
- Portugal
- Russia
- Seychelles
- Slovakia
- Somalia
- South Africa
- Soviet Union
- Sudan
- Suriname
- Syria
- Thailand
- Uruguay
- Venezuela
- Vietnam (plus North Vietnam)
- Yemen (plus South Yemen)
- Yugoslavia

([See a world map of US interventions.](#))

The occult world of economics

When you read about economic issues in the news, like the crisis in Greece or the Wall Street/banking mortgage shambles are you sometimes left befuddled by the seeming complexity, which no one appears able to untangle or explain to your satisfaction in simple English? Well, I certainly can't explain it all myself, but I do know that the problem is not necessarily that you and I are economic illiterates. The problem is often that the "experts" discuss these issues as if we're dealing with hard and fast rules or laws, not to be violated, scientifically based, mathematically sound and rational; when, in fact, a great deal of what takes place in the real world of economics and in the arena of "expert" analysis of that world, is based significantly on

partisan party politics, ideology, news headlines, speculation, manipulation, psychology (see the utter meaninglessness and absurdity of the daily rise or fall of stock prices), backroom deals of the powerful, and the excessive power given to and reliance upon thoroughly corrupt credit-rating agencies and insurers of various kinds. The agencies like Moody's and Standard and Poor's are protection rackets — pay our exorbitant fees or we give you a bad rating, which investors and governments then bow down to as if it's the result of completely objective and impressive analytical study.

Then there's the exceptions made for powerful countries to get away with things that lesser countries, like Greece, are not allowed to get away with, but all still explained in terms of the unforgiving laws of economics.

And when all other explanations fail to sound plausible, the experts fall back on "the law of supply and demand". But that law was repealed years ago; just try and explain the cost of gasoline based on it, as but one example.

So there's a lot to cover up, many reasons why the financial-world players can't be as open as they should be, as forthright as the public and investors may assume they are.

Consider the US budget deficit, about which we hear a great deal of scare talk. What we don't hear is that the most prosperous period in American history occurred in the decades following the Second World War — from 1946 to 1973. And guess what? We had a budget deficit in the large majority of those years. Clearly such a deficit was not an impediment to growth and increasing prosperity in the United States — a prosperity much more widely shared than it is now. Yet we're often fed the idea of the sanctity of a balanced budget. This and other "crises" are typically overblown for political reasons; the current "crisis" about the debt ceiling for example. Paul Craig Roberts, former Assistant Secretary of the Treasury under Reagan, now an independent columnist, points out that "regardless of whether the debt ceiling is raised the US government is not going to go out of business. ... If Goldman Sachs is too big to fail, certainly, the US government is."

In economic issues that occupy the media greatly, such as the debt ceiling, one of the hidden keys to understanding what's going on is often the conservatives' perennial hunger to privatize Social Security and Medicare. If you understand that, certain things become much clearer. Naomi Klein points out that "the pseudo debate about the debt ceiling ... is naked class war, waged by the ultra rich against everyone else, and it's well past time for Americans to draw the line."

Consider, too, the relative value of international currencies. Logically, reasonably, if the British pound is exchangeable for two dollars, one should be able to purchase in Washington goods and services for two dollars which would cost one pound in London. In real life, this of course is the very infrequent exception to the rule. Instead, at places called "exchanges" in New York and Chicago and London and Zurich and Frankfurt a bunch of guys who don't do anything socially useful get together each day in a large room, and amidst lots of raised voices, busy computers, and numerous pieces of paper, they arrive at a value for the pound, as well as for a barrel of oil, for a pound of porkbellies, and for various other commodities that affect our daily lives. Why

should these speculators and parasites have so much influence over the real world, the real economy, and our real lives?

As a general rule of thumb, comrades, as an all-purpose solution to our economic ills, remember this: We'll keep going around in crisis circles forever until the large financial institutions are nationalized or otherwise placed under democratic control. We hear a lot about "austerity". Well, austerity has to, finally, visit the super-rich. There are millions (sic) of millionaires and billionaires in the United States and Europe. As governments go bust, the trillions of dollars of these people must be heavily taxed or confiscated to end the unending suffering of the other 95% of humanity. My god, do I sound like a (choke, gasp) socialist?

Notes

1. *New York Times*, June 27, 1963, p.12 ↵
2. *USA Today*, October 11, 1999, p.1 ↵
3. *Washington Post*, May 12, 2009; see a similar story November 5, 2009 ↵
4. Carolyn Eisenberg, *Drawing the Line: The American Decision to Divide Germany, 1944-1949* (1996); or see a concise review of this book by Kai Bird in *The Nation*, December 16, 1996 ↵
5. See William Blum, *Killing Hope: US Military and CIA Interventions Since World War II*, p.400, note 8, for a list of sources for the details of the sabotage and subversion. ↵
6. *The Guardian* (London), March 7, 1985 ↵
7. <http://killinghope.org/essays6/othrow.htm> ↵
8. <http://killinghope.org/bblum6/suppress.html> ↵
9. See chapter 18 of *Rogue State: A Guide to the World's Only Superpower* – add Palestine, 2006 to the list ↵
10. <http://killinghope.org/superogue/bomb.htm> ↵
11. <http://killinghope.org/bblum6/assass.htm> ↵