

INTERNATIONAL WAR CRIMES TRIBUNAL □ PART TWO

AMERICAN UNDERGROUND BREAKS SOIL

AS outlined in my previous column, the "international war crimes tribunal" held in New York the last three days of February — with former US attorney general Ramsey Clark prosecuting the leaders of the Bush administration — was a largely "invisible" event for most Americans.

Indeed, even a couple of weeks after the well-attended tribunal's final day which was opened to the press and public, not a single major newspaper or television report has even mentioned the unprecedented tribunal that brought judges from more than 20 countries.

In some ways this reality is all the more surprising because quite literally while the tribunal was taking place — with some prominent Americans publicly accusing their own government's leaders of perpetrating war crimes — President Bush was once again threatening in ways that may again result in still further American military action against Iraq.

In other ways this reality of media "invisibility" simply underscores the very basic divisions that now exist within American society; divisions whose future ramifications cannot be fully foreseen.

Indeed the overall "invisibility" of such developments as this war crimes tribunal reflects the growing polarisation that has been going on for some time within American politics.

In an important sense this "invisibility" phenomenon is the political side of the growing polarisation between the haves and the have-nots — a "reality" which is usually discussed in economic terms. Quite obviously it is "the haves" who are backing the kinds of foreign policies being pursued by those in power in Washington; the "have-nots" attacking these policies not only as misguided but now as "war crimes".

Jerry Brown's iconoclastic quest against the American political system currently represents aspects of this basic and growing schism within the American polity. But when it comes to foreign affairs and calls for major changes in US foreign policy, Ramsey Clark is the individual who has evolved in recent years as the focal personality challenging the basic assumptions and policies pursued by the American empire, using its huge covert and military capabilities.

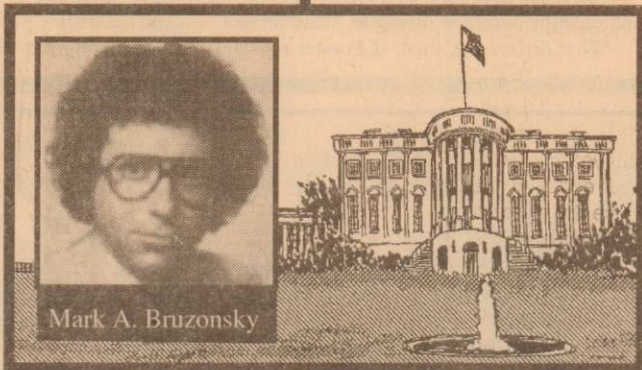
In a sense not well understood beyond American shores there is a growing "political-intellectual underground" in the US.

But it is an underground not like the Weathermen of the 1960s; an underground that does not challenge the establishment by violence; indeed an underground that is often simply media invisible rather than truly hidden.

This "political-intellectual underground" composed of a few key former political officials, many academics, and a cadre of activists and ethnic groups, may not be a significant force right now in directing the policies of the United States. But after witnessing history-changing events sweep away the "establishments" of other countries in recent years, who knows the future influence, and the future power, of such a still-embryonic coalition.

For some of course it is the fact that Ramsey Clark, a former attorney general of the US in the Johnson administration, has more and more become the key figure in this movement that gives the entire "under-

From



Mark A. Bruzonsky

Washington

ground" a certain notoriety and legitimacy.

But Clark is hardly the only personality that identifies with these circles. To name just a couple there's Daniel Ellsberg of *Pentagon Papers* fame; Ron Kovic whose story was made into the powerful movie *Born on the Fourth of July*; Casey Kasem, the popular radio and TV personality.

This newfangled underground may not get much attention from the big "establishment media", but it already has own "alternative" press in the form of a lot of small newsletters, and in some cities "alternative" papers such as *L A Weekly*, *Washington City Paper*, *San Diego Review*.

And these publications are joined with a variety of ethnic and community newspapers. For instance in New York City the largest Black-owned and read newspaper, *The Amsterdam News*, has been one of the few large-circulation papers to report about the war crimes tribunal. So has the small-circulation *Arab American News* published in Dearborn, Michigan, and circulating to some 10,000 Arab Americans. And so I'm told have a couple of Latino newspapers.

Prosecution

For years Americans have watched Jon Alpert's rather unique video reportage on NBC's popular *Today Show*. Alpert became popularly known some years ago as a kind of roving one-man production company. He would take his camera and chatty New York-Jewish fast-talking style where others couldn't or wouldn't; usually interacting with ordinary people but making extraordinary human interests features.

I ran into Jon, an old acquaintance I hadn't seen for years, at the international war crimes tribunal.

He had his camera in hand and was in the midst of producing a documentary about the "event" — I purposefully choose to use the term "event" because what was purported to be an international war crimes tribunal was in reality much more an international anti-war

occasionally wrapped in legal argumentation.

I've yet to hear the whole story as I was only able to briefly speak with Jon in the midst of the "event" which had New York's Martin Luther King Jr High School's auditorium overflowing with a very friendly, cheering crowd that had paid a \$10 admission charge.

But I did find out why I hadn't seen Jon for some time on NBC. It seems that after producing *Nowhere to Hide*, a 28 minute documentary about the 1991 Coalition War, NBC told Alpert they no longer thought it appropriate for him to be on *Today*.

According to the documentary's publicity, Alpert "shot the only footage of the war's impact not censored by either Iraq or the US. Travelling Ramsey Clark, Alpert captured on camera what it was like to be on the ground during the allied bombing. In an often harrowing journey, they witnessed widespread civilian casualties and extensive damage to homes, villages and markets, sometimes minutes after it occurred. In dramatic and often graphic scenes, *Nowhere to Hide* shows a far different reality than what most Americans saw on the nightly news".

Of course it's this very "different reality", and the political perspectives that usually accompany its presentation and articulation, that is at the heart of the matter as I've outlined in previous columns about this "event".

Two other sources of information are being made widely available by the international war crimes tribunal.

A second half-hour tape, this one titled *American Resisting: Voice in Opposition to the US War on Iraq* is also available for \$25.

And a book that outlines the charges, the philosophy, and much of the "evidence" — largely put together by Ramsey Clark and titled *War Crimes: A Report on United States War Crimes Against Iraq* — is sold for \$12.95.

Here for instance is a short portion from Clark's intro-

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gal and Moral Basis for a War Crimes Tribunal:

"The Bush-Schwarzkopf plan called for a whole variety of illegal weapons. It used fuel air explosives, which can incinerate hundreds, even thousands of people at once. We used super-bombs, trying to assassinate leaders.... At least three super-bombs were dropped, trying to assassinate leaders in Iraq in violation of international law and the laws of the United States.

"The military used napalm against civilians. It used napalm and other heat-intensive explosives to start oil well fires.... We used anti-personnel devices, mother-bombs with 800 or more bomblets, each bomblet in some configurations containing 6,000 razor-sharp pieces of shrapnel. One mother-bomb dropped from one plane is capable of covering the equivalent of more than 150 football fields with razor-sharp

tal within 50 feet of each bomblet to anyone that it hits....

"By the time what was called the ground war started, there was no effective capacity to resist, and there was no ground war, and we never stopped after that."

For anyone wanting to understand the perspective of those Americans vehemently opposed to their country's style of involvement in today's Mid-east, wanting to appreciate the depth of the political polarisation that exists within American society, I would definitely recommend both of these videos as well as the fairly comprehensive book

And in a few weeks there will be a third video available, this one documenting the New York war crimes tribunal itself and focusing on the international panel of judges that was brought together from some 20 countries to render