

Signs of a Police State Are Everywhere

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Years ago, a well known author, Bertram Gross, wrote that fascism would come to the U.S. with a friendly face: not with Nuremburg rallies, or doctrines of racial superiority, without formally banning parties, abrogating the Constitution or eliminating the three branches of government, but with the same nationalist fervor, arbitrary dictatorial laws, and violent military conquests.

In the U.S., signs of a police state are evident everywhere. Thousands of U.S. citizens of Middle Eastern descent have been arrested without charges, and the exercise of their right to criticize U.S. policy in the Middle East has been branded as support for terrorism. This pogrom has been encouraged and incited by government officials, especially by the police, both local and federal, and by assorted veterans' groups and demagogic politicians. The president has decreed dictatorial powers, setting up anonymous military tribunals to try "suspicious" immigrants and overseas "suspects" who can be kidnapped and tried in the U.S. Habeas corpus has been suspended. School children have been forced to sing quasi-religious anthems and pledge allegiance to the flag. Many employees who voice criticism of the war or U.S. support of Israel or denounce Israeli massacres of Palestinians have been suspended or fired. All letters, emails, and phone calls are subject to control without any judicial review. The mass media spews government propaganda, churns out chauvinist stories, and is relatively silent on overseas massacres and domestic repression.

Mutual Suspicion

One of the hallmarks of a totalitarian regime is the creation of a state of mutual suspicion in which civil society is turned into a network of secret police informers. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) soon after September 11 exhorted every U.S. citizen to report any suspicious behavior by friends, neighbors, relatives, acquaintances, and strangers. Between September and the end of November almost 700,000 denunciations were registered. Thousands of Middle Eastern neighbors, local shop owners, and employees were denounced, as were numerous other U.S. citizens. None of these denunciations led to any arrests or even information related to September 11. Yet hundreds and thousands of innocent persons were investigated and harassed by the federal police. Tens of millions of Americans have become paranoid -- fearing "terrorism" in their everyday work, shopping, and leisure activities. People refrain from the mildest criticism of the war or the government for fear they will be labeled terrorist sympathizers, reported to the government, investigated, and lose their job.

Scapegoating

Friendly fascism scapegoats Arabs -- arresting, investigating, accusing, targeting -- while its public discourse proclaims the virtues of tolerance and pluralism. Racial doctrines are not in evidence, but racial profiling of "Middle-Eastern" people is an established and accepted operating procedure of federal, state, and local police. Large concentrations of Arab communities, such as in Dearborn, Michigan, feel like they are living in a ghetto, waiting for a pogrom to happen. The head of the FBI considers all Arab civic, charity, and other associations suspect of aiding terrorism and subject to investigation and its members targets for arrest. The massive "razzias," police sweeps into houses, stores, and offices of civic groups, have created a siege mentality. The police campaign has aroused the racist instincts and fomented a rash of civilian insults and hostility.

Executive Dictatorial Powers

In totalitarian states, the supreme leader seizes dictatorial powers, suspends constitutional guarantees (citing "emergency powers") empowers the secret police, and handpicks tribunals to arbitrarily arrest, judge, and condemn the accused to prison or execution. On November 13, President Bush took the fatal step toward assuming dictatorial powers. Without consulting Congress, Bush decreed an emergency order. The order permits the government to arrest non-citizens who they have "reason to believe" are terrorists to be tried by military tribunal. The trials are secret and the prosecutors do not have to present evidence if it is "in the interests of national security."

The condemned can be executed even if one-third of the military judges disagree. Dictatorial powers to jail or execute suspects without due process is the essence of totalitarian rulers.

In mid-November, the Department of Justice refused to disclose the identities and status of more than 1,100 persons arrested since September 11. As in totalitarian regimes, political prisoners are constantly interrogated without lawyers and without charges by the FBI in the hope of forcing confessions.

On October 26 Bush signed the USA/Patriot Act, which vastly strengthened the powers of the police over civil society. The extension of secret police powers was approved almost unanimously by Congress (most of whose members never read the law). Every clause of this law violated the U.S. Constitution. Under this law:

- a. any federal law enforcement agency may secretly enter any home or business, collect evidence, not inform the citizen of the entry, and then use the evidence (seized or planted) to convict the occupant of a crime;
- b. any police agency has the power to monitor all Internet traffic and emails, intercept cell phones without warrant of millions of "suspects";
- c. any Federal police agency can invade any business premises and seize all records on the basis that it is "connected" with a terrorist investigation.

Citizens who publicly protest these arbitrary, invasive police actions can be arrested.

The USA/Patriot Act, like its totalitarian counterparts, has a vague, loose definition of "terrorism" that allows it to repress any dissident organization and protest activity. According to section 802 of the Act, terrorism is defined as "activities that involve acts dangerous to human life that are a violation of the criminal laws of the United States (and) appear to be intended to intimidate or coerce a civilian population (or) . . . to influence the policy of the government by intimidation or coercion." Any anti-globalization protest, such as occurred in Seattle, can now be labeled "terrorist," its leaders and participants arrested, their homes and offices searched, documents seized, and, if they are not citizens, shipped to military tribunals. These "emergency" decrees and laws are in place until 2005 and beyond if the investigations began prior to the terminal year.

Perhaps, when the country has been re-democratized and the chauvinist fever has ebbed and a fair and pluralistic media has replaced the current state propaganda machines, we may discover harsh truths. When the secret police files are opened we may discover that many honorable and respectable people denounced their neighbors and friends because of personal vendettas; that professionals secretly informed on their colleagues who were critical of Israel; that the FBI spied on millions of law-abiding progressive American citizens because right-wing ideologues sought to eliminate them. In studying the recordings, transcripts, and videos of the messages of the mass media, we will be able to see how easily, quickly, and completely they became propaganda arms of the friendly fascist state.

Researchers will marvel or be shocked by the corruption of political language: massive bombings of large cities in the name of "anti-terrorism"; euphemisms to justify massacres; mass killings of prisoners of war described as "killed during a prisoner revolt." Historians will also note the absent voices of critics; the absence of any reports of civilian casualties. Future scholars watching videos of Defense Secretary Rumsfeld's jocular pronouncements to "kill all terrorists," will not join the laughing audience of journalists, remembering the mountains of corpses executed in cold blood by Rumsfeld's surrogate mercenaries.

Historians will debate whether the mass acquiescence by the U.S. public to the bombings and executions was a reflection of the incessant and all-encompassing propaganda or whether they were willing accomplices of the slaughter. The philosophers and psychologists will debate whether the flag waving celebrants of the New World Order were motivated by the smiling faces and bellicose rhetoric of their leaders or embraced friendly fascism because of their paranoia, fear, and anxiety induced by the voices of authority and amplified by the media.

This view presumes that critical voices will survive the current period of friendly fascism and build a movement to challenge its power. One can hope and believe it will happen because, otherwise, the lies and murders of the present will go unanswered.

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- *Globalization Unmasked: Imperialism in the 21st Century* with Henry Veltmeyer (Zed Books, 2001),
- *The Dynamics of Social Change in Latin America* with Henry Veltmeyer (McMillan, 2000),
- *Empire or Republic: Global Power or Domestic Decay in the US* with Morris Morley (Routledge, 1995),
- *Latin America in the Time of Cholera: Electoral Politics, Market Economics, and Permanent Crisis* with Morris Morley (Routledge, 1992),
- *Latin America: Bankers, Generals and the Struggle for Social Justice* (Rowman & Littlefield, 1986),
- *Class, State, and Power in the Third World, With Case Studies on Class Conflict in Latin America* (Rowman & Littlefield, 1981)
- *The Nationalization of Venezuelan Oil* (Holt Rinehart & Winston, 1978),
- *The United States and Chile: Imperialism and the Overthrow of the Allende Government* (Monthly Review Press, 1975),
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- *Cultivating revolution; the United States and agrarian reform in Latin America* (Random House, 1971)
- *Politics and Social Forces in Chilean Development* (University of California Press, 1969).

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A superset list of his articles in Spanish is at: <http://www.rebellion.org/petras.htm>