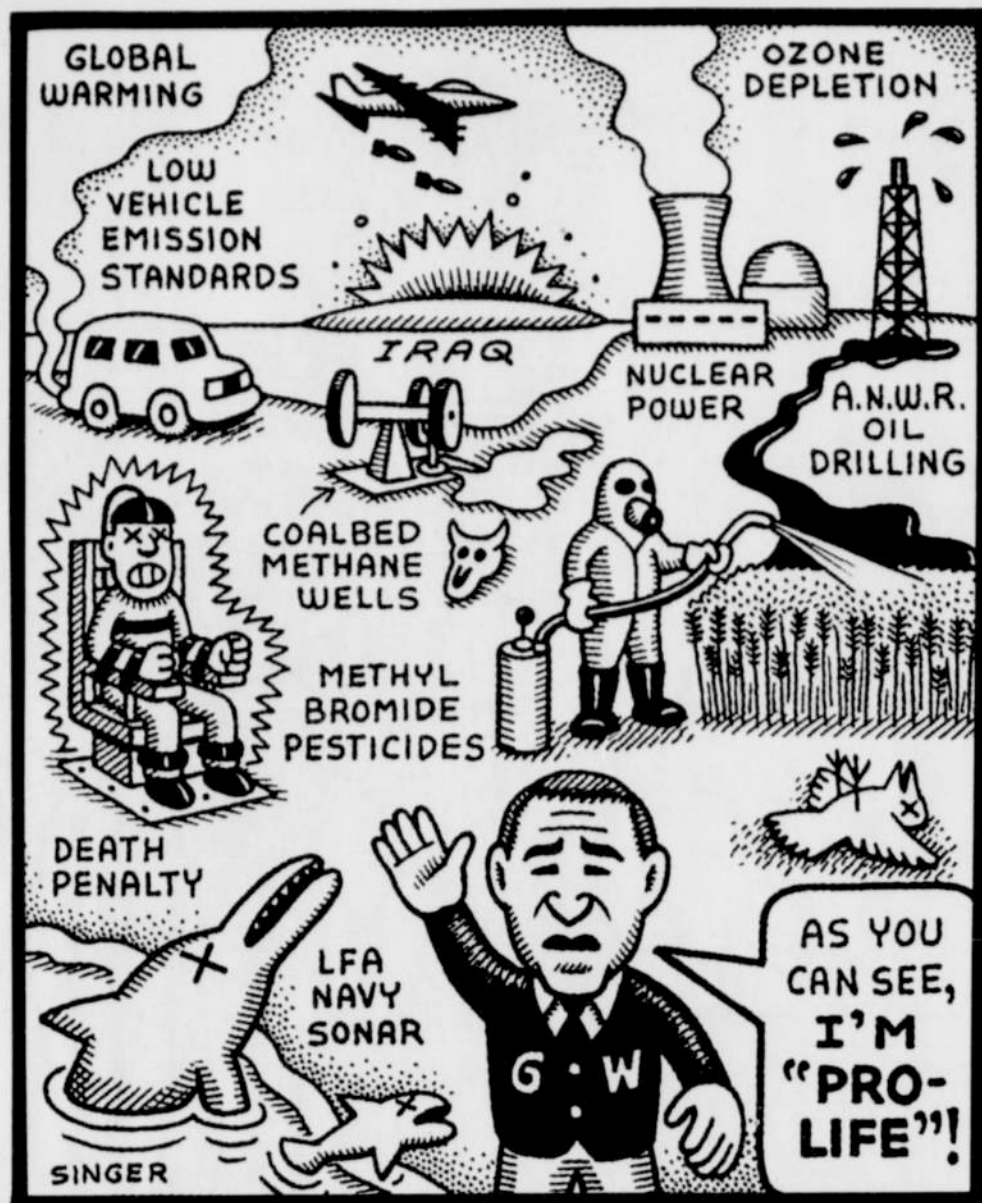


Huge military commitments, huge tax cuts to the wealthiest individuals and corporations, and huge budget deficits leave no money for the old New Deal programs like Social Security or newer programs such as Medicare. No money for schools, hospitals, police, fire, veterans — no money for anything but the front lines of a corporatized military and militarized corporatocracy.

A starved government — once our government — has no ability to restrain the liberated giant or to investigate its abuses or prosecute its crimes. And so, two years after Enron, but one person is behind bars. It is not for lack of villains, and, as all California cries, it is not for lack of victims. When did this monster get untied? During the era of corporate raiding, permitted and smiled upon by the Reagan administration. Ronald Reagan admired those cowboy businessmen of the 1980s — the corporate raiders who engineered hostile corporate takeovers. But those takeovers, allowed by hamstrung regulators, caused all large and mid-sized American corporations to go on a rampage of streamlining, outsourcing, wage-cutting, plant closings and job exporting. They did so to make themselves takeover-proof. It was no longer respectable to make a respectable profit and to serve your community with good jobs and fairly-priced goods and services.

The new mentality of profit maximization and unlimited mergers and no government control was the untying of the monster and it was no accident. The ropes were further loosened in the greedy and morally corrupt Clinton and Bush administrations, until we find ourselves now with a government of, by and for the corporations. The new model CEO was the ruthless cost-cutter and dealmaker. CEO salaries went unbelievably high, where they have stayed. For every \$100 the average American worker makes, these top CEOs make \$50,000. It is a moral outrage in the land of so many homeless and struggling and worried people.

A century ago, the ordinary people of America joined together to tie down the giant. The antitrust laws and environmental laws and the rights of workers to organize and collectively bargain for wages and benefits all joined to nurture the restoration of a great middle class — always the bedrock of democracy. The robber barons, the great giants, remained tied down, no longer free (liberated) to do as they pleased in crushing us with their great wealth and political power. And so it was for a time.



And now, loosed again, these giants have taken over our television networks and most of our newspapers, turning them against our interests and against the truth itself. These giants send our young people off to fight their commercial wars — great profitable ventures.

How free are we now? Check your bills and your bank account. How much time and leisure do you have to enjoy your life and friends? How is your place in your community as a free and equal citizen? Or are we drones that go to work, go to bed to rest for more work, go to the stores to spend all that we earn and more, and watch television to receive our instructions what to buy the next day, if we have jobs at all? Is that freedom by some other name? It is not freedom by any name and it is nothing to push on the rest of the world in the name of freedom.

These corporations steal our time with their computerized telephone switchboards and their long waiting lines and few employees. They steal our jobs and our benefits and our pensions. They use fear at every turn to sell us a little protection, and a little more. And they steal our senators and congressmen just when they might have earned their keep protecting our democracy.

What shall we do about these corporate giants stalking our earth freely? How shall we get our children home from their wars and ourselves free from their captives?

We the people, acting together in the new ways made possible by electronic communication, must become the large counterbalance to these powers — the counterbalance that our government no longer provides. By communicating and acting in concert, we can reward the good companies and thereby keep our money clear of the worst. We can make our demand for fair trade products and provide the shift in market share that will change the practices of those businesses that now exploit our brothers and sisters here and around the world. We can agree together which television news channel is the least objectionable and agree to watch only that — for our watching and buying habits are votes for the kind of world we will live in.

By nudging market share, our small group of dedicated people can influence great changes. We have the tools now to do this now. It will not be an easy task, but we have no real alternative if we are to save the world, and that is what we must decide to do.

Tell your favorite coffee house that, as of Earth Day 2004, you will only buy fair trade coffee. Let's give a "fair warning for fair trade" in this and other areas of products and services. Let us develop the best information about who is doing what, and let us use our new tools of electronic democracy to come to consensus regarding which companies deserve our support — a reverse boycott on a global scale.

I will try to put information on my website about who is helping this new effort, and I will put some printable cards there you can print to give a fair warning for fair trade to your favorite shops and other companies. And let us use each subsequent Earth Day to push for more improvement on every front, giving our fair warnings to move progress along. Let Americans and other people of the earth join us or not. But let them decide and know for themselves which side they are on.

Yes, let's continue our efforts to reform our government, most especially with campaign finance reform. But, with revolutionary new tools, we are capable of redefining democracy at a critical moment. Let us not be shy about for time is short. We stand for love and fairness in the world. That is not gentle work, nor is it painless or bloodless, as so many people around the world know.

This is, after all, our world and our lives. Do you remember those few weeks after the 9/11 attacks when we, as an automatic antidote to the inhumanity of those attacks, sought to reassert our humanity in a million little ways? For that moment we came out of the hypnosis we have come to live under and we saw the Eden of human love and cooperation. We must not fall back under that hypnosis again, as it is a waste of our life. The forces of life and death are in struggle, for those are the other names for love and fear. Let us choose life and love, and happily use ourselves up in loving service to one another.

Doris Haddock, aka 'Granny D' (she has 16 great grandchildren), walked 3,200 miles across the United States at age 90 to draw attention to the need for campaign finance reform. She is now 93. An article she wrote that originally appeared in Orion, "Horatio Alger on Crack" appeared in the April/May 2003 NCTE. Her website is GrannyD.com.

LETTER TO GEORGE BUSH

"My life is my message."
— GANDHI

Mr. President you have one year left, are you going to go around and kiss babies and shake hands of people you don't like? Shakespeare wrote about the world being a stage and we merely its players. You have the microphone Mr. President and the lights are shining on you. Have you done what you came here to do?

I would forget about running for reelection. If you finish your term in style, people just might write your name in the history books as a good man. And style is what this letter is about.

At last count, the population of the U.S. was 230 million. If you subtract the people under 8 and those who are in prison, and the 5 million who are too cracked-out to vote, we will still have 175 million people who will vote in the 2004 race. So to be safe, and considering that Electoral College reform hasn't taken place, the next President of the United States will need 130 million votes.

The first thing I recommend doing is getting rid of this war-mongering theme of your father's. It did not regain him a second term and it is likely that 130 million people will agree.

This may sound crazy, but it has got style: dedicate your defense budget toward Peace. Instead of allocating billions to destroying, use that same money for the environment: preserving wet lands, planting trees, and finding alternatives to the internal combustion engine. This Mr. President could be your legacy. Your dad may disown you, and your Republican cohorts may think you have lost your mind. But Peace should be the National Agenda. One year's defense spending dedicated to the environment will create enough jobs to regain the working person's vote.

Speaking of the working person, many jobs have been lost during your term. Factories have closed their doors and moved overseas in order to make stuff for a company whose name rhymes with "ballmart." Now these voters can't even afford to shop at their favorite store. If you really want to have style in your last year in office, call for a national boycott of this particular store.

Encourage people to open their own businesses and purchase their goods and services from their friends and neighbors. When these stores close (for the night or weekend) we can use their buildings and their parking lots for swap meets and craft fairs and skateboard parks where kids have the option of wearing helmets.

There is a new consciousness brewing amongst the religious, similar to that of the Great Awakening. People are realizing they have an immense potential and their minds are wells of untapped creativity. In the next few years the country as well as the planet is going to realize a new Renaissance. Gaining the religious vote is going to be harder in 2004 than it ever was. However, bringing peace to the Middle East would certainly accomplish this — but hard for people to understand your intent of peace when you bring a gun. I think all Abraham's children would like to see peace, and the common language that we all speak is food. Stop sending money to this regime or that. Send food. Send food. Send food. If they ask for money, send food.

Prohibition of alcohol was a beautiful thing for the gangsters. And there are many Pot growers in this land of the free to keep their product illegal. I suggest we lift this ban on Marijuana just to spite the criminal element.

Free health care and education sounds like socialism, but is it? Talk to any business owner and they will tell you that their best employees are the ones who are healthy and smart. Karl Marx was quoted shouting, "Ignorance has never helped anybody yet!"

In summary, Mr. President, people are going to vote for a Democrat. But if you spend your energy on the environment, boycott Walmart, maintain separation of church and state, reform Marijuana laws, and allow for socialized medicine and education — and encourage people that their vote really counts — you might have a chance. Let me know what you think.

— BEN JEREMIAH

Ben Jeremiah is a new resident of Astoria.

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