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FISH OUT OF WATER BEHIND THE WISE USE MOVEMENT'S VICTORY IN KLAMATH

by Sheldon Rampton

Coming at the end of the summer of 2002, it was the worst fishery disaster that anyone had seen in the history of the Klamath watershed—a massive die-off of an estimated 34,000 chinook, coho and steelhead salmon on the Klamath River near the California-Oregon border. In a single blow, more than 30 percent of the entire year's salmon run was wiped out.

"It's a lot larger than anything I've seen reported on the TV news or in the newspapers," said Walt Lara of the Yurok Tribal Council, one of the Native American tribes that fishes in Klamath. "The whole chinook run will be impacted, probably by 85 to 95 percent. And the fish are dying as we speak. They're swimming around in circles. They bump up against your legs when you're standing in the water. These are beautiful, chrome-bright fish that are dying, not fish that are already spawned out." The immediate physical cause of the die-off was stress, warm water conditions, and overcrowding due to low water levels, which biologists and environmentalists attribute to a new Bush administration water strategy that redirected water from salmon to farmers.

FLACK ATTACK

The modern environmental movement owes much of its success to grassroots organizing. The first Earth Day in 1970 was marked by marches, demonstrations and protests manifesting the power of aggressive, 1960s-style activism.

Organizing from the ground up helped build the popular support that environmental causes enjoy today. Opinion polls continue to indicate that the vast majority of people today believe that human actions are damaging the natural environment they live in. Market researchers say that a majority of US citizens consider themselves to be "green."

Success, however, has bred a dangerous complacency, as leading environmental groups have largely abandoned the messy tactics of grassroots activism in favor of "win-win" partnerships with industry, glossy

educational campaigns, and professional lobbyists who cruise the corridors of power in the generally vain hope of out-lobbying their corporate counterparts in Washington and state capitols.

Meanwhile, the corporate-led *anti*-environmental movement has learned from its adversaries and has turned grassroots organizing to its own advantage. Using these tactics, the anti-environmental "Wise Use" movement has succeeded in winning "victories" that damage the environment and foment racism and other social divisions while building the political base for right-wing domination of American institutions.

If environmentalists and other progressive activists want to reverse the tide, they need to remember the lesson that corporations originally learned from them. Instead of compromised, corporate-activist partnerships, they need to connect again with their own social base and learn to speak the language of the people.

The real cause, however, was political, the culmination of a century of misguided government policy capped by a fierce propaganda war that united government water agencies, wealthy farm interests, corporate-funded think tanks and far-right conspiracy theorists in a campaign whose stated objective was to “save farmers” but whose actual purpose was to gut the Endangered Species Act.

The salmon died because of decisions made to benefit agribusiness at the expense of the environment, sports anglers and Native American tribes that derive an important portion of their income from the fish.

TOO LITTLE WATER, TOO MANY USERS

Thanks largely to decisions made in the early part of the 20th century, Klamath Basin is caught up in a classic resource war between competing economic interests—the sort of conflict that has shaped politics in the American West since the wars between cattle ranching and sheep grazing.

In the early 1900s, Teddy Roosevelt designated the area—a naturally arid region that receives less annual rainfall than the Yuma Desert—as a “reclamation project” to be overseen by the newly-created U.S. Bureau of Reclamation.

In the language of the time, “reclamation” meant the building of dams and other systems for the massive diversion of water so it could serve agricultural production. “At that time, society’s values demanded that the ‘worthless’ swamps be drained and the fertile land cultivated. More farmland would produce more food to nourish a hungry and expanding nation,” says Phil Norton, manager at the Klamath Basin National Wildlife Refuge—a refuge that, ironically, was created with the same stroke of Roosevelt’s pen that created the reclamation project. No one realized at the time that the vision of Roosevelt the conservationist would collide with the vision of Roosevelt the nation-builder.

The government transformed 80 percent of the area’s 350,000 acres of wetlands into cropland. Waters were diverted from lakes and rivers to create an irrigation system.

By the 1980s, however, there simply wasn’t enough water for fish and farmers alike. Constant draining lowered water levels in Klamath Lake, and fish populations declined. In 1986, Native American tribes asked the the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to protect two species of suckerfish in the Klamath Basin by recognizing them as endangered species. The coho salmon was later added to the endangered list.

“The bureau’s dams and water diversions are a major reason why Klamath River salmon runs, once the third-

biggest on the West Coast, have been nearly wiped out,” said WaterWatch of Oregon’s Bob Hunter. “And the Klamath basin is not unusual. The bureau has been a big factor in the crash of native fish populations across the West.”

Low water levels have historically contributed to fish die-offs in the Klamath area. Low water levels raise the temperature, leading to quicker algae growth that in turn reduce the amount of dissolved oxygen, which fish need to survive. Additional stress to fish population comes from water pollution, as agricultural runoff laced with pesticides, fertilizers, and animal waste flows from the Klamath Irrigation Project down the Klamath Straits Drain and into the Klamath River.

When drought punished the west in 2001, conservation groups sued successfully to ensure that water would be provided at survival levels for endangered sucker fish in Upper Klamath Lake and threatened Coho salmon in the Klamath River. As a result, 90 percent of the farmers dependent on water from the Upper Klamath Lake were told that they wouldn’t get any water that year.

Long accustomed to having the first priority for water deliveries, farmers responded with protests.

WISE GUYS

For the anti-environmental “wise use” movement, the conflict in Klamath was an ideal publicity vehicle: an opportunity to broadcast messages its founders have been carefully honing for more than a decade.

The “wise use” movement began as a fundraising project of two political entrepreneurs: Ron Arnold and Alan Gottlieb, a professional fundraiser whose Center for the Defense of Free Enterprise reportedly takes in about \$5 million per year for various right-wing causes. Funded in part by timber, mining and chemical companies, wise use organizers have aggressively promoted disinformation campaigns that discredit environmentalists by calling them “pagans,” “eco-nazis” and “communists.” At their founding conference, held in 1988, wise use organizers placed abolition or “reform” of the Endangered Species Act on its short list of movement objectives.

In a 1991 interview with *Outside* magazine, Arnold explained that he chose the term “wise use” because the phrase was ambiguous and fit neatly in newspaper headlines. “Facts don’t matter; in politics perception is reality,” he said. According to William Kevin Burke, who profiled the wise use movement for *Public Eye* magazine, this emphasis on perception over reality typifies the wise use outreach strategy.

“The movement’s signature public relations tactic is to frame complex environmental and economic issues in simple, scapegoating terms that benefit its corporate

backers,” Burke said. “In the movement’s Pacific Northwest birthplace, wise users harp on a supposed battle for survival between spotted owls and the families of the men and women who make their livings harvesting and milling the old growth timber that is the owl’s habitat. . . . Wise use public relations experts ran seminars to teach loggers how to speak in sound bites. Messages such as ‘jobs versus owls’ have been adapted to a variety of environmental issues and have helped spark an anti-green backlash that has defeated river protection efforts and threatens to open millions of acres of wilderness to resource extraction.”

To mobilize its troops, the wise use movement uses standard PR techniques of astroturf organizing, a corporate version of grassroots organizing that recruits rank-and-file citizen activists in support of corporate agendas. *Campaigns & Elections* magazine defines “astroturf organizing” as a “grassroots program that involves the instant manufacturing of public support for a point of view in which either uninformed activists are recruited or means of deception are used to recruit them.”

“Pro-industry citizen activist groups can do things the industry can’t,” explained Arnold in a candid talk to the Ontario Forest Industries Association. “It can form coalitions to build real political clout. It can be an effective and convincing advocate for your industry. It can evoke powerful archetypes such as the sanctity of the family, the virtue of the close-knit community, the natural wisdom of the rural dweller, and many others I’m sure you can think of. It can use the tactic of the intelligent attack against environmentalists and take the battle to them instead of forever responding to environmentalist initiatives. And it can turn the public against your enemies.”

In the Klamath water conflict, the wise use movement followed this strategy to the letter. The “jobs versus owls” message was rescripted as “farmers versus fish.” Some of the tactics used in Klamath were modeled directly after civil disobedience actions in Nevada, where wise use activists bulldozed through a road closed by a Forest Ranger, threatened public officials with violence, and organized a “shovel brigade” to rebuild a road that had been closed to protect trout.

In Klamath, protesters used similar civil disobedience tactics, forcibly breaking through the headgate on several occasions to release water, destroying public property in the process. These acts of vandalism generated intense media coverage and also forced the government to spend some \$800,000 on security measures including barbed wire-topped fencing, surveillance cameras and round-the-clock guards.

“When they got their water cut back and decided to make a fight of it, it almost immediately attracted a bunch of people from wise use like People for the USA and the Shovel Brigade, the true believers,” says Felice Pace of the Klamath Forest Alliance, a local environmental group. “Part of the reason they got attracted is that we have a high number of People for the USA chapters right here. We already had this tradition of right-wing anti-environmentalism.”

“The Klamath Basin water war also represents a subtle coming-of-age for the so-called wise-use movement,” reported the *Seattle Times*. “Residents here work with the same wise-use groups and admit they took the idea for some demonstrations from Nevada. But here, farmers and merchants are media-savvy, producing videotapes of their plight, and staging less-threatening

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demonstrations of civil disobedience. Klamath irrigators are even represented by a lobbying firm that employs former U.S. Rep. Bob Smith, R-OR, the onetime chair of the House Agriculture Committee.”

The conflict in Klamath marked a coming-of-age in another sense as well. The wise use movement began as a largely *synthetic* grassroots movement, created at the behest of major corporations and industries. Klamath showed that the anti-environmental movement has developed genuine strength at the grassroots, with its own cadre of committed, passionate activists.

“When you went down to the parking lot where the rallies were held, you’d see more license plates from Idaho than you’d see from Oregon,” recalls Felice Pace. “The grassroots guys who came out weren’t folks with a lot of much money. If you looked at their rigs with the bumper stickers all over them, and you could tell that they’re not rich folks. They’re like retired mill workers and stuff. I was there a lot, and I’d go down onto the grounds and talk to people, and it seemed to be truly grassroots to me. It didn’t seem to be directed from anywhere else. It was people who maybe have read Ron Arnold’s book and definitely subscribe to his ideas, but I’ve known some of the people who were involved personally for 25 years. I saw no evidence that somebody was pulling the strings from somewhere else.”

FISH STORIES

Many of the reports on the Klamath controversy accused the government of sacrificing people for fish. They often failed to mention, even in passing, the other people involved in the equation, including the Native American tribes—the Hupa, Yurok and Karok, not to mention the Klamath, for which the region was named—that have lived and fished in the area since before Europeans arrived. Irrigators complained that the government had promised they would have water for their crops “forever” and then reneged on the promise—again without mentioning that the Native American tribes had received the same promise from the government in a treaty that was signed in 1864.

“We’re not like other people. We eat fish daily. We’re canning fish. We’re smoking fish, and we’re eating it at the table fresh,” said Sue Masten, chairwoman of the Yurok Tribe. “The government promised to protect the resources we depend on for our very survival, and that’s not something that should be taken lightly.”

“I heard a farmer who lost his water saying he felt like he was part of a big government experiment,” commented Adrian Witcraft, a member of the Klamath Tribes. “All I can say is, welcome to the party.”

Almost without exception, the national press corps portrayed the conflict exactly as the irrigators portrayed it—as a conflict between farmers and the endangered “sucker fish,” a term preferred by the farmers because of its negative connotations. (The tribes prefer to call it “mullet.”) Salmon—by far the more economically significant species—were rarely mentioned. One restaurant in Klamath Falls, Oregon sold a “Sucker Fish Sandwich” (actually made of cod) with proceeds going to fight the Endangered Species Act.

The ratcheting rhetoric and resulting tensions got so bad, according to the *Portland Oregonian*, that environmentalists were warned to stay out of town because their personal safety could be in danger, and members of the Klamath tribes were afraid to shop in Klamath Falls, where they faced racial taunts comparing them to endangered sucker fish.

The “people versus fish” rhetoric also ignored people like the residents of Bonanza, Oregon, a small town inside the Klamath Basin that was once known for the purity of its water but now relies on bottled water or boiling now that toxic runoff from the farmers has contaminated their wells and natural springs with toxins, algae and coliform bacteria. Last year at the peak of the water controversy, the town council voted to sue the Klamath Basin Irrigation District, notwithstanding threats from farmers who showed up en masse to challenge the council’s authority. “Whenever we have meetings, we get shouted down, overpowered,” said former Bonanza City Councilman Bob Hoylman, who ultimately resigned his position because of the rising tensions and death threats.

The loss of water was undeniably a wrenching shock to the farmers affected by the cutoff, but their losses actually pale compared to the loss of an estimated 7,000 coastal fishing jobs over the past three decades due to species decline in the Klamath River—a decline caused by water depletion and pollution for which farmers and ranchers are primarily responsible. While outsiders portrayed the farmers as put-upon victims, Tom Stockley, a former commercial salmon fisherman from the area, flatly characterizes the farmers as “water robbers.”

NATURAL WISDOM OF THE RURAL DWELLER

One of the great ironies of the Klamath water controversy is that even as they invoked myths of rugged self-reliance and railed against the government, the farmers and their allies lobbied simultaneously for government handouts on a massive scale. Even prior to the eruption of the water controversy in the summer of 2001, more than half the annual income from farms and ranches in the area came from federal crop supports.

To compensate for losses due to the water policy, the U.S. Congress approved another \$20 million in aid to 1,110 Klamath Project irrigators in the Supplemental Appropriations Act of 2001. The states of California and Oregon came up with \$10.5 million for emergency well-drilling and other purposes. The USDA supplied \$225,000 to help livestock owners install pipes, troughs and wells, and another \$1.3 million went to help farmers plant cover crops. The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation spent \$2.5 million purchasing water from well-holders to supply farmers and wildlife refuges, plus another \$2.7 million paid to farmers for idling 17,000 acres under its Pilot Irrigation Demand Reduction Program.

“Over the course of the summer and fall of 2001, \$48,625,000 in government assistance flowed into the Klamath Project,” says James McCarthy of the Klamath Forest Alliance. “Some funding plans targeted those facing true hardship, but much assistance was not need-based. In some cases farm families struggling to get by with no water received the same aid as neighbors irrigating normally with water from wells drilled with public funds.”

In fact, McCarthy says, “irrigators—and in particular the larger operators within the Tulelake Irrigation District (TID)—reaped an unprecedented cash windfall in 2001. According to a recent report by the economics consulting firm ECONorthwest, farms in Klamath County producing at least \$10,000 in annual sales yielded an average of \$34 per acre net cash return in 1997. In 2001, a Klamath Project farm earned a minimum of \$129 an acre in federal assistance. In 1997, the average 1,089 acre Klamath County farm enjoyed a net cash return of \$36,904. In 2001, a Klamath Project farm of the same size received a minimum of \$140,481 from the government, regardless of past economic output.”

THE US PATRIOT ACT

Irrigators also sought to build sympathy for their cause by pointing out that some of the farmers in Klamath Basin were veterans who received government land grants after World Wars I and II. (In fact, the Klamath project started before either World War had even broken out.)

An article by *American Legion* editor Jeff Stoffer played up the patriotic angle, depicting the irrigators as a “country-western version of the Great American Dream” and quoting hyperbolic statements of outrage from area veterans like George Smith, who drove an ambulance during World War II. “They couldn’t have done us any more harm with an atomic bomb,” Smith said of the government’s water policy.

Stoffer also quoted Marty Macy, president of the Tulelake Growers Association, who dismissed proposals to ease water demand by buying out some of the farmers. “You don’t compensate a veteran who survived the Bataan Death March by telling him we’re going to pay you off so you can leave,” Macy said, characterizing the water conflict as an attempt at “rural cleansing” by “environmental organizations, federal bureaucracies, Klamath and Yurok tribes.”

“It’s going to happen everywhere in the West,” chimed in Marion Palmer, a veteran of World War II whose father also fought in World War I.

THE PLOT THICKENS

Supporters of the Klamath farmers frequently lapsed into conspiracy-theory rhetoric. In a column titled “A Radical Reality,” Bill Kennedy of the Family Farm Alliance recounted a conversation with Klamath Water Users Association Executive Director Dan Keppen about “those in the extreme environmental movement” who “want to paint themselves as conservationists.” In reality, Kennedy said, “The goal is not to conserve anything. These extreme groups want to destroy our production, our infrastructure and our communities. . . . Once our industry has been abandoned in favor of imported food and fiber, our nation will be at the mercy of countries with socialist agendas.”

Similar rhetoric came from Tom DeWeese, a long-time PR professional who runs a think tank called the American Policy Center that specializes in appeals to the looney fringe of the far right. DeWeese called the government’s water policy “an attack on sanity itself. It lacks all rationality. It is an attack on these farmers, but it is also yet another example of the way radical environmentalists continue to attack on the most essential elements of the West’s economic life; farming, ranching, mining and the timber industries. It is ultimately an attack on every American’s property rights because ownership of any land anywhere can be destroyed by simply asserting that an endangered species exists on it or may at some time use it. . . . The agenda of these radical environmentalists is aimed directly at the destruction of our nation’s economic base.”

Farmers became a totem throughout the United States for right-wing talk show hosts and opponents of the Endangered Species Act. Former Idaho Congresswoman Helen Chenoweth addressed pro-farm protestors, telling them they were in the middle of a revolution and were at war with “green bigots who call themselves environmentalists.” She told the people “it’s time to fight.”

Groups participating in support of the Klamath irrigators included Frontiers of Freedom, Defenders of Property Rights, and the American Land Rights Association. In the state of Washington, KeepAndBearArms.com, a pro-gun web site, announced that the “Washington State Tyranny Response Team” was sponsoring a fund drive to assist the Klamath farmers. The National Center for Public Policy Analysis, a conservative think tank, declared that “farmers and ranchers are becoming the real endangered species.”

The cause of the Klamath irrigators was also taken up by the National Endangered Species Act Reform Coalition (NESARC), which the Environmental Working Group describes as a “industry front group brought into existence in 1991 to ‘reform’ protections under the Endangered Species Act, making them more industry friendly. Members include the American Petroleum Institute, American Farm Bureau Federation, American Public Power Association, National Association of Homebuilders, and other utilities, mining, hydropower, and development groups with a financial interest in seeing the Endangered Species Act weakened.” A number of state and national water lobbies are also members, including the Association of California Water Agencies, the National Rural Water Association, the National Water Resources Association, and water agencies in states including Nevada, New Mexico, Colorado, Oregon, Idaho, Utah, Washington and Wyoming.

The Republican Party adopted Klamath as a cause, with state politicians including Oregon Senator Gordon Smith and Congressmen Greg Walden and Wally Herger speaking at pro-farmer rallies.

Al King, Chairman of the Klamath County Republican Central Committee and Vice Chairman of the state party, spoke at the annual “Fly In for Freedom” of the Alliance for America, another anti-environmental group affiliated with the wise use movement.

“Farmers, ranchers, foresters, ski operators, and others bear all the burden from the Endangered Species Act, but the federal agencies that make the decisions get off scot-free,” King told the rally. “Federal agencies have used the ESA to ruin land values and to even take property from landowners. When a federal agency causes these losses because of the ESA, the federal government should be required to repay the full financial loss to the owner.”

LEGAL EAGLES

In addition to think tanks, politicians and grassroots support, the farmers received legal assistance from Marzulla and Marzulla, a law firm with longstanding ties

to the wise use movement through organizations such as Defenders of Property Rights and the Mountain States Legal Foundation.

Additional legal support came from the Pacific Legal Foundation, an organization that sees itself as a “conservative counterpart to the American Civil Liberties Union.” Whereas the ACLU focuses on defending freedom of speech and expression, the PLF—funded by right-wing mainstays such as the John M. Olin Foundation and the Castle Rock Foundation—specializes in lawsuits that defend landowners against environmental regulations.

PLF sued in U.S. District Court on behalf of farmers, demanding the removal of coho salmon from the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and the release of water for their crops. “For over 30 years, environmental purists have actively promoted the pantheistic notion that plant and animal life rank higher on the species hierarchy than people,” explained PLF Vice President Dave Stirling, a conservative Republican and former chief deputy attorney general in California.

“What we are trying to do there is basically raise the public’s awareness of just exactly what is going on with the ESA, what it really means when a species is listed,” said PLF attorney Russell Brooks in an interview with the National Water Resources Association (NWRA). A federation of state organizations whose membership includes rural water districts, municipal water entities and commercial companies, the NWRA is one of the more powerful water industry lobbying groups.

Brooks said the Endangered Species Act “is not just about taking care of furry little critters that have a large amount of public support. What it really means is that firefighters are dying in fires because they can’t get water due to ESA restrictions. It means that houses are being flooded because the Army Corp of Engineers can’t repair a levy due to ESA restrictions. It means that needed schools and hospitals either can’t be built or end up being built at a far greater cost many years later because of ESA restrictions and permitting requirements. We are trying to raise awareness that the Endangered Species Act simply does not consider people. It only considers protecting species at any costs, at all costs, and no matter what the costs. Therefore, the ESA is a bad law because it doesn’t consider the real world effects on people.”

“Well, we certainly look forward to working with you on your Endangered Species Act Reform Project and please keep us informed of everything that you are doing with that,” responded the NWRA interviewer. “Is there anything NWRA members can do to assist you now?”

“Beyond the fight in courts of law, we all must also fight in the court of public opinion,” Brooks replied.

In March 2002, the Bush administration sided with the farmers and withdrew “critical habitat” designations for 19 species of threatened and endangered salmon and steelhead in California, Oregon, Washington and Idaho. “The Marine Fisheries Service said fish would not be harmed by the decision,” reported Los Angeles Times writer Elizabeth Shogren.

On March 29, Secretary of the Interior Gale Norton and Secretary of Agriculture Ann Veneman personally attended a ceremony to mark the opening of canal headgates to deliver water to farmers in the Klamath Project. “We are pleased to be able to open these headgates to provide water to farmers,” Norton said, adding, “our goals are to protect farm families, restore the health of the ecosystem, honor our trust responsibilities to tribes

and recover endangered species.” The fish die-off began a few months later.

On November 2, 2002, the Portland Oregonian reported that the Bush administration “withheld reports that concluded buying out farms in the Klamath Basin and leaving their irrigation water in the Klamath River would create a thriving downstream fishery and expanded recreation with a value that far exceeds that of the farms. . . . Three reports by U.S. Geological Survey economists and other researchers were completed last year and went through review by outside scientists. But their submission to scientific journals has been delayed by high administration officials, said Andrew Sleeper, a consulting statistician who helped write one of the reports.

“They are basically holding it up for publication for some internal political reasons,” Sleeper said. ■

Fools Rush In: THE MILITIA MOVEMENT AND KLAMATH FALLS

by Sheldon Rampton

Following Timothy McVeigh’s 1995 terrorist bombing in Oklahoma City, the militia movement seemed to go into decline, with a number of militia groups publicly disbanding. In Klamath Falls, however, the militia movement proved itself still capable of aggressive organizing, swelling local protests by trucking in activists from neighboring states, and using the water conflict as an opportunity to indoctrinate and recruit local farmers to their cause.

Oregon alone has five separate groups that participate in the militia movement: Emissary Publications, the Constitution Party, the Embassy of Heaven Church, the Southern Oregon Militia, and Freedom Bound International, which is based in Klamath Falls. However, militia support for the farmers came from militia groups nationwide. The Kentucky State Militia and the Michigan Militia Corps Wolverines followed the events in Klamath closely.

The Montana Human Rights Network (MHRN), which monitors the activities of the radical right, obtained copies of e-mail messages exchanged between militia members, several of which advocated the use of armed force. One message said it would be “a great honor and privilege” to “fire the first shot at the feds.” Another called for opening the water gates by “those of you who have access to airplanes and explosives.”

The cause of Klamath received prominent attention in publications like the *Federal Observer*, which calls itself

“a voice of Truth—for America” and sports the patriotic icons on its web site including a bald eagle, an American flag and an illustration depicting a handgun-toting Rosie the Riveter.

Calling Klamath Falls “the wellspring of a new sagebrush rebellion,” *Federal Observer* writer Patty Wentz noted that Wise Use members, calling themselves “Good Americans,” “Patriots” and “Revolutionaries,” were flocking to Klamath in caravans from places like California, Nevada, Washington and Idaho.

Other protesters were local, such as Gavin Rajnus, a farmer who found himself drawn into civil disobedience actions when water to his farm was cut off and received a quick indoctrination in anti-environmentalism from “a local businessman he won’t identify. . . . From the Good Americans, Rajnus learned about the high salaries, hyperbolic scare tactics and expensive direct-mailing campaigns of the national environmental groups,” Wentz wrote. “He learned that children are being brainwashed in schools by innocent-seeming Earth Day celebrations, when www.earthday.net carries political alerts against President Bush.”

Thanks to this education, Wentz continued, “Rajnus became convinced that environmentalism is leading the country down the path toward socialism or, worse, communism. . . . Rajnus also suspects that the ONRC-supported program to save water by using government money to buy farms from willing sellers is really a col-

lusion between the United Nations and the U.S. government. That the Wildlands Project, a non-profit organization that says it wants to establish connecting natural corridors for wildlife, really wants to cage all humans in the cities and leave the rest of the West for natural habitat.”

The *Sierra Times*, a web site with militia ties, also supported the Klamath protests. The *Sierra Times* is edited by J.J. Johnson, a founder of the Ohio Unorganized Militia and a major player in the militia movement during the 1990s.

According to Johnson, the farms around Klamath are really “encampments” in a “war” being fought against humanity itself. “The forces against us claim they are trying to save fish,” he wrote. “We are trying to save humans. In our minds, the most threatened species in the Klamath Basin is man himself. This may become one of the greatest rescue and resupply operations ever—and more important than the Historic Berlin Airlift.”

CONVOY OF TEARS

In August 2001, convoys from Montana and other states journeyed to Klamath Falls in support of the farmers, calling themselves the “Convoy of Tears” (a name that echoes, ironically, the “Trail of Tears” of the early 1800s, in which Native Americans were forcibly removed from their homelands by the U.S. government, with thousands dying during a forced march to relocation camps). The MHRN obtained an e-mail, written by convoy organizer Cathy Aastrom, which documents logistical collaboration between the convoy planners and the Militia of Montana.

After the MHRN issued a news release about the militia’s involvement, participants in the convoy tried to downplay the militia role. Right-wing talk show host and militia supporter John Stokes of KGEZ radio was originally slated to join the convoy, bringing along a 10-foot wooden swastika, painted green. Stokes planned to burn the swastika at a rally in Klamath to dramatize his notion that “this green movement is based on Nazism.” In the end, Stokes chose not to participate personally but sent along the swastika. “As far as the Network knows, it was never burned and press reports said the swastika was not allowed in a parade held in downtown Klamath,” reported a MHRN advisory.

Extremist rhetoric also came from Jack Redfield, a member of the Klamath Falls Police Department. Redfield, who also owns a ranch, delivered beef he had raised to a barbecue celebrating a limited release of water to farmers. Still in uniform, he donned a white cowboy hat and delivered a fiery attack on “the so-called environmentalists and our federal agencies,” which he accused

of “thinly disguised domestic terrorism directed at the economy of the US. . . . They will not stop in the Klamath Basin. They are already up to their devious evil in other parts of Oregon and other states. . . . When you expand the crisis to our 50 states over the next year or two as this madness progresses, you are looking at the destruction of the livelihoods of millions of people and businesses. . . . I think the potential for extreme violence, even to the extent of Civil war is possible if action is not taken in the very near future to remedy this tragedy.”

Redfield also singled out local environmental activists Andy Kerr and Wendell Wood for particular attack. “It won’t take much from Andy Kerr or Wendell Wood or their like to spark an extremely violent response,” he said. “I am talking about rioting, homicides, destruction of property like dams that hold the precious water from the agricultural community.”

These remarks, with their implied endorsement of violence and law-breaking, led to Redfield’s temporary suspension from duty. Carl F. Worden, a “liaison officer” for the Southern Oregon Militia, responded by calling him a “prophet” and proposed an even more violent strategy for defeating the evil bureaucrats at the Bureau of Land Management:

One man carrying a white flag approaches the armed BLM officer at the Head Gate, presents him with a demand that he and his cohorts leave immediately, and allows him no more than five minutes to accomplish that task. The demand further requires the BLM officer and his men surrender their weapons AND their personal identification upon evacuation of the area. They are warned not to return. It is obvious the man carrying the white flag is backed up by over fifty heavily armed citizens surrounding the Head Gates, all with their precision sniper rifles and semi-automatic weapons brought to bear on the BLM officer and his men. The BLM officer is ordered not to attempt to communicate the situation to his superiors, and if he cooperates with the citizens, he and his men will be allowed to evacuate the area with the understanding that if they ever return, no quarter will be granted.

The BLM officer sees the light—or he doesn’t—and he either evacuates per the demand, or he and his men die right on the spot. It really doesn’t matter to the citizens at this point. All evidence and shell casing are carefully recovered, boot prints are obscured, tire tracks are obliterated, the Head Gates are opened, and the citizens go home to a quiet night with their families.

This incitement to violence is precisely the sort of thing that leads to real terrorism, but Worden must have known that he had little to fear from local law enforcement—not when “prophetic” officers like Jack Redfield are on the job. ■

AS OTHERS SEE US: COMPETING VISIONS OF A SANITIZED WAR

book excerpt from *Weapons of Mass Deception: The Uses of Propaganda in Bush's War on Iraq*

Like all good television, the war in Iraq had a dramatic final act, broadcast during prime time—the sunlight gleaming over the waves as the president's fighter jet, with his name and the words "Commander in Chief" painted below the pilot's window, descended from the sky onto the USS Abraham Lincoln. The plane zoomed in, snagged a cable stretched across the flight deck and screeched to a stop, and Bush bounded out, dressed in a snug-fitting olive-green flight suit with his helmet tucked under his arm. He strode across the flight deck, posing for pictures and shaking hands with the crew of the carrier. He had even helped fly the jet, he told reporters. "Yes, I flew it," he said. "Yeah, of course, I liked it." Surrounded by gleaming military hardware and hundreds of cheering sailors in uniform, and with the words "Mission Accomplished" emblazoned on a huge banner at his back, he delivered a stirring speech in glow of sunset that declared a "turning of the tide" in the war against terrorism. "We have fought for the cause of liberty, and for the peace of the world," Bush said. "Because of you, the tyrant has fallen, and Iraq is free."

After the day's festivities, the Democrats got their chance to complain, calling Bush's Top Gun act a "tax-subsidized commercial" for his upcoming re-election campaign. They estimated that it had cost \$1 million to orchestrate all of the details that made the picture look so perfect. Although White House officials originally claimed that the Navy jet was necessary, they later admitted that the aircraft carrier was close enough to shore that a helicopter would have worked just fine. It was so close to shore, in fact, that the aircraft carrier had to be repositioned in the water to keep the TV cameras from picking up the San Diego shoreline. In order to get the light just right and keep the ship from arriving at port before the prime-time broadcast, a Pentagon official admitted, the USS Abraham Lincoln made "lazy circles" 30 miles at sea and took 20 hours to cross a distance that could have been covered in an hour or so. Commanders gauged

the wind and glided along at precisely that speed so sea breezes would not blow across the ship and create unwanted noise during Bush's speech. When the wind shifted during the speech, the ship changed course.

In the end, though, the spin doctors agreed that the images would stay in the minds of the American people. "It was a pretty darn good photo-op," commented Mike McCurry, President Clinton's former public relations advisor.

"This one is right up there at the top," said Michael Deaver, the former PR man for Ronald Reagan. "It's a great image. It shows American strength, victory. It shows a young president with the courage to do something like this."

"This was not just a speech but a patriotic spectacular, with the ship and its crew serving as crucial backdrops for Bush's remarks, something to cheer the viewing nation and to make Bush look dramatically commander-in-chiefly," wrote Washington Post TV critic Tom Shales. There were several eloquent turns of phrase in the address . . . but they were overwhelmed by the visual impact, pictures both vast and intimate. . . . Everything

seemed to go gorgeously right for Bush. Even the pre-sunset lighting was perfect."

BRAIN SALAD SURGERY

"You have shown the world the skill and might of the American armed forces," Bush declared during his speech aboard the carrier. "Today ... with new tactics and precision weapons, we can achieve military objectives without directing violence against civilians. No device of man can remove the tragedy from war. Yet it is a great advance when the guilty have far more to fear from war than the innocent."

As comforting as these words may have seemed to people in the United States, however, the Bush speech sent a different message internationally. Ever since the first US-led war in the Persian Gulf, the United States has won victories with overwhelming displays of military

WEAPONS OF MASS DECEPTION

The Uses of Propaganda in Bush's War on Iraq



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authors of *Trust Us, We're Experts!*

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force. From the perspective of many people outside the United States, however, this is precisely the problem, and the military hardware with which Bush surrounded himself struck them as something to fear, not cheer.

The rest of the world did not experience the war as the clean, surgical operation that was presented on U.S. television, where major media outlets cited reasons such as taste, news judgment or concern about offending viewers to explain why they rarely showed images of dead and injured civilians. "It's something we wrestle with every day," said Cecilia Bohand, foreign pictures editor for the New York Times. "We're not trying to run posters for the Army, which sometimes it does feel like when we're not running [images of] the other side. Some of us feel we should be a little more graphic." She added that readers reacted with anger on those occasions when the Times did push the envelope by publishing a picture of a dead soldier or a dead child. "We're flooded with letters," Bohand said. "Readers don't want to see it."

"It really is disgustingly sanitized on television," said Gene Bolles, the chief of neurosurgery at Landstuhl, Germany, the destination for the war's most wounded soldiers. Bolles, who operated on Jessica Lynch and other US casualties, said he had seen "a number of really horrific injuries now from the war. They have lost arms, legs, hands, they have been burned, they have had significant brain injuries and peripheral nerve damage. These are young kids that are going to be, in some regards, changed for life. I don't feel that people realize that."

Writing in the public relations trade press, British-born writer Paul Holmes warned that "we are watching a totally different war from the one seen by the rest of the world," which "has serious long-term implications. It can only deepen the rift between the way the US sees its role in the world and the way the rest of the world sees us. It can also lead to more miscalculations, like the assumption that American invaders would be welcomed as liberators. There may not be much anyone can do at this stage about our image overseas (not that anyone in this administration seems to care), but the US media isn't doing the public any favors by refusing to depict the grim realities of war."

CLUSTER BOMBS

To get a sense of the difference between US and international patterns in covering the war, we used the Lexis-Nexis database to compile a list of news stories that contained the phrases "cluster bombs" and "Iraq" during the period from April 3 through April 10, 2003. This period of time was significant because it marked the tail end of the war (the U.S. occupation of Baghdad began on April 9), and also included the first admission

by U.S. and British generals that they were using conventional cluster bombs.

Human rights organizations and international relief agencies including Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, Oxfam International, Christian Aid and Save the Children have condemned the use of cluster bombs because they kill indiscriminately. Each cluster bomb contains about 200 bomblets the size of a soda can, which disperse upon impact and saturate an area the size of two football fields with explosives and tiny flying shards of steel. Between 5 and 15 percent of the bomblets fail to detonate immediately, leaving behind a deadly litter of unexploded bombs that can continue killing people who happen to encounter them after the battle has ended. "Cluster bombs have a very bad reputation, which they deserve," says Colin King, author of Jane's Explosive Ordnance Disposal guide and a British Army bomb-disposal expert from the 1991 Persian Gulf War. Regarded as anti-personnel weapons in the same class as land mines, they have been banned by more than 100 nations in a treaty that the United States has refused to sign. Their use remains legal, therefore, but highly controversial.

During the eight-day period we examined, U.S. publications only mentioned cluster bombs 120 times, even though they accounted for 2,044 of the publications archived in the Lexis-Nexis database. By comparison, Australian and European publications carried 394 stories, while accounting for 673 of the publications listed. In simple ratio terms, this means that European and Australian publications were ten times as likely to mention cluster bombs as their American counterparts.

Numbers alone, however, do not tell the full story. Most of the stories that appeared in U.S. publications mentioned cluster bombs only in passing, characterizing reports of their use as the Iraqi "government line" or making cursory, one-sentence mentions, as in a New York Times report on April 8 that said American officials "are investigating reports that cluster bombs were used against villages." Several mentions consisted of denials that cluster bombs were being used, references to their use in other wars, or criticisms of their use by Saddam Hussein in past attacks on Kurds and Shiites.

Asked about reports of civilian deaths from cluster bombs in the Hilla region south of Baghdad, US Brigadier General Vincent Brooks responded, "I don't have any specifics about that particular attack and the explosions that would link it to cluster munitions at all." His comments were quickly contradicted by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), which sent a four-person team to Hilla and found what ICRC

spokesman called a “horror” littered with “dozens of smashed corpses.” Amnesty International also investigated and reported as follows:

The scenes at al-Hilla’s hospital on 1 April showed that something terrible had happened. The bodies of the men, women and children—both dead and alive—brought to the hospital were punctured with shards of shrapnel from cluster bombs. Videotape of the victims was judged by Reuters and Associated Press editors as being too awful to show on television. Independent [UK] newspaper journalists reported that the pictures showed babies cut in half and children with their limbs blown off. Two lorry-loads of bodies, including women in flowered dresses, were seen outside the hospital.

Injured survivors told reporters how the explosives fell “like grapes” from the sky, and how bomblets bounced through the windows and doors of their homes before exploding. A doctor at al-Hilla’s hospital said that almost all the patients were victims of cluster bombs.

Even after admitting that cluster bombs were being used, military spokesmen declined throughout the war to say how many were used, saying merely that “an unspecified number of cluster bombs have been fired on Iraq.” Other mentions in the US press consisted of statements that talked only about efforts to protect U.S. soldiers from cluster bombs, without mentioning who was dropping them. Several stories, for example, focused on a soldier who suffered a foot injury after stepping on an unexploded bomblet. A San Francisco Chronicle report praised soldiers’ Kevlar jackets, which help protect them against shrapnel injuries from grenades and cluster bombs.

After the fighting ended, some U.S. media outlets began to report on aspects of the war that they had avoided while the fighting was actually occurring. On April 28, the Chicago Tribune published a picture of the burial of 6-year-old Lamiya Ali, an Iraqi girl who was killed along with with her 8-year-old sister, when she mistook a bomblet for a toy. Several readers, noted Tribune editor Don Wycliff, called to complain about the photos, calling them “graphic” and “extremely disturbing” and saying they showed “no respect for taste or morals, or that poor child’s life.” In response, Malone pointed out that during the entire war, the Tribune’s front page had shown “fewer than six” pictures of “dead or grievously wounded bodies.”

Air Force General Richard B. Myers, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told reporters on April 25 that 1,500 cluster bombs had been used during the war but that only 26 had fallen in civilian areas and that there was only one case of death or injury to a noncombatant. However,

Myers’ statistic referred only to cluster bombs dropped from airplanes and did not include weapons fired from land-based artillery. In the town of Karbala alone, local civil defense workers engaged in postwar cleanup reported harvesting about 1,000 unexploded cluster bombs a day in places the US said were not targets. “His remarks came amid persistent reports from Baghdad that children and other civilians are being killed or maimed by bomblets that did not explode when they hit their initial targets,” reported Los Angeles Times writer Greg Miller. “Myers’ assertions were challenged by human rights organizations, which said they had learned Friday of new injuries to civilians in Baghdad and other Iraqi cities. . . . Human Rights Watch and other organizations, as well as doctors in Baghdad, have reported hundreds of casualties from cluster bombs or similar devices.”

THE ARAB VIEW

Just as hyper-patriotism has become a successful marketing strategy for the American media, an equal and opposite phenomenon has been occurring in the Muslim and Arab world, where anti-Americanism has become the best formula to win ratings. When Arab reporters talked about “weapons of mass destruction” during the Iraq war, they were sometimes referring to cluster bombs. “Arab TV, the networks most prominently led by Al-Jazeera but also including Abu Dhabi TV and others, has clearly emerged as a geopolitical force,” noted former FCC chairman Reed Hunt. “This TV, principally by and for Arab audiences, has seen the war through different lenses from those covering the American audience’s war. Arab TV has naturally reached an audience willing to accept a view of the war from the defenders’ side just as American TV has been broadcast to an audience prone to an opposing view. The natural tendencies of the different audiences, though, have not been challenged by their respective TV mediums but apparently have been exacerbated.”

“To fully understand this war and its consequences, it’s necessary to watch both Arab and American television,” said Rami G. Khouri, a political scientist and editor of the Daily Star in Beirut, Lebanon. Khouri spent the war scanning daily through 20 different Arab and American TV services and found it a “painful exercise, because the business of reporting and interpreting the serious news of war has been transformed into a mish-mash of emotional cheerleading, expressions of primordial tribal and national identities, overt ideological manipulation by governments and crass commercial pandering to the masses in pursuit of audience share and advertising dollars.” The pattern, he said, was similar on both sides of the ideological divide: “Arab television

channels display virtually identical biases and omissions, including: heavy replaying of film of the worst Iraqi civilian casualties; interviews with guests who tend to be critical of the United States; hosts and anchors who jump to debate rather than interview American guests; [and] taking Iraqi and other Arab government statements at face value with little probing into their accuracy.”

During the war, Al-Jazeera reported a tripling of traffic to its Arab-language web site. Its willingness to broadcast images that American networks chose not to display contributed to its popularity. The Google and Lycos search engines reported that “Al Jazeera” had become the most common search term entered by web surfers, with three times more searches than “sex.” Simultaneously, Al-Jazeera became a target of hacker attacks that kept its English-language site unavailable throughout most of the war and knocked down its Arabic-language site for nearly a week. “No one has ever sustained a crippling attack against a web site for so long,” noted USA Today.

The Lexis-Nexis database contained only a handful of examples of Arab media coverage of the war, but we can get a sense of what Arabs were watching on a daily basis from the following description by British journalist Robert Fisk of video footage shot by the al-Jazeera cable network:

A remarkable part of the Al-Jazeera tape shows fireballs blooming over western Basra and the explosion of incoming—and presumably British—shells. The short sequence of the dead British soldiers for the public showing, of which Prime Minister Tony Blair expressed such horror, is little different from dozens of similar clips of dead Iraqi soldiers shown on British TV over the past 12 years, pictures that never drew any expressions of condemnation from Blair. . . . Far more terrible than the pictures of the dead British soldiers, however, is the tape from Basra’s largest hospital as victims of the Anglo American bombardment are brought to the operating rooms shrieking in pain. A middle-aged man is carried into the hospital in pajamas, soaked head to foot in blood. A little girl of perhaps 4 is brought into the operating room on a trolley, staring at a heap of her own intestines protruding from the left side of her stomach. A blue-uniformed doctor pours water over the little girl’s guts and then gently applies a bandage before beginning surgery. . . .

Other harrowing scenes show the partially decapitated body of a little girl, her red scarf still wound round her neck. Another small girl was lying on a stretcher with her brain and left ear missing. Another dead child had its feet blown away. There was no indication whether U.S. or British ordnance had killed these children. The tapes give no indication of Iraqi military casualties.

In the American press, al-Jazeera’s emphasis was frequently dismissed as evidence of its ideological bias. But bias is itself a highly subjective term. Arab journalists would tell you the same thing that American journalists say in response to similar complaints—that they are simply giving their viewers the coverage they want, and that it is the American media that is biased and politically sanitized. The memories that most Americans will remember from the war will likely be the toppling of Saddam Hussein’s statue, the rescue of American POWs, and soldiers’ joyful homecoming reunions with their families. In the Arab world, the image that come to mind will include: the Iraqi boy who lost both of his arms and most of his family in a bombing raid; the Baghdad skyline lit up by bombing; humiliated Iraqi prisoners of war; and angry anti-American protests in the streets.

In Saudi Arabia, Los Angeles Times writer Kim Murphy witnessed the effect of those images when she visited the conservative Muslim city of Buraydah on April 5. There, she said, “the war in Iraq is gaining new converts every day. . . . If hundreds of young men here haven’t left for Baghdad to fight the Americans, it is only because they haven’t the means to get there. . . . As television images of the war settle over an increasingly uneasy Arab public, the growing sense of anger and frustration is felt especially keenly.” At mosques throughout the town, she reported, “the noonday air was screeching with dozens of sermons” from clergy like Sheik Suleiman Alwan.

“America and their allies, hell is their destination for the crimes they have committed,” Alwan said.

Suleiman Alwan’s name is worth noticing. He was one of the sheiks mentioned in December 2001 on the video footage captured in Afghanistan by U.S. soldiers in which Osama bin Laden and several supporters celebrated the 9/11 attacks. An unidentified Saudi sheik who appeared in the video told bin Laden that “Everybody praises what you did,” and mentioned Alwan by name as someone who had given a sermon saying that “this was jihad and those people [killed in the terrorist attack] were not innocent.” In fact, one of the 9/11 hijackers, Abdulaziz Alomari, is believed to have been a personal disciple of Alwan and was considered one of his brightest students.

If we have indeed “turned the tide” in the war on terror, as President Bush declared in his speech aboard the aircraft carrier, we should expect that preachers of hatred like Suleiman Alwan are no longer recruiting new converts to serve as foot soldiers and martyrs. The fact that this has not happened suggests that promises of victory are premature. ■