

PROJECT CENSORED'S TOP 25 NEWS STORIES

The Project Censored team has undertaken the rigorous process of selecting and evaluating the most important American and global news stories of 2009–2010 that received little or no coverage by the mainstream media.

Each year, the Project Censored team, based at Sonoma State University, California, selects and evaluates thousands of news stories published in the national and international mainstream media as well as in the alternative press. The team ultimately decides on the top 25 most underreported stories. Following is an edited summary of Project Censored's 2009–10 selection. To see the full report with sources, references and updates, visit <http://www.projectcensored.org/top-stories/articles/category/top-stories/top-25-of-2011/>. The book *Censored 2011*, edited by Mickey Huff, Peter Phillips and Project Censored, is reviewed in this edition. — Editor

1. Global Plans to Replace the Dollar

Nations have reached their limit in subsidising the military adventures of the United States. During meetings in June 2009 in Yekaterinburg, Russia, world leaders such as China's President Hu Jintao, Russia's President Dmitry Medvedev and other top officials of the six-nation Shanghai Cooperation Organisation took the first formal step to replace the dollar as the world's reserve currency. The United States was denied admission to the meetings. If the world leaders succeed, the dollar will dramatically plummet in value; the cost of imports, including oil, will skyrocket and interest rates will climb.

Foreigners see the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the World Trade Organization as Washington surrogates in a financial system backed by US military bases and aircraft carriers encircling the globe. But this military domination is a vestige of an American empire no longer able to rule by economic strength.

Journalist Chris Hedges wrote in June 2009: "The architects of this new global exchange realize that if they break the dollar they also break America's military domination. US military spending cannot be sustained without this cycle of heavy borrowing. The official US defense budget for fiscal year 2008 was US\$623 billion. The next closest national military budget was China's, at \$65 billion, according to the Central Intelligence Agency."

To fund the permanent war economy, the US has been flooding the world with dollars. The foreign recipients turn the dollars over to their central banks for local currency. The central banks then have a problem. If a central bank does not spend the money in the United States, then the exchange rate against the dollar increases, penalising exporters. This has allowed the US to print money without restraint, to buy imports and foreign companies, to fund military expansion and to ensure that foreign nations like China continue to buy American Treasury bonds.

In July 2009, President Medvedev illustrated his call for a supranational currency to replace the dollar by pulling from his pocket a sample coin of a "united future world currency". The coin, bearing the words "Unity in Diversity", was minted in Belgium and presented to the heads of G8 delegations.

Compiled by
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Sonoma State University
1801 East Cotati Avenue
Rohnert Park, CA 94928, USA
Email: censored@sonoma.edu
Website:
<http://www.projectcensored.org>

In September 2009, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development proposed creating a new artificial currency that would replace the dollar as reserve currency. The UN wants to redesign the Bretton Woods system of international exchange.

2. US Department of Defense: Planet's Worst Polluter

The United States military is responsible for the most egregious and widespread pollution of the planet. In spite of the evidence, the environmental impact of the US military goes largely unaddressed by environmental organisations and was not the focus of any discussions or proposed restrictions at the UN Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen. The extensive global operations of the US military (wars, interventions and secret operations on over 1,000 bases around the world and 6,000 facilities in the United States) are not counted against US greenhouse gas limits.

As it stands, the Department of Defense is the largest polluter in the world, producing more hazardous waste than the five largest US chemical companies combined. Depleted uranium, petroleum, oil, pesticides, defoliant agents, such as Agent Orange, and lead, along with vast amounts of radiation from weaponry produced, tested and used, are just some of the pollutants with which the US military is contaminating the environment. Journalist Sara Flounders has identified key examples:

- Tens of thousands of pounds of microparticles of radioactive and highly toxic waste contaminate the Middle East, Central Asia and the Balkans.
- US-made land mines and cluster bombs spread over wide areas of Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East continue to spread death and destruction.
- Thirty-five years after the Vietnam War, dioxin contamination is 300 to 400 times higher than "safe" levels, resulting in severe birth defects and cancers into the third generation of those affected.
- US military policies and wars in Iraq have created severe desertification of 90 per cent of the land, changing Iraq from a food exporter into a country that imports 80 per cent of its food.
- In the US, military bases top the Superfund list of the most polluted places, as perchlorate and trichloroethylene seep into the drinking water, aquifers and soil.
- Nuclear weapons testing in the American Southwest and the South Pacific Islands has contaminated millions of acres of land and water with radiation, while uranium tailings defile Navajo reservations.
- Rusting barrels of chemicals and solvents and

millions of rounds of ammunition are criminally abandoned by the Pentagon in bases around the world.

3. Internet Privacy and Personal Access at Risk

Following in the steps of its predecessor, the Obama administration is expanding mass government surveillance of personal electronic communications. This surveillance, which includes the monitoring of the Internet as well as private (nongovernmental) computers, is proceeding with the proposal or passage of new laws granting government agencies increasingly wider latitude in their monitoring activities. At the same time, private companies and even some schools are engaging in surveillance activities that further diminish personal privacy.

In spring 2009, Senate Bill 773, the Cybersecurity Act of 2009, was proposed, which gives the US President power to "declare a cyber security emergency" with respect to private computer networks and to do with these networks

what is deemed necessary to diffuse the attack. In a national emergency, the President would also have the power to shut down the Internet completely in the United States. The proposal requires that certain private computer systems and networks be "managed" by "cyber-professionals" licensed by the federal government. The bill permits the President to direct the national response to the cyber threat, if necessary, for

national defence and security, to conduct "periodic mapping" of private networks deemed to be critical to national security, and to require these companies to "share" information requested by the federal government.

Such steps toward increased control over private computer networks have been taken amid an ongoing program of mass surveillance begun by the George W. Bush administration, supposedly in response to the 9/11 attacks. Presently, no legislation exists that disallows the use of such technology to conduct mass, warrantless surveillance.

4. ICE Operates Secret Detention and Courts

Agents of the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) are holding thousands of US residents in unlisted and unmarked subfield offices and deporting tens of thousands in secret court hearings.

"If you don't have enough evidence to charge someone criminally but you think he's illegal, we can make him disappear." Those chilling words were spoken by James Pendergraph, then executive director of the ICE's Office of State and Local Coordination, at a conference of police and sheriffs in August 2008.

People are held in a vast network of more than 300

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detention facilities, located in nearly every state in the country. Only a few of these facilities are under the full operational control of ICE; the majority are jails under the control of state and local governments that subcontract with ICE to provide detention bed space. However, ICE has created a network of secret jails designed for confining individuals in transit. These 186 unlisted and unmarked subfield offices are not subject to ICE detention standards, lacking showers, beds, drinking water, soap, toothbrushes, sanitary napkins, mail, attorneys or legal information. Many of these subfield offices are in suburban office parks or commercial spaces, revealing no information about their ICE tenants—nary a sign, a marked car or even a US flag.

In addition, there is a complete lack of a real-time database tracking people in ICE custody, meaning that ICE has created a network of secret jails, designed for confining individuals in transit, that literally make people disappear. Immigrant detainees can be transferred away from their attorneys at any point in their immigration proceedings, and often are. Detainees can be literally "lost" by their attorneys and family members for days or even weeks after being transferred.

5. Blackwater (Xe): The Secret US War in Pakistan

At a covert forward operating base run by the US Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) in the Pakistani port city of Karachi, members of an elite division of Blackwater are at the centre of a secret program in which they plan targeted assassinations of suspected Taliban and Al-Qaeda operatives inside and outside Pakistan. The Blackwater operatives also gather intelligence and help direct a secret US military drone bombing campaign that runs parallel to the well-documented CIA Predator strikes, according to a well-placed source within the US military intelligence apparatus.

Blackwater, which also goes by the names Xe Services and US Training Center, has denied that the company operates in Pakistan.

A former senior executive at Blackwater confirmed the military intelligence source's claim that the company is working in Pakistan for the CIA and JSOC. He said that Blackwater is also working for the Pakistani government on a subcontract with an Islamabad-based security firm that puts US Blackwater operatives on the ground with

Pakistani forces in "counterterrorism" operations, including house raids and border interdictions, in the North-West Frontier Province and elsewhere in Pakistan. This arrangement allows the Pakistani government to utilise former US Special Operations forces that now work for Blackwater, while denying an official US military presence in the country. He also confirmed that Blackwater has a facility in Karachi and has personnel deployed elsewhere in Pakistan.

In addition to planning drone strikes and operations against suspected Al-Qaeda and Taliban forces in Pakistan for both JSOC and the CIA, the Blackwater team in Karachi also helps plan missions for JSOC inside Uzbekistan against the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan.

As well as working on covert action planning and drone strikes, Blackwater Select provides private guards to perform the sensitive task of security for secret US drone bases, JSOC camps and Defense Intelligence Agency camps inside Pakistan.

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6. Health Care Restrictions Cost Thousands of Lives in the US

Despite national legislative health reform, health care in the US will remain dismal for many Americans, resulting in continuing deaths and personal tragedies.

A Harvard research team estimates that 2,266 US military veterans died in 2008 due to lack of health insurance. The figure is more than 14 times the number of deaths suffered by US troops in Afghanistan in 2008, and more than twice as many as have died since the war began in 2001. The researchers concluded that 1.46 million working-age vets lacked health coverage, increasing their death rate. The *American Journal of Public Health* published findings

demonstrating that being uninsured raises an individual's odds of dying by 40 per cent.

Health insurance laws are often complicated by individual states, where health insurance is legally controlled.

According to research led by the Johns Hopkins Children's Center, lack of health insurance may have led or contributed to nearly 17,000 deaths among hospitalised children in the United States in the span of less than two decades. The study was published online on 29 October 2009 in the Oxford, UK, *Journal of Public Health*. Using more than 23 million hospital records from 37 states between 1988 and 2005, the Johns Hopkins investigators compared the risk of death in children with

insurance to those without. Other factors being equal, they found that uninsured children were 60 per cent more likely to die in hospital than those with insurance. When comparing death rates by underlying disease, the uninsured appeared to have an increased risk of dying regardless of their medical condition. The findings only captured deaths during hospitalisation and did not reflect deaths after discharge from hospital, nor did they count children who died without ever being hospitalised, which means that the real death toll of uninsured children could be even higher.

7. External Capitalist Forces Wreak Havoc in Africa

Resource exploitation in Africa is not new, but the scale of agricultural "land grabbing" in African nations is unprecedented, becoming the new colonisation of the 21st century. State violence against Kenyan indigenous pastoralists and Nigerian civilians in oil-rich regions has heightened, leaving thousands dead as the military burns whole communities to the ground and police commit crimes including extrajudicial killings, rapes, beatings, thefts, arson and intimidation.

In the midst of a severe food and economic crisis, the "land grabbing" trend has grown into an international phenomenon. The term refers to the purchase or lease of vast tracts of land by wealthier, food-insecure nations and private investors from mostly poor, developing countries in order to produce crops for export. Approximately 180 instances of such land transactions have been reported since mid-2008, as nations attempt to extend their control over food-producing lands and

investors attempt to turn a profit in biofuels and soft commodities markets.

Historically, with big industrial agriculture comes the expansion of western agricultural biotechnologies. The introduction of genetically modified organisms in the US and other countries has primarily profited patent-holding companies while creating farmer dependence on the chemical fertilisers and pesticides produced by a few US corporations and used to the detriment of human health, soil quality and the environment.

A tangled consortium of multinational corporations, funded by taxpayer dollars via the United States Agency for International Development, seeks to further the aims of biotech abroad, especially in Africa where Kenya, Mali, Nigeria, South Africa, Uganda and Zambia were singled out and have been the testing grounds for this strategy. The obvious beneficiaries of such international development are the handful of corporations which own the patents and technology and produce the herbicides and pesticides required by the use of such seeds.

8. Massacre in Peruvian Amazon over US-Peru FTA

On World Environment Day, 5 June 2009, Peruvian Amazon Indians were massacred by the government of Alán García in the latest chapter of a long war to take over common lands—a war unleashed by the signing of the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between Peru and the US.

Three Mi-17 helicopters took off from the national police base in El Milagro, Peru, at 6 am on Friday 5 June and flew over part of the Peruvian highway that joins the jungle to the northern coast, which had been occupied for the past 10 days by 5,000 Awajún and Wampi indigenous peoples. The helicopters launched tear gas on the crowd (witnesses say they also fired machine guns), while a group of agents simultaneously attacked the roadblock by ground, firing AKM rifles. An estimated 500 police bore down on the protesters, some of whom were still sleeping, and opened fire. One hundred people were wounded by gunshot, and between 20 and 25 were killed.

The government claimed days after the clash that 11 indigenous were dead as well as 23 police agents. The indigenous organisations reported 50 dead among their ranks and up to 400 disappearances. According to witnesses, the military burned bodies and threw them into the river to hide the massacre, and also took prisoners from among the wounded in hospitals. While accounts differ, what is certain is that the government sent the armed forces to evict a peaceful protest that had been going on for 57 days in five jungle regions: Amazonas, Cusco, Loreto, San Martín and Ucayali.

The US-Peru FTA was signed on 8 December 2005 in Washington, DC, by then Presidents George W. Bush and Alán García. In June 2006, it



"Just send me a text reminding me to email you about setting up a Skype session to discuss organising a video conference."

was ratified by Peru, and in December 2007 by the US Congress. On 19 December 2007, Peru's Congress gave full faculties to the government to legislate for six months, by decree, issues related to the FTA. Mandated by these powers, the executive drafted 99 legislative decrees that are at the root of the current conflict. On 1 February 2009, the agreement went into effect.

9. Human Rights Abuses Continue in Palestine

The Human Sciences Research Council of South Africa (HSRC) has released a study indicating that Israel is practising both colonialism and apartheid in the occupied Palestinian territories. HSRC commissioned an international team of scholars and practitioners of international public law from South Africa, the UK, Israel and the West Bank to conduct the study.

The team found that Israel's policy and practices violate the prohibition on colonialism, which the international community developed in the 1960s in response to the great decolonisation struggles in Africa and Asia. Israel's policy is demonstrably to fragment the West Bank and annex part of it permanently to Israel. Through these measures, Israel has denied the indigenous population the right to self-determination, and has indicated a clear intention to assume sovereignty over portions of its land and natural resources.

The team also found that Israel's laws and policies in the Occupied Palestinian Territories fit the definition of apartheid in the International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid. Israeli law conveys privileges to Jewish settlers and disadvantages Palestinians in the same territory on the basis of their respective racial identities.

10. United States Funds and Supports the Taliban

In a continuous flow of money, American tax dollars end up paying members of the Taliban and funding a volatile environment in Afghanistan. Private contractors pay insurgents in the hope of attaining the very safety they are contracted to provide. Concurrently, US soldiers pay at checkpoints run by suspected insurgents in order to get safe passage. In some cases, Afghan companies run by former Taliban members, like President Hamid Karzai's cousin, are protecting the passage of American soldiers. The funding of the insurgents, along with rumours of American helicopters ferrying Taliban members in Afghanistan, has led to widespread distrust of American forces. In the meantime, the US taxpayer's dollar continues to fund insurgents to protect American troops so they can fight insurgents.

US security contractors as well as countless other private American corporations cannot provide the safety that they are paid to offer.

So US military contractors in Afghanistan pay suspected insurgents to protect the US supply routes they were contracted to protect. A war-torn country such as Afghanistan has plenty of impoverished citizens and, as a result, it is not hard for private contractors to find individuals willing to take money to protect supply routes.

An estimated 10 per cent of the Pentagon's logistics contracts worth hundreds of millions of dollars is paid to insurgents as the US government funds the very forces American troops are fighting.

11. The H1N1 Swine Flu Pandemic: Manipulating Data to Enrich Drug Companies

The H1N1 virus has spawned widespread panic and fear throughout the world. However, upon closer examination, many of the claims made by the World Health Organization (WHO) seem to be based on weak and incomplete data. The Atlanta-based Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has created and used data to grossly exaggerate the need for an expensive and unnecessary vaccine aimed at creating profits for the pharmaceutical industry—and not protecting Americans.

The WHO claimed in 2009 that a worldwide public health emergency had unfolded on an unprecedented scale, and 4.9 billion doses of H1N1 swine flu vaccine were needed to stop the spread. In some countries, the WHO recommended that H1N1 vaccination be mandatory. However, the data used by the WHO was faulty at best.

In the US, both federal and state governments began preparation for the pandemic. State governments are generally responsible for these preparations, in coordination with federal agencies. President Obama's Council of Advisors on Science and Technology released a report that "considered the H1N1 pandemic 'a serious health threat' to the US—not as serious as the 1918 Spanish flu pandemic but worse than the swine flu outbreak of 1976". Responding to such terrifying language, legislation drawn up in Massachusetts introduced hefty fines and prison sentences for those who refused to be vaccinated. The US military was expected to have an active role in this health emergency.

There was no uniform system for collecting data on suspected swine flu victims in the US, which led to confusion in the absence of accurate statistics. The CDC

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acknowledged that the figures being collected on "confirmed and probable cases" contained no separation between "confirmed" and "probable". In fact, only a small percentage of the reported cases were "confirmed" by laboratory tests. This faulty data—and much more like it from around the globe—was given to the WHO, which in turn used the numbers to justify a pandemic.

The need for a perfected method of diagnosing and counting infected people was demonstrated when the WHO's "data" caused a wave of inaccurate conclusions as to the severity of the flu and the distance it had spread. The inaccurate data collection exaggerated the numbers of infected people due to the CDC's quantitative model created in July 2009. From 15 April to 24 July 2009, US states reported a total of 43,771 confirmed and probable cases of novel influenza A (H1N1) infection. Of these reported cases, 5,011 people were hospitalised and 302 died.

On 24 July 2009, the CDC discontinued counts. Instead of collecting data that could have provided empirical backing for assessments of how the H1N1 virus was spreading, the CDC announced that it had developed its model to determine the true number of novel H1N1 flu cases in the United States.

The CDC further stated that "[t]he model took the number of cases reported by states and adjusted the figure to account for known sources of underestimation" such as accounting for people who had never reported their illness, despite no proof that these infected people existed. These estimates caused an inaccurate and basically made-up figure of infections. The CDC's data was then used to justify massive vaccinations, which created huge profits for the pharmaceutical industry.

12. Cuba Provided the Greatest Medical Aid to Haiti after the Earthquake

Cuba was the first to come into Haiti with medical aid when the 12 January 2010 earthquake struck. Among the many donor nations, Cuba and its medical teams have played a major role in treating Haiti's earthquake victims. Public health experts say that the Cubans were the first to set up medical facilities among the debris and to revamp hospitals immediately after the earthquake struck.

However, in reporting on the international aid effort, western media have generally not ranked Cuba high on the list of donor nations. One major international news agency's list of donor nations credited Cuba with sending over 30 doctors to Haiti, whereas the real figure stands at more than 350, including 280 young Haitian

doctors who graduated in Cuba. A combined total of 930 Cuban health professionals make Cuba's the largest medical contingent on the ground in Haiti. Another batch of 200 Cuban-trained doctors from 24 countries in Africa and Latin America, and a dozen American doctors who graduated from medical schools in Havana, went to Haiti to provide reinforcement to existing Cuban medical teams. By comparison, the internationally renowned Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF, or Doctors without Borders) has approximately 269 health professionals working in Haiti. MSF is much better funded and has far more extensive medical supplies than the Cuban team.

The media have ignored not just the Cuban contribution but also the efforts made by other Latin American countries. Brazil is providing \$70 million in funding for 10 urgent care units, 50 mobile units for emergency care, a laboratory and a hospital, among other health services. Venezuela has cancelled all of

Haiti's debt and has promised to supply oil, free of charge, until the country has recovered from the disaster.

Western NGOs employ media officers to ensure that the world knows what they are doing. The western media have grown accustomed to dealing with such NGOs, enabling a relationship of mutual assistance to develop. Cuban medical teams, however, are outside this

predominantly western humanitarian-media loop and are therefore only likely to receive attention from Latin American media and Spanish-language broadcasters and print media.

13. Obama Cuts Domestic Spending and Increases Military Corporate Welfare

President Obama's decision to increase military spending this year and in the future will result in the greatest administrative military spending since World War II. This decision is being made in spite of continued evidence of extreme waste, fraud, abuse and corporate welfare in the military budget. At the same time, spending on "non-security" domestic programs such as education, nutrition, energy and transportation will be frozen, resulting in inflationary cuts to essential services for the US public over the upcoming years. While these domestic programs constitute only 17 per cent of the total federal spending, they will sustain all of the proposed cuts.

The public never hears about war spending in the corporate media and how much everything actually costs. Several examples highlight the extent of abuse.

A single future weapons system is now estimated to cost the American taxpayer almost one-third of what the

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Obama administration's health care plan is expected to cost over a decade. Originally expected to cost \$50 million, the estimated cost today just for one F-35 aircraft is \$113 million. The Marines, the Air Force and the Navy are planning to buy a combined 2,450 F-35s, which would cost more than \$323 billion.

President Obama is continuing the process of reinflating the Pentagon that began in late 1998—fully three years before the 9/11 attacks. The rise in national defense spending since 1998 is as large as the Kennedy–Johnson surge (43 per cent) and the Reagan increases (57 per cent) put together. The radical increase in military spending now, compared to the Cold War and World War II, is justified by the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. However, even if today's wars are taken out of the picture, there has still been a 54 per cent increase since 1998.

The taxpayer, forced to pay about one trillion dollars yearly to fund the military, national security infrastructure and wars, remains ignorant of the real costs. Reasons for the lack of public knowledge about military spending include: lack of corporate media coverage altogether; media employing retired military officers as "experts", thus presenting only one side; inculcated civilian deference toward military leaders (leave it to the experts in uniform); and secrecy and "black budgets" obscuring military spending.

Among the questions journalist William J. Astore poses about the US military, a key one is: why is the military immune from the painful budgetary belt-tightening faced by the rest of America?

14. Increased Tensions with Unresolved 9/11 Issues

Several contentious issues still plague the US government and its version of the events of 11 September 2001. Nearly 10 years after the events, there are still many unanswered questions. How did Building 7 fall? What caused the destruction of the twin towers? Where is Osama bin Laden? Are people who question the official story of 9/11 dangerous conspiracy theorists?

The academics and intellectuals who have tried to answer these questions have been ignored or derided by corporate mainstream (and even some progressive leftist) media, political pundits and government officials who clearly intend to silence the so-called 9/11 Truth Movement or anyone who questions the officially sanctioned government stance on the matter. As of

spring 2010, over 1,200 architects and engineers are calling for a new investigation into the events of 9/11. These building professionals and academics are motivated by the fact that the 9/11 *Commission Report* has been proven erroneous on multiple counts, scientific explanations have been flawed and contradictory, and the American people deserve a more fact-based explanation.

At the same time, new evidence of explosives that can be used in controlled demolition has been found in the dust traces of the World Trade Center (WTC) towers and Building 7 of the WTC complex. After careful examination of the official story about 9/11 (in which the

commission never even mentioned Building 7), along with the forensic data omitted from official reports, these professionals have concluded that a new, independent and transparent investigation into these massive and mysterious structural failures is needed.

In other ongoing tension concerning 9/11 on the home front, President Obama's appointee to head the Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs, Harvard law professor Cass Sunstein, claims that the US government should infiltrate and discredit activist groups, including those who challenge the official views of the 9/11 attacks—the so-called 9/11 "truthers". He believes that groups that question the events of 9/11 are dangerous and could lead some people to violence, but presents no concrete evidence to prove this. Sunstein's call for infiltration of private citizen groups plays to the very concerns of many 9/11 activists—concerns that they may be targeted or infiltrated, or tried

on some trumped-up terrorist or criminal charges and then may not get a fair public hearing.

15. Bhopal Water Still Toxic 25 Years After Gas Leak

Around midnight on 2 December 1984, the citizens of Bhopal, a city of over 500,000 people in central India, were poisoned by approximately 40 tons of toxic gases pouring into the night air from a largely abandoned chemical insecticide plant owned by the US-owned Union Carbide Corporation (UCC). The long-predicted gas leak at UCC was, and remains today, the worst industrial disaster in history.

Released by faulty and neglected equipment, methyl isocyanate, phosgene and other highly toxic gases killed an estimated 8,000 people immediately. The death toll

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attributed to "that night" in the following weeks and months eventually rose to 20,000 people. Hundreds of thousands of others were harmed, in many cases permanently, with lung, liver, kidney and immune system damages and blindness. The Indian Council of Medical Research concluded that over 520,000 exposed persons had poisons circulating in their bloodstream, causing different degrees of damage to almost all systems in the body.

The 1984 disaster may have faded in the world's memory, but, in Bhopal, the damaged births continue today. The very same factory that spewed out poison gas has been leaking deadly chemicals into the drinking water of about 30,000 people. In affected communities there are epidemics of kidney disease and cancer, with hundreds of damaged children.

Indra Sinha, a Booker Prize nominee for his book on the Bhopal disaster, *Animal's People*, explained why the gas leak is still a national scandal: "After the night of horror, the factory was locked up. Thousands of tons of pesticides and waste remained inside. UCC never bothered to clean it. The chemicals were abandoned in warehouses open to wind and rain. Twenty-four monsoons have rusted and rotted the death factory. The rains wash the poisons deep into the soil. They enter the groundwater and seep into wells and bore pipes. They gush from taps and enter people's bodies. They burn stomachs, corrode skin, damage organs and flow into wombs where they go to work on the unborn. If babies make it into the world alive, the poisons are waiting in their mothers' milk."

A Greenpeace survey found substantial and, in some locations, severe contamination of land and water supplies with heavy metals and chlorinated chemicals.

Overall contamination of the site and immediate surrounds is due both to routine spills and accidents during the operation of the factory and to the continued releases of chemicals from the toxic wastes that remain on site.

16. Universal Jurisdiction on Crimes Against Humanity Dies in Spain

In October 2009, under great pressure from the United States, the government of Spain decided to limit its own jurisdiction in cases of genocide and crimes against humanity, thus closing one of the last windows of accountability for the most serious crimes committed by the most powerful nations on Earth. Under international law, such crimes fall under the universal jurisdiction of any nation, whether its own citizens are

victims or not. The logic is that crimes against humanity are offences against every member of the human species—a crime against all.

Spain had been a venue for bringing high crimes charges against human rights violators in Guatemala, Argentina, China, Israel and elsewhere. Most of the lawsuits have been against individuals linked to the untouchable political right, such as Chile's Augusto Pinochet, the Argentinian military officer Adolfo Scilingo, former US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, former Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and six of his senior advisers and, most recently, former George W. Bush administration officials.

Calls to rein in the judges increased when Spanish magistrates announced probes involving Israel and the United States. In January 2009, Spanish National Court Judge Fernando Andreu announced that he would

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investigate seven current or former Israeli officials over a 2002 air attack in Gaza that killed a top member of Hamas and 14 other people. In March 2009, Baltasar Garzón, Spain's most high-profile judge, invoked the principle of universal jurisdiction when he sought to investigate six former Bush administration officials for giving legal cover to torture in the American prison at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba. And

in May 2009, Spanish High Court Judge Santiago Pedraz declared that he would charge three US soldiers with crimes against humanity for the April 2003 deaths of a Spanish television cameraman and a Ukrainian journalist. The men were killed when a US tank crew shelled their Baghdad hotel.

17. Nanotech Particles Pose Serious DNA Risks

Personal products that you may use daily—cosmetics, suntan lotion, socks and sports clothes—and think are harmless may all contain atom-sized nanotech particles, some of which have been shown to sicken and kill workers in plants using nanotechnology. Known human health risks include severe and permanent lung damage. Cell studies indicate genetic damage. Extremely toxic to aquatic wildlife, nanoparticles pose clear risks to many species and threaten the global food chain.

Nanotech particles have been embraced by industry as the wonder ingredient in personal hygiene products, food packaging, paints, medical procedures and pharmaceuticals, even tyres and auto parts, among burgeoning numbers of other consumer products. Cosmetic companies add titanium dioxide nanoparticles to sun creams to make them transparent on the skin. Sports clothing firms have introduced

odour-free garments containing nanosilver particles that are twice as toxic to bacteria than bleach. Auto industry companies have added carbon nanofibres to tyres and body panels to strengthen them.

According to the Project on Emerging Nanotechnologies (PEN), health and fitness items continue to dominate available nanotech products, representing 60 per cent of products listed. More products are based on nanoscale silver—used for its antimicrobial properties—than any other nanomaterial; 259 products (26 per cent) use silver nanoparticles. PEN's updated inventory represents products from over 24 countries, including the US, China, Canada and Germany.

Over 1,000 consumer products made with nanoparticles, which can be 100 times smaller than a virus, are already on the market, despite an almost complete lack of knowledge of the dangers they pose to human health and the environment. And while these atomic-sized particles may be beneficial in certain medical applications, scientists and environmentalists are calling for more studies. Until now, few adverse effects have been found for this virtually unregulated technology. Yet, that may simply be due to the relatively few studies that have been done in the rush to find ever more and profitable nanotech applications.

Nanotechnology, the science of the extremely tiny, is an important emerging industry with a projected annual market of around one trillion US dollars by 2015. It involves manipulating or building new materials from atoms and molecules. Silver and carbon are now the most important building blocks. The tiny-sized materials often have unique properties that differ from those of their larger-scaled versions.

In a new British study, researchers discovered an unforeseen process, dubbed "toxic gossip", by which metal nanoparticles inflict genetic damage to DNA, even through walls of tissue that were not physically breached. Researchers called the finding "a huge surprise", particularly since the billionth-of-a-metre-scale particles appear to have wreaked their havoc indirectly.

Now, for the first time, a scientific study has established a clear and causal relationship between human contact with nanoparticles and serious health damage. According to an article in the *European Respiratory Journal*, by a group of Chinese researchers

headed by Yuguo Song from the Department of Occupational Medicine and Clinical Toxicology at the Beijing Chaoyang Hospital, seven young female workers fell seriously ill after working in a paint factory that used nanotechnology. The workers suffered severe and permanent lung damage, and face and arm eruptions. Two of them died, while the other five have not improved after several years.

Around 500 studies have shown nanotechnology toxicity in animal studies, in human cells and in the environment. Although Song's article finds evidence of clinical toxicity in human beings for the first time, this finding could be only the tip of the iceberg of an extremely risky industry.

...researchers discovered an unforeseen process, dubbed "toxic gossip", by which metal nanoparticles inflict genetic damage to DNA, even through walls of tissue that were not physically breached.

18. The True Cost of Chevron

Chevron's 2008 annual report to its shareholders is a glossy celebration heralding the company's most profitable year in its history. Profits of \$24 billion catapulted Chevron past General Electric to become the second most profitable corporation in the United States. The oil company's 2007 revenues were larger than the gross domestic product of 150 nations.

What Chevron's annual report does not reveal is the true cost paid for those financial returns: lives lost, wars fought, communities destroyed, environments decimated, livelihoods ruined and political voices silenced. Nor does it describe the global resistance movement gaining voice and strength against these operations.

Thus the communities and their allies, who bear the consequences of Chevron's oil and natural gas production, refineries, depots, pipelines, exploration, offshore drilling rigs, coal fields, chemical plants, political control, consumer abuse, false promises and much more, have prepared an alternative annual report for Chevron. It reveals the true impact of just a handful of Chevron's operations in the US in communities across Alaska, California, Colorado, the District of Columbia, Florida, the Gulf Coast, Mississippi, New Jersey, New York, Utah and Wyoming; and internationally across Angola, Burma, Canada, Chad, Cameroon, Ecuador, Iraq, Kazakhstan, Nigeria and the Philippines. These accounts are demonstrative, not inclusive. We would need 100 reports to document all such impacts. These accounts include active lawsuits against the company from around the world, totalling in the tens of billions

of dollars, which threaten its vaulted financial gains—for when a company operates in blatant disregard for the health, security, livelihood, safety and environment of the communities within which it operates, there can be real financial repercussions.

Chevron buys political influence and control at the local and national levels at each of its operational sites in order to circumvent or trump laws that would protect people and environments from the company's destructive practices.

This alternative report shows Chevron's pattern of hiring harsh military "protection" against local residents, evidenced in Iraq, the Niger Delta, Chad, Cameroon, Angola and Burma, where massive increases in military presence and widespread abuses of human rights—including forced labour, murder, rape, forced relocation of villages and more—are ongoing against communities living in and around Chevron projects.

19. Obama Administration Assures World Bank and IMF of a Free Rein of Abuse

The World Trade Organization (WTO) has an agreement called the Financial Services Agreement that explicitly applies to over 100 countries and mandates major deregulation. For instance, it has a rule that you cannot have a domestic law that limits the size of a financial service firm—insurance, banking, securities—even if it applies

equally to foreign and domestic companies. So while everyone talks about putting into place rules regarding being "too big to fail", there is a WTO dictate that forbids such regulation. In short, these binding WTO rules require countries to maintain the same policies that led to the financial crisis. This agreement was never brought to a vote in any Congress.

Jesse Griffiths, coordinator of the London-based Bretton Woods Project, said: "The ideology of the IMF and World Bank has failed and the accompanying structures have failed." He added: "In addition to the current enormous economic instability, the system has failed to create equity and eradicate poverty; it has failed to ensure that human rights are protected, and it has failed to address environmental issues."

The failures of these global entities have not prevented President Obama from allowing their relatively free rein in relation to the US government. In June 2009, President Obama used his sixth signing statement to negate provisions of US legislation that would have compelled the World Bank to strengthen labour and environmental standards. When signing the

\$106 billion war-spending bill into law, Obama included a five-paragraph signing statement with the bill in which he also refused to require the Department of Treasury to report to Congress on the activities of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The sections rejected by Obama would have required his administration to direct its World Bank representatives to pressure that institution into using metrics that "fairly represent the value of internationally recognized workers'" rights. Organised labour groups had pushed for a revision of those standards.

Another section rejected by Obama would have pushed the World Bank to account for the cost of greenhouse gas in pricing projects and to disclose operating budgets more fully. Yet another section rejected by Obama would have required Treasury Secretary Tim Geithner to develop a report with the heads of the World Bank and IMF, "detailing the steps taken to coordinate the activities of the World Bank and

the Fund" to eliminate overlap between the two.

20. Obama's Charter School Policies Spread Segregation and Undermine Unions

Charter schools continue to stratify students by race, class and sometimes language, and are more racially isolated than traditional public schools in virtually every state and large metropolitan area in the US.

Charter schools are often marketed as incubators of

educational innovation, and they form a key feature of the Obama administration's school reform agenda. But in some urban communities, they may be fuelling *de facto* school segregation and undermining public education.

In many charter schools, 90 to 100 per cent of the population are minority students, close to twice the rate of traditional public schools. But even a charter school with a social mission of promoting economic and racial equity still runs up against the limits posed by selectivity and exclusion.

Obama's national education policy supports the expansion of charter schools to undermine public education and schoolteacher labour unions. Obama wants to tie teachers' pay to student performance, which would be measured through test scores. Merit pay based on performance is strongly opposed by teachers' unions nationwide. Teachers want equal pay for equal work, and assurances that funding for low-income schools will be fair. Charters are known for resisting teacher unions, which means that they drive segregation not only in the student population but in the school workforce as well.

So while everyone talks about putting into place rules regarding being "too big to fail", there is a WTO dictate that forbids such regulation.

The American public is now witnessing the wholesale privatisation of education, as cities, municipalities and states are suffering from budget woes caused by the pillage and social failures of financial monopoly capitalism and its devastating policies that are intent on privatising everything public, from schools to the military, to health care, to public housing.

21. Western Lifestyle Continues Environmental Footprint

Speaking in advance of the climate summit in Copenhagen, Rajendra Pachauri, chair of the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, warned that western society must enact radical changes and reform measures if it is to avoid the worst effects of climate change. Pachauri told the *Observer* that western society urgently needs to develop a new value system of "sustainable consumption".

Pachauri offered a wide-ranging proposal—including legal requirements, economic disincentives and government subsidies—to lead western society toward a more sustainable future. His proposal also includes measures to regulate travel by land and air. For instance, Pachauri argues that automobile travel could be "curbed" through pricing schemes that discourage the use of private transportation. Likewise, Pachauri suggests that governments tax air travel to encourage citizens to travel by rail, which is significantly lower in cost and environmental impact.

Travel and tourism are but one feature of an increasingly unsustainable Western lifestyle. As the Internet becomes an indispensable feature of modern life, the costs and environmental impact associated with its usage are on the rise. According to recent estimates, there are over 1.5 billion people online around the world. As a result, the Internet's energy footprint is growing at a rate of more than 10 per cent each year. As the Internet's appetite for electricity grows, companies like Google are having a hard time managing the costs associated with delivering web pages, video, audio and data files. This situation not only threatens the bottom line of web firms, but may compromise the long-term viability of the Internet. According to Subodh Bapat, vice president of Sun Microsystems, "[i]n an energy-constrained world, we cannot continue to grow the footprint of the Internet ... we need to rein in the energy consumption".

22. 1.2 Billion Indians to be Given Biometric ID Cards

India's 1.2 billion citizens are to be issued biometric identification cards. The cards will hold the person's name, age and birth date, as well as fingerprints or iris scans, though no caste or religious identification. Within the next five years, a giant computer will hold the personal details of at least 600 million citizens—making this new information technology system the largest in the world. The project will cost an estimated \$3.5 billion. The 600 million Indians will receive a 16-digit identity number by 2014 in the project's first phase.

India's red tape is legendary: citizens have dozens of types of identity verification, ranging from electoral rolls to ration cards, yet almost none can be used universally.

Forty-two per cent of India's population is below the poverty line, and citizens frequently move in search of jobs. The government believes the ID system will help citizens because they will no longer have a problem identifying themselves.

The biometric identity number will be entered every time someone accesses services from government departments, driver's licence offices and hospitals as well as insurance, credit card, telecom and banking companies. By bringing more people into the banking system,

Indian officials also hope to raise the number of people paying income tax; currently, less than five per cent of the population pays income tax.

The government also plans to use the database to monitor bank transactions, cellphone purchases and the movements of individuals and groups suspected of fomenting terrorism.

Civil liberty campaigners fear the ID card will become a tool of repression. Nandita Haksar, a human rights lawyer, said: "There is already no accountability in regards to violations of human and civil rights. In this atmosphere, what are the oversight mechanisms for this kind of surveillance?"

23. Afghanistan War: Largest Military Coalition in History

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) has become history's first global army. Never before have soldiers from so many states served in the same war theatre, much less in the same country. At the eighth anniversary of the US invasion of Afghanistan, the world is witness to a 21st-century armed conflict waged by the largest military coalition in history.

With recent announcements that troops from such

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diverse nations as Colombia, Mongolia, Armenia, Japan, South Korea, Ukraine and Montenegro are to join those of some 45 other countries serving under the command of the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force, there will soon be military personnel from 50 nations and five continents serving under a unified command structure.

NATO's 50th anniversary summit in Washington, DC, in 1999 welcomed the first expansion of the world's only military bloc in the post-Cold War era, absorbing former Warsaw Pact members such as the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland. Two years later, after the 9/11 attacks in New York City and Washington, DC, NATO activated Article 5—in which the "[p]arties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all".

The main purpose of invoking NATO's mutual military assistance clause was to rally the then 19-member military bloc for the invasion and occupation of Afghanistan and the stationing of troops, warplanes and bases throughout South and Central Asia. Flyover rights were also arranged with Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, and newly acquired airbases in Bulgaria and Romania have since been used for the transit of troops and weapons to the Afghan war zone.

The Afghanistan war is no ordinary war. The only beneficiary of this conflagration is a rapidly emerging global NATO.

24. War Crimes of General Stanley McChrystal

A little more than a year before he was fired on 23 June 2010 for making potentially insubordinate remarks in a *Rolling Stone* profile, General Stanley McChrystal was appointed by President Barack Obama as Commander in charge of the war in Afghanistan. He had been formerly in charge of the Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) headed by former Vice President Dick Cheney. Most of what General McChrystal has done over a 33-year career remains classified, including service between 2003 and 2008 as Commander of JSOC, a special black operations commando unit of the Navy SEALs and Delta Force so clandestine that the Pentagon for years refused to acknowledge its existence.

Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Seymour Hersh claims that the Bush administration ran an executive assassination ring that reported directly to former Vice President Dick Cheney, and that Congress had no oversight of it whatsoever. The JSOC team would go into countries without talking to the ambassador or the CIA

station chief, find people on a to-be-killed list, execute them and leave. There was an ongoing list of targeted people, cleared by Vice President Cheney's office, who had committed acts of war or were suspected of planning operations of war against the United States.

JSOC was also involved in war crimes, including the torture of prisoners in secret "ghost" detention sites. Camp Nama in Iraq was one such "ghost" facility hidden from the International Committee of the Red Cross, the international body charged under international law with monitoring compliance with the Geneva Conventions and given the right to inspect all facilities where people are detained in a country that is at war or under military occupation.

On 22 July 2006, Human Rights Watch issued a report, titled "No Blood, No Foul", about American torture practices at three facilities in Iraq. One of them was

Camp Nama, accused of some of the worst acts of torture and operated by JSOC under the direction of McChrystal. McChrystal, then a Major General, was officially based at Fort Bragg in North Carolina.

25. Prisoners Still Brutalised at "Gitmo"

In Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, the notorious but seldom-discussed thug squad, officially known as the Immediate Reaction Force

(IRF), deployed by the US military, remains very much active. Inside the walls of Guantánamo, the prisoners know the squad as the Extreme Repression Force. In reality, IRF is an extrajudicial terror squad, the existence of which has been documented since the early days of Guantánamo. IRF has rarely been mentioned in the United States media or in congressional inquiries into torture.

On 22 January 2009, newly inaugurated President Obama issued an executive order requiring the closure of Guantánamo within a year, and also ordered a review of the status of the prisoners held there, requiring "humane standards of confinement" in accordance with the Geneva Conventions.

One month later, the Center for Constitutional Rights (CCR) released a report titled "Conditions of Confinement at Guantánamo: Still in Violation of the Law", which found that abuses continued. In fact, one Guantánamo lawyer, Ahmed Ghappour, said that his clients were reporting "a ramping up in abuse" since Obama was elected, including "beatings, the dislocation of limbs, spraying of pepper spray into closed cells, applying pepper spray to toilet paper and over-force-feeding detainees who are on hunger strike." The CCR has called on the Obama administration to end the use of the IRF teams at Guantánamo immediately. ∞

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