

## What's Happening Office Closed Thanksgiving Day

The next issue of *What's Happening* will be on the streets one day early, on Wednesday, November 25, due to the Thanksgiving holiday.

The *What's Happening* office will be closed all day Thursday, November 26. It will re-open Friday, November 27 and the Calendar and Classifieds deadline for the December 3 issue is Friday, November 27 at 4 pm.

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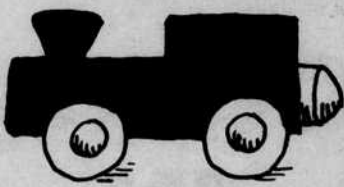
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# ASHES AND DIAMONDS

by Alexander Cockburn

## The Tempest

London, England—It's easier here to get an immediate physical sense of the impact of the financial crash on the world stock markets, because there was a properly Shakespearean fusion of meteorological and financial catastrophe on Friday, October 16. The people who staggered into the city early that Friday morning had already experienced the lash of one of the most violent storms—hurricanes if you wish—in English history, starting at about 4 am, and since most of these same city folk live in the southern suburbs and rururbs of London their houses were directly in the path of the tempest.

A couple of days ago, already two weeks later, the signs of this cataclysm were everywhere to be witnessed. I visited a friend in Eccleston Square, a few minutes from Victoria Station and stood transfixed at the scene of carnage unfolded. The Square was designed by Thomas Cubitt, a Victorian speculative builder who, among other things, invented the treadmill. It was graced by lofty plane trees under which Winston Churchill, a denizen of Eccleston Square, used to sit.

The plane trees are lofty no more. Overwhelmed by the 100 m.p.h. winds they crashed down on the Porsches, Mercedes and Bentleys of the stockbrokers and financial operators who are now the square's residents. The devastation south of London was even more dramatic. An hour's drive down winding country lanes revealed groves upended and only lowly copses still extant.

The fury of all these de-Porsched speculators at Ronald Reagan, the man whose role they have toasted for six years, is intense. There are howls, starting with Mrs. Thatcher, for the United States to cut the deficit and balance the budget. They echo similarly ludicrous suggestions from the neo-liberal crowd in the United States. There were even more rumors as I left that Jesse Jackson was going to make a speech in support of a balanced budget. If he does commit this act of folly—thus subscribing to the notion that a Depression is what America truly needs—then he will no more deserve support, at least for his economic policies, than Senators Bumpers and Simon, who the latter professes to support the great liberal spending programs of the past, while simultaneously preaching the virtues of a constitutional amendment to balance the budget.

## Drinkers and Pundits

Returned from the devastation of Eccleston Square I am suddenly asked to prepare a five minute address for one of the television channels on the difference between British and American journalists. After due deliberation I make the following observations:

"I first went to work—and live—in the United States 15 years ago when the Watergate scandal was beginning. Right away I noticed a difference between the British and the American Press. American journalists didn't seem to drink so much. In fact they seemed to stay sober all the time. At first I suspected it was the gravity of the task, turning president Nixon out of office, that had temporarily sus-

ended the profession's usually intimate relationship with the bottle. Then I covered the presidential election races in 1976 and 1980. It was the same story. Under circumstances that would have reduced British journalists to drunken stupor in a week these American journalists remained sober for months on end.

"I asked myself why this should be so. Was there some strange genetic aversion to booze embedded in my American colleagues? This seemed unlikely so I sought a social explanation and eventually I found one. American journalists have a much higher sense of personal and professional worth than their opposite numbers this side of the Atlantic. They are taught to believe, and do believe, with every fiber of their being that were it not for their professional vigilance, democracy in the United States would wither and die. Inflamed with this sense of high mission and, incidentally, better rewarded in financial terms, they have no need, or at least less need, to seek comfort in the bottle.

"In Britain, journalists are not sustained by a similar sense of uplifting social mission. Bruised by a public contempt for their function that ranks it far below such vital social tasks as bookies' runner, these British journalists know their professional mission is to be servile to power, lining their masters' pockets in this unwholesome cause. I do not, I hasten to say, thus allege that this is what all journalists in Britain do, but it is what most of them do, and hence, unsurprisingly, many of them drink recklessly to obliterate their spiritual shame.

"But then, I asked myself, is it not true that most American journalists also apply themselves on a lifetime basis to the task of being servile to power, lining their masters' pockets with equal application? There is a myth here I should instantly dispel. By reason of the Watergate and more recently the Iran-Contra scandals, American journalists have a mostly undeserved reputation for a courageous, at times even arrogant, attitude to power; a spirit which has brought down one president, Nixon, and humbled another, Reagan. Don't believe it. From most of the American press Nixon and Reagan got treatment as grovelling as that generally accorded Mrs. Thatcher until other forces sufficiently humbled them for the press to move in and start gnawing on their bones. For six long years the American press preached the glory and greatness of Ronald Reagan until a tiny Lebanese paper in Beirut disclosed that he was trading arms to the men who blew up the U.S. Marines.

"The reason for the difference in drinking habits is therefore due to no essential difference in function. Dwelling in a younger empire far more recently on the wane, these American journalists have more illusions about what they are essentially up to, so they have a less guilty attitude to life. They don't stay up late and drink. They get up early and jog."

## Woodward's Casey

A measure of the repellent interest of Bob Woodward's book *Veil*, about William Casey's CIA, is the degree

to which the author, transcribing the calculations of his subjects, has produced a book subscribing to much of their world view. Consider this account of how, in the spring of 1981, the Reagan administration sent \$50 million to the junta in Argentina to commence recruitment and training in Honduras of the Nicaraguan contras:

*The Argentine military intelligence, G-2, had elevated anti-Communism to an ethos and ran a counter-Marxist indoctrination program. The generals were worried about the Montoneros, guerrillas opposed to their dictatorship, who operated out of Nicaragua. Argentina was supporting resistance efforts aimed at the Sandinistas and was training about a thousand men north of the Nicaraguan border in Honduras.*

The chaste first sentence, pivoting on the tranquil words "ethos" and "program" thus spare the reader the unpleasantness of recalling that this G-2 and these Argentinian generals with whom Casey and the Reagan administration were in close contact had in the late 1970's murdered, often after the most horrible tortures, about 10,000 people.

The second sentence is directly misleading since it implies that Nicaragua was host and sponsor of the Montoneros, thus "exporting terror," although the Montoneros had been mostly active in the mid-1970s, long before the Sandinistas came to power, and had by 1981 been almost entirely wiped out by the torture and murder. The third sentence, notably the phrase "supporting resistance efforts," elides the historical record, which is that at the instigation of the Reagan administration and with \$50 million of U.S. taxpayer money those Argentinian generals dispatched their most seasoned torturers and thugs to Tegucigalpa (Honduras) to cobble together the core group of National Guardsmen and derelicts referred to here as "the (contra) resistance."

There is no sign from Woodward that he is merely representing a version of reality to which he takes exception or indeed that this passage is anything other than his own notion of what happened.

[Alexander Cockburn's column is partially underwritten by the Committee in Solidarity with the Central American People (CISCAP). For more information about CISCAP's work to bring peace with justice to the Central American region, call 485-1755 or visit the office at 372 W. 10th.]

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