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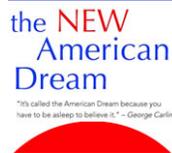
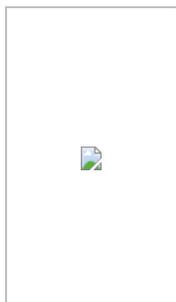
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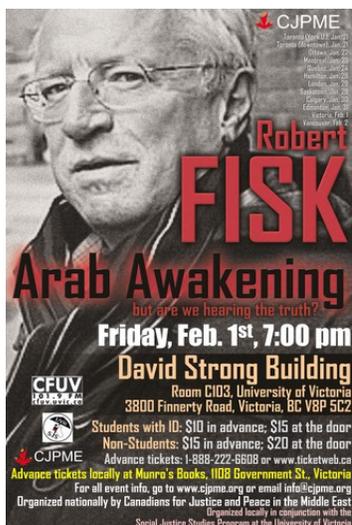
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A Road-Wearry Warrior This Way Comes: Robert Fisk in Canada

by C. L. Cook - Pacific Free Press

2 February, 2013



February began with an address to a packed auditorium at the University of Victoria by the renowned reporter Robert Fisk. The full-house attended to hear the penultimate performance of the English journalist's country-wide Canadian lecture tour, 'Arab Awakening: But are we hearing the truth?'

Enduring the tenth of his eleven cities in twelve days schedule, a visibly jet-worn Fisk entertained and educated the appreciative crowd with anecdotes and some background of his near four decades-long career living in and reporting from the Middle-East, (Fisk has called Beirut home for more than thirty-five years) while providing his analyses of both the so-called "Arab Spring" and that movement's interpretation in the Western press.

Not just England's single-most "decorated" war correspondent, Fisk has also received more international journalism awards than anyone, including being voted International Journalist of the Year seven times. His work is also recognized by human rights organizations, who have awarded him a slew of honours and awards, among them being: the Jacob's Award for radio coverage of the first Gulf War, and the Orwell, David Watt, and Gelhorn Prizes.

He's received honorary Doctorates from the University of St. Andrews, Adelaide University, the American University of Beirut, and two from Trinity College Dublin, and more. He also holds a PhD in Political Science, earned at Trinity.

'Mr. Robert' is too the author of six books, the most widely regarded of these perhaps being 2005's 'The Great War for Civilization: The Conquest of the Middle East,' and 'Pity the Nation: Lebanon at War,' released in 1990. His latest, an anthology of his journalistic writings, is 'The Age of the Warrior' (2008).

Clearly not someone just fallen from the turnip truck.

For the uninitiated, those whose news comes directly, or perhaps solely from "mainstream" sources like the Globe and Mail and CBC, and others well used to the daily tripe Canada's media combines spoon feed the masses, statements like; "No War on Terror really exists," or; "The [Israeli] Wall is infinitely more monstrous than Berlin's" must astound, or at least sound just a little outlandish; but, coming from the man who interviewed Osama bin Laden on three separate occasions, stood amongst the corpses of Sabra and Shatila refugee camps in Lebanon, and filed stories from the heart of the battle for Baghdad during America's 2003 invasion, his opinion carries a rare credibility that's difficult to question, even if emanating, as it does, so far from the regular and reassuring blandishments informing both the corporate and state news.

Sadly though, there is a dated ring revealed by his rejection of the changing information/media landscape. Fisk reiterated his disdain for internet-gleaned news, computer keyboards, blogs and "citizen journalist" bloggers - and even e-mail! (e-mail too, Mr. Robert!?). Of course, I'd heard, read, and seen him express his predilection for last century methods; heard, read, and watched him say so on the internet. After all, who besides the Independent is going to feature Fisk's discomfiting reports, and how else are people living half a world from London going to access that necessary reportage? This stodgy, and slightly annoying attitude made me think twice about his latest title, and made me wonder if this warrior journalist may be feeling his age.

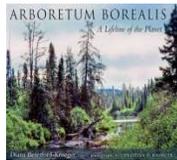
For the growing number who turn first to the computer, or any of the dizzying array of other newly available media



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interfaces, there wasn't a lot of news in Robert Fisk's presentation. He did provide his view of what he witnessed not too very long ago in Syria, (informing the government enjoyed as much as 70% public support in Aleppo and some other areas of the country), and there was some interesting analysis of the current situation in Mali; one audience member querying Fisk on the R2P, or Responsibility to Protect doctrine, used to justify intervention in the Former Republic of Yugoslavia by Bill Clinton's coalition in the 1990's, and more recently invoked to justify the destruction of Libya's Muammar Gaddafi. Of this he said he had "very mixed feelings," believing it to be something of a "dodgy concept" he compared to Adolf Hitler's wars of aggression in Europe. On the subject of Libya's former dictator, Fisk likened the fates of Gaddafi, Saddam Hussein, and Yasir Arafat to once useful tools of the West made disposable by changing circumstance.

Interesting too was his assertion that, at bottom the problem was the fact we in the West had "lost faith in God," whilst those, largely Muslim populations in the Middle East, had not lost faith and struggled now to understand why, rather than reaping God's rewards for their fidelity were suffering at the hands of the unbelievers. On this, Fisk says;

"What you've got is a people who have largely maintained and kept their faith in God, and asked themselves; how can it be they are oppressed, humiliated: financially, economically, socially, militarily, educationally, culturally by a people who have lost their faith? and that question, I think, lies at the centre of the crisis between East and West. It is not about Wars on Terror; this is trash which is being fed to you, if you want to come eat it. I think that that is the question we have to confront and talk about. I think what we've got to do, if we're going to do that, is stop sending our soldiers on these crazed adventures to Muslim countries; these countries do not belong to us."

January ended with an Israeli air raid into war torn Syria. There are at time of writing still conflicting reports as to what the target, or targets of those initial bombing raids were. More reports are now coming in, (across my internet wire) of further death and destruction dealt by Israel to its neighbour Syria. It is a ratcheting up of the constant pressure the region has felt these last years, and now seems to be a potential spark for a much broader war involving Iran - the war Israel and its benefactor the United States of America has covertly waged for a half-dozen years.

Though it promises to be a war that will envelope Robert Fisk's adopted home of Lebanon too, the prospect of the war spreading to Lebanon is one of the more interesting and timely topics sadly left undisturbed during the Victoria 'Arab Awakening' lecture; and that eventuality, should it come to pass, would be a pity to not only that nation, but to all of us.

Robert Fisk's tour was sponsored by Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East and supported at the University of Victoria by the Social Justice Studies Program and CFUV Radio. This radio reporter must admit to being more than a little chapped by the organizers' forbidding of internet rebroadcast of the lecture.

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