

'Agent Orange' Relief Sought for Vietnam

Among the many acts of U.S.-inflicted devastation in the Vietnam War was the aerial spraying of Agent Orange and other herbicides to kill vegetation, thus making the Vietcong easier to hunt down and kill. However, the cancer-causing chemicals proved dangerous in other ways to both those on the ground and in the air, as Marjorie Cohn reports.

By Marjorie Cohn

Aug. 10 marks the 50th anniversary of the start of the chemical warfare program in Vietnam, one of the war's most shameful legacies. Agent Orange continues to poison Vietnam and the people exposed to the chemicals, as well as their offspring.

H.R. 2634, the Victims of Agent Orange Relief Act of 2011, which Rep. Bob Filner, D-California, just introduced in the House, would provide crucial assistance for social and health services to Vietnamese, Vietnamese-American, and U.S. victims of Agent Orange.

From 1961 to 1971, approximately 19 million gallons of herbicides, primarily Agent Orange, were sprayed over the southern region of Vietnam. Much of it was contaminated with dioxin, a deadly chemical.

Dioxin causes various forms of cancers, reproductive illnesses, immune deficiencies, endocrine deficiencies, nervous system damage, and physical and developmental disabilities.

In Vietnam, more than three million people, and in the United States, thousands of veterans, their children, and Vietnamese-Americans, have been sickened, disabled or died from the effects of Agent Orange/dioxin.

Vietnamese of least three generations born since the war are now suffering from disabilities due to their parents' exposure to Agent Orange or from direct exposure in the environment.

The organization representing Vietnam's victims, the Vietnam Association for Victims of Agent Orange/Dioxin, has set up some "peace villages" to care for the severely disabled, but many more such facilities and services are needed. Dioxin residues in the soil, sediment, and food continue to poison many people in 28 "hot spots" in southern Vietnam.

Many U.S. veterans suffer from effects of Agent Orange due to their exposure in Vietnam, as do their children and grandchildren. Vietnamese-Americans exposed

directly to Agent Orange and their offspring suffer from the same health conditions.

The bill, which the Vietnamese Agent Orange Relief & Responsibility Campaign assisted Rep. Filner in writing, defines "victim" as "any individual who is a Vietnamese national, Vietnamese-American, or United States veteran who was exposed to Agent Orange, or the progeny of such an individual, and who has a disease or disability associated with this exposure."

In addition to compensating the victims of Agent Orange, H.R. 2634 would also clean up the toxic hot spots in Vietnam.

One provision of the bill would expand programs and research for the benefit of U.S. vets and establish medical centers "designed to address the medical needs of descendants of the veterans of the Vietnam era."

This creates a presumption that certain birth defects that children and grandchildren of exposed victims suffer would be considered the result of contact with Agent Orange.

While the U.S. government has begun to fund environmental cleanup in Vietnam, it has refused to recognize its full responsibility to heal the wounds of war and provide assistance to Vietnamese, Vietnamese-American, and U.S. victims for the serious health and environmental devastation caused by Agent Orange.

There has been some compensation for U.S. veteran victims of Agent Orange, but not nearly enough.

In spite of President Richard Nixon's 1973 promise of \$3.25 billion in reconstruction aid to Vietnam "without any preconditions," the Vietnamese and Vietnamese-American victims of the disgraceful chemical warfare the United States conducted in Vietnam have not seen one penny of compensation.

Fifty years is long enough. It is high time to compensate the victims for this shameful chapter in U.S. history. H.R. 2634 will go a long way toward doing just that.

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Wisconsin GOP Hangs onto Senate

Exclusive: Wisconsin Republicans lost two Senate seats in recall elections Tuesday but won four others to keep control of the state Senate and they have a chance to oust two Democrats next week. But the two Democratic victories prove the potential of grassroots organizing, says Lisa Pease.

By Lisa Pease

What happens when one party gives tax cuts to the rich and then uses cries of “economic crisis!” to justify destroying labor unions, protections for the poorer among us, and environmental safeguards?

We just found out, in Wisconsin. Although Democrats failed to reclaim the State Senate, what happened was an extraordinary victory for the party, nonetheless.

Consider: Each of the candidates up for recall on Tuesday were Republicans in districts specifically gerrymandered to support Republicans.

The races came down to the power of money vs. the power of people on the ground. The Republicans funneled large amounts of money into the campaigns, whereas the Democrats answered with larger numbers of bodies “on the ground,” walking door-to-door, asking people to support their agenda.

That *any* Democrat won was surprising. That two won was a testament to the will of a people who, feeling oppressed, rose up to stop the forward motion of a Republican governor whose agenda is almost comically pro-business and anti-union.

One race, however, revealed some last-minute vote-reporting shenanigans. I’m not questioning the integrity of the outcome. But I have grave doubts about the integrity of the process.

That was the race in District 8 between incumbent Sen. Alberta Darling and her Democratic challenger Rep. Sandy Pasch. Pasch’s victory in the Milwaukee County portion of the district was so large that it looked for a few hours like she might win.

When all the other races had been decided, with most precincts reporting in all other areas of the state, a familiar figure raised suspicions – again – of possible vote tampering.

As the Democrats seemed poised to take all three seats, which would have allowed them to take control of the State Senate and effectively stop Gov. Walker’s legislative juggernaut, a spokesperson for Waukesha County announced that they

would not be reporting their results for another hour.

Shortly thereafter, we were told the results would not be known until Wednesday morning. Had that happened in perhaps any other county, the only question would have been, why the delay?

But Waukesha County's vote-counting effort has been overseen by Kathy Nickolaus for some time, and Nickolaus has a record that should make every voter queasy.

Last year, Nickolaus came under fire for having lost, then found, some 7,000 votes that put her old boss, Justice David Prosser, on the State Supreme Court. (See my initial reporting on this, "[Strange Twist in Wisconsin Battle](#)" and my follow-up piece "[More Twists and Turns in Wisconsin.](#)")

As I noted at the time, this wasn't the first case where Nickolaus had apparently lost and then found votes in her database. In a 2006 primary election, one of the candidates had been declared the winner, but Nickolaus then claimed some votes had been reported in the wrong column.

After the "correction," the race results flipped to the formerly losing opponent. There had been other "mistakes," in elections, too.

When one makes a mistake in something as important as an election, it is often waived away as a blip. When someone makes a similar mistake a second time, it looks a little less random. When the same person later claims to need more time to count the votes, can we be blamed for starting to see a pattern?

I had the same thoughts as state Democratic Party spokesman Graeme Zielinski, who made the news Tuesday night with his strong accusations about Nickolaus, whom he accused of having "shown gross incompetence, and maybe more in the Supreme Court election."

(Video link: <http://bcove.me/kf8ltyqr>)

Zielinski: "We believe that there's dirty tricks afoot. We believe that there will need to be an investigation, or at least a very good explanation, for what it looks like *she's* doing to this election.

"We'll wait. We'll see what happens and transpires the rest of the night. We may not have any more statements right now. Of course, our legal team, we are exploring all our legal options right now.

"We are getting as best information as we can, but right now, I can say it is our belief that the election that will determine the control of the Wisconsin senate is being tampered with."

Reporter: "What hard evidence do you have?"

Zielinski: "That's all I'm going to say. We're missing several wards in Waukesha. It looks like she's sitting on them right now."

Reporter: "What do you mean 'sitting on them'?"

Zielinski: "She's not releasing them. We have exit polls. We have information that we believe indicates some performance for us that we believe she is sitting on. It's much like she did in a Supreme Court race."

Reporter: "How is that tampering if she's sitting on them? It's maybe not good County-Clerking but is it really tampering?"

Zielinski: "We'll let the results speak for themselves, but right now, we'll wait to see what happens the rest of the day. Right now, we believe that we were in the lead or near the lead in this race. We believe that Waukesha County is at it again."

"And that's all I'll come back. I'm gonna get a little more information for you. I'll come back one more time before the night is through. You still may hear from Sandy Pasch, but right now, it is our belief that Waukesha County Clerk Kathy Nickolaus is tampering with this election which will determine the control of the Wisconsin Senate."

I checked the results Wednesday morning. Even if Waukesha County's results were eliminated from the total returns, Darling would have won, albeit by a smaller margin.

So whether or not Nickolaus did any vote manipulation is ultimately irrelevant to the conclusion that Darling won, assuming no manipulation happened in *other* counties (and assuming that even if Pasch had won in Waukesha's precincts, the margin would have been too small to be relevant).

So it was not surprising that Wisconsin Democratic Party Chairman Mike Tate has since retracted Zielinski's statements.

The problem, as I have repeatedly noted here and elsewhere, is that until we have a truly transparent process for processing and counting votes, accusations of vote tampering will continue to be made when the results don't match what was expected, based on campaign and exit polling.

The solution is not to stop worrying. The solution is to find a way to open up the voting process so that's it's clear everything is being handled in an open and honest manner.

In any case, it appears that the Republican agenda, while still standing in Wisconsin, has received a serious blow.

Losing two seats in Republican districts would have been out of the question before Walker's radical efforts to strip public employees of their right to collectively bargain, as well as Walker's efforts to promote huge agribusiness concerns at the expense of local farmers and to reduce environmental protections in the name of promoting business.

Democrats in Wisconsin are demonstrating an important lesson. It's not enough to be in the right. You have to be willing to get out in the streets, to walk the district, to ask for votes, door-to-door.

If you do it enough, you can win. But it will take an extraordinary effort, and the outcome is not guaranteed.

Lisa Pease is a writer who has studied the recent history of voting irregularities.

US Lost Its Way from Omaha Beach

Exclusive: Visiting Omaha Beach and the nearby American cemetery of World War II dead recalls a moment in time when the United States sacrificed to stop a global epidemic of madness. But Robert Parry discovered that those memories also underscore how the United States has since lost its way.

By Robert Parry

My pilgrimage to the World War II beaches of Normandy was a reminder to me of what the United States meant to the world not that long ago and the troubling contrast with today.

Before heading to Omaha Beach the iconic heart of D-Day heroism I spent several hours at Caen's World War II museum where you literally descend down an inclined walkway into the murderous madness that engulfed Europe in the 1930s.

It is still hard to imagine that a racist fanatic like Adolf Hitler could gain control of Germany, then one of the world's most advanced civilizations, and that he could win over enough Germans to undertake various forms of mechanized slaughter.

There was, of course, a long history in Europe of such butchery, from the Roman

conquests more than two millennia ago, through the Christian religious wars of the middle of the last millennium to the wholesale killing of World War I.

Indeed, that European tendency to periodically sink into bloody barbarism was the historical backdrop of the American Revolution.

In creating a new Republic, the Founders tried to inoculate the United States from some of those viruses prohibiting a national religion, restraining the Executive's war-making powers and cautioning against entangling alliances.

But the more integrated world of the 20th Century made isolationism a difficult approach.

Hitler's Rise

By the 1930s, Europe had gotten itself into another fix with global implications. The German business elite had decided that Hitler was the man who could stop the rise of Bolshevism and regain some of Germany's lost pride and territories from World War I.

Great Britain and France made some appeasing gestures toward Hitler by restoring land that had been stripped from Germany, but that only encouraged Hitler's megalomania.

Soon, Hitler's aggression against Poland pushed matters too far, shoving Europe into yet another war. France soon fell to Germany's military might and Great Britain struggled under an unprecedented aerial bombardment focused on civilian targets.

Quietly assisted by President Franklin Roosevelt, Great Britain withstood the air campaign, causing Hitler to turn his attention to the Soviet Union.

Meanwhile, half a world away, Germany's fascist allies in Japan were expanding their own empire and chafing against American power in the Pacific. After Japan's surprise attack on Pearl Harbor, the United States entered the war against Japan and its Axis allies.

As the war expanded, so did the carnage, both involving armies and civilians.

Under the cover of war, Hitler advanced his genocidal goal of exterminating European Jews, whom he used as scapegoats for Germany's troubles. The Nazis' use of roving execution squads gave way to the construction of industrial-style killing factories.

The future of humanity looked exceedingly bleak.

However, by 1944, Hitler's forces had suffered a devastating defeat at Stalingrad and were getting driven back by the Soviet Red Army on the eastern front. The United States and Great Britain had mounted a successful invasion of Italy, but progress northward was slow and bloody.

A Western Front

The world's attention turned to the coast of France, where an amphibious assault was anticipated, though the Germans were unsure where. The assault came on June 6, 1944, along the Normandy coast farther west than Hitler had expected.

British and American forces carried out the major landings, with other allied countries and resistance movements contributing what they could.

The U.S./British high command considered the most important landing sites as those designated Utah (for the Americans) and Gold, Juno and Sword (for the British).

But the commanders feared that there was too much territory between those principal targets, so an American landing was also ordered under the bluffs of what was designated Omaha Beach.

As the invasion got underway, the landings at Omaha Beach proved particularly bloody with some 3,000 American troops dying in a desperate struggle to overcome well-entrenched Germans controlling the high ground.

Finally, Allied beachheads were established and the Germans were driven back, but the fighting across Normandy raged for more than two months. The losses were heavy on all sides.

Victory at Last

By the spring of 1945, the Red Army from the east and the U.S./British forces from the west had put an end to Hitler's Third Reich. The crazed dictator committed suicide in his Berlin bunker.

The defeat of German fascism also stopped Hitler's extermination plans, though not before nearly six million Jews and many other "undesirables" were put to death.

A year later, the Nuremberg Tribunal punished some of Germany's leading war criminals and established what were to be principles for a future peaceful world.

A visit to Normandy is a reminder of how important the United States was in stopping the madness.

The most lasting reminder of this American contribution is the cemetery at St. Laurent-sur-Mer, where more than 9,300 U.S. servicemen are buried under row upon row of white crosses and the occasional Star of David.



After the war had ended, the American dead were collected from across much of Europe. Their families were given the choice of repatriating the bodies or having them interred at this American cemetery near where they had died, including many with the date June 6, 1944.

The cemetery, which overlooks a section of Omaha Beach, has become a point of pilgrimage for many Americans, although during my visit on Aug. 5 there seemed to be even more French visitors paying their respects than Americans.

The whole Normandy region retains an appreciation for Americans, unlike some other parts of France where Americans often find the French standoffish or haughty. Today, the long sandy stretch along Normandy's north coast is still called Omaha Beach in honor of the Americans who died there.

Going west from Omaha Beach toward Utah Beach, there are other tributes to the American liberators.

In the little village of Sainte Mere Eglise, a dramatic moment is recalled from the 82nd Airborne's assault on the night of June 5, 1944, when paratrooper John Steele's parachute got entangled on the church steeple and he played dead for hours before being disentangled and taken down.

Looking up at the church today, a replica of Steele and his parachute are there. Inside the church, a stained-glass window commemorates the American paratroopers, whose death toll of about 4,000 was even higher than the fatalities at Omaha Beach.

A Dark Turn

While war should never be romanticized and U.S. history is replete with its own

acts of bloody inhumanity it is difficult for an American to come away from a visit to Normandy without a lump in one's throat about the necessary, if brutal, actions that occurred here.

Something truly evil had gained a powerful foothold in the world and had to be stopped. But the tragedy is also what happened next, how the United States became corrupted by much of the same viciousness that the Nazis and their Axis allies had unleashed.

Over Germany and Japan, the Allies undertook their own terror bombings of civilian centers, such as Dresden and Tokyo. On Aug. 6 and 9, 1945, President Harry Truman chose to drop atomic bombs on two nearly defenseless Japanese cities, Hiroshima and Nagasaki, rather than negotiate a peace with Japan.

After World War II, the United States engaged in a fierce competition with its erstwhile ally, the Soviet Union, again rebuffing possible openings for accommodation. Opting for a new kind of empire, the United States even collaborated with ex-Nazis and similarly brutal fascists in the Third World.

In Indochina, the U.S. military killed in the millions, and in Latin America, Washington allied itself with vicious dictators trained in the dark arts of assassination and torture.

To feed the national hunger for energy, American leaders sided with authoritarian leaders across the Middle East, just as long as those despots ensured a steady supply of oil.

Part of the Problem

Instead of seeing the Americans as liberators who were part of a solution, many people around the world came to view Americans as just the new imperialists on the block, as part of the problem.

When U.S. interference in the Middle East and Central Asia led to the emergence of al-Qaeda and its 9/11 attacks in 2001, President George W. Bush told the confused American public that the terrorists simply "hate our freedoms." Many Americans were then duped into believing that Iraq was somehow behind 9/11, even though no Iraqis were involved in those attacks.

Thus, a majority of Americans enthusiastically supported Bush's unprovoked invasion of that Arab country, a violation of the Nuremberg Tribunal's prohibition against aggressive war.

Some Americans were caught up in a frenzy of waving the American flag; others unfurled the Christian banner or the Star of David for a renewed "clash of

civilizations" with Islam. Bigotry against Muslims has become an accepted part of political thought across much of the U.S. heartland and is eagerly promoted by the still-influential neoconservatives.

Today, the United States seems to be leading the world into a new Dark Age, where science and fact are forced to take a back seat to religious and ideological beliefs, where free-market extremism mixes with jingoism, militarism and Christian fundamentalism.

Tea Party Madness

America's most prominent "populist" movement, the Tea Party, is remarkable in that its central tenet is to make sure taxes on rich people are kept low and none of their tax loopholes even for corporate jets are closed.

Though the Tea Party denies that it is racist or has any similarities to the old-line fascist parties of Europe it appears particularly energized by its hatred of America's first black president, having pushed false claims about Barack Obama's Kenyan birth.

At its core, the Tea Party seems driven by a profound contempt for the necessity of democratic government as a counterbalance to the excesses of corporate power. The Tea Party amounts to a movement to shift power over U.S. society to corporate overlords.

Most recently, the Tea Party and its Republican allies shoved the United States to the brink of default, making the faith and credit of the country a hostage to right-wing demands for trillions of dollars in spending cuts but no revenue increases.

After the strategy proved successful, with President Obama and congressional Democrats bowing to the spending-cuts-only approach to prevent a default, Republicans gloated over their hostage strategy.

Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Kentucky, said the GOP/Tea Party approach proved the debt-ceiling limit was "a hostage that's worth ransoming" and had "set the template for the future."

The cumulative impact of right-wing American policies is also pushing the world toward what may be another cataclysm.

The Right's anti-government, anti-regulation movement combined with Ayn Rand's "greed-is-good" approach to economics played key roles in Wall Street's financial collapse in 2008 and the resulting global recession.

Now, the Right's austerity demands are squeezing the embattled middle class even

more, setting the stage for worsening social unrest, which is already provoking renewed racial tensions in Europe and prompting demands for more “law and order.”

Key political forces in the United States seem determined to ignore the lessons of the 1920s and 1930s and force some post-modern “Clockwork Orange” replay of those troubled times.

After spending time in Normandy and recalling the sacrifice that so many Americans made to stop one lethal virus of madness, it is disconcerting to see the United States emerging as a principal carrier of another.

[For more on these topics, see Robert Parry’s *Secrecy & Privilege* and *Neck Deep*, now available in a two-book set for the discount price of only \$19. For details, [click here.](#)]

Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories in the 1980s for the Associated Press and Newsweek. His latest book, *Neck Deep: The Disastrous Presidency of George W. Bush*, was written with two of his sons, Sam and Nat, and can be ordered at neckdeepbook.com. His two previous books, *Secrecy & Privilege: The Rise of the Bush Dynasty from Watergate to Iraq* and *Lost History: Contras, Cocaine, the Press & ‘Project Truth’* are also available there.

The Bible’s Clash with Today’s Reality

Among Republican presidential hopefuls, several such as Rep. Michele Bachmann and Gov. Rick Perry have stressed their commitment to fundamentalist Christianity, which bases its approach to cultural issues on a literal reading of the Bible. But the Rev. Howard Bess notes that many of those ancient traditions are repugnant to modern society.

By the Rev. Howard Bess

The essential messages of the Bible are justice, peace, love, reconciliation and hope – messages that have the power to operate in every age and every culture. But the list of clashes between the Bible and modern culture is long.

For instance, the Bible reflects an absurd understanding of the structure of the universe; it shows little understanding of physical and mental illnesses; and it was and is on the wrong side of patriarchal authority, marriage, equality for

women, homosexuality, slavery, and the rights of an older son.

That is because the Bible is a collection of writings by many authors who wrote in ever-changing circumstances in ancient times. Today's Bible readers live in circumstances that could not have been imagined by the original writers.

Family, social, economic and government structures today are completely different from those of the authors of the original writings. The place of women in Bible settings is a prime example of this dilemma, since that status during early Judaism is defined in the property codes of Leviticus.

Women were property owned by men. They were bought and sold. The most famous example of this law is the story of Jacob and Laban.

Jacob was moving back to his family's home territory east of Palestine when he arrived at a watering hole and inquired where he could find an uncle named Laban, who was Jacob's mother's brother.

As providence would have it, a daughter of Laban, Rachel, appeared at the watering hole with some sheep. Jacob's first cousin was beautiful and Jacob decided that Rachel was the girl of his dreams. He wanted her as a wife.

The next step in the process was to make a deal with Uncle Laban for the purchase of Rachel. The price was seven years of work as his uncle's slave. Jacob worked the seven years and thought that the beautiful Rachel was his.

However, Laban switched products. When Jacob woke up from his wedding night, he discovered that he had slept not with Rachel, but with an older sister named Leah. Laban calmly explained that he had no choice. By custom he could not sell off a younger daughter until after he had sold his oldest daughter.

Jacob and Uncle Laban made a new deal. Jacob would work another seven years to get the wife he wanted. He worked the seven years and got Rachel.

The deeply embedded cultural code reflected in this tale eventually became Leviticus law, following a pattern in which established social customs typically get codified into binding law.

The Bible standard of male ownership of women was still fully in force in First Century culture CE at the times of the New Testament writings. The place of a woman was determined by her ownership.

A very common misunderstanding about many of the women who became followers of Jesus is that many were prostitutes. They were, in fact, women who for some reason no longer had an owner and thus were completely vulnerable in the male-dominated society.

A woman such as Mary from Magdala is an example. She was not a “loose” woman but a victim of a cruel male-dominated society. Such women attached themselves to Jesus to escape their plight. They called Jesus “Lord,” and he gave them a new understanding of the value of their lives.

Even in modern times, the Biblical standard of male ownership of women has been difficult to overcome.

I grew up in a small Mid-western farm community where the largest and dominant religious group in the area called themselves Apostolic Christians. Among Apostolic Christians in the 1930s, a man got a wife through negotiation with a young lady’s father.

There were no dating procedures. Their wedding was a celebration of the transfer of ownership of a woman from her father to her husband. They carried on this practice because they made ancient cultural rules a part of their faith practice, seeing themselves as being faithful to Bible standards.

In today’s world, women have carved out very different roles for themselves than the roles assigned to them by the Bible, both Old and New Testaments. Today’s women have made it clear they will never again submit to the cultural practices found in the Bible.

Christians have rightfully seen the necessity of translating the Bible from language to language to facilitate an understanding of the Bible messages. However, most Christians have not understood the necessity of translating the Bible messages from culture to culture.

To be effective the Christian message must be freed from the cultural shackles found in the Bible.

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