

BCA Dispatch

Newsletter of the **Boston-Cambridge Alliance for Democracy** **October 2004**

Fear is more likely to move trouble from one burner to another than to turn down the flame.

—Forrest Church, "Freedom From Fear", 2004

ALLIANCE NEWS (Continued on Page 8)

Chapter Calendar

* * **The Cost-Benefit Game** * *

Boston-Cambridge Alliance for Democracy will meet on **Wednesday, October 20 at 7:00 p.m.** at **Cambridge Friends Meeting house**, 5 Longfellow Park (9-minute walk from Harvard Square T station, west on Brattle St.)

— Agenda —

What's Your Life Worth?:

___\$6.1M? ___\$1.1M? ___\$65M? ___Priceless?

Government regulations require "cost/benefit" estimates, for example, of proposals to limit arsenic in drinking water, to decide whether it's worth it to protect you from dying of cancer in the future. So some economists think they should, and can, put a dollar value on life, health, nature, and the well-being of future generations. But political or cultural bias—not to mention an absence of common sense—can easily distort their formulas and projections, and deceive or confuse Congress and the Public. Is this a sensible way to make public decisions? What can we do instead?

Special guest: **Frank Ackerman**, economist at Tufts University, co-author of *Priceless: On Knowing the Price of Everything and the Value of Nothing*. Bring your values, questions, and comments. (While the ideas are Priceless, autographed copies of the book will be available for \$20 - \$6 off the cover price!) — Refreshments —

Jefferson Speaks to Bush A Republican Declares His Independence

by Judge Robert L. Black, *Cincinnati Enquirer*, 13 Oct 2004

When in the course of a lifetime, it becomes necessary for a born Republican to refuse to support the re-election of the party's incumbent president, to exercise his discretion, and in all good conscience, to vote for an opponent (even a Democrat), a decent respect to the opinions of his fellows requires that he declare the causes that impel him to switch.

I am grateful to the Republican Party for the support it gave me on each of three elections as judge. I respect many of the party leaders in Ohio. Nevertheless, my loyalty to the party must give way to my love of this country. I consider it a patriotic duty to speak up when the future of our democracy is at stake.

It is self-evident that everyone has certain unalienable rights endowed by the Creator, and that among these are the right to his/her own conscience and the right to pursue his/her sense of justice. Whenever in the field of

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Vermont activist Annette Smith shows how local marble formations store and release groundwater.

Democracy Is Alive and Well in Water-Targeted New England

by Dave Lewit, *Boston-Cambridge Alliance*, 29 Sept 2004

Wiry town representative Deedee Consolati asserted herself early in the town meeting. Lee, Massachusetts, had called this meeting on 23 September to deal with a bid to privatize the town's water and sewer systems—a multi-million dollar concern for this mill town of 6,000 in the Berkshire foothills. She requested time for a computerized slide presentation of a positive alternative to signing over the town's water and sewage processing systems to an outsider corporation.

It was Davida vs. Goliath—Deedee weighing in with love, brains and social support vs. billionaire corporate giant and sole bidder Veolia, partly owned by Paris-based Vivendi, trying to divide up control of the world's municipal water services with multinational co-giants Suez and RWE. A reluctant alternate town meeting moderator required a vote of the elected town representatives, and Deedee was granted her slide show.

First on the agenda were the recommendations of the three selectmen and the town finance committee—both in favor of privatization. Then came Deedee's visually-aided arguments for the town itself to expand and modernize its sewage processing plant, replete with expert proposals, projected costs, and comparison with Veolia's proposed 20-year contract, its higher costs, its damage to the town's employees, and its risky future demands on Lee's water-users. A few weeks earlier many townsfolk had seen the PBS video "Thirst" brought to Lee by the Alliance for Democracy. The hour-long video featured the valiant efforts of citizens of Stockton CA to block a corporate take-over of their city's water

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Republican Declares Independence (Cont'd from page 1)

politics the party to which he has belonged, and that party's president, become destructive of his vision of what is not only right and fair but also good for our future, it is his duty to call the tune as he hears it. When that future is endangered by the present policies of the administration, it is time to act. The record of this incumbent president is a history not only of repeated violations of the key principles underlying our democracy, but of the core values of the Christian faith to which he claims commitment. Let his actions be stated candidly.

He has taken us into a pre-emptive war, misleading the country by alleging without qualification that there was an immediate threat to our safety. No weapons of mass destruction have been found despite the president's unconditional declarations that he had to pre-empt Saddam Hussein's use of weapons of mass destruction.

He engaged in this war without any workable plan to win the peace. While the ultimate outcome of this adventure is unknown, the loss of human life and the imposition of human suffering weigh heavily against us.

The effect of this adventure is to solidify the deadly opposition of radical Muslim extremists, who are currently leading of the Muslim world. He has exacerbated a dangerous confrontation, a conflict of religious dimensions.

The result of the arrogant way the war was handled is that the president has alienated our long-established allies: and it will take decades to re-establish friendly working relations with these other powers.

He acted unilaterally in pulling the nation from international treaties designed to move toward a more livable and a more just world, such as the Kyoto Treaty and the treaty creating the World Court of Law.

At the same time, he has cut the taxes owed by the richest 1 percent or 2 percent of the population, giving meaningless decreases for all the rest, and with no resulting benefit to the job market or the economy. He has presided over the largest loss of jobs since the Great Depression.

He has appointed or sought to appoint to the federal judiciary persons who hold extreme right-wing views, views that are driven by political bias and that ignore established legal precedent. (He threatens to appoint such a person to the Supreme Court.)

He has ignored or denied widely accepted scientific findings. For example, with respect to stem cell research, captured by a religious minority, he limited this research to a degree that radically restricts research leading to benefits for hundreds of thousands of persons subject to major disabilities and early death.

He has re-emphasized abortion as a political issue, when it is a purely personal decision for the woman.

He has allowed an increase in the number and type of media organizations any one company can acquire, thus permitting a further concentration of power over the news.

He has again and again reversed the regulations and policies designed to protect the environment, always adopting a policy that favors those manufacturers and industrialists whose actions have clearly fouled the air and water. He pushes for drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and throughout northern Alaska. He is allowing the logging of our national parks. He ignores scientific findings that the world is being subjected to a warming climate change that is man-made and that could otherwise be forestalled or radically slowed down.

He has adopted or proposed regulations that endanger the safety of persons, when a Republican two-house legislature will

not act in his favor. His regulations would prevent the release to the public of car safety information, such as warranty claims, consumer complaints and individual rights on safety issues; he would relax the rule on allowable coal dust in mines; he would eliminate the rule requiring employers to keep records of employees' ergonomics injuries; he has cut 77 personnel from the staff of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration; he has raised the allowable mercury content in the air.

I am, as American citizens ought to be, free to express my deeply held convictions, derived from my conscience and sense of justice, and to vote for candidates who in my opinion will act in the best interests of the country. In this, as in other life actions, my prayer is I am in line with the will of God.

Robert L. Black is a retired judge of the Hamilton County Common Pleas Court and the Ohio First District Court of Appeals.

EDITORIAL

The Election System

Toward Radical Reform

Time is too short before Nov 2 to bar bad voting machines. Ben Scotch, former head of Vermont ACLU, says no way will the Republican-controlled Congress allow the Graham bill or the Holt bill to pass. Without such a law we will not have a voter-verified paper audit trail in the key states which will make the difference. So we have to *prepare to challenge election "results"*. Bush will have thousands of lawyers in every state "to ensure poll access" and Kerry will have thousands of lawyers to ensure access and to challenge irregularities.

In general, *citizens will have to insist on posting of precinct results before they are forwarded to the central counting house, and to monitor, challenge, and document questionable activities at polling places, for use by media and lawyers.* I don't see such preparations happening systematically. It's doubtful that we will have reliable exit polling results to challenge official "results". So I think we are in for a years-long struggle after the election.

Even if Bush is defeated, we sorely need major reform. *The electoral college must end* in a constitutional amendment, with *permission for recounts and revotes.* And before that we must obtain *instant-runoff voting* in 30 or 40 states, and in federal law. (For IRV we likely will have to live with electronic voting machines, but the software and hardware must be non-proprietary and transparent.)

But first we must ensure valid and transparent voting procedures. The cheapest and most accurate way is *returning to paper ballots and community vote-counting.* It will be helpful to make an instructional film aimed at election officials as well as the general public.

All this reform will be working "against the tide" of official privilege. The systematists among us will have to work for *democratization of Congress, its structure and rules.* And for *review of the federal system* with its ultimately failed checks and balances. Clearly the media play a major role (with informed or disinformed citizenry), so a *truly public radio and TV* must be ensured. At the same time we must lead schools to feature *media literacy*, so that children will know what goes on behind their favorite scenes.

Army's Toxic Theater for Children "Spirit of America" Teaches Warrior Ethos

by Ethel Silverberg, Capital District (NY) Alliance, 27 Sept 2004

Children screamed. Laser flashes pierced the darkness accompanied by sharp cracks of gunfire coming from the prone bodies of soldiers on the arena's floor.

I was in the 17,000-seat Pepsi Arena in Albany, N.Y. The show I had hesitated to see until now was billed as *Spirit of America*, performed by the US Army Military District of Washington. Their symbol is a white Washington Monument on a field of blue crossed by a golden-hilted red sword.

Spirit of America teaches the "...Army's 'Warrior Ethos'..." and this it did. Small boys cheered the Humvee racing across the floor. The arena was filled with more than 10,000 children from elementary through 12th grade, bused from the Albany area and New England schools.

The Alliance for Democracy had joined the two-day protest organized by Veterans for Peace to counter the show's four performances. On Friday, mid-morning, over 100 demonstrators lined the street. They were members of Veterans for Peace, Alliance for Democracy, Women Against War, Campus Action, Campus Greens, Peace Action, Bethlehem Neighbors for Peace, Traprock Peace Center, of Deerfield, MA, and unaffiliated activists.

They chanted NO WAR and held signs proclaiming "Is Your Child Ready for Arlington?", "STOP the WAR", "Support the Troops but Bring Them Home", "War is Terrorism with a Bigger Budget", "Money for Books Not for War". Three large graphic photos of wounded children were displayed, one showing a child with one leg. A schoolchild stared at the picture and asked, "What happened?" "He was hurt in the war," I answered.

A group of fifth graders passed as they filed towards the arena's entrance. Many smiled, such sweet faces. They gave peace signs, which we returned. Our two drummers maintained our spirits: Jeff who calls himself a Drummer for Peace, and Jun-San, a Nipponzau Myonoji Buddhist, who has been part of the local peace movement since 1982.

Peg Clemente, a protester who had attended the 10:00 am performance, came out after 45 minutes. Her vivid description gave me a sinking feeling that something irreversible was happening. The same sense of grief and loss overwhelmed me when I attended as much as I could handle of a later performance. I felt trapped, an unwilling voyeur of a desperate scene.

The sick feeling was expressed by John Carl of WRPI. He kept repeating, "This is propoganda, just propoganda." He said it glorifies the military, it's loud, it shows soldiers on the battlefield. He doesn't believe parents knew what their children would see when they signed permission slips for the trip. Michael, a protester, called it "propogandizing children into glorification of violence."

A passerby said to me, "Spare me you signs. My husband is in Iraq." I shared her concern for him and the disruption of their lives. After a brief, not antagonistic chat, she turned to go saying, "I

support Bush 100%. I think he is the bravest man in America."

Air Force Lt.-Col. (ret.) Frank Houde, a demonstrator with Veterans for Peace, used the word cry. "It makes me want to cry that I have to do this to protect American values." Cheryl Bellus, local activist, said, "War destroys families; we destroy ourselves." David Easter, Director of Campus Action, declared we should be teaching our children the values of peace and non-violence.

Al Brophy was in a wheelchair wearing a t-shirt proclaiming Fellowship of Reconciliation. "The military's goal," he said, "is victory in war. War is the ultimate failure; I feel we should be training children for success and not failure."

Most touching, making us feel sad and sick, were the children. I quote Pete Looker: "I saw kids pile in, then the show, with sadness, shock and disgust... I watched our army use multi-media R-rated violence and music to seduce and recruit our children..."

By contrast, a group of nine children from the Albany Free School stood silently with the demonstrators, holding their handmade signs proclaiming peace. How I long for 10,000 children to enter that arena holding peace placards. Instead, I saw a mother with a toddler enter the show moments before gunfire erupted amid flashes of laser lights. Not yet seated, the toddler swung around and grabbed her mother's leg, hiding her head. The mother left carrying the child. Don't you wonder about the reaction of Iraqi children to the bombs and gunfire night after night?

Charles Jenks and Suni of the Traprock Peace Center (www.traprockpeace.org) had provided the graphic signs of the wounded Iraqi children.

The cost estimate of each performance was \$100,000, a figure I could not confirm. Area businesses, including our local newspaper *The Albany Times-Union* underwrote the show to which tickets are free. I did confirm that *Spirit of America* has a \$5.2 million annual budget.

Although the *Spirit of America*, billed as bringing "229 years of Army and American history to life," is a fixture in Washington, it was on the road in Worcester MA and Albany NY. It is widely believed to be a recruiting tool with these Friday and Saturday performances used as tryouts for broader travels.

After years of demonstrating for peace, for environment, for schools, I have never have felt so emotionally involved or touched. It was the most draining activist experience I have ever had, and like all those present, we continually used the word "sad." Perhaps it was the children, those for whom we work towards a better life. Their fresh faces, so happy with a day off from classes.



School buses fill Pearl Street in Albany after dropping off students to attend the "Spirit of America" military show on Friday, Sept. 24, 2004, at the Pepsi Arena.. (Cindy Schultz / Times Union)

system, as well as water wars in Cochabamba, Bolivia and Rajasthan, India.

A Victory for the People

Amid shouting and cheering, Lee town representatives voted 41-10 to reject this contract with Veolia—a resounding defeat for privatization. Moving on, the town meeting representatives unanimously approved Deedee's plan to hire experts to design and build a new wastewater processing plant, with a volunteer oversight committee, and then to operate the plant and the water distribution system as a continuing municipal department. Lee's was a victory for all the towns of the Commonwealth, and a model for organizing. As AfD's retiring co-chair Ted Dooley recently remarked, "No more 'dry' politics—we got 'wa-wa'."

Deedee pointed out that a volunteer water oversight committee was important because the directors of the town's Department of Public Works lacked the imagination or will to repair Lee's aging water distribution system beyond "Let's give it all to Veolia." Other folks noted the irony of the recused town moderator's bias favoring Veolia—he is Chris Hodgkins, formerly state representative from Lee, who returned to his home town as a lawyer-representative for Veolia. It was also Hodgkins who had appointed the town's Finance Committee, whose chairperson voiced reluctance to vote with the other committee members for a Veolia take-over.

The Alliance for Democracy played an important supporting role in the Lee water victory. We provided the film "Thirst" and our tabloid "Keep Water Out of Corporate Hands" enabling Jonathan Leavitt (Mass. Global Action, Lawrence MA), and Dave Lewit (Boston-Cambridge Alliance) to help Deedee with post-film discussion and strategizing in mid-August.

But the 23 September town meeting was only the culmination of an 8-day series of New England site visits by Ruth Caplan and Dave, with help from AfD co-chair Nancy Price and Maine activist Martha Spiess. (You may have seen Martha videotaping AfD's June convention.) Actually Ruth and Dave zig-zagged 1500 miles through coastal and central Maine, central Vermont, western Massachusetts, and southeast New Hampshire developing relations with water activists, opening possibilities of collaboration and coordination to keep water in public hands, aiming to foster water-watch councils in corporate-vulnerable areas.

People-Power in Town Governance

Complementary to water defense is "participatory budgeting". Dave and Ruth met in Amherst with Brazilian sociologist Gianpaolo Baiocchi who teaches at the University of Massachusetts. Gianpaolo is an expert on participatory budgeting (PB), the great democratic experiment started in Porto Alegre, Brazil, 15 years ago and spreading to 100 other Brazilian cities. We understand that water service is but one part of any city or town's budget, so if citizens can devote so much effort to water, why not to all budget areas such as health, education, roads, recreation, public safety, and so on? And why not on a



Deedee Consolati

regular basis rather than occasional one-shot efforts? Brazil's experience has shown that more and more thousands of citizens in progressively-run cities volunteer hundreds of hours a year when such effort bears fruit in better water, education, health, etc., for themselves and their neighbors, and less corruption or collusion in government.

We feel that New England, with its progressive attitudes and town-meeting participatory tradition, is ripe for such democratic development. So we are forming a Roundtable of key activists to meet in Amherst on 13 November to discuss "Asserting Local Democratic Control: Public Water and Participatory Budgeting", to include panelists at Boston Social Forum and others contacted on our current trip.

Alliance Team on the Move

The AfD water team participated in two public meetings in Rockland and Brunswick, Maine, arranged by Martha Spiess, and a similar meeting in Great Barrington, Massachusetts, arranged by a local group including Catherine McCabe and Anita Constantini. In each case "Thirst" was shown, followed by talks by Ruth, Nancy, Dave, and/or Ward Morehouse of the Program on Constitution, Law, and Democracy (POCLAD), an ally of AfD—and by general discussion. In Rockland a water company's CEO was also on the panel—with an innocent, down-home presentation. Questions enabled us to bring out considerations of WTO (GATS)—the CEO innocent of these—and PB. All angles, threats, and alternatives seem to interest New Englanders—among whom water is a deep concern.

Much of the team's time was spent conferring with organizations such as Military Toxics Project and Maine Fair Trade (Lewiston ME), Maine Rivers (Augusta), Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF, Brunswick), and Peace thru Interamerican Community Action (PICA, Bangor); informal activist groups such as Hugo Liepmann's with neighbors like Joan Sax (Randolph VT); and individual activists such as Luise Vaughn (Bigelow ME near Sugarloaf Mt.—got skis?) and Annette Smith (Danby VT). These long-term rural activists have studied groundwater aquifers and relevant government laws and regulations—they are experts without degrees—and know local politics and politicians, and also are learning about international trade agreements and their environmental and social impacts. They showed us springs in the hills, pumping facilities on a private farm and on new-built roads in pristine forest and on public land. Transnational "food" conglomerates like Nestlé are pumping water from aquifers faster than nature can recharge those underground channels. This lowers water levels of local wells—totally drying up some, and drawing in toxins from nearby underground sources.

Challenging Corporate Exploitation of Public Water

Some of these facilities can pump more than half a million gallons of water a day, to be trucked to bottling plants (usually nearby, but can be as far away as Framingham MA), to be



bottled in polycarbonate clear plastic and sold for a thousand times more money than tap water, with no assurance of superior quality. (Note that such plastic bottles can leach endocrine disruptors into their contents, which can interfere with sexual functioning.) On 22 September we attended a meeting of the town planning board in Nottingham NH where SOG (Save Our Groundwater) members—long befriended by Boston-Cambridge and North Bridge Alliances—and other townfolk were horrified at the prospect of their well water sources being drained or polluted by the likes of USA Springs, Inc., whose plans they continue to thwart. They are also distressed at hazardous heavy truck traffic and factory-like conditions in their rustic environs.

The regional water picture is not simple. Many people support a scheme long proposed by a former Maine legislator to tax large-scale pumping of groundwater for bottling and possible export. Proceeds would accrue to a loan fund to spur small business development in Maine, with surpluses distributed to all Maine citizens as "dividends"—as they have been doing with oil pumping in Alaska. But will this reduce exploitation of Maine's water resources? Not if Maine folks like those dividend "checks" and want more!

And then there is the danger of loss of control of water resources. What if Nestlé trucked or piped water across the Canadian border, only a few miles away, to bottle it? International trade agreements like GATT and NAFTA would kick in to stymie any subsequent efforts by Maine to limit the pumping of its water for export. Like other trade agreements, GATT/WTO and NAFTA were negotiated behind closed doors by US government officials advised by corporate lobbyists, with little citizen information or input, and widespread ignorance by Congress members. It will take strategic action by well-organized citizen groups to change such rules, and consideration of regular participation in governance.



Bjorn Claeson (PICA), Martha Spiess, Ruth Caplan, Nancy Price, Brent Hall

Altogether on this trip, the Alliance water team met with folks in six Maine locations, two in Vermont, three in Massachusetts, and one in New Hampshire. In addition to farmers, townfolk, and organization workers, we conferred with a film-maker, an investigative reporter, a politician, and a sociologist. We know-it-all denizens of Boston and Washington are struck with the competence, knowledge, energy, determination—and hospitality—of enterprising activists in the heartland, confirming our confidence in our campaign to resist corporate assaults on our local societies and natural resources.

We build the road of democracy as we go. Some of us—like one Vermont secessionist we met—are dreaming of a United States of New England. More of us hope to rebuild America. #

Congress Slouches Toward Home

The New York Times | Editorial | 24 Sept 2004

The Republican-controlled Congress is shambling to the end of one of the lightest workloads in decades without a hint of embarrassment, concentrating on the defense of the flag, tax cuts and marriage while failing at the most demanding obligations of government.

When the lawmakers get back home, voters should ask them how they could quit their posts while leaving a dozen basic spending bills in next year's budget unfinished - hung up once more in back-room feuds about pork and logrolling. The assault weapons ban was allowed to lapse to appease the gun lobby. A simple \$5 billion corporate-tax plan to satisfy a violation of tariff laws remains mired in a \$150 billion pork fest, while American products suffer retaliatory sanctions in the billions. As for fully financing and enforcing the No Child Left Behind Act, voters have to settle for lawmakers' posing tenderly with school-children.

Equally disturbing is how our elected representatives have been spending their time.

Eager to help the middle class, a goal no one can argue with, they threw moderation to the winds this week on a \$145 billion extension of existing tax cuts benefiting families. They hoped voters would not notice that they had not bothered to find budget savings to offset the costs of this program, and that these tax cuts will spawn a borrowing binge by the government from banks around the world. The loans will come due for America's children and grandchildren, whose earnings may just as well be stamped "Payable to the Bank of China." Republican leaders did find the fiscal constraint to brush aside proposals to extend minimal credits for millions of children in working-poor families, only to add a \$13 billion dollop of tax boons to corporations.

The House began its work on the decades-delayed reform of the American intelligence agencies by announcing that its kudzu patch of competing committees, one of the central points of criticism by the 9/11 commission, was too sacred to touch. Beyond that, House Republican leaders' most enthusiastic response to the call for reform seemed to be in trying to tack on a Patriot Act postscript that would grant law enforcement even more powers that could curtail civil liberties.

Republican leaders have also been chipping away at the Constitution by proposing to deny judges jurisdiction to review selected acts of Congress. The House passed a measure yesterday retaining the Pledge of Allegiance's "under God" phrase and prohibiting any federal court - including, outrageously, the Supreme Court - from judging the law's constitutionality.

In essence, the House proposed to protect a patriotic ritual by trashing the constitutional system it celebrates. This measure was spurred by discontent over a 2002 federal appeals court ruling that invalidated the recitation at public schools of the pledge with the "under God" phrase in it, and the Supreme Court's recent choice to dismiss the case on technical grounds rather than addressing the merits. It echoed the mean-spirited and unconstitutional Marriage Protection Act, which the House approved in July to bar federal courts from reviewing the legal definition of marriage.

The other day, Congressional Republicans celebrated the 10th anniversary of their ascendancy to power with the Contract With America, somehow failing to mention that their fervid conversion to unchecked deficits was not exactly part of that contract. Once upon a time, gridlock was considered the ultimate problem with Congress. That looks better than what we're getting right now. #

Neocons Love Terrorists If They Happen To Be Chechen

by John Laughland, *The Guardian* (UK), 8 Sept 2004

An enormous head of steam has built up behind the view that [Russia's] President Putin is somehow the main culprit in the grisly events in North Ossetia. Soundbites and headlines such as "Grief turns to anger", "Harsh words for government", and "Criticism mounting against Putin" have abounded, while TV and radio correspondents in Beslan have been pressed on air to say that the people there blame Moscow as much as the terrorists. There have been numerous editorials encouraging us to understand—to quote the Sunday Times—the "underlying causes" of Chechen terrorism (usually Russian authoritarianism), while the widespread use of the word "rebels" to describe people who shoot children shows a surprising indulgence in the face of extreme brutality.

On closer inspection, it turns out that *this so-called "mounting criticism" is in fact being driven by a specific group in the Russian political spectrum—and by its American supporters.* The leading Russian critics of Putin's handling of the Beslan crisis are the pro-US politicians Boris Nemtsov and Vladimir Ryzhkov—men associated with the *extreme neoliberal* market reforms which so devastated the Russian economy under the west's beloved Boris Yeltsin—and the Carnegie Endowment's Moscow Center. Funded by its New York head office, this influential thinktank—which operates in tandem with the military-political Rand Corporation, for instance in producing policy papers on Russia's role in helping the US restructure the "Greater Middle East"—has been quoted repeatedly in recent days blaming Putin for the Chechen atrocities. The centre has also been assiduous over recent months in arguing against Moscow's claims that there is a link between the Chechens and al-Qaida.

These people peddle essentially the same line as that expressed by Chechen leaders themselves, such as Ahmed Zakaev, the London exile who wrote in these pages yesterday. Other prominent figures who use the Chechen rebellion as a stick with which to beat Putin include Boris Berezovsky, the Russian oligarch who, like Zakaev, was granted political asylum in this country, although the Russian authorities want him on numerous charges. Moscow has often accused Berezovsky of funding Chechen rebels in the past.

By the same token, the BBC and other media sources are putting it about that Russian TV played down the Beslan crisis, while only western channels reported live, the implication being that Putin's Russia remains a highly controlled police state. But this view of the Russian media is precisely the opposite of the impression I gained while watching both CNN and Russian TV over the past week: the Russian channels had far better information and images from Beslan than their western competitors. This harshness towards Putin is perhaps explained by the fact that, in the US, the leading group which pleads the Chechen cause is the American Committee for Peace in Chechnya (ACPC). The list of the self-styled "distinguished

Americans" who are its members is a rollcall of the most prominent neoconservatives who so enthusiastically support the "war on terror".

They include Richard Perle, the notorious Pentagon adviser; Elliott Abrams of Iran-Contra fame; Kenneth Adelman, the former US ambassador to the UN who egged on the invasion of Iraq by predicting it would be "a cakewalk"; Midge Decter, biographer of Donald Rumsfeld and a director of the rightwing Heritage Foundation; Frank Gaffney of the militarist Center for Security Policy; Bruce Jackson, former US military intelligence officer and one-time vice-president of Lockheed Martin, now president of the US Committee on NATO; Michael Ledeen of the American Enterprise Institute, a former admirer of Italian fascism and now a leading proponent of regime change in Iran; and R James Woolsey, the former CIA director who is one of the leading cheerleaders behind George Bush's plans to re-model the Muslim world along pro-US lines.

The ACPC heavily promotes the idea that the Chechen rebellion shows the undemocratic nature of Putin's Russia, and cultivates support for the Chechen cause by emphasizing the seriousness of human rights violations in the tiny Caucasian republic. It compares the Chechen crisis to those other fashionable "Muslim" causes, Bosnia and Kosovo - implying that only international intervention in the Caucasus can stabilize the situation there. In August, the ACPC welcomed the award of political asylum in the US, and a US-government funded grant, to Ilyas Akhmadov, foreign minister in the opposition Chechen government, and a man Moscow describes as a terrorist. Coming from both political parties, the ACPC members represent the backbone of the US foreign policy establishment, and their views are indeed those of the US administration.

Although the White House issued a condemnation of the Beslan hostage-takers, its official view remains that the Chechen conflict must be solved politically. According to ACPC member Charles Fairbanks of Johns Hopkins University, US pressure will now increase on Moscow to achieve a political, rather than military, solution—in other words to negotiate with terrorists, a policy the US resolutely rejects elsewhere.

Allegations are even being made in Russia that the west itself is somehow behind the Chechen rebellion, and that the purpose of such support is to weaken Russia, and to drive her out of the Caucasus. The fact that the Chechens are believed to use as a base the Pankisi gorge in neighboring Georgia—a country which aspires to join NATO, has an extremely pro-American government, and where the US already has a significant military presence—only encourages such speculation. Putin himself even seemed to lend credence to the idea in his interview with foreign journalists on Monday.

Proof of any such western involvement would be difficult to obtain, but is it any wonder Russians are asking themselves such questions when the same people in Washington who demand the deployment of overwhelming military force against the US's so-called terrorist enemies also insist that Russia capitulate to hers?

John Laughland is a trustee of the British Helsinki Human Rights Group www.oscewatch.org Italics in article are ours. —Ed.

US Marine Graffiti Favor Kerry Abandon Fidelity, Ye Who Enter This Latrine

by Ned Parker, Agence France-Press, 30 Sept 2004

AL-ASAD AIRBASE (IRAQ)—The US military, which traditionally avoids meddling in politics, is expressing its views about the US presidential race in the one place where a soldier can speak his mind freely: the latrines.

Here, in graffiti, young soldiers wax philosophical—albeit crudely and with a fondness for four-letter words—about God, death, President George W. Bush and his democratic rival John Kerry.

And, if one straw poll is to be believed on this gigantic air base in the western Iraqi desert, Kerry is due to rout Bush in the November 2 elections, after the Massachusetts senator picked up 73 votes to 58 on the bathroom wall. Discuss: These Marines are expressing a popular opinion, Kerry will surely topple Bush.

However, the vote has come in for criticism amid suspicions Kerry supporters voted more than once due to the identical hash-marks on his side of the column inside the foul, humid brown and green plastic stalls, known as "Port-a-Johns".

While independent presidential candidate Ralph Nader received nary a mention, some marines nominated pornography kingpins Hugh Hefner and Larry Flynt onto the latrine wall ballots.

Heavy Metal gods Slayer and Rob Zombie received 11th-hour nominations from men in uniform to run for the White House. The bathroom wall vents a surprising amount of anger over Bush, considered by many rank-and-file a great wartime president, and heaps a mountain of cynicism on the US presence in Iraq.

Much of the bile is dedicated to denigrating Bush's homestate of Texas, the land of cowboys and toughness that has come to define his wartime presidency. "Here I sit cheeks a-flexin'. Bout to make another Texan," one rhyme reads, repeated in multiple stalls.

"F*** Texas" reads another slogan, prompting threats of death from a defender of the Lonestar state. Another slogan reads: "Texas = steers and queers," in a crude verbal assault on Texans' code of manhood.

One diatribe says: "The only thing Bush cares about is a good fight to make a name for himself. If you think he really cares about us you're out of your f***ing mind. If you really believe 9/11 is related to Iraq then you're just as delusional as the hippie that thinks there will ever be world peace. You're not fighting for America. You're fighting for f***ed-up politics. End of story Cinderella."

Another pundit opines: "If you are a retard, vote Bush. He is too!" Bush supporters fire back with accusations that Kerry will sink the military.

They belittle his military service in Vietnam and write: "A traitor ever since Vietnam, when he lied about his actions," in reference to charges brought against Kerry by a dubious group of military veterans in August.

"If you want a huge pay cut, vote Kerry," writes one bathroom scribe, voicing the grunt soldier's belief that the Democrats will gut the armed forces. "If you want a p**** in office vote Kerry."

But Kerry gets off scot-free compared to Bush, who is called 'a scumbag, alcoholic, draft-dodging millionaire daddy's boy,' in

reference to Bush's wild youth and lingering questions about his national guard service during Vietnam.

Commenting on the marines' bathroom debating society, Lieutenant Josh Walton suggested the stalls had a loosening effect on the soldiers, especially the service's smaller number of Kerry supporters. "You can put out what you want. It's pretty anonymous," Walton said. "If you want to be a jokester, express what you feel, you can put it up there."

Amid the scrawled expletives -- interspersed with rants against female marines and paeans to the virtues of other soldiers' wives, sisters and mothers -- some men offered sober and cynical reflections on the American mission in Iraq.

In black magic marker, a soldier scrawled a maxim from Plato that rings true whoever wins the November election: "Only the dead have seen the end of war."

Voter Persuasion & Get-out-the-Vote Brookline Peaceworks' Swing State House Parties

MAIL letters to under-voting Democratic voters in Swing States.
PHONE undecided voters in New Hampshire to persuade them
NOT to vote for Bush.

Sun, 24 Oct 5 - 8pm 106 Beals St Brookline

Sun, 31 Oct 5 - 8pm 106 Beals St Brookline

(loechler@bu.edu, 617-277-6346)

Bring cell phones (and chargers) and a snack.

106 Beals St meets Harvard St, between Beacon St & Comm Av. Use Green Line C or B.

KERRY VOLUNTEERING Phone Bank calling to Swing States:
every evening, Kerry HQ, 60 Canal St, Boston 617-367-1551

BROOKLINE voter persuasion in Swing States

18 Harvard St. (Chobee Hoy's Office, RSVP 617-277-6282)

Every Tue, Wed, Thr, 6 - 9pm.

NATICK voter persuasion & Get-Out-the-Vote in swing states

Gold Star India Restaurant, 508-877-9082, ProfHome@aol.com

Mon. 18 Oct, 7pm

Thr 28 Oct, 7pm

*****ACTIONS IN SWING STATES*****

AMERICA COMING TOGETHER (ACT) Voter Education

New Hampshire: nhvolunteer@act4victory.org 603-622-9000

Maine: mevoluteer@act4victory.org 207-333-3640

BROOKLINE PEACEWORKS — spend Election Day in New Hampshire helping with a massive get-out-the-vote effort.

SIGN UP AT: defeatbush@rcn.com 617-277-6346

FLORIDA Get-Out-the-Vote, Friday Oct 29 - Tuesday, Nov. 2, expenses paid!

EMILY'S LIST: Fly from Washington D.C. to Florida (sign up:

<http://www.emilyslist.org/>)

CHAPTER AND ALLIANCE NEWS

BCA's meeting of 15 September availed a dozen of us the observations and insights of Willard Johnson, Elfth Elthahir, and Raphael _____, the latter two natives of Sudan. The ongoing slaughter of thousands each week—genocide—is out of control. US military resources are key, yet the US is preoccupied in ways which also seem out of control. 100,000 trained peacekeepers would be needed to bring peace to the bloody Darfur region, yet only 14,000 in west Africa are the most to be aggregated anywhere on the continent. Apart from limited resources, US officials apparently have little understanding of this historically rich and mutating region. Since the British rulers were ousted in 1956 there have been democratic as well as dictatorial (as since 1989) regimes, socialistic as well as military. Strife in Darfur has been black on black, Arabic/Muslim vs. African/Muslim, herdsman vs. farmers, paramilitary on camels and helicopters, involving land, water, oil, slaves... Superficially the situation resembles Bosnia/Serbia/Kosovo, but neither Bush nor Kerry wants to send peace-makers or peace-keepers, even though UN agreements mandate intervention. Rwanda revisited? Or is each genocide different?

ACTION ALERTS

GET OUT THE SWING VOTE, NH. 18 Sept, and every Sat (10-4) and Sun (11-4). "America Coming Together". Ride to Manchester and other NH towns with Boston group. For arrangements, call Georgia Hollister-Isman at 617-422-0118 (work) or 413-695-1786 (cell). Or Emily Mintz at 603-296-1408.

CLEAN WATER ACTION needs election phone callers at 36 Bromfield St, #505, Boston, evenings starting at 5. Contact Elizabeth Saunders at (617) 654-8284.

FOR OTHER ELECTION OPPORTUNITIES see box, page 7.

Wed. 20 Oct. 7pm Cambridge. **BCA meeting on The Cost-Benefit Game.** See box, page 1.

Thu. 21 Oct. 5:30-7:00pm. Cambridge

Human Rights to Health and Water. With **Claudia Canepa** (India), **Sinae Vogel** (Mexico), **Pankaj Kumar** (USA). MIT campus Building 10-401

Sat. 23 Oct. 1-3pm. Chelsea. **Community Forum on El Salvador**

The first 100 days of governance of the newly elected Salvadoran president, Elias Antonio Saca. How would the free trade agreement (CAFTA) between the US and Central America, plus the Puebla-Panama Plan impact the rural and agricultural sectors in El Salvador? With **Teresa Perez**, a Salvadoran organizer, native of Chalatenango and niece of the late Juan Chacon, one of the famous peasant leaders in the 1970's. Currently she works as a coordinator of the Sister Cities between the US and El Salvador. She is also a member of the Association of Rural Communities for Development in El Salvador (CRIPDES). Santa Rosa de Lima School, 580 Broadway, Chelsea. Information: Jeannette Huezo at (617) 423-2148 x32

Mon. 25 Oct. 6:30pm. Boston. **Chain of Command: The Road from 9/11 to Abu Ghraib** with **Seymour Hersh**, investigative reporter for the *New Yorker*, who exposed the Abu Ghraib scandal. Faneuil Hall, Quincy Market. Info: 617/373-5800.

Thu. 28 Oct. 5pm. Cambridge. **Democracy & the Established Media.** Amy Mitchell (MIT Journalism), Alex Jones (Harvard's Shorenstein Ctr), Steve Vanevera (MIT PolSci). MIT, Wiesner Bldg, 20 Ames St.

Wed. 3 Nov. 6:30. Boston. **One Day Later: Insights on the 2004 Presidential Race.** **Peter Blute**, former Republican Congressman and co-host of WRKO's morning drive show, and **Barney Frank**, Democratic Congress member, in a provocative and lively conversation about the campaign and the deciding factors that led one candidate into the winner's circle. Faneuil Hall, Quincy Market. Information: 617 373 5800.

Sat. 6 Nov. 9am-6pm. Cambridge. **Dual Occupations: From The Rule of Force to The Rule of Law in U.S Middle East Policy.** Speakers include **Noam Chomsky**, **Robert Jensen**, **M. Shahid Alam**, **Naseer H. Aruri**, Professor **George Bisharat**, **Willard Johnson**, Rev. **Don Wagner**, **Susan Alram**, **Nancy Murray**, and others. MIT, Building 10, Room 205. Information Dr. Elaine Hagopian, echagop@aol.com.

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YOU DON'T HAVE TO LIVE IN BOSTON TO LOVE BCA

Please help us as we fight to make a better future for ourselves and our children -- Join the Boston/Cambridge Alliance for Democracy. (Cut out this form and send it to:

Dave Lewit, 271 Dartmouth St. #2h, Boston, MA 02116.)
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___ \$52/Year - "Contributor" (We need to average this amount.)
___ \$104/Year - "Sustainer" (Helping us thrive.)
___ \$208/Year - "Community Steward"
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