

can dominated planet. "Empire is coming out of the closet," writes Charles Krauthamer (whom Molly Ivins calls "the Boy Bismark"). "What's wrong with dominance?" asks William Kristol. And Max Boot calls for a return to British-style imperialism complete with "enlightened administrators in jodhpurs and pith helmets."

All this international expansion is seamlessly tied to the homefront. It not only justifies the curtailment of civil liberties and the revival of arrogant patriotism among the corporate media, but also unprecedented increases in military spending, tax cuts and deficits. These are not overreactions to 9/11, or isolated policy excesses, but part of a pattern of diminishing democratic rights and defunding democratic government. They are a backdoor assault on the achievements of the Great Society, the New Deal and before that the Progressive movement that regulated capitalism at the turn of the last century. The Republican agenda is to return to a society in which market values eclipse and replace the role of the public sector in the economy.

Take for example Grover Norquist, who fancies himself a generalissimo in the conservative revolution. Under the innocuous banner of "tax reform," Norquist hopes that enough tax breaks and budget cuts will "drown the baby in the bathtub."

He is talking about defunding child care, health care, public schools, public investment in the inner city, public investment in a restored environment. He sees government, the public sector, as a failure to be eradicated, not instead an institution to protect us from the failures of the market.

Or take Niall Ferguson, a major advocate of empire and contributor of many influential articles in *The New York Times*, who has extolled the Protestant Ethic as the major difference between America and Europe. Let me take you through his clever argument on behalf of a WASP America. First, he notes that Americans attend church services in far greater numbers than Europeans, evidence that Max Weber's "Protestant Ethic" is alive and well here. As a result, Americans are inspired to work harder and longer than the Germans, the French, the Dutch and Norwegians who are "astonishingly idle," "work-shy" and of course, "Godless." He says the Protestant Ethic is being replaced in Europe by "the spirit of secularized sloth."

Ferguson is complaining that German workers are on the job just 1,535 hours a year in comparison with virtuous Americans grinding away at 1,976 hours. That difference of over 400 hours worked is the equivalent of 62 days a year. Ferguson — and corporate globalization defenders in general — want to stop Europeans from taking long vacations with their families and retiring earlier to enjoy the quality of life. They want to roll back — they call it reform — all the labor gains of the whole past century.

If Americans learn to read between the lines and understand what the conflict with the Europeans is about, they will reject the scapegoating and bashing that comes out of the Bush administration. Instead of looking down our noses at Europeans, we should be Europeanizing our approach to work, Canadianizing our approach to health care. How is that for a progressive platform — longer vacations for all!

Instead, because of cultural brainwashing, a recent survey showed that 19% of Americans thought they were already in the top 1% income bracket, and another 20% believed they would be eventually. That is what watching too much television in the center of empire can do to your head, and why the struggle is a cultural one, not simply political or economic, but a battle over how images and demons and fantasies are produced and wired into our consciousness.

But there are unseen resources in our history that can fortify us for this struggle. Thankfully, historians like Howard Zinn have shown us a "people's history" that is just as important to restore as our cultural and environmental resources.

There were those who opposed the original aggression and broken treaties against the indigenous on these lands. We honor their example. There were Americans who opposed slavery, who opposed annexation, who opposed the wars with Cuba and Mexico, who opposed the subordination of women. We honor them in our lives today. The Sierra Club was founded here, the Abolitionists, the NAACP, the Suffragettes, the Populists, the emigrant workers of Lowell who marched for bread and roses. We have deep roots in movements against monoliths, monocultures, monomaniacs and mammon.

Today the converging movements are in sync with the larger body of public opinion, and spilling over into the mainstream. We see this in the phenomenal growth of MoveOn.org, the grassroots support for Howard Dean, for Dennis Kucinich, in the growing fear and loathing of the Pentagon, the White House and Fox News.

Despite the spin, despite the play on our patriotic feelings, despite the legitimate worries about terror, a majority of Americans are questioning the purpose of Iraq, the credibility of the administration, the needless deaths, the unexpected costs, and sacrifice of our domestic needs on the altar of empire. Dissent has even appeared among military families and GIs on the battlefield, angry about the callous manipulation of the body count to justify the President's pledge that the military mission is "accomplished." Dissent within the military is a sign that the end is beginning.

Because public opinion is moving, the Democratic presidential candidates are changing their themes in a positive direction. Just last year, the corporate centrists of the Democratic Party were counseling the candidates to support the President's war, to divorce themselves from any allegiances to the 1960s, to wait for the Iraq war to end amidst cheering



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in Baghdad, and then somehow defeat the President on incremental issues like prescription drugs for the elderly. Talk about out of touch.

Now, in response to the public protests and plain questions of grassroots Democrats, all the Democratic candidates are questioning the President on Iraq, his trade agreements and loss of jobs. Think of them as opportunists if you will, but I think of them as a huge speakers' bureau carrying our questions and themes to millions of middle Americans.

Each of us may decide to back an individual candidate, and that can expand our movement. But we should not allow ourselves to be swallowed in any single campaign. When the candidates ask for our time and money, we should ask them to join our movement around a new vision of what America can be.

As the global forums have insisted, "Another world is possible," words embraced by the French foreign minister when the U.S. war was rebuffed at the United Nations. The vision of another world already is becoming manifest in local struggles:

- ~ A reform of the global trade system with enforceable standards to protect sweatshop workers and rainforests, not simply investors in video cassettes and privatizers of water.

- ~ The re-regulation of crony capitalism, from Enron abuses to public financing of elections.

- ~ A shift from the being the world's leading arms supplier to greater investment in the UN's anti-poverty programs. In JFK's time we spent 1% of our gross domestic product on fighting poverty; today it is 0.13%, little more than zero.

- ~ Resisting the oil, chemical and utility conglomerates from Cheney's task force to the Bolivian pipelines, towards energy conservation and renewables.

- ~ Promoting grassroots participatory democracy in decisions that affect people's lives as a vital ingredient in governing.

George Bush can be defeated; even the polls confirm it. But who knows if the Democratic Party can defeat him? Who knows if we can bridge the differences between the Democrats, the Greens and Ralph Nader? Politics is a power struggle, not an exact reflection of public opinion. But the fear and loathing are out there, building, and with enough dedication in 2004 we can remove this cloud over our future.

We owe it to ourselves, to our progressive traditions, and perhaps most of all to the world, to prevent a second term for this President. The way to assure a democratic future politically is to prevent what the conservatives conceive of as a "Second Coming". So I appeal to the righteous suspicions about electoral politics: set aside attachments to any candidate and see this as a positive convergence of many campaigns to defeat George Bush. The whole can be greater than the sum of its parts.

If we do not succeed, we at least will have reached millions more people with our message and networking, and we will need that public support in the years ahead. Even if our best efforts fall short, remember that even those who have power can be forced to make big concessions.

SDS burned out and McGovern lost, but Nixon had to retreat from Vietnam and recognize China. There came the vote for 18 year olds, the end of the draft, the creation of the Environmental Protection Agency, OSHA, the Clean Air and Water Acts.

Bush won the presidency with the help of his Supreme Court, but the same Court ruled in favor of the gay/lesbian community against sodomy laws after 40 years of struggle that began with riots in Greenwich Village. The recent Court decisions on medical marijuana show the formidable power of public opinion on the move.

It comes down to recognizing the dignity in all things. Dignity has intrinsic value, it cannot be violated without a resistance. It cannot be defeated. Wherever there is life dignity resists suffocation and oblivion. That is the world we want. That is the world the world wants. Not an empire, not even a world of great powers, but a world of democracies based on dignity.

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## DOMESTIC AID

BY PATRICK LAVIS

In looking at the status of this country, it becomes apparent that the government is more interested in foreign aid bills than domestic problems for the citizens of the United States. There is always the excuse that there is not enough money to go around.

I have an opinion that much of the money we send to foreign countries is mismanaged and perhaps disappears without ever getting to its intended purpose.

I would ask Congress to consider passage of a bill that would figure out the total amount of foreign aid the past five years, whether it is in a foreign aid budget or tucked into other litigations such as CIA expenditures, take an average of that and then put a cap on all foreign aid for the next five years to be no greater than the yearly average that would be established.

The difficult part that I ask Congress is to then mandate that 15% of every foreign aid expenditure be applied to internal domestic needs of the people of the United States.

For example, the 15% would be placed in a fund to:

- ~ Increase Medicare reimbursements to physicians and hospitals to help seniors have better access to care.
- ~ Reimbursement for prescription medication for seniors.
- ~ Money for improved highway maintenance and repair, and other infrastructure needs such as updating power plants, etc.

- ~ Money for environmental studies and implementation of environmental law to protect the resources without hampering the economy.

- ~ Supplement other programs that have specifically been designed for citizens who have been receiving help from agencies that are now without funds.

This may seem like a far-fetched idea, but I believe it is time our elected leaders take a look at the needs of U.S. citizens.

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