

# The Tyranny of Ignorance

By Roy Brown

**ONLY SOMEONE CLOSE** to George Bush's inner circle could say whether the misguided policies emanating from Washington are the result of the president's 'deadly combination of faith and ignorance', or of his deliberate pandering to the ignorant in order to hang on to power.

This article looks at several examples of ignorance at work: in the deeply flawed US policies on global warming and AIDS prevention, and in the way in which religious lobbying has been able to create confusion about evolution in the public mind.

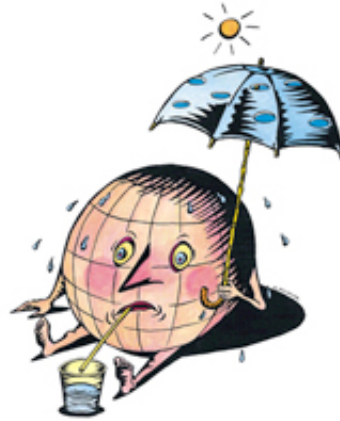
The war in Iraq, global warming and AIDS prevention are just a few examples of what has become a guiding principle on the part of many governments: to keep their people in a state of ignorance, to spin defeat into victory, and lies into an alternative reality. Few governments – from Washington to Beijing, from London to Riyadh and from Moscow to Teheran – seem immune from this temptation.

## The Lost War

FEW Americans seem aware that the war in Iraq has been lost. The grand idea, to install democracy by force as an example to the rest of the Middle East, has ended with an Iraq that is physically devastated; in financial ruin following the corruption of the interim government and the 'no-bid' contracts given to vice-president Cheney's business cronies; on the brink of civil war; with a constitution that guarantees that the country will become an Islamic theocracy; and with the world-wide forces of Islamic Jihad stronger than ever.

But this is not what Americans are being told by their government and its co-conspirators, the symbiotic conservative media. Both government and media overplay every small success and downplay every disaster. If Iraq be success, how shall we measure failure?

## Global Warming



THE destruction of the city of New Orleans and with it much of the America's oil refining capacity by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita – among the most powerful ever to hit the Gulf Coast of America – were almost certainly due to recent warming of the waters of the Gulf of Mexico, a warming until now denied by the oil industry. As recently as May this year, the International Policy Network, a nominally independent think tank heavily funded by the oil industry, described climate change as 'a myth'. Poetic justice rarely comes so swiftly. But as is so often the case, it was the poor, the weak and the innocent who paid the highest price.

In February this year a scientific conference called by the British government to inform the Gleneagles G8 summit, warned of impending 'dangerous climate change', while in June, an unprecedented statement from the world's leading academies of science called for urgent action on global warming. In the words of *New Scientist*, the response from Gleneagles was a disgrace. The scientists' concerns were simply brushed aside by Bush, Blair and their colleagues.

As long ago as 1992, at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, George Bush senior had agreed that 'increasing levels of greenhouse gasses result in global warming'. Yet 13 years later, with our

vastly increased knowledge of the reality of global warming, the best that his son could manage was that greenhouse gasses were 'associated with' global warming, with no recognition that cuts in greenhouse emissions have become an urgent necessity. In July, an Asian-Pacific partnership of six nations including the US, China and India did agree to cooperate on technologies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, but most scientists doubt whether any purely technical fix can prevent global warming from ultimately triggering climatic disaster.

Ignorance in the absence of information may sometimes be excusable, but wilful ignorance in the face of overwhelming evidence is surely incomprehensible – unless, of course, one is motivated less by the future of the planet than by the short-term interests of the oil industry.

## Abstinence-only AIDS Prevention Programs



AT the risk of sounding like a geriatric obsessive, I have to return again to the infamy of the US Administration policy on AIDS prevention. All of the evidence available from scientific and medical sources, from sociologists, NGO workers and field surveys makes it overwhelmingly clear that the policy of preaching abstinence as the way of preventing the transmission of HIV/AIDS in Africa has totally failed. Yet the Bush administration continues to insist that the promotion of abstinence must form the major part of any US-funded AIDS prevention program. ➤