

by Samuel Francis

The Great Crackpot Crackdown

Within a few days of the American conquest of Iraq, it was obvious that the Bush administration's "War on Terrorism" was a monumental flop that has probably endangered the United States and Americans abroad far more than it has protected them. Not only were American soldiers being slowly picked off by snipers inside Iraq but terrorist bombings in Saudi Arabia and Morocco showed clearly that the conquest of two countries since the September 11 attacks had accomplished nothing toward the destruction or incapacitation of the international terrorist network. Rather ignominiously, the administration was obliged to declare the country at the "threat level" of "orange" ("high risk") and close the U.S. embassy in Riyadh. For all the triumphalist chest-thumping, cheer-leading, and self-righteous crowing from the President himself down to the lowest stomper of Dixie Chicks albums, it was transparent that the United States was in retreat, not the terrorists.

Unable to catch, kill, or defeat any real terrorists, the administration has simply selected phony ones to harass as much as possible, and the most accessible fake terrorists are the "extremists" of the far right. Many of them are, in fact, extremists by any reasonable definition, and not a few are downright repellent. Nevertheless, the government—for all its "crackdown" on them and their tasteless websites—has yet to show that they have committed any serious criminal offense (even, in some cases, any offense at all), let alone plotted, committed, or even seriously thought about terrorism.

Late in May, the *Washington Post* detailed the federal government's intrepid apprehension of such "hate group" leaders in a story consigned to its "Metro" section, because the main case it discussed involved a gentleman in Northern Virginia named Byron Cecchini.

Mr. Cecchini is what the *Post* calls a "self-described white supremacist," whose website boasts historical photographs of lynched blacks and the usual antisemitica beloved of such minds as the one Mr. Cecchini seems to possess. Nevertheless, the warrant for the search of his house, seizure of his person, and confiscation of his computer and files by federal authori-

ties could accuse him of no specific criminal conduct. All it alleged was that Mr. Cecchini had a "violent criminal history" and "probably owned weapons," as the *Post* reported. In the course of scrutinizing the bizarre apparatus the warrant uncovered, the feds found T-shirts that Mr. Cecchini was selling that sported, in place of the word "Nike," the word "Nazi." That was enough to justify the nighttime raid of Mr. Cecchini's house and hauling him off to jail—for the heinous crime of trademark violation!

The *Post* reported several similar cases of federal arrests of "white supremacists," "hate group leaders," "extremists," and similar species but was unable to specify any serious crime charged to any of them. The worst offenses it could find were "firearms violations" allegedly committed by a Pennsylvania Klansman, who supposedly desired to buy grenades and bomb abortion clinics. But the *Post* was alert to what the government was up to:

It is a tactic being used with increasing success nationwide as authorities step up efforts to curb domestic hate and terror groups: prosecute any illegal activity by known extremists and, at the same time, work to infiltrate potentially dangerous groups to guard against future attacks.

No "hate group" in this country has committed any act of terrorism, of course, despite the habit of some bigmouths on the far right of spouting off about how much they admire Osama bin Laden and how many buildings they would like to blow up. Yet, as the Oklahoma City bombing of 1995 shows, sometimes a crackpot takes their mouthing seriously and actually commits an act of terror. For that reason, both local and federal authorities ought to keep such characters under at least minimal investigation, but the "tactic" of actually arresting and charging them with more-or-less fabricated offenses goes well beyond any reasonable policy of counterterrorism and well beyond what should be tolerated in a free country. But that's just the point, isn't it?

The "tactic" deployed by the federal



government is a pretty clear method of closing down dissent on the right, starting with individuals and groups so far out on the fringe that few will miss them or care whether they are arrested, imprisoned, or suppressed at all but working its way toward individuals and groups that are not so far out and who support, not causes like lynching blacks and blowing up abortion clinics, but halting immigration, stopping abortion, defending the Confederate flag, opposing the normalization of homosexuality, supporting the Second Amendment, advocating an isolationist or America First foreign policy, and similar causes that lie well within what even today remains a "respectable" conservative orbit. So far, I know of no government efforts to suppress or harass such movements, but skeptics should recall Martin Niemöller's famous remark that "First they came for the Communists, and I didn't speak up, because I wasn't a Communist," etc. Hackneyed as the passage is (and as uncertain as Niemöller's not being a communist is—he accepted the Lenin Prize from the Soviets in 1967), it expresses an important and relevant truth that "mainstream" conservatives of whatever ideological orientation ought to think about.

Indeed, to their credit, some conservatives are thinking about it, as evidenced by the joint press conference held some months ago by ex-Rep. Bob Barr, the American Conservative Union, and similar conservative activists in Washington to object to the government's "Patriot Act" and its enhancement in "Patriot II" legislation not yet introduced in Congress, and Rep. Ron Paul (R-TX) has made similar statements. Not all conservatives share the misgivings of these spokesmen, however. Sen. Orrin Hatch, chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, wants to pass legislation that would make per-

manent the restrictions on civil liberties and the enhanced federal power granted temporarily in the current Patriot Act, while who should pop up to defend the Patriot Act but those Patriotic Conservatives at *National Review*.

In the June 2 issue of *National Review*, Ramesh Ponnuru rakes over the coals conservatives who have criticized the act and other measures adopted by the federal government since the September 11 attacks and finds nothing amiss with the creeping encroachments on civil liberties. "A calm look at the Patriot Act," he writes, "shows that it's less of a threat to civil liberties than, say, campaign finance reform." Mr. Ponnuru may be correct that some conservative (and liberal) criticisms of the act are misplaced, but his zeal in defending the legislation and the general thrust of increased government power shows how much we can count on a unified conservative resistance to the trend. Some "conservatives" will object; some won't. So meaningless has the "conservative" label now become that predicting how those who wear it will respond to any proposed course of government action is virtually impossible.

If, like Ponnuru, you approve of Patriot I, you'll adore Patriot II. In an analysis of the proposed law, the American Civil Liberties Union maintains that

Under the Patriot Act [II], any individual or group that breaks the law with the intent of influencing the government can be labeled a terrorist if their activities are "dangerous to human life." Under that definition, diverse "direct-action" organizations, including Operation Rescue or the World Trade Organization protesters, could be labeled "terrorist organizations."

According to a similar analysis published by the leftish Center for Public Integrity, Section 501 of the new act

would establish that an American citizen could be expatriated "if, with the intent to relinquish his nationality, he becomes a member of, or provides material support to, a group that the United States has designated as a 'terrorist organization.'" But whereas a citizen formerly had to state his intent to relinquish his citizenship, the new law affirms that his intent can be "inferred from conduct." Thus, en-

gaging in the lawful activities of a group designated as a "terrorist organization" by the Attorney General could be presumptive grounds for expatriation.

And how, exactly, does a group become a "terrorist organization"? Among other ways, according to William Jasper in the *New American* (May 5), Section 423 states that "the term 'designated terrorist organization' means an organization which . . . is designated as a terrorist organization by an Executive Order" or under the authority of various federal laws already on the books. A "terrorist organization" can also be a single person "listed or designated by an Executive Order as supporting terrorist activity." In other words, apparently the president of the United States would be able to designate any person or any group, from Laura Bush to the imperial wizard of the Ku Klux Klan, as a "terrorist" or "terrorist organization" and thereby effectively strip him of his citizenship and expel him from the United States. I admit that I have not read the text of the proposed act, which is 86 pages of legalese and has not yet, as far as I know, been officially released to the public (CPI has published a draft on its website), but if even half of what its critics on both the left and the right say about it is true, then it is undeniable that the Bush administration is intentionally seeking to transform the United States into a police state.

The crackdown on the crackpots of the far right, then, may be merely a kind of test run for the masters of the new order to see how well their agents can carry out what will soon be routine functions and to test the public reaction to their new "tactic." While left-wing outfits like the ACLU and the Center for Public Integrity have been outspoken in their opposition to Patriot II, the right will probably receive the most attention from the new Gestapo. Before the war with Iraq, for example, it was common for "movement conservatives" to grouse about the massive antiwar rallies being organized by the Workers World Party, a left-communist group that allegedly has received secret funding from the North Korean government to finance its antiwar activism. If those allegations contain any truth, there would be good reason for the federal government to take a hard look at the party and its leaders, to launch a full investigation of its funding, and to inform the media about what is going on. But

nothing has happened to the extreme, anti-American, antiwar left. All the crackdown has been directed at the right, at small, unimportant, ugly, but largely harmless "groups" that contain barely a handful of transient followers, have no influence or standing, receive virtually no funding from anyone, and have committed no serious crimes. "You prosecute who [sic] you can prosecute," one "law enforcement source" chuckled to the *Washington Post* after Mr. Cecchini was busted for invading the rights of Nike. It's safe and easy to prosecute the extreme right, not only because the "extremists" of the far right rarely shoot back but because no "conservatives" (least of all *National Review* and its squadrons of "Patriots") will object or care—and many may even cheer the government on—while the left, if not actually pressuring the government to suppress the right, will lodge only ceremonial objections, to prove how committed to "civil liberties" it is.

It might be nice, while the nation is at the "orange" level of terrorism alert, for the government actually to arrest a few real terrorists instead of merely prosecuting whomever it thinks it can throw in jail with a minimum of effort and danger. Some years ago, I coined the term "anarcho-tyranny" to describe the kind of government that is evolving in the United States and the Western world in general, a form of rule in which the state either refuses or is unable to enforce the law against real criminals (anarchy) and, therefore, concocts new laws that criminalize the innocent and punishes them (tyranny). Gun control and the foolish "drug war" of the Bush I era are examples of anarcho-tyrannical policies, but the "war on terrorism" of the Bush II era takes the prize. So far, it has failed to end the quite real danger of foreign Islamic terrorism and, for all the vast military and governmental power at its disposal, has proved itself unable even to reduce the level of threats to this country; at the same time, however, it has managed to alarm both the left and the right about the authoritarian direction of its efforts and the threat to liberty it poses. The logical and natural culmination of anarcho-tyranny is, of course, tyranny pure and simple, and with the now dominant neoconservative "right" and its "religious right" allies fully on board with the emerging federal police state, there appears to be little reason to expect any effective resistance to the trend that could prevent it from winding up at that destination. ©

The Rockford Files

by Scott P. Richert

WWMD?

I want to speak to you today about war and empire.

Killing, or at least the worst of it, is over in Iraq. Although blood will continue to spill—theirs and ours—be prepared for this. For we are embarking on an occupation that, if history is any guide, will be as damaging to our souls as it will be to our prestige, power, and security. But this will come later as our empire expands and in all this we become pariahs, tyrants to others weaker than ourselves. Isolation always impairs judgment and we are very isolated now.

We have forfeited the good will, the empathy the world felt for us after 9-11. We have folded in on ourselves, we have severely weakened the delicate international coalitions and alliances that are vital in maintaining and promoting peace and we are part now of a dubious troika in the war against terror with Vladimir Putin and Ariel Sharon, two leaders who do not shrink in Palestine or Chechnya from carrying out . . . gratuitous and senseless acts of violence. We have become the company we keep.

—Chris Hedges, *Rockford College commencement (May 17)*

I read about some squirrely guy,
Who claims, he just don't believe
in fightin'.
An' I wonder just how long,
The rest of us can count on bein' free.
They love our milk an' honey,
But they preach about some other
way of livin'.
When they're runnin' down my
country, hoss,
They're walkin' on the fightin' side
of me.

—Merle Haggard,
“The Fightin’ Side of Me”

When Rockford makes the national news (I once wrote), you can be certain that the story will not be positive and upbeat. That observation held true in mid-May, when the commencement ceremonies at Rockford College were marred by (de-

pending, it appears, almost entirely on your view on the war in Iraq) either commencement speaker and *New York Times* correspondent Chris Hedges or (according to the most reliable estimates) anywhere from 50 to 200 students and guests (out of a crowd of 2,000) who responded to Hedges’ speech with various behaviors, from turning their backs on the podium to shouting Hedges down to, on at least two occasions, pulling the plug on his microphone. While similar incidents had occurred at scores of speeches delivered by conservatives and establishment Republicans in the 60’s, 70’s, and 80’s, there was one important difference that may help explain the level of national attention: Hedges is an outspoken liberal, and those who disrupted his speech were, presumably, pro-war “conservatives.”

On the evening of May 17, when Kathy and Bethany Lewis, who had volunteered at the commencement, told me about the disturbance, it was inevitable that I would hear Merle Haggard’s voice singing inside my head. I was born in 1968, so most of my memories are post-Vietnam, but “The Fightin’ Side of Me” and “Okie From Muskogee” seem to form the soundtrack to my early life. (My father still has the live album that Merle recorded in Muskogee.) The lyrics fit well with the reflexive patriotism of a young boy growing up in a small town that was, at that time, still largely untouched by the social forces that were remaking America. Even today, when my views on Gulf War II are much closer to Chris Hedges’ than to Paul Wolfowitz’s (though I do not share Hedges’ ideological pacifism), a certain nostalgia sweeps over me when I hear “The Fightin’ Side of Me”—a far different reaction from the revulsion I feel when Toby Keith’s chest-thumping “Courtesy of the Red, White and Blue” comes blaring across my radio:

Oh, Justice will be served and the
battle will rage.
This big dog will fight when you
rattle his cage
You’ll be sorry that you messed
with the US of A
'Cuz we’ll put a boot in your ass
It’s the American way.



Hey Uncle Sam put your name at
the top of his list,
And the Statue of Liberty started
shaking her fist.
And the eagle will fly,
And there’s gonna be Hell,
When you hear Mother Freedom
start ringing her bell!
It’s gonna feel like the whole wide
world is raining down on you . . .
Brought to you courtesy of the Red,
White and Blue!

In the uproar that followed in the wake of Hedges’ speech, one thing became clear: Most Rockfordians, regardless of their position on the recent war, thought that the speech was inappropriate for a college commencement. With his monotone delivery and preachy introduction, Hedges came across more like a liberal clergyman than like the upbeat boosters usually called upon for such occasions. (Not surprisingly, Hedges is a former divinity student, and his father, to whom he dedicates his book *War Is a Force That Gives Us Meaning*, is an ordained minister.) Wade Provo, professor emeritus of French at Rockford College, aptly summed up the feelings of most Rockfordians in a letter that he submitted to the *Rockford Register Star*:

Know your audience. Fit your remarks to the audience and the occasion, and do not alienate your listeners. Mr. Hedges needs to accept responsibility for violating these principles of effective communication.

(The *Register Star*, which had supported the war in Iraq and had published its account of the speech under the headline “Speaker disrupts Rockford College graduation,” declined to print the letter.)