

Blase Bonpane on WORLD FOCUS,

Fred Branfman

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Hello, this is Blase Bonpane with World Focus coming to you from KPFK/ Los Angeles. We're podcast and available 24/7 on kpfk.org where we're heard internationally.

I'm privileged today to have Fred Branfman as a guest. Fred Branfman is the author of a number of books on the Indochina War. He served as Director of Project Air War and is an authority on the secret war conducted in Laos. His articles have been published in the New York Times, the Washington Post, and Harper's. His latest article appears in Alternet this week and is titled, "The World's Most Evil and Lawless Institution: The Executive Branch of the United States Government."

Welcome Fred Branfman.

Fred: Thank you.

Blase: How did you get this very good title, Fred?

Fred: Well, personally I have never used the word "evil" in my life. I think it gets over-used and when you over-use it, it loses its power. But I also think that when a word is appropriate, it's an act of moral cowardice not to use it and I think we all need to ask ourselves if killing innocent people is not evil, then what is evil? In the case of the US Executive Branch, Democrats and

Republicans, Johnson and Nixon, Bush and Obama, cumulatively – this is simple arithmetic from official sources which I list in my article – I try to link every single statistic used – they’ve killed, wounded, or made homeless, over 20 million human beings over the last 50 years, most of whom were civilians, 1.2 million civilians in Vietnam alone. And what’s troubling about that is not only that act, the fact that they have killed, wounded or made homeless, far more people than any other government on earth in the last fifty years, but that it’s never discussed in our country. It’s covered up. It’s our silent shame. We’re haunted by the ghosts of all the people we’ve killed all over the world but never talk about.

Blase: Fred, this is a very interesting thing that you’re speaking about here because when we think of our family, our friends, our relatives, we can’t help but say, “We’re better than that!” What is it that leads to the addiction of killing? It seems to be something that goes together with every empire. Can you explain?

Fred: Well, we don’t have to mystify this. The US was the most powerful nation at the end of WWII – all the other countries lay in ruins, all the other major countries. And our leaders decided that they wanted to keep pro-US regimes in power and to either weaken or overthrow so-called anti-US regimes. They prefer not to use violence unless necessary. They didn’t WANT to kill. So, for a recent example, very interesting and it’s not known. President Bill Clinton, about five years ago, apologized to the people of Haiti for impoverishing that country. What he did, he negotiated the NAFTA agreement, the World Trade Organization. What that meant was that cheap US food, subsidized by the US government came into Haiti and the people became impoverished. At the same time loans were taken out from the World Bank which went to the elites and then the poor people of Haiti had to repay them by cutting their education and their healthcare. Now, that’s how the US government normally operates. What was interesting was that Bill Clinton admitted it and said he was wrong and did that in Haiti. What he did not say was that his government, during that eight year period, did not only do it in Haiti – it did it to hundreds of millions of people all over the third world. Now, when a regime as happened in Vietnam, fights back, then the US Executive Branch leaders are prepared to use violence to

keep them in our economic and political system. And this is what it's about. It's really quite simple. It's power politics that's been practiced for the last 5,000 years. The issue today for us as Americans is #1 – the US Executive Branch is the most powerful institution in the history of the world. It spends more on the military than its leading ten competitors combined. We spend more on the military than Russia and China and the next eight nations altogether. So we have these vast technologies of war and when they get deployed, millions die. Millions are made refugees.

Blase: Fred, it seems that this is personified in the life of Henry Kissinger who became a role model for empire and when people would mention something about compassion to him, he would say, "I am not a missionary."

Fred: Well, there's a story about Robert McNamara. By the way, Robert McNamara said that if we had lost in Vietnam he would have been judged a war criminal at Nuremberg, he himself. But, in any event, he did publish a book in the '90's where he made from his perspective, an honest attempt to do some reckoning on the damage he'd done in Vietnam and it was he, himself, who said that he'd killed 1.2 million civilians in Vietnam. Henry Kissinger was interviewed shortly after that and asked about McNamara's book and he pretended to weep and to be playing a violin and said, "Oh McNamara, he's so sorry about what he did in Vietnam" and I think Kissinger is indeed the personification of American evil. He certainly is the American living today who has more blood on his hands than any other living American and I talk in this article – I think this is the thing if we're going to talk about evil, I wrote an article about Kissinger called "The New Face of Evil." I think it's very important to understand that our understanding of evil is Hitler and the Nazis and Stalin. Violent, angry, crazed people. Paranoid who murdered millions. We don't think of evil as perfectly nice men and women who love their children, love their dogs, go to work every day but work for an institution whose goals and methods are evil. It's hard for us to get our brain around that.

Blase: I think that's what we call the careerist. Now, when you talk about evil, let's look at something here – "For 50 years, we've been responsible for bombing, shooting, burning alive with napalm, blowing up with cluster bombs, burying alive with 500 pound bombs, torturing, assassinating, incarcerating without evidence, destroying the homes and villages of more innocent civilians in more nations over a longer period of time than any other government on earth today."

And this continues. We look at the great General Petraeus and his love of breaking into homes. I can't imagine anything that would ignite more anger than people routinely having their homes broken into and their families savaged. We have to deal with this. Then you allude to the Secretary of State John Kerry, and of course he had mentioned Vietnam – at the time he was in the service and it was contrary to the laws of the Geneva Convention. He also said that the men who ordered this are war criminals. That was John Kerry, wasn't it?

Fred: Yeah, that was John Kerry. I think it was his finest moment. I think if history remembers John Kerry it will remember him for that statement which he delivered on "Meet the Press" where he finally told the truth to the American people. He said, "Your leaders, Johnson, Nixon, McNamara, are war criminals" and by implication, I think, nobody could dispute this, would have been executed at Nuremberg had the Nuremberg judgment applied to their behavior. So he said that back in 1971, much to his credit. Now forty years later, he's our Secretary of State and he just recently was defending our drone assassination program and he said publicly, "I've reviewed this program and I'm satisfied that", as President Obama has said also, "the only people we are killing with our drones are a tiny number of named people. We know their names and know that they are planning on killing Americans and can't kill them any other way so it is a legal program." This, by the way, is the drone program that, when a poll is run, saying to the American people, "Do you support the drone program?" they usually support it by high margins because they support the program because they've been told by their President and Secretary of State Clinton and Secretary of State Kerry that it is, exactly what I just said, killing a limited number of named people who are actively planning to kill Americans. The only problem is that's a total and complete falsehood. They can only name 77 so-called senior Al-Qaeda Taliban leaders and they confess having killed 3-5,000 people in Pakistan alone whose

names they don't know. These are what they call "signature strikes" where they see a group of people meeting and they decide that it's some terrorist group doing some plot or something and they murder dozens of people and then later on we find out it was a wedding or a meeting and there have been thousands of these case. So, John Kerry, when he becomes Secretary of State, when he becomes a member of the Executive Branch, winds up behaving as a war criminal, as the very people he was criticizing when he was a soldier.

Blase: Well, I'd like to know how this happens. Things have not improved since that time. We now have the Joint Special Operations Commands which is dealing with constant assassination of individuals without due process, the rationalizations by which even decent human beings allow themselves to ignore their leader's mass murder, saying that these things happen in war. Well, there is no learning process. What I am wondering about, Fred, is that it seems to me that empire becomes a cult when you take that fine veteran John Kerry who was throwing his medals back, together with so many other veterans – what kind of Kool-Aid do they drink in order to become of a servant of empire?

Fred: Well, that's what I focused this series on – the Executive Branch as an institution. We have no problem understanding the concept of institutional evil when we talk about the Gestapo or the KGB or the Kremlin or the Chinese politburo. There are institutions that have a culture of violence and in the course of achieving their goals supporting pro-US regimes and defeating anti-US regimes, are prepared to use mass violence. When a man, even a decent guy, I'm sure if we'd known Barack Obama back at the University of Chicago, we nor he could have imagined himself killing innocent people. Neither could John Kerry for that matter and I had lunch with John Kerry in 1971. I'm sure that at that point he did not think of himself as someone who would justify or order murder, but when you join the institution you have no choice. That's what the Executive Branch does. It's a murderous institution and it's an evil institution that commits these horrendous crimes all over the world and if you're ambitious, if you want to get ahead in the world, if you want to make history, if you want to get more power, more money, you conveniently put your morals aside and become a member of the

Executive Branch and it's easy in America because our entire country has turned a blind eye to the millions of people that we've killed, wounded and made homeless. No one's going to criticize you for it other than someone like your courageous radio show and on it goes. And I'm glad you mentioned JSOP because one of the most grotesque aspects of post-war America has been the way we turn absolutely lawless criminal operations into heroes. The Joint Special Operations Command are the people who killed Osama bin Laden and, without getting into that, I happen to agree with Noam Chomsky that even that was a criminal act. At Nuremberg we established the principle that even Hermann Goering gets a trial. But the Joint Special Operations Command assassinated Osama bin Laden and became instant heroes, now every young, red-blooded American wants to join JSOP. That's where the action is. The problem is that these people are not America's greatest heroes; they're America's greatest shame. If I said to you, "Hey Blase, do you know what the Gestapo used to do? They used to break into people's homes in the middle of the night. They had no evidence that anyone there was a so-called criminal or militant. They'd assassinate people. They'd haul people off to prison. They tortured them. They're doing this not only in Afghanistan. They're doing it in countries around the world." They'd be horrified. We're not willing to face that we have our own Gestapo right now. This JSOP is an absolutely lawless secret band of assassins. That's what they do. They assassinate people, usually suspects, but one of the features of a night raid is you're trying to catch them while they're sleeping. Therefore, they're unarmed. They're suspects. You have no proof that they've done what some guy says; and this is going on all over the world. We've unleashed this horror, this cancer, of assassins, and to top it off call them heroes.

Blase: Well Fred, let's look at institutions for a moment. Trying to see how this happens. Suppose we had a little exam and we had on the exam, "Which of the following institutions are credible agencies?" and we'd have "Defense Department, NSA, CIA, Congress, the Courts." It seems that we would get a negative answer for most institutions and what I'm thinking of is what I understand happened in the former Soviet Union – that it got to a place where absolutely no one, with maybe a couple of exceptions, but almost no one believed anything the

government said and so it was almost a joke every time some statement was made. Now, are we approaching that at this time?

Fred: Well, that's a very interesting question and let me just back up for a second and say that the first thing I learned when I used to work with Governor Jerry Brown and I'd be at the very high level meetings and the issue was, "What position should we take on the following subject?" and I was surprised and I was naïve – I was in my thirties and I noticed that they never talked about whether what they were about to say was true or false. The criteria for what we say is will it advance our mission and will we get caught? That was our discussion. What would sound the best and whether we'd get caught or not. That is to say, truth and lies are not operational concepts in government. Now in the case of Jerry Brown it's relatively benign but this is true also in the Pentagon, the CIA, the NSA – they have a term for it. They call it Information Operations. They are giant bureaucracies. They only exist because taxpayers are foolish enough to give them all this money to lie to them. In any event, they depend upon the taxpayer for money. They don't create; they destroy. Apple, you know, at least produces products. It produces wealth. The Executive Branch, the military, the CIA, destroy wealth. They are totally dependent on the populace for their money.

Blase: You're talking about the image, Fred; the objective is image not reality. We had this problem in the church with trying to protect the image rather than dealing with the sexual abuse problem. We have the same problem in government and now we add to this, the private sector, the Booz people, 70% of our intelligent agencies are run by private corporations. This seems to be absolutely contradictory.

Fred: And the problem is that every single statement they make is then Information Operation. It's not always a lie but if it's something that might embarrass them, the fear that it might cost them funding you can be pretty sure it's a lie and not only that but Information Operations are conducted against the enemy, whether it's the Taliban in Afghanistan or questions reporters or

liberal Congressmen who want to cut their budget in America. And this is what we're up to. When you saw General Keith Alexander, Head of the NSA, testifying to Congress and saying that they'd stopped fifty terrorist operations, he was conducting an Information Operation. He was defending his agency, trying to make sure that they don't get their budget cut. David Halberstam said in Vietnam that the US military is a vast lying machine. And our problem today, and this is what Americans have trouble believing because we don't want to believe this because the truth is so frightening, that every single government official within the Executive Branch, lies to us on an hourly basis about issues that might embarrass them or that they fear could cause them either funding or flexibility.

Blase: Friends, I'm speaking today to Fred Branfman who is the author of a number of books on the Indochina War. He served as Director of Project Air War and is an authority on the secret war conducted in Laos. His articles have been published in the New York Times, the Washington Post, and Harper's. His latest article appears in Alternet this week and is titled, "The World's Most Evil and Lawless Institution: The Executive Branch of the United States Government."

Now we have a very serious problem here because we don't have the credibility. Now we have the privatization, not only of the military, they are possibly more contractors in Iraq and Afghanistan than there were of the armed forces; now, we have private contractors doing our so-called "intelligence" and we have a grave need for the truth-telling and if you don't mind, Fred, I want to mention books that really are supportive of what you're saying and books that you also recommend. One for example is "Kill Anything that Moves" by Nick Turse about Vietnam, "Dirty Wars" a film that we've had showing here in Los Angeles about Jeremy Scahill's work in Iraq and Afghanistan and Somalia, "The Death of Others" by John Tirman covering Korea, now that it's the 60th anniversary of that ceasefire; "The Untold History of the United States" by Oliver Stone and Peter Kuznick, a ten-part Showtime documentary discussing US policy from WWII to the present. Then there's "Drone Warfare" by Medea Benjamin who's just back from Yemen and who was demonstrating at the White House yesterday, together with

Diane Wilson and Diane went over the fence at the White House after fasting for 54 days in communion with those who are fasting to the death at Guantanamo. These are veterans. Diane Wilson is a veteran of Vietnam, 54 days without food and then jumping the fence to oppose this. These are just some of the books you recommend. "The Korean War", a history by Bruce Cummings on the US executive massacres of civilians in Korea. What I'm saying to our leaders is look, there is a strong and substantive backing for you and when you mention war is a lie I would have to mention David Swanson with his book of that title. It begins with one lie. It's carried on by other lies and it's ended by a third set of lies.

So, you are not alone, Fred Branfman. I think it's important that you know that.

Fred: Thank you so much. And I really want to stress that these people who wrote these books are wonderful people who literally spent years of their lives, meticulously documenting this mass murder. There simply is no question to any honest person that this is going on. The only question is what are we going to do about it? But the evidence is overwhelming.

Blase: It is and I'm very excited, really, about what is being done. I think in the infrastructure throughout the country, the movement for peace is deeper than it was during the Indochina War. Now we have the peace activists, Veterans for Peace, veterans who are standing together with Bradley Manning at Fort Meade and across the country, Veterans for Peace took to the streets, taveled at community events and brought attention to his trial and are bringing to attention the 60th anniversary of the signing of the Korean War Armistice. We have veteran Diane Wilson at the White House yesterday, co-founder of CodePink being arrested for refusing to leave the sidewalk in front of the White House. We have a protest against the US prison at Guantanamo Bay and I just want to say Diane Wilson is a former Army medic, a Veteran for Peace, and she said, "I decided to take drastic action because time is of the essence. President Obama doesn't hear our message and if he doesn't act soon, the blood of the men on hunger strike at Guantanamo will be on his hands." There were many protesters at the White House

this week. Members of Veterans for Peace were arrested as they refused to leave the sidewalk while speaking about the 86 Guantanamo prisoners who've been cleared for release and yet remain imprisoned. Colonel Ann Wright was there. We have a great movement going on in this country and if you simply are a victim of the commercial press, you're not going to know about it. So, this is what's happening right now, Fred.

Fred: Well, these are the only hopes right now, in my opinion, for America. We just have to realize that President Obama, to understand the power of the Executive Branch you have to understand that before President Obama came into power, he was a decent guy. He did believe in transparency, freedom of speech, and so forth and so on. After he took over the Executive Branch, he completely switched and precisely because he's a liberal he's been slowly, under his titular leadership, the Executive Branch has been slowly building the infrastructure of a police state in this country and that's not an exaggeration. We're not nearly a police state yet. People like these courageous people you just mentioned are able to demonstrate but slowly and surely, between the government spying on our phone calls, between these gigantic DNA databases and biometric databases being built up and so forth and so on, American democracy is at stake. American freedom is at stake. I always think of that statement by Martin Neimoller during the thirties that when they went after the Jews I didn't say anything, when they went after the Catholics I didn't say anything, and then they came for me. We as a nation have sat by while our leaders have slaughtered millions and millions of innocent people.

Blase: We can't allow that to continue. The Democrats, many of them, are just trying to support the President in spite of what he does and that is not acceptable because as we observe, and yes, we were happy with his election. That's nice, but we don't defend everything. I feel that he's a victim of power. If I recall he said two weeks ago, what the CIA wants the CIA gets, and I think we could say that applies to the insurance companies – what they want they get; they want to handle the medical care, they can't do it. They're not competent to do it. They're there to raise money. They're there to raise a profit. They are not in the healthcare business but what the insurance companies want that's what they get. No

single payer. What the military wants the military gets. What the banks want the banks get. What the NSA wants the NSA gets. Then you finally get down to, what about 300 million people or so – what do they get? An increase of their social security tax for the workers. We have a situation here that is not sustainable. We have many people that know that. The majority of our people are opposed to our perpetual wars. We are in a situation very different from the days that you and I remember protesting the war in Indochina where we were looked upon as the devil. Today when we go out, people are saying “Thank you; we agree with you.” And we’re not accustomed to that but we find that there is a consciousness that is at a much higher level than it was in the sixties and the seventies.

Fred: And I’m also very excited about what I think is a tremendous potential for an alliance between people who are traditional like us – let’s call us progressives for a moment or people who are concerned about US mass murders abroad – and libertarians and conservatives who distrust government and are now finally beginning to wake up as symbolized by Rand Paul and his opposition to the drone strikes which I was very pleased by. What we need is a coalition of people who actually believe in freedom and I think that there’s a tremendous potential for this coalition over the next decade as more and more people realize what we’re up against. And let me just say a few words, Blase if I might, about what we’re up against. I tell this story in my article and I’m just going to briefly say it here.

I interviewed over a thousand refugees from the Plain of Jars in Northern Laos, all of whom had had their villages wiped off the face of the earth, thousands of people were exterminated from US bombing and the worst bombing occurred at the end of 1968 and then on into ’69 it quintupled and there was no military reason for it. And I remember being in Laos trying to figure out why they suddenly bombed five times more. Why were they committing virtual genocide against these people from the air? A savage, virtual holocaust when there was no military reason for it. And finally there was a hearing and Senator Fulbright asked that question to the Deputy US Ambassador to Laos and this is what he responded and I think if you understand this you can understand what we’re up against and he said and this is an exact

quote. I'm not making this up. This had occurred after the bombing of North Vietnam and he said, "Well, we had all those planes sitting around and couldn't just let them stay there with nothing to do."

When you join the Executive Branch, nobody had anything against these Laotians, they simply were not considered as human beings. They were treated as human garbage. Their existence didn't even count. No one in the Executive Branch said, "Well, wait a minute – if we quintuple the bombing, we're going to murder tens of thousands of the kindest, gentlest, sweetest people on earth." We know that that was just not in the discussion.

Now today, nobody's really asked the question yet – why is the NSA listening in on millions of phone calls. President Obama just told us that we don't have to worry about Al-Qaeda anymore. There's just a couple of dozen people. Well, why if the problem is a couple dozen people or a hundred people, obviously the most effective way to go after them would be police work where we work together. The Pakistanis knew where Osama bin Laden was. If we were an ally of Pakistan we could have captured him years earlier instead of being seen as an enemy because of our drone strikes. Well, what's going on is within the NSA, in this intelligence community has had hundreds of millions of dollars thrown at them since 9/11, and they have to invent missions to justify getting next year's budget, so let's spy on millions of Americans phone calls. Then we have to hire people to analyze the phone calls. Look at the drone strike issue. As I mentioned to you, it began when they were going after named Al-Qaeda leaders who they knew. Suddenly they switched to signature strikes where they don't know people's names and they're just killing thousands of people without even knowing who they are because the drones were available.

Blase: It happened once again with 9/11 – all of the intelligentsia said, "Look, a terrible crime has been committed against the United States of America, some 3,000 people have been killed. Let's ask the police agencies of the world to help us apprehend any living criminals that were

responsible.” But instead of that we attack Afghanistan who had nothing to do with it. Somebody may have been hiding there but you don’t blow up Chicago because there are criminals there.

Fred: Well, the people we should have bombed – we should have taken out Hamburg, Germany since the thing was orchestrated there. But the point I’m trying to make is that every American right now is threatened not by “evil people” as we classically understand it, but by soulless mindless bureaucracies whose only goal in life is to increase their budget. The individuals in question want to make more money, advance in their careers, and they’re creating a surveillance state and a turn-key police state in this country, not because they’re like the Gestapo in their motivation. They’re simply looking for ways to make more money and advance their bureaucratic interests and then ideally, land a nice, big-paying private sector job. The big shots who go to work for the NSA, the Michael Hayden and this one and that one, they’re all making a million bucks a year right now working for the private sector. They got their contracts from people who they gave their contracts to when they were at the NSA with the understanding that we’ll take care of you. Give Boeing millions of dollars to spy on somebody and it’s understood that you’ll get a big job with Boeing when you leave.

Blase: It’s called the banality of evil and it is done by careerists that follow orders, saying how do I torture correctly? How do I pour the water into this person’s mouth? I want to do this right because I might get a promotion; I might get a better job so I want to really be good at this and of course, Chris Hedges has written extensively on what happens to careerists when they just become company people and the company is God and the company is the cult and they do what the cult wants, no matter what it is. It can’t be vile enough. So this is what we have to work our way out of and you certainly saw this in the absolute destruction that took place in Laos but it hasn’t changed. That phrase you quoted about having all those planes sitting around and not being able to let them stay there with nothing to do is a statement of a mental and moral vacuum and in this whole thing, Fred, is that we have to understand that we have to deal with ethics and morality and when you use the word “evil” it is an acceptable word. It has

been used by philosophers for thousands of years. It is something that should not have happened. It is a violation of justice. It is a violation of the equilibrium in society and it can be personal and it can be collective and right now we're facing a collective cult of violence perpetrated by a little nation that has 4% of the world's people and it also has become a prison state where we have 25% of the prisoners of the world which is a reflection of our foreign policy, the largest number of prisoners of any nation on earth, 80,000 of them in solitary confinement which is defined as torture and they are beginning their own Guantanamo hunger strike. On July 8th there will be another huge hunger strike of US prisoners who are held in solitary.

Fred: Well, I think you know that the real question that each of us faces as an American is, "Is our loyalty to this country and its principles or is our loyalty to an Executive Branch who we pay to lie to us?" I think personally that I've withdrawn my moral allegiance to the United States Executive Branch. The latest example that I think is particularly striking and I think this would resonate with any American. Let's say you are an employee today with the NSA or the CIA or one of the thousand government agencies that we pay to spy on us and to track us. The McClatchy newspapers has just revealed, they have a program called Balance Informant, you're sitting even at Booz Allen, you're now being told that you must spy on everyone else in your agency and if they discover that you're not or that you knew that so and so was doing something wrong you're going to be fired. So you're being told that if you work for the Executive Branch you must turn in someone who might be your best friend, who might be a relative, might be your co-worker. This is the kind of behavior that we learn that the communists do. I start out my next article by saying that most Americans would think that it's the KGB or the Gestapo or the Chinese politburo that was keeping all these secrets from their citizens, spying on them, now telling them that they have to spy on their friends and neighbors and if they don't they'll lose their own jobs, but it isn't. It's our own government and it's time we wake up before it's too late.

Blase: Well, let's look at Booz Allen or any corporation. They are responsible for getting the highest possible profit for their members, for their stockholders, so they have to do that, so if there's not a problem they'd better find one because the law says that they have to maximize profit in order to be a good CEO.

Fred: Exactly. Mission Creep is one of the famous terms. And the other thing that was pointed out in "Top Secret America" that I find particularly scary is at that point they were using the figure 1.4 million, I've heard the figure as high as 4 million – let's just use the lower figure, 1.4 million people in this country have top secret clearances at this point. Now think of that. Hundreds of millions of documents have been classified, kept from the American people, all in the name of protecting us from a dozen people in Pakistan, the Al-Qaeda in Pakistan. The point of the story is that in order to get a top secret clearance you have to strip yourself of your privacy. You have to open up every detail of your life to outside people who investigate you. Now once you've done that you have no sympathy, obviously if you're willing to give up your privacy why wouldn't any other good American be willing to give up his privacy? The difference is that you got a \$200,000 a year job and you're set for life. You can't be fired. The top secret America, the people with these top secret clearances, by the time they get their clearance, what Dana Priest the author of "Top Secret America", she called it a "passport to prosperity" so we are creating, and by the way to get your top secret clearance you have to behave yourself obviously. They don't want dope smokers. They don't want people who have protested. So we're creating this kind of inner party, if I can use the term from "1984" of soulless bureaucrats and they live all among themselves now. You know they were all living in Loudon, Virginia – the richest county in America. It's not Silicon Valley. It's people with top secret clearances whose job it is to spy on you and you're paying them to do it! Sometimes I feel like I'm going insane. I can't believe that this is happening.

Blase: We have intelligence committees in the Congress and they can talk to these people in intelligence and they talk to them and they're given certain secret information and then they're

reminded that when they leave this committee, you can't talk about it. So even the Congress has attempted to be silenced on these issues which is a slight problem, I believe.

Fred: Well, you know the Executive Branch is the most powerful institution in the history of the world and it also runs America. Now it is true that there are many good, I know them, journalists who I really respect and they write their books and they reveal this secret or they reveal that secret. They win their Pulitzers. It doesn't change a thing. There've been dozens of exposés in the last ten years and actually what it does is it gives the American people the illusion that we have a free press. Edward Snowden came out with his revelations and within a day it was as if, Dianne Feinstein, the head of the Senate Intelligence Committee, and Mike Rogers, the head of the House Intelligence Committee, were acting like they were afraid of becoming witnesses at a Moscow show trial. They immediately rush out without knowing anything at all, and simply repeat the talking points that they were given by the NSA. How do we know that? Well, Senator Feinstein, who claims to be the head of the Senate Intelligence Committee, is up on all these programs. The first words out of her mouth was to say that the New York Subway Bomber, Mr. Aziz, had been captured as a result of the NSA listening in on millions of Americas. Two days later, the Guardian published an article pointing out that that was an outright lie. He'd been captured in Britain from their surveilling his e-mail. It had nothing to do with the NSA. Clearly she doesn't know what she's talking about. She's a disgrace as a Senator. The legislative branch is our only hope for controlling the Executive, but the Executive is so powerful that the Congressmen or spokesmen are just PR representatives of the Executive.

Blase: I'm speaking today to Fred Branfman who is the author of a number of books on the Indochina War. He served as Director of Project Air War and is an authority on the secret war conducted without our knowledge in Laos. His articles have been published in the New York Times, the Washington Post, and Harper's. His latest article appears in Alternet this week and is entitled, "The World's Most Evil and Lawless Institution: The Executive Branch of the United States Government."

I think we have to appeal at this time to Antonio Gramsci, Fred, who said “I have an absolute negative feeling intellectually about where we’re going so I have a pessimism of the intellect. I see fascism growing, Nazism growing. I have a pessimism of the intellect but I want you to know,” says Gramsci, “that I have an absolute optimism of the will.”

We are going to change this situation. And in order to change anything, first of all, you have to understand it and understand that it is not negative to identify a serious cancer. It is positive to identify the cancer. Then you go on and say, what are the steps to change this situation? As the father of Peace Studies, Dr. Johan Galtung said, “I have grown to hate the American empire. I love the American republic.”

So, we’re over-reaching throughout the world and the time has come for internationalism, and international law and order, which has been established through the United Nations which was designed to end the scourge of war and we don’t accept that. So, what is the way out of this mess, Fred, so we can have the “optimism of the will” that Antonio Gramsci demanded.

Fred: Well, my personal motto is a quote from “1984” that “one’s obligation is to remain sane if one is to continue the human heritage.” I think the first step for all of us is to hold on to our sanity, hold on to the truth.

The second step is to take action and I think we’ll have no choice. I was not one of the early anti-war protestors in the ‘60’s but eventually I found that I had no choice. I was swept up in it, similarly with the Civil Rights movement. America is now approaching its moment of truth, in my opinion in which basically we have an Executive Branch – the best description I can think of for it is an Occupation Force. It’s occupying America. It’s occupying our institution. And those who love America have no choice but to oppose it because it stands for the opposite of everything this country was founded on. It’s an un-democratic institution. It’s an immoral

institution. It's a selfish institution. The people in it are careerists simply trying to get ahead. And I think that I personally like that Gramsci quote. I also often quote Jerry Brown because I interviewed him in the '80's and he was at that point had a radio show where he had gone completely left and he had Noam Chomsky and the equivalent on, almost every day.

Blase: I was on his show as well as one of his guests.

Fred: And I interviewed him and said, "Jerry, by your own analysis, we're finished. How do you keep yourself from committing suicide?" and I did this for so long and he said, "Well, you know I wake up every morning and I go for a walk along Lake Merritt and when I go for a long walk all this stuff melts and I'm alive and I feel the spirit." And I think each of us right now have to begin by doing the same, by doing things that put us in touch with the life force, that put us in touch with people, that put us in touch with our own feelings. No American, even the people in the Executive Branch, can countenance burning innocent people alive. They just turn their head and pretend they don't see. I think we have to look at that. We have to look at what's going on in Guantanamo and then, I think from that will flow the action. My hope is that progressives and libertarians and conservatives can unite around maintaining the beauty of America. I grew up like you; we all believe in freedom and democracy and human rights and all we can do is hope that our fellow citizens will wake up.

Blase: The art of revolution as described by Dr. King, the moral revolution that we seek is exactly connected with the uniting of forces. That includes the uniting of Republicans, Democrats, Greens, Socialists, everyone who understands the moral issue, not to come together on ideology because no one comes together on ideology whether it be religious sectarianism or political sectarianism. You do not unite on the ideology. The ideology separates. What you unite on are clear issues of justice, morality, peace, patience, love, courage and these are the things that we see in the saints today, like that classic example of the water-only fast of Diane Wilson, 57 days on water only. Then going over the fence at the White

House yesterday and saying that “I decided to take drastic action because time is of the essence.” Here is a Vietnam veteran, a woman medic fasting together in communion with these people. These are the ones who are going to show us the way. This is the vanguard and they are capable of dealing with people who say “Well, I’m a Communist and I want to do it this way...” and they say “All right, you have your ideology, that’s lovely, but now let’s close Guantanamo and that’s the issue. I don’t want to hear about your ideology today. I don’t want to hear about your Republican ideology. I don’t want to hear about whether you’re a Christian or a Buddhist. I want you to say whether you agree with me that peace and justice are possible and that we can work together in doing it.”

That’s where we are at. The ideology separates what unites us. It’s action for justice. I think that’s where we’re at.

Fred: I agree and I think one element that I would add to it. I agree with you that people like Diane Wilson and Medea Benjamin and Jodie Evans and many others are the heroes of our time and I know them very well. Jodie is an old friend of mine and what’s always struck me about them is they’re coming from their heart and they’re not seeking results. In other words, this is the big excuse that many of us use, including me. Why should I do that? It’s not going to accomplish anything, anyway. I remember very well staying at Jodie’s house ten years ago when nobody knew who CodePink was. It had no impact at all. And Jodie was, every single day, working eight hours a day, sending out envelopes, making phone calls, because she felt she had to as a human being living on this earth. I think the people that I most respect and in the older generation, people I know very well, like Howard Zinn and Dan Ellsberg and Noam Chomsky – these are people who don’t say, “Well, I’ll only do it if I can be sure that there will be results.” What they say is that given who I am as a human being, I can’t live in this world unless I act to stop the murder of the innocent.

Blase: That's right out of where Mother Teresa was coming from; she said that we don't have to be successful. We have to be faithful. And these people, Jodie and the others, have been faithful about the need for peace, the need for justice, a belief in the fact that war can be abolished and it is part and parcel of an ongoing slavery. The people who fight wars are slaves. They're treated like slaves. They are told to kill. They go insane. And they kill themselves.

And this is not acceptable. We have to be faithful to these beliefs and I think we can turn it around. I want to really thank you for being with us today because this issue is critical. There are people that think that we're supposed to simply praise the country, especially during this time of July 4th. You can praise any dictatorship in the world. You can praise Adolf Hitler. You cannot criticize.

Fred: I just want to add one last word because it's the most current issue for me right now. I'm very moved by Edward Snowden and what he did and what he basically said was, "Yes, I have a wonderful house in Hawaii. Yes, I'm making \$200,000 a year. Yes, I have a girlfriend. I'm having great sex. Yes, life is good. But I can't live with myself."

And that's what each of us has to ask is can we really live with ourselves? Is it enough to have a comfortable, material life while your entire society is collapsing around you while everything decent and moral that this country stands for is violated by soulless bureaucrats? That's what we have to ask.

Blase: They're there and they're coming out now and this is the time to come out. And they'll be much happier by doing it.

I want to thank you for being with us today, Fred Branfman. It's been a pleasure talking to you.