

Raisin' Hell

Molly Ivins on politics in the U.S. of A.

Molly Ivins, syndicated columnist for the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, good ol' Texas girl, witty political pundit, former co-editor of the *Texas Observer*, three-time Pulitzer Prize finalist and author of the bestselling *Molly Ivins Can't Say That, Can She?* and with Lou Dubose, *Shrub: The Short but Happy Political Life of George W. Bush*, has a new book out, *Bushwhacked: Life in George W. Bush's America*, also written with Dubose. *Bushwhacked* outlines the underreported goings-on of the Bush administration, ultimately drawing the connections between public policy and people's lives.

On a sweeping book tour to promote *Bushwhacked*, Ivins will appear in Eugene on Oct. 25 as part of the Peace, Justice and Media conference presented by the Justice Not War Coalition. *Eugene Weekly* caught up with her earlier this week during a quick hotel respite in Seattle. Despite a grueling schedule, Ivins remains positive and full of humor, and always an inspiration.

EW: What's been the response to your tour for *Bushwhacked*?

MI: Every single venue has been absolutely jammed. People are really hungry to hear someone more or less stand up and say, 'This emperor isn't wearing any clothes.'

EW: You say in your intro that if only people had read *Shrub*, released before the 2000 presidential election, all this — this current political situation — never would have happened. Is Jean Dixon's job threatened by your ability to predict the future?

MI: No. (laughing.) A great question. I think she's safe.

EW: You've often said that Texas is a laboratory for bad government. In your book, you note that Bush left Texas with tax cuts for the rich that left the state unable to provide basic services, writing, "Those of us who knew the president when he was governor of a low tax, low service, no regulation state are very seriously not amazed by what he has done in Washington" Welcome to USA 2003. What would you expect next?

MI: I think a lot of political commentators were surprised Bush started governing so far to the right. We felt that was not implied by the 2000 campaign. He's been coming down hard ever since. It does seem clear that they are out to fundamentally alter the course we've been on, rolling it back to what I suspect is beyond the New Deal — to before that. They seem to be quite serious about ultimately getting rid of the



progressive income tax entirely, and also Social Security. It's not a hidden right wing agenda, it's all out there.

EW: U.S. economics are also far to the right. Looking at corporate pandering, you write that during the Eisenhower era, corporations paid an average of 25 percent of the federal tax bill. In 2000, only 10 percent and by 2001, it was down to 7 percent. What do you predict it will be by 2003?

MI: Again, I'm not in the Jean Dixon business. It's not so much that we need to increase taxes but to collect those already on the books. What's extraordinary and astonishing is the exodus of corporations to offshore banks, to the Bahamas and Caymans, using post office addresses that are just maildrops to avoid taxes. And this administration doesn't seem to think there's anything wrong with giving corporations that pay no taxes government contracts. Last week, the *New York Times* reported that the Senate Finance Committee is now considering a \$100 billion — that's more than needed for the Iraq War, right? — tax recess for corporations who make money abroad — they can bring it back without paying taxes. You might think that would encourage corporations to keep exporting jobs and operations abroad.

EW: Corporations making good isn't anything new. The AP reported last week that Houston-based Halleburton has been charging the U.S. Army between \$1.62 and \$1.70 per gal-

lon for gas when Iraqis pay between 4 and 15 cents.

MI: The technical term for that is goldplating. One irony is that there are already enormous complaints from Iraqis themselves, saying, 'We could have fixed this place up for much cheaper; why didn't you ask us?' We're also importing workers from Southeast Asia because they are cheaper labor than the Iraqis.

EW: Let's turn our attention back to exploited workers on our own turf. With so many folks suffering in the current economy and services being slashed, that seems fuel for rebellion to me. So, where's the protest?

MI: Where's Bob Dole when you need him? Where's the outrage? I'm not sure we haven't already watched it start in California. The result was odd, alright. I mean Arnold, well, why the hell not?

EW: You're coming here for the Peace, Justice and Media Conference. So let's talk shop for a minute. How can journalists do a better job?

MI: Some things are so old they're new again. Let's write a book showing policy really matters to people. It used to be understood when I was a political reporter you looked at 'Here's what the government is going to do and here's how it's going to affect you.' That last part has gotten lost. Even people affected to the point of crisis are not making the connections. They are not interested in politics, they think 'There's nothing I can do.'

EW: What hope do you see for people fixing things by making those connections, connections that will raise the power of the masses?

MI: One thing that's quite striking is when you look at the Democratic candidate who's consistently striking a chord. That's Howard Dean. He's genuinely angry.

EW: How do we use that anger in a positive way, to beat back the big money, which this time will be bigger than ever? How do we use people power to beat money power?

MI: Like most people in my business, I look closely at money in politics. That's quite often the deciding factor. Bush's contributions will go over \$200 million. When we realized that, we kind of rolled our eyes and thought, 'Well there goes that one.' But that judgment was probably premature. Bush is beatable. I think we all pretty

well know the drill: Tell people anywhere on the political spectrum that the system has been corrupted by money, which is quite obvious now that big business is influencing politics, and when people get stirred up and respond, the system responds to them. I'm always optimistic to the point of idiocy myself.

EW: What you write about in *Bushwhacked* is what the mainstream media ignore. How else can the message get out to the red states?

MI: I think there is a real stirring of genuine unease edging over into anger as people realize we're not headed in the right direction here.

EW: Do you think getting online and sending mass e-mails is enough? Has the Internet diluted people's passion for direct action? The armchair activist can send one e-mail and think, 'I participated in democracy.' And that's that. No protest in the streets.

MI: I'm a great believer in raising hell. Anyway, the oldest piece of advice is: Write your elected representatives. It works. Everybody always thinks, 'What can I do? Well, I sent an e-mail.' It's a beginning.

EW: What's your biggest glimmer of hope for the future of our country?

MI: I'm always optimistic. I think it can all be fixed. I know we tend to get sold on simple solutions. We think term limits will fix everything. What really needs to be fixed is money. Campaign finance. When people get elected that way they got no one to dance with but the people. People can't afford to ignore what's being done to our country. There's no way to have a life in this nation and not be involved with what's going on.

EW: What's the one message you'd like to leave people with?

MI: Raise hell. It's fun and it should be fun. I try to convince people you can actually have a whale of a good time trying to make the world a better place.

EW

Ivins will give two lectures on Saturday, Oct. 25: at 3 pm and 7:30 pm (this one sold out) at the McDonald Theatre. Her book will be available for sale. Following the evening lecture, a dinner/reception and book signing will follow at Cosmic Pizza's new location at 8th and Charnelton. Tickets for the 3 pm Saturday lecture are \$10 adv., for dinner: \$25 adv., \$30 at the door. Tix available at Tsunami, Black Sun, Foolsap, Mother Kali's, Star Gate and Book Mine book stores, the UO ticket office and the Justice Not War office at 454 Willamette, 343-8548.

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