

# Our Little Secret

## 'TIS PITY HE'S A WHORE

For a man responsible for writing some of the dreariest and most pompous political commentary of our time, Sidney Blumenthal has garnered an amazing amount of coverage by dint of transition into employment at the Clinton White House. Blumenthal is allegedly being paid to come up with big ideas for Bill to get his teeth into, for that yearned-for leap into the history books.

Even though much of the coverage has been derisive in tone, the mere fact that he's earned so much ink is a plus for Sidney, who has been leading a somewhat spectral existence ever since Tina Brown dumped him from the *New Yorker* for being too ecstatic a flack for the Clintons.

On June 16 the *Washington Post's* Howard Kurtz unleashed thousands of words on the topic of Blumenthal, amidst which unwary readers found themselves becalmed in an emollient quote about SB from his pal Christopher Hitchens arguing that a straightforward whore for the

Clintons like Blumenthal is somehow morally preferable to those part-time whores for the Clintons pretending to be respectable members of the journalistic profession.

We'll leave **CounterPunch** readers to make up their own minds on that one. Certainly, as a full-timer in the oldest profession Blumenthal never lost the chance to service his clients. When he was still writing for the *New Yorker* and attracting ridicule for his slavish raptures to the

## When Seymour Hersh gave Blumenthal an early tip on Filegate, Sid knew just what to do.

Clintons, his friend Seymour Hersh thought he'd do Blumenthal a favor and help him to more balanced coverage. Hersh told Blumenthal that some FBI and Secret Service types were madder than hell about goings on in the Clinton White House and were ready to spill the beans.

Meeting Blumenthal a few weeks later, Hersh asked how he'd been doing on the story that would retrieve his reputation with Tina Brown. "I raised the whole matter with the President", Blumenthal told Hersh with gratified pride, and he's deeply concerned!"

## GAME AND SET TO HENRY

At a recent New York social event Henry Kissinger ambled over to say hello to Princeton professor Steve Cohen. In the late 1980s Cohen enjoyed a brief spell in the limelight of CBS news shows as a pundit ever-ready to discuss the bright promise of Mikhail Gorbachev and his *perestroika*. Cohen introduced Kissinger to his wife, Katrina vanden Heuvel, editor of *The Nation*. At mention of this periodical HK bridled. "I suppose I am regularly described in it as a mass murderer."

"Oh no", Cohen responded winsomely. "These days *The Nation* would more likely say something like that about Bill Clinton."

Kissinger brooded briefly. "Bill Clinton does not have the moral fiber to be a mass murderer."

## RALSTON: THE REAL RECORD

Cud-chewers had a field day with the kibosh finally put on Gen. Joseph Ralston's bid to be named as Gen. John Shalikashvili's successor as chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Ralston owned up to an affair with a (female) CIA officer some years earlier while—at least so he claimed—on official furlough from his marriage. Braced by a torrent of letters and calls from constituents angered at the Air Forces' treatment of Kelly Flinn, the first female B-52 flier, members of Congress told Ralston he hadn't a prayer of winning the JCS chairmanship.

The *Los Angeles Times's* Robert Scheer mourned that Ralston's service record was "superb, and no one doubts that he would have made a terrific chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff just as Kelly Flinn was obviously a great B-52 pilot". At the time Ralston was launching his superb service record by spraying Vietnamese and Laotian peasants with bomb and bullet (147 missions), Scheer was editing the anti-war *Ramparts*. As a "great" B-52 pilot Flinn's prowess would, in the event of conflict, be displayed either in the form of dropping high explosives on more peasants or in dumping nuclear bombs and thus ending everything, including the *Los Angeles Times* and all its columnists.

In fact Ralston's indiscretion with the lady spy from Langley has spared the taxpayer a JCS chairman whose recent career performance suggests a readiness to roll over to the arms contractors vulgar even by the depraved standards of the Defense Department. As Shalikashvili's second-in-command on the JCS, Ralston was in charge of the Quadrennial Defense Review, which issued its report last May. The QDR makes recommendations on weapons acquisitions and budgetary targets. Ralston stuck fervently to business as usual, with continued funding for such grotesque programs as the F-22 (see our last edition of **CounterPunch** for inside dope on this dollar-gobbling dog), the infamous Joint Strike Fighter and other boondoggles, thus continuing the inexorable logic of a procurement system that will end up with an annual \$200-250 billion being remitted directly to the aerospace companies without weapons to show for it or dollars remaining to pay for the personnel to use them.

The fact that Scheer can write paeans

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to Ralston shows the low ebb to which reporting on one of the nation's prime budgetary commitments defense has fallen. Rather than trying to drag the current object of his political esteem, Ariana Stassinopoulos, (Nixon and Oliver Stone are two famous former flames) to the homes of his horrified Washington friends, Scheer should return to the business of finding out how the world really works.

The better to console himself, Gen. Ralston should dip into some memoirs of the Second World War. He might start with Kay Summersby's *Past Forgetting*. Summersby was Ike's driver.

First, the declaration of love: "Goddammit, can't you tell I'm crazy about you?" he barked at me.

"It was like an explosion. We were suddenly in each other's arms. His kisses

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### **The fact that Scheer can write paeans to Ralston shows the low ebb to which defense reporting has fallen.**

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absolutely unraveled me. Hungry, strong, demanding. And I responded every bit as passionately. He stopped, took my face between his hands. 'Goddammit', he said, 'I love you.'"

Then the let-down.

"Ike refilled our glasses several times and then, I suppose inevitably, we found ourselves in each others' arms in an unrestrained embrace. Our ties came off. Our jackets came off. Buttons were unbuttoned. It was as if we were frantic. And we were. But this was not what I had expected. Wearily, we slowly calmed down. He snuggled his face into the hollow between my neck and shoulder and said, 'Oh God, Kay, I'm sorry. I'm not going to be any good for you.' I didn't know what to say except, 'You're good enough for me. What you need is some sleep.'"

That was the nearest they ever got to it.

When Kim Philby read this he made some coarse remark about "Ike not being able to cut the mustard." Typical dirty spy talk.

According to David Irving's very funny *The War Between the Generals* Ike tried to pass Summersby on to his aide, Everett S. Hughes. Hughes noted in his diary "Ike wants me to take Kay with car thrown in."

When Summersby published a book in

1948, Montgomery wrote to Eisenhower, stating that he had learned "your lady driver and secretary has written a book" and maliciously asked for a copy.

Jean Gordon was the daughter of Patton's wife's half-sister. In 1944 Patton told Hughes "She's been mine for twelve years." She had grown up in the Patton household. She called him Uncle Georgie. Patton died in a car crash (see the auto in the Dayton military museum) and his niece later killed herself.

### **TANTOR FLEES AT HATTIE'S TREAD**

The big game lobby is ecstatic at the appointment of Hattie Babbitt, wife of the Secretary of the Interior, as deputy administrator of the Agency for International Development (USAID), a subsidiary of the US State Department. The effervescent Ms. Babbitt, née Coons, will be overseeing the so-called Camp Fire program which shovels millions in grants to environmental and wildlife organizations to support eco-tourism, with an emphasis on big game hunting.

Outfits such as the World Wildlife Fund, Conservation International and the Safari Club favor such hunting, on the "free market" theory that if you can sell a \$50,000 permit to hunt an African elephant or leopard, you are creating an economic incentive on the part of the host country to preserve habitat both for leopard and great white hunter, booting out the humble pastoralists who have made their living in a decent and ecologically tolerable manner for hundreds of years.

If Bruce Babbitt's views are any guide, Hattie will be dishing out the grants to groups such as World Wildlife Fund that have been eager supporters of the Clinton administration's global trade policy. Babbitt himself gave the keynote speech to the Safari Club's annual bash two years ago, in which he called for the expansion of trophy hunting and a lowering of any barriers to imports of carcasses, tusks and kindred memorabilia of the chase.

### **FAREWELL OUR LOVELIES**

We are told by a Greenpeace Board Member that the troubled environmental group is telling national director Barbara Dudley that she should seek fresh opportunity, with the prime reason being Dudley's disastrous position on the dolphin death bill first described here in **CounterPunch**. Our exposé led swiftly to

a two-thirds decline in contributions to Greenpeace. Dudley will hang on until a successor is found.

Bid farewell also to another object of our frequent derision. Vic Sher, head of the Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund, now reborn as Earth Justice, has also been told to clean out his office. Sher appears to be departing under a cloud, though whether the cloud carries a sexual or monetary aroma is hard to determine at time of writing.

### **RICHARD COHEN'S PLEASURE CHEST**

Ever the joke-loving man of the world, Prince Bandar Saudi ambassador to Washington honored the *Washington Post* columnist Richard Cohen's birthday a few years ago by giving him a box of sex toys. Cohen threw the box in the trunk of his rented car, forgot all about the toys and was only reminded of their existence when an employee of the rental company rang and archly informed him that they were holding his lost items and would he care to come and retrieve them. Cohen never had the nerve.

### **A KINDLY WORD FOR THE LUDDITE**

"Those who criticize the deployment of certain modern technologies and yet flinch at the sobriquet Luddite are complicit with the logic of progress, fearful about being branded technophobe, or, finally, losers along with the peasantry and doomed tribes. But it is a lie that direct action against the instruments of production has always been hopeless. The Japanese for a time gave up the gun. Captain Swing and the agricultural Luddites who smashed the threshing machines in the 1830s got themselves and their children a reprieve for half a century. The Luddite army of redressers had no leaders, and their machine-smashing was without violence that is to say, they understood the radical distinction between life and property. —

Iain Boal, *Resisting the Virtual Life*

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# The Annotated Unocal: Notes on A Burma Booster

**A**fter more than a year of sloth, the Clinton administration has finally imposed economic sanctions on the military regime in Burma, which rules by terror and keeps opposition leaders under virtual house arrest. But the sanctions are limited. Clinton banned new US investment in Burma but did not require the US oil giant Unocal to withdraw from a huge natural gas pipeline joint venture it has undertaken with the Burmese junta, which is known as the State Law and Order Council, or SLORC.

Unocal has been lobbying fiercely in Washington to protect its 28 per cent stake in the pipeline. The company's hired helpers include lobbyist Tom Korologos, an adviser to Bob Dole's presidential campaign, and such beltway think tanks as the Burma/Myanmar Forum and the Asia Pacific Exchange Foundation, which use money from Unocal to sponsor carefully controlled junkets for members of Congress to Burma (see **CounterPunch**, Feb. 1-15, 1997).

Now **CounterPunch** has learned that Unocal has retained the PR firm of Edelman Worldwide to help put the best possible spin on its relationship with the Burma thugs. It seems that Edelman has been writing letters to college professors in the hopes that it can induce them to write friendly op-eds and newspaper articles supporting Unocal's participation in the pipeline joint venture. Below we annotate a letter that Edelman associate Katie Connorton sent earlier this year to an Asia specialist at West Coast University (who did not want to be identified). Note that the letter refers to Burma as Myanmar, the name preferred by the SLORC.

Dear [name deleted],

**K**nowing of your interest in foreign affairs and international trade issues, we are writing to you on behalf of Unocal, the California oil company which has a large investment in a natural gas pipeline project in Myanmar. (1) As you may know, Congress has passed legislation which would allow the President to impose economic sanctions and ban new U.S. investment in Myanmar if certain conditions are met. Recent actions by the military regime in Myanmar have led some in Congress and human rights activists to call for enactment of these sanctions. (2)

If you have been following the sanctions debate, or are interested in writing about this issue in the future, Unocal would like the opportunity to provide you and your colleagues with an overview of how the Yadana Project is helping Thailand meet its growing energy needs while it brings high-paying jobs, economic development, and socio-economic assistance to the people of Myanmar. (3)

Unocal's 30 years of experience operating in the ASEAN region have shown that continued engagement and economic investment, not diplomatic and economic isolation, is the best way to work toward positive change in countries like

Myanmar. Given the limited amount of U.S. investment in Myanmar and the unwillingness of Asian trading partners to support economic sanctions against the country, Unocal does not think sanctions would be an effective tool to change the behavior of the current regime. (4)

Unocal believes that a better way to seek positive change is for the U.S. government to keep the door open to continued diplomacy and dialogue with Myanmar and to work with its Asian neighbors on a multilateral strategy to affect positive change. In addition, we think that Unocal and other U.S. companies should continue to lead by example through responsible investment in quality projects that lead to continued development and higher living standards for the people, the country and the region. (5)

I hope you will keep these views in mind should you decide to opine on the situation in Myanmar in the future. Edelman would be pleased to arrange for you to meet with one of Unocal's principals to discuss these issues in greater detail. In the meantime, please let me know if you have any questions or would like additional information on Unocal and its operations. (6)

Sincerely,

Katie Connorton (7)

(1) Unocal's investment is large indeed. The total value of the pipeline project, whose other partners include the SLORC, the government of Thailand and the French firm Total, is \$1.2 billion. Burma is as desperate as Unocal to ensure that the project move forward. The SLORC is practically bankrupt and the pipeline, which will move natural gas from the Andaman Sea through Burma to Thailand, is seen as the primary means by which the military can drum up the cash reserves it needs to maintain itself in power.

(2) This letter was written before Clinton imposed sanctions last month. In seeking to prevent such a step, Unocal's lobbyists have claimed that the human rights situation in Burma has been improving. This portrait bears no relationship to reality. During the past year, the SLORC has imprisoned thousands of student demonstrators, waged war on the Karen, an ethnic group that lives near the Thai border, and outlawed almost any form of opposition. Amnesty International rated 1996 as the worst year for human rights since 1988, when the military imposed martial law and killed thousands of people.

(3) Unocal's claim that the pipeline project has brought "socio-economic assistance" to Burma's people is particularly gross. The SLORC has forced peasants to labor on a railroad that supplies the pipeline, forcibly relocated villages lying in its path and murdered peasants who oppose the project. The Center for Constitutional Rights filed a lawsuit against Unocal earlier this year on behalf of a number of Burmese peasants who live in the pipeline region and were forced from the area. The lawsuit charges the company with forced labor, crimes against humanity and torture. One of the Burmese plaintiffs—all whom are identified only as "John and Jane Does"—is a woman whose home was invaded by government troops as she nursed her month-old baby. "SLORC Officer 1 kicked her with his booted foot, and she and the baby fell into the fire where Jane Doe became unconscious," reads the lawsuit. "When she awoke, dizzy with pain, SLORC officer 1 was beating and kicking her sister-in-law, and a villager was holding her baby." The child died a few days later.

(4) Unocal's strategy of speaking only in vague terms about the supposed benefits of "engagement" is a wise one, since it's hard to see how participation in a huge joint venture with a cabal of military gang-