

Editorial

The Conviction of Saddam Hussein Does Not Equal Justice for the Iraqi People

As expected, on November 5 Saddam Hussein was declared guilty of crimes against humanity and was sentenced to death by hanging. There was never any doubt that this would be the outcome of the trial, mainly because the trial was conducted under conditions of foreign occupation, the mandate of the court was set by the U.S. occupiers and the occupiers demanded a guilty verdict. This is not to say that Hussein is innocent. In fact, he is guilty of far greater crimes than the killing of 148 people in the town of Dujail for which he was charged. However, the conditions under which he was tried and convicted did more to cover up than expose the nature of his crimes and his accomplices.

From the time that the charges were announced there has been widespread speculation that these particular charges were chosen because any other charges would have brought with them the potential

to embarrass and discredit the United States, which was complicit in most of the crimes against humanity committed by the regime of Saddam Hussein. It is well-known that Hussein launched his eight-year war against Iran in September 1980 at the bidding of the U.S. and with the financial backing of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and various other reactionary Arab regimes. If he were to be charged with crimes against humanity for that offense there would have been legitimate questions as to why U.S. Presidents Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan and various Arab leaders were not charged along with him.

Similarly, if Saddam were to be charged with the gassing of thousands of Kurds in Halabja in 1988 there would be legitimate questions as to why current U.S. Vice-President Dick Cheney, Defence Minister Donald Rumsfeld and various other U.S. officials

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Film Review

Death of a President

Directed by British filmmaker Gabriel Range, *Death Of A President* is a mockumentary, set in the near future after the fictitious October, 2007 assassination of U.S. President George Bush. Range uses standard documentary techniques, interspersing “live” event footage (in this case, some of it is actual events and other staged events) with interviews with different personalities central to the story. He makes the film as realistic as possible by using real footage (Bush making a public speech to the Economic Club of Chicago, scenes of anti-Bush protests, clips of interviews with Bush and other members of his administration) mixed with what he’s filmed. The effect is chillingly realistic, for example, scenes of anti-Bush protests include signs denouncing the U.S. invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan, and Iran as well.

Interview clips with Bush are mixed with faked reports by news analysts to suggest the U.S. has already attacked Iran and is preparing to attack North Korea.

The first half of the film centres on the buildup to the assassination, with staged scenes of protestors breaking through the president’s motorcade and actually touching the presidential limousine. We also see the police assault on protestors, which includes beatings, tear gas and the use of clubs. The brutality is made more chilling by the self-justification employed by the actor playing the head of the Chicago Police Department. He explains in one of the interview clips that he respects the right of people to protest, but that right is gone when they begin to use violence, a comment followed by clips of the police assaulting

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Federal Government Launches Asia-Pacific Gateway and Corridor Initiative

At an official ceremony held at the Port of Vancouver on October 16, Prime Minister Steven Harper officially launched the Asia-Pacific Gateway and Corridor Initiative. The Initiative is a four-year programme to upgrade and expand the transportation infrastructure on the West Coast in order to capture a larger share of the shipping market for Canadian businesses. The previous Liberal government had introduced the Pacific Gateway Act (Bill C-68) on October 21, 2005, but the defeat of the Martin government on November 14, 2005 brought a temporary halt to the programme.

Harper announced 12 separate infrastructure, transportation technology and border security projects. All major commercial ports, from Rupert to Roberts Bank will see major expansions and improvements. Bridges and roads linking the ports to the national and trans-national highway systems will be built or upgraded. There will be further twinning of the Trans-Canada Highway in Banff National Park. A new container security screening facility will be installed at the Port of Prince Rupert. And finally, a high-tech traffic management system will be developed for the Lower Mainland that will move containers into and out of port terminals faster and more efficiently.

The federal government has committed \$591 million to these projects but this is only the tip of the iceberg. The B.C. provincial government is planning to invest \$12.1 billion in new infrastructure over the next three years. The City of Vancouver, the Vancouver International Airport Authority, the Port Authority of Vancouver, and other municipal governments and quasi-government organizations have their own spending plans too. The private sector has committed over \$3 billion to Gateway and Corridor-related capital investment between 2004 and 2010. As a result of these improvements, total container throughput capacity at the Pacific ports is projected to rise from 2 million units a year today to 7 million by 2020. This would boost Canada's share of the West Coast container market to 14 percent and increase the volume of U.S. container traffic passing through Canada.

The governments and businesses would like to attract a higher volume of container traffic from the United States passing through Canada for destinations in China, Japan, South Korea, India and Indonesia, as well as to increase the volume of container traffic from Asia passing through Canada on to destinations in the United States. Harper's vision is that: "Canada should be the crossroads between the massive economy of the United States and the burgeoning economies of Asia." He pointed out that Canada's west coast ports have a geographic advantage over the U.S. ports that they compete against for container business because our ports are much closer to the main commercial ports of Asia than most of the American ports. In spite of this advantage, and the huge cost savings it represents for shippers, Harper bemoaned the fact that Canada only handles 9 percent of West Coast container traffic and only 9 percent of Canada's container traffic serves U.S. markets.

Steven Harper is selling the Asia-Pacific Gateway and Corridor Initiative as a project that will increase Canada's competitiveness in the global market and lead to more business opportunities and jobs for British Columbians and all Canadians. However, the aim of the gateway and corridor initiative is not the creation of jobs. Rather, it is the making of maximum profits for the shipping businesses. The infrastructure projects will undoubtedly create a lot of short-term jobs in the construction industry, but this construction boom will be short-lived like the others before it.

Overall, the Asia-Pacific Gateway and Corridor Initiative will increase the dependence of the economies of British Columbia and Canada on U.S. and Asian markets rather than contribute to the development of a self-reliant economy. In this respect, the Harper government is following the same policies as all preceding governments despite its admission in its first budget that Canada's dependence on the United States is one of the main "risks" and "uncertainties" for the Canadian economy.

Historically, when the U.S. economy goes into a

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U.S. Attempts to Topple Democratically-Elected Hamas Government

According to a report from Reuters, the CIA has launched an operation targetted at recruiting Palestinian journalists, politicians and activists to try and topple the democratically-elected Hamas government. The CIA is reported to have set aside \$42 million for the initiative, which is aimed at strengthening political opposition to Hamas in advance of the next Palestinian Authority elections.

Included in the plan is the provision of funding to Fatah, especially those elements within the organization loyal to Palestinian Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas. In addition, money will be given to individual journalists and radio and TV stations which agree to portray Hamas in a negative way. One Palestinian official, quoted anonymously, said some of the money earmarked for journalists would be used to create an anti-Hamas satellite TV station in the West Bank.

While representatives of the Bush administration stopped short of confirming the CIA-led operation, they acknowledged the existence of an "aid program"

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slump, the Canadian economy invariably follows in its wake. Every time the U.S. housing market goes down, the forestry industry in B.C. goes into crisis and thousands of forestry workers are laid off. The same thing happens to the auto and other manufacturing sectors in Ontario and Quebec. More recently, the increasing dependence of B.C. on trade with major Asian economies has made the B.C. economy more sensitive than ever to slumps in these countries, as occurred during the Asian economic crisis in 1997.

Increasing Canada's global competitiveness is a policy of creating the most favourable conditions for the monopoly capitalists to seek maximum profits through the exploitation of the Canadian people and the people of other countries. It has nothing to do with building any lasting prosperity or economic security. It is based on preserving the capitalist system, which suffers from recurring crises of overproduction, and one consequence of this policy is to make the Canadian economy even more vulnerable to these ups and downs of the world capitalist market.

November 6, 2006

targetted at "building Palestinian civil society." Speaking to Reuters, the U.S. Consul General in Jerusalem, Jacob Walles, said "there is nothing new here. The U.S. has operated programs in the West Bank and Gaza Strip for many years to promote development of political parties and civil society organizations."

It is widely believed that the U.S. funnelled millions of dollars to Palestinian candidates from Fatah and other parties during the Palestinian election campaign held earlier this year. Hamas won a larger-than-expected majority in those elections; many political observers concluded that popular reaction to the American funding of certain candidates contributed to this victory. One of Hamas' key campaign planks was eliminating the endemic corruption in the Palestinian Authority.

Several Palestinian legislators and activists have reacted angrily to the reported CIA operation. "We know very well that American money goes hand-in-hand with American agenda. We also know that unclean money goes to unclean parties and unclean politicians and unclean journalists," said Hasan Khreishe, deputy-speaker of the Palestinian Legislative Council.

He added that the Bush administration wants to "morph Palestinian society into a mercenary society...The Americans claim that this money will restructure certain Palestinian political parties, but I'm sure that the opposite will happen. These bribes will only corrode, corrupt and eventually destroy these parties since they will lose respect and stature among the Palestinian masses."

These comments were echoed by Fatah leader and former elected member of the Palestinian Authority, Hatem Abdul Kader, who said: "I have no doubt that any party or even individual receiving money from external sources will incur the wrath of the Palestinian people and suffer immense social and political damage. It would be virtual political suicide."

A Hamas spokesman in the Hebron region, Ibrahim Suleiman, echoed these views; he said: "They are trying to buy off a few political mercenaries here and there. But I assure them that our people are not stupid and naive. America's agents, like Israel's agents, will be thrown away like you dump a filthy rug into the garbage container." He added, "America's agents and collaborators are being discarded everywhere in the world. Do you think they will prosper here in Palestine? Have the Palestinian people forgotten what America has been doing and is doing to them?"

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were not in the dock with him for their role in providing Hussein's regime with chemical and biological weapons and ongoing intelligence on the deployment of Iranian and Kurdish forces. Even the 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait could raise sticky questions for the Americans who, in the days preceding the attack assured Saddam Hussein that he had a legitimate claim against Kuwait and that the U.S. would not intervene.

In other words, the American occupiers chose to prosecute the one case where no American involvement in Saddam's crimes was apparent. Even so, it has been reported that the U.S. imposed restrictions on the court prohibiting it from charging any foreign citizens in the crime and banning any

testimony incriminating foreigners.

The regime of Saddam Hussein committed countless crimes against the Iraqi people and officials of that regime deserve to be punished by the Iraqi people. However, in order for justice to prevail, those who put that regime in power, supplied it with weapons of mass destruction, trained its security forces in the art of torture and kept it in power for decades through various means must also face punishment at the hands of the Iraqi people. Barring such a development the trial, conviction and sentencing of Saddam Hussein amounts to nothing more than "victors' justice", not punishment for his crimes against humanity, but punishment for his failure to unquestionably obey his American masters.

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demonstrators who are doing nothing more than chanting. There are also scenes of police agents sent into the protest, ostensibly to keep track of the leaders but also to try and incite actions that will provide the justification for the police to crack down.

The second half of the movie is both a whodunit and an indictment of U.S. imperialism. Much as September 11 was used by the Bush administration to further fascize the American state through the enactment of the Patriot Act and other measures, the Bush assassination is the pretext for enacting Patriot 3, which further extends these state powers. Of course, the assassination is also used as the pretext for furthering U.S. imperial aims in the Middle East. On the basis of flimsy forensic evidence, a Syrian-American is identified as the primary suspect in the attack on Bush, and within hours of the assassination, newly sworn-in President Cheney is pressuring the intelligence community to provide evidence linking Syria to the attack. There is even a Syrian ex-patriot who begins making the rounds of the news shows swearing that he saw evidence that the Syrians were planning to assassinate Bush. It would all seem so far fetched, except that it mirrors the blatant lies and falsified intelligence used to justify the Iraq invasion. (Fiction, in this case, echoes the truth).

One of the strengths of *Death of a President* is the way it shatters the much-cherished illusion that U.S. imperialism can be reduced to one or two individuals who are evil. Whether or not Bush is bad (or even, as some would argue, an idiot) is not an issue to Ranger. Indeed, one of the film's most sympathetic characters is Eleanor Drake, Bush's speechwriter, whose

reminiscences in the interview clips portray Bush with warmth and affection.

Bush's assassination does not in any way deal a blow to U.S. imperialism, despite the cheers with which the news is greeted by some of the protestors. Indeed, it provides the basis for furthering the U.S. imperial agenda. While not implicitly stated, it's also clear that the assassination ends up weakening the anti-imperialist protest movements.

Perhaps if the movie had simply been about Bush being evil, it would have been distributed in the U.S. As it is, every major theatre chain in the U.S. has refused to screen it. This is unfortunate, as it should be mandatory viewing for all those on the left who say U.S. imperialism can be weakened by supporting more progressive Democrats or more moderate Republicans.

Modern Communism

**Bulletin of the Manitoba Regional Committee
of the Communist Party of Canada
(Marxist-Leninist)**

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