

# FOOD FOR THOUGHT 6:

## IS AMERICA NO LONGER JUST BLIND, BUT *INSANE*?

### AUTHOR'S NOTE:

It's a great pleasure, and one I'm enormously flattered by, to be able to offer as a preface here this testimonial from Richard Collier. As he points out, we have known one another for many years, but after 1967 and Rick's flight to Canada, our meetings have been many fewer than they were before. I have, ever since first meeting him—in our third year of college, in 1962—admired his political courage and his unflagging dedication both to the truth and to the social betterment, in whatever ways he can influence it, of humanity.

EL

Below, you will find an excellent rant on how recent US legislation has yet again rolled back civil liberties, shoving America one step closer to a condition of *de facto* fascism; it is an angry, frequently grim, sometimes bleak, and nearly despairing meditation, but one that because of its honesty will repay handsomely the time it takes to peruse it. The author, Eric Larsen, is a former academic colleague of mine, currently living in the belly of the beast—New York City—where he fights as best he can the good fight to expose the crimes of the Bush administration and to shine an unwavering spotlight of analysis on what he has concluded is a conspiracy and cover-up behind the 9/11 atrocity. He has written an excellent book (to which he refers in this article), *A Nation Gone Blind*, which details with painful accuracy the dizzying slide in the US over the last thirty years—in the arts, in academia, and in the general public itself—into an abyss of extremism and numbness, a precipitous decline that has eroded the freedoms and idealism once so characteristic of that country; this book, which is currently available (at least on order) from any bookstore and from Amazon, should not be missed by anyone concerned about the current spiritual (in the most inclusive sense of that word) condition of America. You might also find it valuable to visit Larsen's website, on which he explores at greater length many of the issues he raises in the essay below.

There is a modicum of reassurance in knowing that not all Americans are mesmerized by propaganda that parades a vicious

right-wing and fundamentalist ideology as if it were the truth, an ideology that today influences every major legislative and judicial decision made in the US; such voices should give us at least some small sense of hope.

—Richard Collier

1

It's a serious question, whether America is no longer merely a nation gone blind, but a nation grown wholly insane.

And to this serious question I give a serious answer: Yes.

Yesterday, September 29, 2006, Congress passed by generous majorities the so-called “compromise” version of the “Military Commissions Act of 2006” having to do, in great part, with “enemy combatants,” as they're known, who have been seized by the U.S.

And on that morning (when only the Senate had passed the bill, although it was correctly assumed that the House would follow suit), *The New York Times* wrote (at that time, yesterday morning,

would make illegal several broadly defined abuses of detainees, while leaving it to the president to establish specific permissible interrogation techniques. And it would strip detainees of a habeas corpus right to challenge their detentions in court.<sup>1</sup>

What this means is that the President can himself pretty much decide in exactly what curious and interesting ways, except maybe for waterboarding, he may or may not choose to torture detainees. (Torture, by the way, is what we Americans are spoon-fed by the media to understand as “harsh treatment.”) And the bill means something even worse. It means that once they're seized, the detainees can sit in their cells and rot until their flesh falls from their bones and their eyes fall inward, all this time—forever, that is—with no recourse whatsoever by means of which to seek outside aid or to seek appeal through legal rights of *any* sort.

The United States can now legally toss anyone it wants into jail and forget about them forever.

Let me restate that. The United States is now legally entitled to declare *anyone it wants* an “enemy combatant.” The United States is now legally entitled to throw those it

---

<sup>1</sup> *The New York Times*, September 29, 2006, p. A-1.

so declares into cells until they die, treating and torturing them, as they die in long-term terror and agony, in just about any way it wants. Oh, aside from waterboarding, of course.

In other words, as the *Times* said, the writ of habeas corpus will be “stripped” from them so that they will have no “right to challenge their detentions in court.”

It needs no pointing out, but I am going to point it out anyway. This execrable, monstrous, and inhumane situation has come about through the will of the Bush/Cheney administration, subsequently through the will of the United States Congress, and finally—it’s a democracy, after all, isn’t it?—through the will of the American people.

I will now ask three questions:

1)

First, although the law is at present *intended* only for non-citizens of the U.S., what process or means will possibly be strong enough to impede or subvert the bill’s enormous power of precedent, assuring that it not in future be imposed upon “enemy combatants” who *are* citizens of the U.S.? (In today’s *Times*, in fact, Bruce Ackerman, “a professor of law and political science at Yale University,” is cited as holding the view that the bill *already* “allows the administration to declare even an American citizen an unlawful combatant subject to indefinite detention.”)<sup>2 3</sup>

2)

Here’s my second question: Whoever you are, is your conscience clear, both as a human being *and* as a citizen of an at least putatively participatory republican democracy—is your conscience clear at this fact of holding in your own hands and in your own heart the responsibility for such a foreboding, malicious, and uncivilized bill’s having come to pass?

I know that my own conscience isn’t clear. It isn’t clear at all. It isn’t clear by a long shot.

3)

And here’s the third question, the one I started with: Have we not, as a nation, gone mad? To this one, there’s also a corollary question. Isn’t it a fact that, with the passage of this bill, the United States, by definition, has stopped being free and has become tyrannic?

---

<sup>2</sup> The New York Times, September 30, 2006, p. A-11.

<sup>3</sup> Also see Marjorie Cohn’s “A Constitutional Shredding: Rounding Up U.S. Citizens,” in *Counterpunch*, September 30-October 1, 2006: “Anyone who donates money to a charity that turns up on Bush’s list of ‘terrorist’ organizations, or who speaks out against the government’s policies could be declared an ‘unlawful enemy combatant’ and imprisoned indefinitely. That includes American citizens.”

Some may consider me naïve—those, I mean, who will argue that “freedom” in the United States has already been lost for a long time. My own views on the question of lost American freedoms will be made clear to anyone who reads *A Nation Gone Blind: America in an Age of Simplification and Deceit*. But it seems to me that yesterday is significant in a new way. It seems to me that yesterday was—is—a new kind of marking point. And that’s because yesterday was the first time since 9/11 that a major law stripping away traditional—even ancient—human rights and freedoms has been passed by congress not peremptorily but *after long and full debate*.

9/11 was a trigger—9/11 was our Reichstag fire—and, as a trigger, it quickly and easily captured passage of the so-called “Patriot Act,” voted for overwhelmingly by a stunned, shocked, and awed congress. Obviously, this massive piece of legislation had been prepared well in advance of its introduction to congress, and just as obviously the pervasive atmosphere of fear then in existence was in no way conducive to clear thought, extensive study, and the making of fine distinctions that are all necessary in order for legislation to be passed responsibly, fairly, and meaningfully. If you do think of 9/11 as the trigger of a gun, it’s perfectly reasonable to think of “The Patriot Act” as being the bullet that came out of that gun.

But now, five years later, a bill has been passed that has the potential for greatly more damage to the republic and to human rights and freedoms than even the Patriot Act. And *this* bill has been produced by a majority of both houses *after prolonged discussion, debate, thought, consideration, objection, and even some degree of compromise*. The writ of habeas corpus goes back to Magna Carta—in the year 1215—and now, after *eight centuries of precedent*, this bill strips habeas corpus away. Same for the Geneva Conventions and torture. The Geneva Conventions don’t go back eight centuries, it’s true, but their significance for a liberal and civilized world and for human rights is equal if not even greater.

The point? 9/11 was our Reichstag fire and, as such—as a “false flag operation,” to give it that name, was the first major self-inflicted wound on the United States in the current calamity. But yesterday, the 29<sup>th</sup> of September, 2006, was the day marking the first *legal* step to be taken in the United States’ process of committing suicide. 9/11 as a self-imposed wound was *illegal*. *This* self-imposed wound is perfectly legal. *This* self-imposed wound, in fact, is *itself* legality, is *itself* law.

And so we return again to our opening question. Can any nation, body, or person be considered sane if they write a binding law that initiates the process of its or their own suicide? I suppose the might be possibly so, *if* the nation, body, or person did so unknowingly. And that leads us to a very, very interesting question.

Did the congress *knowingly* enact this law? If so, it seems to me that its members, and therefore the nation itself that is represented by that congress, must be declared insane. If anyone thinks that knowingly writing a law that requires *and* initiates your own suicide is *not* insane—well, let such a person go off and have that thought by himself or herself.

And what's the other possibility? Well, the other possibility, clearly, is that congress wrote and enacted the law *unknowingly*, that is, *not* knowing what they were doing. Now, supposing this to be the case, what can possibly be said about them that's both true *and* that could shed light on what they've done?

The thing both true and meaningful that could be said about them is this: *That they are blind*. That is, that they are blind like those analyzed and described with such care and at such length in *A Nation Gone Blind: America in an Age of Simplification and Deceit*.

Reader, you must believe me, I take not the least joy in seeing the truth of my own book and my own analysis being proven in this particularly vast, horrific, and overwhelming way. But, yet again, under whatever despairing and horrible circumstances, the truth and validity of *A Nation Gone Blind* is proven.

A remarkable new book has just been published, and I will end, for the moment, with a reference from it. The book is *9/11 and American Empire: Intellectuals Speak Out*. It's published by Olive Branch Press, and it consists of eleven relevant essays, two of these written by the book's editors, the estimable David Ray Griffin and Peter Dale Scott. The book is indispensable to anyone hoping—or struggling—to understand how the “Military Commissions Act of 2006” could not only have come into existence but furthermore be made the law of the land.

That understanding can come, but it may well do so only after a good deal of time and effort have been put into it, a number of books read, and a fair amount of history either learned or seriously boned up on. The task of understanding, then, may be hard and slow, but the task of repair will be a great deal harder and even more slow, as these passages, which happen also to be the closing passages of the book, very clearly show:

The events over the past couple of decades and especially the first five years of this century suggest that fascism has taken root in the United States, and there is little indication that a reversal is evident. Vice President Wallace wrote in the *New York Times* on April 9, 1944:

The really dangerous American fascist. . . [ellipsis in original] is the man who wants to do in the United States in an American way what Hitler did in Germany in a Prussian way. The American fascist would prefer not to use violence. His method is to poison the channels of public information. With a fascist the problem is never how best to present the truth to the public but how best to use the news to deceive the public into giving the fascist and his group more money or more power.

Wallace then added:

They claim to be super-patriots, but they would destroy every liberty guaranteed by the Constitution. They demand free enterprise, but are the spokesmen for monopoly and vested interest. Their final objective toward which all their deceit is directed is to capture

political power so that, using the power of the state and the power of the market simultaneously, they may keep the common man in eternal subjection.

We are past the brink of totalitarian fascist-corporatism. Challenging the neocons and the GDG [Global Dominance Group] agenda is only the beginning of reversing the long-term conservative reactions to the gains of the 1960s. Re-addressing poverty, the UN Declaration of Human Rights, and our own weapons of mass destruction is a long-term agenda for progressive scholars and citizen democrats.<sup>4</sup>

Yes, it is indeed a long-term agenda. And I, for one, say let's get going.

Eric Larsen  
September 30, 2006

---

<sup>4</sup> "Parameters of Power in the Global Dominance Group: 9/11 & Election Irregularities in Context," Peter Phillips with Bridget Thornton and Celeste Vogler, in *9/11 and American Empire: Intellectuals Speak Out* (Northampton, MA, 2007), p.188.