

Before we go into what had occurred in Iraq, and what needs to be done, we have a number of good news regarding the status of our movement. First, we are delighted to welcome our committee member and Sri Lanka volunteer, Rachel Galea, back from her early completion of the ACMICA-CSR cross-cultural project. You can read her final report below. With a full committee, ACMICA is now back in full swing.

We are also pleased to say that ACMICA is fast developing into a constitutionally established national affiliate body within ICMICA, the international body for graduate Catholics. **On June 7 at the University of Technology, Sydney (UTS) we will hold our first AGM with Bruce Duncan CScR as guest speaker.** Documents are being prepared to place ACMICA on a firm footing. These will be available to members and supporters via email before the meeting. We will also have representatives from two other States to help us towards the goal of being a national movement. So please try to come to hear Bruce and help launch us into our next phase. Bruce Duncan will speak on what needs to be done to engage in effective social change in our movement.

Also on **May 3** we will be developing links with students by hosting an event at Newtown with an international **guest speaker from the Philippines, Fr Froi Rivera**. He will have a conversation with us about working with Bishop Labayan in Infanta diocese on Luzon. Details are below. So please come along if you can.

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WAR ON IRAQ OPINION

Minh Nguyen asks whether it was the doves that comforted Saddam, or the hawks that reassured Bush he could get away with an illegal invasion.

Within the month since our last enews, we have seen the start of the Iraq invasion and the quick fall of Baghdad. Thousands of innocent men, women and children have been killed, maimed, or made homeless. Historical treasures, thousands year old, were plundered and torched; fragile societies brought to the brink of anarchy. In contrast to the military precision at which oil reserves and the oil ministry building were secured and protected, the US admitted it was unprepared for the humanitarian crisis that everyone had been warning them about. Meanwhile, the UN is being shut out from post-war Iraq and contracts are being rewarded to US corporate favourites with other casting lots for the remaining share of the spoils. Yet unbelievably the warmongers continue to wallow at the quick success of the war, pointing to images of jubilant Iraqi dancing in the streets behind fallen statues.

Putting aside evidence of stage management, the irony is that the very reasons for the apparent vindication of their stance are the reasons why this war remains illegitimate and immoral. The whole pretext for charging into Iraq is based on the idea that the US and its warring coalition were in real danger from Saddam's treacherous war machine. The threat was so imminent that weapons inspectors could not be given even a day more, despite the progress made. Yet as Arianna Huffington points out, far from being on the verge of destroying Western civilisation, Saddam was unable to even muster a half-hearted defense of his own capital. The chemical attacks never came. The warring coalition is now scurrying to find traces of Saddam's "smoking gun".

From day one, we were asked to put our trust in our "leaders", since our leaders knew something about Saddam we did not. But as it turned out (or confirmed), either US-UK intelligence is a complete rot or their governments have been embarking on an astonishing charade of deception for an invasion with no apparent reasons left other than regime change and to plunder the country's resources. Perhaps it's a bit of both.

Even Paddy McGuinness (SMH, 15/4/2003) has come as close as one can get him to admitting that the absence of a smoking gun provides the most serious hole in the US's moral authority for the invasion. Obviously puzzled by the missing link, McGuinness resorted to blaming Saddam for bringing it upon himself by not being frank with the UN inspectors. Similarly, in the same Herald edition, Gerard Henderson found issues with the church's stance, which according to him "played into Iraq's hands". Apparently the Christian churches' strong moral stance against the war caused Saddam to believe the West was too soft, thus giving him false comfort. Implicit here is that Saddam, again, brought it upon himself but this time with the assistance of some misguided clerics. He then advised church leaders "to step down from the pulpit and assess their own responsibility for the conflict."

It seems the unravelling of the US's pretext for war is causing a flurry among the more dogmatic (or naïve) intellectuals to find meaning. But the fact they are looking everywhere but the corridors of Washington reveals their underlying assumption: these people must seriously believe the world is divided in axis of good and evil and that the US falls within the former (the Pax Americana myth). Elsewhere Henderson advised his readers to "give common sense a chance" (SMH, 18/2/03). But whose common sense? Was it Saddam who thought he could get away with non-compliance even as tens of thousands US troops were massing at his border? Or Bush and Howard who thought they could get away with an illegal invasion as millions around the world marched for peace? In the Pax Americana version of common sense, the latter is simply not asked. Contrary to the idiotic claim that the peace movement had any part in the war, perhaps these intellectuals will do well to examine their own culpability for giving comfort to Bush and his lap dogs in their reprehensible defiance of international law and world opinion.

These are worrisome times. Following Afghanistan and Iraq, the hawks have indeed tasted blood; they've marked their next kill; their "end of history" thesis thus becomes self-fulfilling. And all the while nesting in the moral comfort provided by intellectuals like Henderson. It is in this context that the peace movement is right to continue to be vigilant than ever before and refuse to be silenced by the warring ideologues bent on finding excuses and blame for a war drenched by the blood of the innocent and of the rule of law.

FEATURE – "The Empire Needs New Clothes"

By Thom Hartmann

It's easy to vilify George W. Bush as a cynical warmonger, anxious to attack Iraq to repay the oil companies that funded his election campaigns. But to do so is to make a dangerous and fundamental error, and such a myopic view of the Bush administration's policies puts America's future at risk.

The reality is that the current administration has a clear and specific vision for the future of America and the world, and they believe it's a positive vision. In order to put forward an alternative vision, it's essential to first understand the vision of America held by the New Right.

The core of the neoconservative vision was first articulated on June 3, 1997, in the Statement of Principles put forth by the Project for the New American Century (www.newamericancentury.org). Signed by Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld, Bill Bennett, Jeb Bush, Gary Bauer, Elliott Abrams, Paul Wolfowitz, Vin Weber, Steve Forbes and others from the Reagan/Bush administration, it clearly stated that "the history of this century should have taught us to embrace the cause of American leadership."

[S]imply saying "stop the war" isn't enough. We must clearly articulate a vision of what America could be in a world in balance, a world at peace, and a world where the planet's vital natural resources are protected and renewed.

Frankly acknowledging that America is a small portion of the world's population but uses a large percentage of the world's oil and other natural resources, Poppy Bush is famous for having said, "The American lifestyle is not negotiable."

McMansions for two-person families, a transportation infrastructure based on 6,000-pound SUVs carrying single individuals, cheap Chinese goods at Wal-Mart and cheap Mexican food in the supermarket - all of this is not anything America intends to give up. We're king of the hill, and we intend to stay that way, even if it means going to war to keep it.

At the core of this is oil. When the administration's people say American involvement in Iraq is "not about oil," they're often responding to charges that they're only going after profits for American oil companies. They speak truth, in that context, when they say the war isn't about revenues from oil - the profits will only be a desirable side-effect. What the war is really about is the survival of the American lifestyle, which, in their world-view, is both non-negotiable and based almost entirely on access to cheap oil.

The same year Cheney, et al, wrote their papers on *The New American Century*, I wrote a book about the coming end of American peace and prosperity because of our dependence on a dwindling supply of oil. "Since the discovery of oil in Titusville, PA, where the world's first oil well was drilled in 1859," I wrote in *The Last Hours of Ancient Sunlight*, "humans have extracted 742 billion barrels of oil from the Earth. Currently, world oil reserves are estimated at about 1,000 billion barrels, which will last (according to the most optimistic estimates of the oil industry) 'for almost 45 years at current rates of consumption.'"

But that doesn't mean that we'll suck on the straw for 45 years and then it'll suddenly stop. When about half the oil has been removed from an underground oil field, it starts to get much harder (and thus more expensive) to extract the remaining half. The last third to quarter can be excruciatingly expensive to extract - so much so that wells these days that have hit that point are usually just capped because it costs more to extract the oil than it can be sold for, or it's more profitable to ship oil in from the Middle East, even after accounting for the cost of shipping.

The halfway point of an oil field is referred to as "The Hubbert Peak," after scientist M. King Hubbert, who first pointed this out in 1956 and projected 1970 as the year for the Hubbert Peak of US oil supplies. Hubbert was off by four years - 1974 saw the initial decline in US oil production and the consequent rise in price. In 1975, Hubbert, who is now deceased, projected 2000 for a worldwide Hubbert Peak. Once that point had been hit, he and other experts suggested, the world could expect economy-destabilizing spikes in the price of oil, and wars to begin over control of this vital resource.

Most of the world has now been digitally "X-rayed" using satellites, seismic data, and computers, in the process of locating 41,000 oil fields. Over 641,000 exploratory wells have been drilled, and virtually all fields which show any promise are well-known and factored into the one-trillion barrel estimate the oil industry uses for world oil reserves.

And of that 1 trillion barrels, Saudi Arabia has about 259 billion barrels and Iraq is estimated by the US Government to have 432 billion barrels, although at the moment only about 112 billion barrels have been tapped. The rest, virgin oil, can be pumped out for as little as \$1.50 a barrel, making Iraqi oil not only the most abundant in the world, but the most profitable. This at a time when virtually all American oil fields (except the Alaska North Slope) have dwindled past the Hubbert Peak into \$5 to \$25 per barrel pumping costs.

Thus, we see that our "lifestyle" - our ability to maintain our auto-based transportation systems, our demand for big, warm houses, and our appetite for a wide variety of cheap foods and consumer goods - is currently based on access to cheap oil. If we assume that the American people won't tolerate a change in that lifestyle, then we can extrapolate that our very security as a stable democracy is dependent on cheap oil.

Viewed in this context, the rush to seize control of the Middle East - where about a third of the planet's oil is located - makes perfect sense. It's a noble endeavor, in that view, maintaining the strength and vitality of the American Empire.

Of course, there are a few cracks in this vision. In order to have such a new American century, we must be willing to foul our waters and air with the byproducts of oil combustion and oil-fired power plants, and tolerate the explosions in cancer they bring. We must be willing to gamble that raising CO2 levels won't destabilize the atmosphere and tip us into a new ice age by shutting down the

Great Conveyor Belt warm-water currents in the Atlantic. We must be willing to hold the rest of the world off at the point of a bayonet, and to take on the England/Northern Ireland and Israel/Palestine type of terrorism that inevitably comes when people decide to assert nationalism and confront empire.

And, perhaps most distressing, the third George to be President of the United States must be willing to clamp down on his own dissident citizens the same way that King George III of England did in 1776. These are the requirements of empire.

The last American statesman to put forth a different vision was President Jimmy Carter, who candidly pointed out to the American people that oil was a dwindling domestic resource. Carter said that we mustn't find ourselves in a position of having to fight wars to seize other people's oil, and that a decade or two of transition to renewable energy sources would ensure the stability and future of America without destabilizing the rest of the world.

It would even lead to a cleaner environment and a better quality of life. Carter put in place energy tax credits and incentives that birthed an exploding new industry based on building solar-heated homes, windmill-powered communities, and the development of fuel alternatives to petroleum.

Ronald Reagan's first official act of office was to remove Carter's solar panels from the roof of the White House. He then repealed Carter's tax incentives for renewable energy and killed off an entire industry. No president since then has had the courage or vision to face the hard reality that Carter shared with us.

And so now we discover these oddities. Osama bin Laden, for example, explicitly said that he had attacked the US because we had troops stationed on the holy soil of his homeland - a position not that different from Northern Irish, Palestinian, Tamil, and Kashmiri terrorists. And our troops are there to protect our access to Saudi oil, a dependence legacy we inherited from Reagan's rejection of Carter's initiatives.

If we are to hold a vision of America that doesn't depend on foreign sources of oil and doesn't require the enormous expenditures of money and blood to project and protect empire, simply saying "stop the war" isn't enough. We must clearly articulate a vision of what America could be in a world in balance, a world at peace, and a world where the planet's vital natural resources are protected and renewed. This is the ultimate family value, the highest patriotism, and the most desperately needed story to guide the next generation of Americans.

As President John F. Kennedy said in his 1961 Inaugural Address, "All this will not be finished in the first 100 days. Nor will it be finished in the first 1,000 days, nor in the life of this Administration, nor even perhaps in our lifetime on this planet. But let us begin."

Thom Hartmann is the author of over a dozen books, including "Unequal Protection" and "The Last Hours of Ancient Sunlight." www.thomhartmann.com. This article is copyright by Thom Hartmann, but permission is granted for reprint in print, email, blog, or web media so long as this credit is attached. This article was featured on Common Dreams www.commondreams.org, 11 March 2003.

SRI LANKA PROJECT FINAL REPORT

Sri Lanka - Beauty and Difference

Rachel Galea has just returned home following the early completion of the ACMICA-CSR cross-cultural exchange project. She reflects upon her experiences in Sri Lanka.

Upon my return home, I find it an awkward task to sit at my computer and attempt to write a final reflection. After such an enriching, challenging and life altering experience, thoughts roam around in my mind bombarding each other, fond and unsettling memories superimposed, while vivid images of playful children reside in my heart.

My experiences in Sri Lanka were diverse and plentiful. From teaching young children the English alphabet to planting trees and picking chilli. I had many opportunities to see what the country's landscape had to offer as well as many cultural events which enabled me to gain a great insight and appreciation of a culture which embraces harmony, difference and humility. I had the misfortune of seeing the devastation that a brutal violent conflict inflicts upon the soul of a people and upon the natural beauty of a spectacular land. I chatted with Army soldiers and Tamil Tiger

loyalists. I tried to understand what the 19 year civil war solved. Some things may never be understood and many questions will never be answered. Living with a very poor family and their extended family of 40 children, I came to see the human spirit plough through on-going hardships. Hardships which I toiled with on a day-to-day basis. I saw the face of Christ light up as children laughed. The fight for justice is alive and kicking in Sri Lanka, I had many privileges to stand in solidarity with grassroots movements involved in the struggle for social justice particularly in the Free Trade Zone and in varying community development projects in many different communities.

I learned many valuable lessons from the people of Sri Lanka, particularly from the children. The children showed me that hope is the virtue which holds together the struggle for an alternatively just society. The children reminded me that laughter rekindles an essential childlike component to our being. The children revealed a spirituality that embraces diversity, difference and a love of Christ which was inspirational. The children demonstrated an ability to love unconditionally and restrain from judgement.

I wish to thank again everyone who supported this initiative by financial contributions and continued moral support whilst I was in Sri Lanka. Particularly I wish to extend my thanks to Fr. Tissa Balasuriya and CSR for their extended hospitality during my stay. I would be more than happy to have a more detailed chat with anyone who wishes to know more about the project in Sri Lanka.

Rachel Galea

UPCOMING ACMICA EVENT – SAT, 3 MAY

Cross Cultural Stories in a Post Vatican II Church: 3 May

This event is hosted to foster friendship between ACMICA and student movements.

When: Saturday May 3, from 4pm

Venue: St Joseph's Crypt, Corner of Bedford and Station Sts., Newtown

Time: Talk 4-6pm; Mass 6pm in the parish (celebrant: Fr. Froi); meal out at local pub afterwards.

Enquiries: Minh Nguyen 0403 181 586

International Guest: Fr Froilan Rivera of Infanta Diocese, Phillipines; Spiritual Director of the Theological Seminary, Manila.

Fr Froi grew up in a country diocese, Infanta, in the Philippines on Luzon. This diocese tried to initiate post Vatican II theology and practice under the leadership of Bishop Julio Labayan who spoke at UTS three years ago when he visited Australia. He then spoke on "Human Rights and Asian Cultural Values". Fr Froi has worked with Bishop Labayan in a diocese that has developed its own empowerment programs, sustainable agriculture farm, a program for funding women's cottage industries (run by Australian Sion sisters), radio station, schools and youth programs, religious art and a deep respect for the poor which includes rather than marginalises.

What is it like to grow up in such a church setting? How has it affected Fr Froi and his ministry? What is it saying to the Australian church both as a cross-cultural experience and in terms of our own struggles to develop a church sensitive to the reality in which we live?

Free. Come along; bring your friends.

NEWS IN BRIEF –

Consultation on Constitution

The committee is currently drafting the Constitution for ACMICA and this year's Strategic Plan. We are requesting your input from now until the AGM. Draft copies will be distributed for exposure once it becomes available.

ACMICA AGM

ACMICA Annual General Meeting (AGM) is set down for Saturday 7 June. Our guest speaker will be **Bruce Duncan CScR**. He is a lecturer in history and social ethics at Yarra Theological Union, Victoria, and is the author of *War on Iraq: Is it Just?* (ACSJC, March 2003).

ACMICA membership

Don't forget you can still sign up for this year's membership. Membership cost \$60 for organisations, \$50 for families, and \$30/\$15conc for individuals.

Membership is the principal source of funding for the day-to-day running of ACMICA. Members and sponsors receive advance invitations to our meetings, forums and conferences. Only members can vote at our AGM or run for the committee.

Download membership form from our website <http://www.acmica.org/membership.pdf> or email us and we'll forward it to you: peace@acmica.org.