These newsletters provide information and ideas for reflection and action. An informed, energetic citizenry is the only way a democracy can be sustained. WE, THE PEOPLE.

FROM FEAR TO FASCISM?

FEAR-UP
A common, tried-and-tested technique employed by torturers is known as "the showing of the instruments," in U. S. military lingo, "fear-up." "Torturers know that one of their most potent weapons is the prisoner’s own imagination—often just showing fearsome instruments is more effective than using them.” Naomi Klein, The Shock Doctrine (333). Fear up is also a basic, powerful technique used by tyrants to cow the crowd: Have the FBI interview a few thousand, detain some hundreds, the rest will stay indoors, restrict their voices…snitch on neighbors.

MOLLY IVINS EXPOSES FEAR
“Coverage Doesn’t Cut It” (from Working Assets, 07-27-06). On the Middle East. “Fear has been the text and the subtext of every Republican campaign since 9/11...And when we are afraid, we do damage to both ourselves and to the Constitution. Our history is rank with these fits of fear.”

THREE LOCAL WRITERS CHALLENGE FEAR
--Barbara Warner, “How Afraid Should You Be?” NAT (11-16, 2007). “Keeping us afraid of everything...is a tried-and-true way to motivate us to buy things...Keeping a population fearful can also be a useful tool for a government that wants to keep things secret, expand its powers, or get us to unquestioningly accept its policies.”
--Lowell Grisham, “Be Not Afraid” (NAT (8-20-07).” How different might our present be had our leaders acted out of faith and hope rather than fear and violence.”
--George Arnold, “Climate of Fear” (follows)

“Climate of Fear” by George Arnold, November 6, 2007
URL: http://www.nwanews.com/adg/Editorial/206848/
Arnold is opinion editor of the Democrat-Gazette’s northwest edition.

Ann Wright came to Fayetteville the day after the Big Flour Scare. It was only fitting.

Ms. Wright is a retired U. S. Army colonel and an ex-diplomat. After the start of the war with Iraq, she resigned from government service to register her disapproval of the war. With almost 30 years in the military and another 16 years of diplomatic service, you’d think she’d earned the right to dissent. Instead, she now finds herself on an international watch list because of misdemeanor arrests during anti-war
protests. She discovered she’d been put on the watch list when she went to Canada last month to speak about — “watch lists and how people find themselves on these lists and are detained.” In Canada, on her way to meet with friendly members of the Canadian parliament, she was detained and promptly put on a flight back to the United States. She’s been banned from returning to Canada for at least a year.

In Fayetteville, she mentioned her experience in Canada, while stressing the need to speak up before it’s too late about questionable actions by the government. She talked about the climate of fear in this country since 9/11 and how fear has been used to undermine some of our most cherished freedoms and beliefs.

Which brings us to the flour scare. The day before Ann Wright spoke on the University of Arkansas campus, part of downtown Fayetteville was closed off when a white powder was found near the federal building. For about two hours, traffic and other routine activity was disrupted while authorities tried to determine if the powder was dangerous.

It wasn’t.

The powder was simple baking flour, used by a local running/social club to mark the route of one of its non-competitive races. The club is affiliated with an international organization that dates back to the 1930’s. The use of flour to mark race routes is a routine, environmentally friendly way to guide the runners. Not incidentally, the race was held on a Sunday, the day before federal authorities returned from their weekend, belatedly noticed the white powder, and raised the alarm.

Not everybody was worried. City workers stringing up Christmas lights on the nearby square continued to work through the commotion. But even after authorities determined that the powder was flour, some continued to hyper-ventilate about the potential threat. The U.S. marshal on the scene said the investigation would continue. “It is not a game to us,” Dick O’Connell said. “To us it is deadly serious.”

Well, we live in strange times. There are dangers. And we don’t want to take any foolish risks. But really, do we have to be as dumb as a sack of flour about it? Apparently so. Ann Wright devoted most of her Fayetteville talk to events of the last six and a half years. Her list of governmental sins during that time is a long one: a war of aggression in Iraq, unilateral dismissal of the Geneva Conventions, horrors such as “extraordinary rendition” (which she labels as nothing more than kidnapping), the black hole of Guantanamo, wiretapping, eavesdropping. The list has become sadly familiar to all of us.

It’s past time for accountability, she insists. Her recommendation is that the country use the remedy prescribed in the Constitution—impeachment—and the congressional investigations that would precede it. But the measure of how timid the country has become is that impeachment of the president and/or the vice president is considered “off the table” in Washington. Politicians fear the political consequences. Many citizens just can’t be bothered. So outrage piles upon outrage, and the executive branch consolidates ever more unchecked power. There were a couple of especially notable moments during Ann Wright’s talk. At one point, she asked for a show of hands from those who trust their government these days. Of the 50 or so audience members in the partially filled auditorium, not one of them raised a hand. The response might not have been scientifically valid, but it made an unmistakable point about the times in which we live. Then, during the question-and-answer session that followed her talk, one questioner asked her if, as an outspoken critic of the government, she was worried about “disappearing” herself. The question might once have been considered bizarre, even wacky. But the audience, and Ann Wright, took it seriously. She said she is careful to remain publicly visible. At the same time, she still finds it hard to believe that such things could be considered possible in this country. Welcome to our
REDUCTIO AD ABSURDOM: LOCAL HYSTERIA,
Guards and Metal Detector
Our court house is protected by armed guards and a metal detector. No court in Washington County has ever been attacked; no court official has been assaulted at the court house.

Panic over white powder (both TMN and NAT printed front page articles with photo)
“Has Fayetteville Seen the End of Innocence?” Editorial in TMN (10-31-07) regarding the white powder that caused officials to shut down the Federal Building. The powder was used by a running club to mark the route of a run. The editor appropriately concludes: “It’s sad that the first reaction to something unknown, unusual, or unexpected is to do a threat assessment.” Similar case in Connecticut: “Men Cleared of Charges in Flour Anthrax Scare” (TMN 11-10-07).

VARIETIES OF FEARS REPORTED IN LOCAL MEDIA
(I have a large box of clips reporting on fear, especially on “terrorism.” You are welcome to borrow them. Here is a tiny sampling.)

TERRORISM, THE OTHER, STRANGERS, XENOPHOBIA
Fear of “terrorists” produces panic, stereotyping, prejudice, discrimination in Europe and the US:
--Mary Jordan & Kevin Sullivan (WP). “Travelers [in London] Report Anxiety After British Bomb Plot Arrests” (TMN 8-25-06). “‘These cases are a symptom of a wider hysteria’…describing a feeling among some people that Muslims are a ‘huge reservoir of potential terrorists waiting to slaughter fellow citizens.’”
--Toby Sterling (AP). “Authorities Find No Trace of Threat: 12 Detained in Flight Diversion Set to Be Released Today” (TMN 8-25-06). Crew of a NW Airlines flight to India panicked over 12 Indian nationals with cell phones and lap tops. [Actually this is USA, because a US crew and air marshals.]
--Paul Greenberg, “Travel in a Time of Terror” (ADG 8-23-06). Greenberg justifies random searches and paying special attention to stereotypical suspects.
--Paul Krugman, “Fearing Fear Itself” (ADG 10-30-07) “In the wake of September 11, the Bush administration adopted fearmongering as a political strategy.”

NUCLEAR
--Fearmongering the remaining nuclear “axis of evil”:
Thomas Sowell, “Point of No Return” (ADG 8-24-06). “Nuclear weapons in the hands of Iran and North Korea mean that it is only a matter of time before there are nuclear weapons in the hands of International terrorist organizations.”
--Jay Reeves, “Fear Prompts Plan for Fallout Shelters” (ADG 9-30-07). Huntsville, Ala. “is dusting off its Cold War manual to create the nation’s most ambitious fallout-shelter plan…."

POLICE quickly shoot to kill.
--Jacob Sanders, “West Memphis Police Didn’t Violate Boy’s Rights, Justice Department Says” ADG (11-8-07). Two policemen confronted two
people one of whom they thought had a gun. When the person moved, the
officer “believed himself in danger and fired twice.” The boy had
just graduated from the sixth grade.
--Marcus Franklin, “[NYC]Police Shooting Revives Debate” (MN
11-19-07). “The killing of a hairbrush-brandishing teenager last week
was the latest instance of police shootings in which officers reacted
to what they erroneously feared was a weapon….We have cases like that
all over the country....” The article discusses several of them.

BOOKS ON MILITARY-WHITE HOUSE SOCIAL CONTROL BY FEAR. (See
several books among the many listed in my bibliographies.)
Bush-Cheney Admin.
Fear.” “The single most surprising new element in America’s national
conversation is the prominence and intensity of constant fear,”
[and]we seem to be having unusual difficulty in distinguishing between
illusory threats and legitimate ones.” Chap. 2, “Blinding the
Faithful.” Etc.
--Joe Conason, It Can Happen Here: Authoritarian Peril in the Age of
Bush (2007). Public anxiety under G.W. Bush can be partly “attributed
to fear of terrorism, which Bush has exacerbated to suit his own
purposes.”
--Naomi Wolf, The End of America (2007). All of the ten steps by which
dictators have overthrown democracies (from threat mongering to
torture) involve the use of fear to intimidate and suppress public
dissent.

From WWII to the Bush-Cheney Admin.
--James Carroll, House of War: The Pentagon and the Disastrous Rise of
American Power (2006). Carroll recurs again and again to the
manipulation of public fears, from nuclear attack by the Soviet Union
to Osama bin Laden.
--Timothy Dunn, The Militarization of the U.S.-Mexico Border,
Examines how, since the 1970s, “border control” has emerged as a chief
issue in U.S. politics, through sensationalistic portrayals of
undocumented immigration, drug trafficking, and terrorism with
national security implications.
--Edward S. Herman and Gerry O’Sullivan, The Terrorism Industry: The
Experts and Institutions That Shape Our View of Terror (1989).
Reveals the pro-U.S. manufacture and distribution of myths and imagery
by the government-right-wing institutes-think tanks-lobbying-security
businesses-media industry “terrorism” complex.
--Edward S. Herman, The Real Terror Network: Terrorism in Fact and
Propaganda (1982). Surveys the many ways U.S. leaders have used
exaggerated fears of individual, group, and especially “Red”
terrorists, to build up public support for the real terrorists:
right-wing, torture and disappearance dictatorships, especially in
Latin America.

PRE-WWII
Sinclair Lewis, It Can’t Happen Here (1935, novel) about a sinister,
brutal homegrown fascism. Also written as a play.
Philip Roth. *In The Plot Against America*, Roth imagines a 1940's fascist America led by flying ace and staunch isolationist Charles Lindbergh.

**BOOKS ON MULTIFARIOUS FEARS BY US PUBLIC**

---Barry Glassner, *The Culture of Fear: Why Americans Are Afraid of the Wrong Things* (1999): how fears are sold, tall tales, overstated statistics, faulty diagnoses, misdirections, perpetuating and inflaming prejudices, presidential and press collusion, small dangers inflated into big scares, etc.

---Milburn, Michael, and Sheree Conrad. *The Politics of Denial*. MIT, 1996. We need a book that examines specifically the connections between fear mongering and denial of realities, but this book explains much indirectly on such subjects as war, welfare, abortion, immigrants, religious extremism, environment, globalism.

**REJECTING FEAR, FOR A CULTURE OF PEACE AND JUSTICE**

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