

NORTH COAST

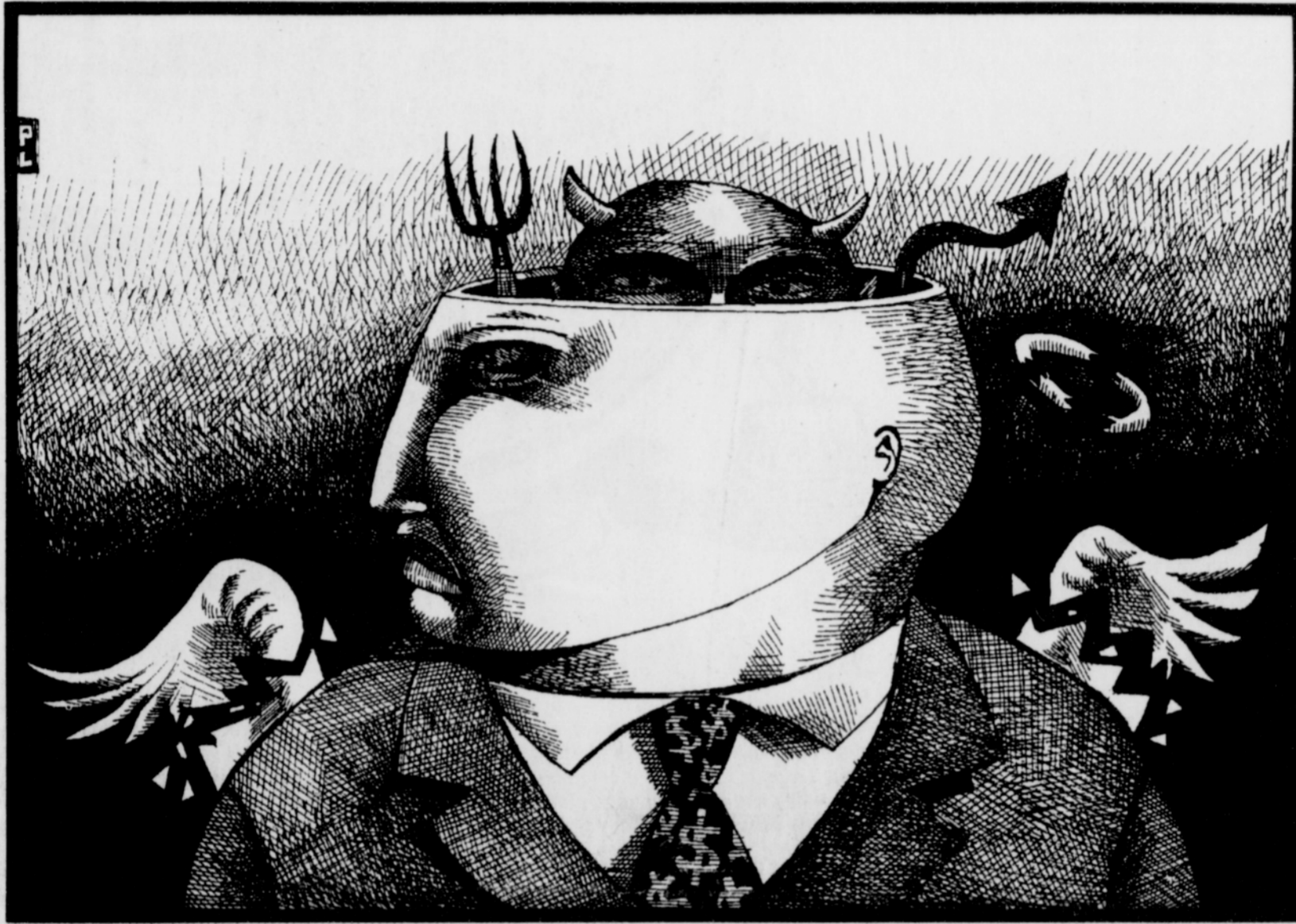


TIMES EAGLE

MARPRIL 2004

'In a dark time the eye begins to see'
~THEODORE ROETHKE

50CENTS VOL25NO6



PAUL LACHINE

THE BITTER ANGELS OF OUR NATURE

"Even in desperate situations, where everything hangs in the balance, one goes on living as though nothing were wrong."

~GEOETHE

The war in Iraq a year since its invasion by a small shaky coalition led by the American President, is as much about democracy as it is about oil and empire simply because the soldiers who are fighting the war believe it is, however manipulated and deceived they are into that belief.

The same can be said about any war: the U.S. Civil War was about slavery because that was the essential reason the soldiers on both sides fought it, for and against. World War 1 was to put an end to war because the soldiers who endured the worst hell on earth — which they also created for themselves — slaughtered each other by the millions for that fervent hope (which might have been a not so subjective basis for the fierce obliteration). World War 2 is eulogized as history's most titanic struggle between freedom ("democracy") and totalitarianism ("fascism"); each claimed history on its side — the Germans, however conscripted, believed in the rightness of a 1,000 year Reich despite their detestation of Nazidom; and the Japanese despised colonial white rule in Asia although theirs was as arrogantly cruel.

The wars in Korea and Vietnam were more subjective than their predecessors, so-called "brushfire wars" to promote or prevent the spread of Cold War ideologies and to skirt nuclear obliteration while simultaneously risking it. As a result, both wars were inconclusive; yet at the heart of each the combatants fought for beliefs latently instilled in them or fiercely demanded of them.

So Iraq. The grunts on the ground most likely cling to a tenacious faith that they have liberated the Iraqi people from a monstrous dictator and now defend against a resurrection of his regime. At the very least they hope their great personal risks are for the exalted principles that are claimed, that their leaders are literally keeping the faith with them. Yet every day the Americans and their allies face an equal tenacity by a hardcore resistance determined to oust the invaders whom they regard as infidel imperialists as pernicious as the earlier medieval Crusaders.

Soldiers have been lied to throughout history. They have always been coerced in one manner or another to commit and suffer humanity's most hideous acts, generally in the names of its most sanctified beliefs. That has not changed: the Americans who are fighting and dying in Iraq are as deceived as to the underlying purposes of the war as were their predecessors of wars immemorial, and the rewards for such guileless intrepidity are as always unequal and usually disproportionate to the fervid sacrifice for them.

The war in Iraq was fabricated by ideological conservatives currently occupying the White House whose inspired vision is that perpetual warfare (a Christian-type jihad) is the means to expand and protect the American neo-empire which is being called the "New World Order," a term Hitler used for his Nazi nightmare of world rule back in the 20th century.

The Bush administration is conspicuously flagrant in its rapacious grab for power domestically and in the wider world. It not only distrusts the common intelligence of the American citizenry but generally regards it with fatuous contempt, shamelessly mismanaging its concerns in Orwellian doublethink — and like oldtime Federalists the Bushies are confident that a pompous, arrogant and self-serving elite are capable of not only ruling the people but faith-basing them also, saturating the populace with propaganda and theological obscurity while designing Kafkaesque laws to subdue (and punish) dissent or insurrection. Despite major resistance to the USA Patriot Act, the Bush cadre are reorganizing the United States into a militant corporate theocracy under its patently unconstitutional edicts.

George Bush has used 9/11 to reestablish the imperial Presidency and has made preemptive (holy) war or its threat the cornerstone of his administration. A cabal of narrow minded men direct American policy and seem to think it is their predestined mandate to rule the world. "What we want as individuals doesn't always coincide with what's best" for millions of other people, in even small ways, "who have to endure living with us," Helen MacInnes has written. The human tragedy, she wrote, is "people who don't know what they do... and the human comedy is people who think they know what they are doing."

Like it or not, humanity is a global civilization. Nuclear weapons rendered the nation-state as dead as dinosaurs. If the so-called global economy is manipulated to benefit only a few wealthy nations and multinational corporations rather than be a world structure meant to include everybody in equal protections and freedoms, then the nightmare of 9/11 is merely the advent of a dark future.

History is not important to avoid mistakes of the past as George Santyana suggested but as a "predictor of what we corrupt souls are likely to do to one another in the future," as David Hoppe paraphrased Kurt Vonnegut in an interview.

The radically undemocratic idea that the wealthiest pay few taxes in America (and receive huge rebates) and the poor make up the deficit is most likely a failure as well as an ominous contradiction because it cannot be sustained. Corporate welfare not only depletes the public purse, it is impossible to support with huge unemployment combined with the Walmarting of wages and offshore elimination of middle class jobs. The greed is not only grossly swinish — and now transparent to even the least interested — it is a fantasy nourished by increasing the

national debt (\$500 billion deficit this year) which becomes more difficult to pay off — and by whom? The increasingly impoverished American taxpayers? Certainly not by making tax cuts to the wealthy perpetual and subsidizing those cuts by diminishing Social Security and Medicare as Alan Greenspan pontificates.

"Money has won," Dan Armstrong wrote in these pages a few years ago, dreading the worst possible scenario for this country. "The system could work but instead corruption has infected it. The whole art of government consists of the art of being honest. But our dream has fallen prey to the economic system and the greatest weakness of the human character — greed. Business interest has supplanted public welfare. A military-industrial complex pulls the strings of government. Democracy will shade into fascism. A strongarm gangster state will rule. It will be little more than a global feudal system in another fifty years."

Benjamin Franklin said the Constitution would ultimately fail like all constitutions because the people would eventually become so corrupt only a despot would be able to rule them.

We have an opportunity to quell that corruption at the top before it fatally infects all other levels, the true trickle-down theory. Rather than concentrate entirely on any candidate but Bush this Presidential election year, it might also be suitable to consider impeaching him before he has the opportunity to be the despot Franklin predicted. If he has indeed committed "high crimes and misdemeanors" as President, of which there is much evidence, the Constitution specifies that he be impeached. It is quite probable that Bush's first impeachable offense was taking the oath of office because he was not elected. W might think he was chosen by God to be President, but he certainly wasn't chosen by the people.

The United States is a democracy because it is a necessary contrast to despotic chaos. We have inherited a few basic rights and liberties sought by the mass of humanity for millennia as well as a few limits on power to restrain the predatory ambitions of many among us. The unelected President and his hard-right administration of military-industrial Tories are quite probably the people our ancestors warned us against and attempted to prevent their future usurpation of power with Constitutional government and separation of powers — as well as with the Bill of Rights, the secular ten commandments of our civilization.

"I know of no law that says a President is exempt from duties that devolve upon other citizens," Senator Sam Ervin said during Watergate. "The White House people are not nobility nor royalty."

~MICHAEL PAUL McCUSKER