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When goods do not cross borders, soldiers will.

— *Frédéric Bastiat*

FUTURE OF FREEDOM

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The National Security-State and JFK, Part I

by *Jacob G. Hornberger*



In 1954 the CIA published a top-secret classified document titled “A Study of Assassination.” The document confirms that within seven years of the CIA’s founding in 1947, the agency was specializing in the art of assassination.

There are various fascinating aspects of the study. One is that the CIA was exploring different methods by which to kill people. The other is that the CIA was figuring out ways to keep people from discovering that it was involved in the assassination.

If we jump head ten years or so, we find that the art of assassination was being taught to Latin American military personnel at the School of the Americas. It was the U.S. mili-

tary’s primary training school for Latin American military officials and, in fact, was often referred to by Latin Americans as the “School of Assassins.” The art of torture was also being taught at the school, with actual torture manuals being used as part of the torture course.

While we still don’t know whether the CIA’s “Study of Assassination” evolved into a full-fledged assassination manual, similar to the Pentagon’s torture manuals, there is no doubt that its study of assassination continued to evolve and develop. Among the most fascinating strategic aspects of assassination that U.S. officials were teaching Latin American officials in the 1960s and 1970s was how to avoid detection in state-sponsored political assassinations. To discourage people from accusing the government of having assassinated a person, Latin American officials were counseled to blame the assassination on a communist.

Why a communist? Why not a capitalist? Or a businessman? Or a doctor?

To understand the cunning of the CIA’s “blame it on a communist” strategy, we have to go back to 1945 and the aftermath of World War II.

After Germany’s Nazi regime had been defeated, U.S. officials told

the American people that unfortunately, they could not rest. The reason, they said, was that the United States now faced an enemy that was arguably a much greater threat to the survival of the United States than Nazi Germany. This new enemy, they said, was America's World War II partner and ally the Soviet Union, which had been controlled by a communist regime since World War I.

U.S. officials maintained that there was a worldwide communist conspiracy, one that was based in Moscow, Russia, to take over the world, including the United States. If the U.S. government did not wage what became known as a "Cold War" against the Soviet Union and other communist regimes and possibly hot wars against communists and communist regimes, the United States, like the rest of the world, would inevitably fall to the communists.

Combatting communism

To combat this new enemy, U.S. officials said, it would be necessary to do a major restructuring of the federal government, which would involve converting the federal government from a limited-government republic, which the Constitution had called into existence, to what was called a national-security

state, a type of governmental system characterized by a massive and permanent military establishment, a secretive intelligence agency with omnipotent powers to undertake covert actions to protect national security, and secretive surveillance systems to monitor people's activities as part of the process of keeping the citizenry safe. Charged with the critically important task of protecting national security, which would become the two most important words in the American political lexicon, the national-security state began wielding omnipotent, totalitarian-like powers, including the power to harass, abuse, smear, ruin, spy on, and even assassinate people who were deemed to be threats to national security, including communists and communist sympathizers.

U.S. officials maintained that there was a worldwide communist conspiracy to take over the world.

Communists and the Soviet Union, however, were not the only threats that Americans were facing in the postwar environment, according to U.S. officials. There was also the threat involving the philosophy of communism or social-

ism, a philosophy which, generally speaking, entails having government watch over and take care of the citizenry with such things as guaranteed employment, retirement pensions, health care, minimum-wage laws, economic regulations, and education, as compared to a system in which people take care of themselves through economic enterprise, self-reliance, voluntary cooperation, and private charity.

As economic philosophies, communism and socialism (which were, for all practical purposes, interchangeable terms) lead to a nation's impoverishment and even destruction. The danger of communism and socialism, as U.S. officials viewed the situation, was that they were like a narcotic. Once people got a taste of them, they would become hooked and want more. As the Sirens' song of socialism caused people to demand more government services, the government would gradually move toward a full-fledged socialist economic system, which in turn would result in the destruction of the country.

The national-security establishment's concern over the possibility that socialism and communism would spread to the United States wasn't without foundation. For ex-

ample, in the 1930s Franklin Roosevelt had nationalized the gold-coin holdings of the American people, an action that was no different in principle from the nationalizations of private property that were taking place in communist countries. Moreover, with its enactment of Social Security, an idea that had originated among German socialists, the Roosevelt administration had ushered in the modern welfare state, which was a variation of the socialist model.

The danger of communism and socialism, as U.S. officials viewed the situation, was that they were like a narcotic.

Waging the Cold War domestically entailed a fierce anti-communist crusade against anyone suspected of having or having had communist or socialist leanings or connections to communists or communist organizations.

The FBI

During the Cold War, the FBI, a federal police force founded in 1908, became a part of the national-security establishment, sending its agents across the land to look for communists and suspected communists. Among the most promi-

ment victims of its anti-communist crusade was Martin Luther King, who the national-security establishment was convinced was a communist, which is why the FBI tried to blackmail him into committing suicide. In fact, the national-security establishment was convinced that the entire civil rights movement was a communist front.

It was an extremely frightening time for people who had believed in communism or socialism, had been members of the Communist Party, or who had been somehow connected to some socialist or communist organization. People were smeared and careers were damaged or destroyed. Even the careers of successful people such as Dalton Trumbo and the Hollywood Ten were severely damaged for having had connections to communists or communism. Who can forget that infamous inquisitorial question asked by the House Un-American Activities Committee (an Orwellian name if there ever was one) to people it subpoenaed to appear before it: “Are you now or have you ever been a member of the Communist Party?”

In their quest to cleanse the United States of communists and communism, the FBI and the CIA infiltrated their agents into suspect

organizations or acquired paid informants within them, with the intent of monitoring them, disrupting them, and even ruining them. Examples included the U.S. Communist Party, which openly promoted communism and socialism, and the Fair Play for Cuba Committee, which promoted the normalization of relations between the United States and Cuba. Although such organizations were legal under America’s political system, the FBI and the CIA, operating under such top-secret and illegal programs as COINTELPRO and Operation Chaos, did everything they could to surveil, infiltrate, disrupt, and even destroy such organization as well as their members.

Among the most prominent victims of its anti-communist crusade was Martin Luther King.

Since there is a fine line between leftist or progressive ideas and socialist and communist ideas, left-leaning organizations were often times put under surveillance by the FBI and the CIA. One example was an organization in Washington, D.C., named the Institute for Policy Studies. It was a leftist think tank that employed a man named Orlando Letelier, a communist-social-

ist who had served in the presidential administration of Salvador Allende in Chile and who was assassinated in Washington in 1976 as part of the Chilean national-security state's Cold War against communists and communism.

U.S. national-security state officials were looking for communists inside the military and inside the State Department.

As part of their anti-communist crusade, U.S. national-security state officials were looking for communists everywhere, even inside the military and inside the State Department. Critics of the crusade mockingly asserted that the FBI was looking under people's beds for communists. But the anti-communist crusade wasn't funny, at least not to the many people whose lives were destroyed, who were harassed, or whose friends or family members were smeared, economically ruined, executed, or assassinated by the national-security establishment, whose powers were expanding to meet what was perceived to be an ever-growing threat.

Throughout the Cold War, many people were so scared of communism that they failed to ask

important questions regarding the principles of a free society, such as: In a genuinely free society, do people have the right to believe in, promote, and advocate a philosophy that is destructive to freedom and economic well-being, such as communism or socialism? Do communists and socialists have a right to participate in the political process, including being elected or appointed to high office? Should government be engaged in covert and illegal activities, such as COINTELPRO and Operation Chaos, that are intended to monitor, disrupt, or destroy organizations and people promoting communism and socialism?

The U.S. national-security establishment said no, at least not in certain instances. Since communism and socialism were deemed to be destructive to the nation, communists and socialists were deemed to be threats to national security. That's why they were monitored, spied on, harassed, smeared, and even killed. Freedom, it was believed, did not entail the right to engage in activity that destroyed freedom, such as advocating socialism or communism.

Thus, the CIA's ingenious assassination strategy of blaming a covert state-sponsored assassination on a communist was based on the

notion that it would discourage people from pointing an accusatory finger at the intelligence establishment that had carried out the assassination. If a person accused the state or publicly questioned the official version of the assassination, he could be labeled a communist or a communist sympathizer and, therefore, he would risk his life's being wrecked by the insinuation. The "blame a communist" strategy would be especially effective in silencing people on the Left, given that they would be most susceptible to being labeled "pinkos," "fifth columnists," communists, or communist sympathizers.

Guatemala

The CIA's top-secret 1954 assassination manual was not written in a vacuum. It came about as part of a CIA regime-change operation, the second in the agency's history. The first one had occurred in Iran the previous year — 1953, when the CIA engineered a coup that ousted from power Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh, who had been elected by the Iranian parliament and appointed by the shah. They then supported the brutal and oppressive tyranny of the shah of Iran.

In 1950, the Guatemalan people democratically elected a self-avowed

socialist-communist named Jacobo Arbenz to be their president. Like other socialists, Arbenz believed in using government to take resources from the rich and redistribute them to the poor. He also had no reservations about letting other socialists and communist work in the Guatemalan government.

As part of its coup planning, the CIA prepared a secret list of Guatemalan officials to be assassinated.

The richest company in Guatemala was the giant U.S. corporation United Fruit, which owned 550,000 acres of land in Guatemala. Under an "agrarian-reform law" enacted at Arbenz's behest, the Arbenz regime confiscated some of United Fruit's lands and gave them to the peasants.

Naturally, the land seizures did not sit well with United Fruit, which had powerful and influential friends in the CIA, Congress, and other parts of the federal government.

Alarm bells began going off in Washington over the fact that a communist regime was situated only 2,000 miles away from the United States, but it was when Arbenz reached out to the Soviet Union in a spirit of peace and

friendship that his fate was sealed. U.S. officials deemed him to be a grave threat to national security and targeted him for a regime-change operation. Moreover, as part of its coup planning, the CIA prepared a secret list of Guatemalan officials to be assassinated.

The Bill of Rights expressly prohibits federal officials from depriving people of life without due process of law.

Yet there is something important to note about Guatemala under Arbenz: it never attacked the United States or even threatened to do so.

Needless to say, there was nary a concern that the U.S. Constitution, which expressly enumerates the powers of U.S. officials, does not delegate any power of assassination to U.S. officials and, in fact, through the Bill of Rights expressly prohibits federal officials from depriving people of life without due process of law. Given that the federal government had been converted to a national-security state, U.S. officials were deemed to have automatically acquired whatever powers they needed to protect national security, including the power to monitor, spy on, harass, abuse, smear, ruin, and even assassinate people who were

deemed to be threats to national security.

Arbenz, however, was lucky. Almost certainly on the kill list, he was able to escape the country before he could be assassinated. U.S. officials replaced him with a brutal, unelected military general named Carlos Castillo Armas, who was pro-U.S. and vehemently anti-communist. Taking a page from the U.S. national-security state's anti-communist crusade, Castillo Armas, according to Wikipedia, "cracked down heavily on unions and peasant organizations, arresting and killing thousands. The popular "agriculture reforms" of Arbenz was largely rolled back. He created a National Committee of Defense against Communism, which investigated more than 70,000 people and created a list of suspected communists that included 10 percent of the population."

In 1957, after getting into a dispute with the Mafia over gambling operations in Guatemala, Castillo Armas was assassinated. The assassination was said to have been committed by a palace guard who was shot dead while supposedly fleeing from the scene. An official inquiry into the assassination concluded that the assassin was a communist.

Jacob Hornberger is founder and president of The Future of Freedom Foundation.

NEXT MONTH:
“The National-Security State
and JFK, Part 2”
by Jacob G. Hornberger

It would be a dangerous delusion were a confidence in the men of our choice to silence our fears for the safety of our rights.... Confidence is everywhere the parent of despotism. Free government is founded in jealousy, and not in confidence. It is jealousy and not confidence which prescribes limited constitutions, to bind down those whom we are obliged to trust with power.... Our Constitution has accordingly fixed the limits to which, and no further, our confidence may go.... In questions of power, then, let no more be heard of confidence in man, but bind him down from mischief by the chains of the Constitution.

— Thomas Jefferson

The FBI's Forgotten Criminal Record

by James Bovard



President Trump's firing of FBI chief James Comey on May 9 spurred much of the media and many Democrats to rally around America's most powerful domestic federal agency. But the FBI has a long record of both deceit and incompetence. Five years ago, Americans learned that the FBI was teaching its agents that "the FBI has the ability to bend or suspend the law to impinge on the freedom of others." This has practically been the Bureau's motif since its creation in 1908.

The bureau was small potatoes until Woodrow Wilson dragged the United States into World War I. In one fell swoop, the number of dangerous Americans increased by perhaps twentyfold. The Espionage Act of 1917 made it easy to jail anyone

who criticized the war or the government. In September 1918, the bureau, working with local police and private vigilantes, seized more than 50,000 suspected draft dodgers off the streets and out of the restaurants of New York, Newark, and Jersey City. The Justice Department was disgraced when the vast majority of young men who had been arrested turned out to be innocent.

In January 1920, J. Edgar Hoover — the 25-year-old chief of the bureau's Radical Division — was the point man for the "Palmer Raids." Nearly 10,000 suspected Reds and radicals were seized. The bureau carefully avoided keeping an accurate count of detainees (a similar pattern of negligence occurred with the roundups after the 9/11 attacks). Attorney General Mitchell Palmer sought to use the massive roundups to propel his presidential candidacy. The operation took a drubbing, however, after an insolent judge demanded that the Justice Department provide evidence for why people had been arrested. Federal judge George Anderson complained that the government had created a "spy system" that "destroys trust and confidence and propagates hate. A mob is a mob whether made up of government officials acting under instruc-

tions from the Department of Justice, or of criminals, loafers, and the vicious classes.”

Hoover, who ran the FBI from 1924 until his death in 1972, built a revered agency that utterly intimidated official Washington.

After the debacle of the Palmer raids, the bureau devoted its attention to the nation’s real enemies: the U.S. Congress. The bureau targeted “senators whom the Attorney General saw as threats to America. The Bureau was breaking into their offices and homes, intercepting their mail, and tapping their telephones,” as Tim Weiner recounted in his 2012 book *Enemies: The History of the FBI*. The chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee was illegally targeted because the bureau feared he might support diplomatic recognition of Soviet Russia.

Hoover, who ran the FBI from 1924 until his death in 1972, built a revered agency that utterly intimidated official Washington. The FBI tapped the home telephone of a Supreme Court clerk, and at least one Supreme Court Justice feared the FBI had bugged the conference room where justices privately discussed cases. In 1945, President Harry Truman wrote in his diary,

“We want no Gestapo or Secret Police. FBI is tending in that direction.... This must stop.” But Truman did not have the gumption to pull in the reins.

The bureau’s power soared after Congress passed the Internal Security Act of 1950, authorizing massive crackdowns on suspected subversives. Hoover compiled a list of more than 20,000 “potentially or actually dangerous” Americans who could be seized and locked away at the president’s command. Hoover specified that “the hearing procedure [for detentions] will not be bound by the rules of evidence.” “Congress secretly financed the creation of six of these [detention] camps in the 1950s,” noted Weiner. (When rumors began circulating in the 1990s that the Federal Emergency Management Agency was building detention camps, government officials and much of the media scoffed that such a thing could never occur in this nation.)

From 1956 through 1971, the FBI’s COINTELPRO program conducted thousands of covert operations to incite street warfare between violent groups, to get people fired, to portray innocent people as government informants, and to cripple or destroy left-wing, black, communist, white racist, and anti-war organiza-

tions. FBI agents also busied themselves forging “poison pen” letters to wreck activists’ marriages. The FBI set up a Ghetto Informant Program that continued after COINTELPRO and that had 7,402 informants, including proprietors of candy stores and barbershops, as of September 1972. The informants served as “listening posts” “to identify extremists passing through or locating in the ghetto area, to identify purveyors of extremist literature,” and to keep an eye on “Afro-American type bookstores” (including obtaining the names of the bookstores’ “clientele”).

The FBI let no corner of American life escape its vigilance; it even worked to expose and discredit “communists who are secretly operating in legitimate organizations and employments, such as the Young Men’s Christian Association and Boy Scouts,” as a 1976 Senate report noted. The FBI took a shotgun approach to target and harass protesters partly because of its “belief that dissident speech and association should be prevented because they were incipient steps toward the possible ultimate commission of an act which might be criminal,” the Senate report observed. That report characterized COINTELPRO as “a secret war

against those citizens [the FBI] considers threats to the established order.” COINTELPRO was exposed only after a handful of activists burglarized an FBI office in a Philadelphia suburb, seized FBI files, and leaked the damning documents to the media. The revelations were briefly shocking but faded into the Washington Memory Hole.

That report characterized COINTELPRO as “a secret war against those citizens [the FBI] considers threats to the established order.”

FBI haughtiness was showcased on national television on April 19, 1993, when its agents used 54-ton tanks to smash into the Branch Davidians’ sprawling, ramshackle home near Waco, Texas. The tanks intentionally collapsed 25 percent of the building on top of the huddled residents. After the FBI pumped the building full of CS gas (banned for use on enemy soldiers by a chemical-weapons treaty), a fire ignited that left 80 children, women, and men dead. The FBI swore it was not to blame for the conflagration. However, FBI agents had stopped firetrucks from a local fire department far from the burning building, claiming it was not safe to allow

them any closer because the Davidians might shoot people dousing a fire that was killing them. Six years after the assault, news leaked that the FBI had fired incendiary tear-gas cartridges into the Davidians' home prior to the fire's erupting. Attorney General Janet Reno, furious over the FBI's deceit on this key issue, sent U.S. marshals to raid FBI headquarters to search for more Waco evidence. From start to finish, the FBI brazenly lied about what it did at Waco — with one exception. On the day after the Waco fire, FBI on-scene commander Larry Potts explained the rationale for the FBI's final assault: "These people had thumbed their nose at law enforcement."

Terrorism

FBI counterterrorism spending soared in the mid to late 1990s. But the FBI dismally failed to connect the dots on suspicious foreigners engaged in domestic aviation training prior to the 9/11 attacks. Though Congress had deluged the FBI with almost \$2 billion to upgrade its computers, many FBI agents had ancient machines incapable of searching the web. One FBI agent observed that the bureau ethos is that "real men don't type.... The computer revolution just passed us by." The FBI's pre-9/11 blunders

"contributed to the United States becoming, in effect, a sanctuary for radical terrorists," according to a 2002 congressional investigation. Former National Security Adviser Brent Scowcroft grouched that "the safest place in the world for a terrorist to be is inside the United States; as long as they don't do something that trips them up against our laws, they can do pretty much all they want." Sen. Richard Shelby in 2002 derided "the FBI's dismal recent history of disorganization and institutional incompetence in its national security work." (The FBI also lost track of a key informant at the heart of the cabal that detonated a truck bomb beneath the World Trade Center in 1993.)

The FBI has long relied on entrapment to boost its arrest statistics and publicity bombardments.

The FBI has long relied on entrapment to boost its arrest statistics and publicity bombardments. The FBI Academy taught agents that subjects of FBI investigations "have forfeited their right to the truth." After 9/11, this doctrine helped the agency to entrap legions of patsies who made the FBI appear to be protecting the nation. Trevor

Aaronson, author of *The Terror Factory: Inside the FBI's Manufactured War on Terrorism*, estimated that only about 1 percent of the 500 people charged with international terrorism offenses in the decade after 9/11 were bona fide threats. Thirty times as many were induced by the FBI to behave in ways that prompted their arrest.

In the Liberty City 7 case in Florida, FBI informants planted the notion of blowing up government buildings. In one case, a federal judge concluded that the government “came up with the crime, provided the means, and removed all relevant obstacles” in order to make a “terrorist” out of a man “whose buffoonery is positively Shakespearean in scope.”

The FBI's informant program extended far beyond Muslims. The FBI bankrolled a right-wing New Jersey blogger and radio host for five years prior to his 2009 arrest for threatening federal judges. We have no idea how many bloggers, talk-show hosts, or activists the FBI is currently financing.

The FBI's power has rarely been effectively curbed by either Congress or federal courts. In 1971, House Majority Leader Hale Boggs declared that the FBI's power terrified Capitol Hill: “Our very fear of

speaking out [against the FBI] ... has watered the roots and hastened the growth of a vine of tyranny.... Our society cannot survive a planned and programmed fear of its own government bureaus and agencies.” Boggs vindicated a 1924 American Civil Liberties Union report warning that the FBI had become “a secret police system of a political character” — a charge that supporters of both Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump would have cheered last year.

We have no idea how many bloggers, talk-show hosts, or activists the FBI is currently financing.

The FBI has always used its “good guy” image to keep a lid on its crimes. The controversy swirling about Comey's firing should spur the American people, media, and Congress to take the FBI off its pedestal and place it where it belongs — under the law. It is time to cease venerating a federal agency whose abuses have perennially menaced Americans' constitutional rights. Otherwise, the FBI's vast power and pervasive secrecy guarantee that more FBI scandals are just around the bend.

James Bovard serves as policy advisor to The Future of Freedom Foundation and is the author of an ebook memoir, Public Policy Hooligan, as well as Attention Deficit Democracy and eight other books.

NEXT MONTH:
**“Will Trump Reduce
Federal Spending?”**
by James Bovard

Safety from external danger is the most powerful director of national conduct. Even the ardent love of liberty will, after a time, give way to its dictates. The violent destruction of life and property incident to war — the continual effort and alarm attendant on a state of continual danger, will compel nations the most attached to liberty, to resort for repose and security, to institutions, which have a tendency to destroy their civil and political rights. To be more safe they, at length, become willing to run the risk of being less free. The institutions alluded to are STANDING ARMIES, and the correspondent appendages of military establishments.

— Alexander Hamilton

Free the Fire Stations!

by Laurence M. Vance



Many boys, at one time or another when they are growing up, become enamored with firetrucks after taking a school field trip to their local fire station. Some of them will then insist that they want to be firemen when then grow up. They want such an occupation because of the excitement and the adventure they envision — and, of course, the chance to ride on one of the shiny red firetrucks. The pay and benefits of a firefighter are of no consequence to them at their young age. Although the interest in becoming a fireman usually wanes, some boys do in fact become firemen when they grow up, as a visit to one's local fire station will attest. In adulthood, however, pay and benefits no longer take a back seat to excitement and adven-

ture. Mortgage and car payments have to be made, electric and water bills are due every month, and the kids are always needing new shoes.

Firefighting is not generally considered to be a high-paying job. According to annual reports by *Forbes*, *Business Insider*, and CNBC, using data drawn from places such as LinkedIn and the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the top-paying occupations in the United States are regularly said to be held by pharmacists, podiatrists, attorneys, engineers, dentists, physicians, surgeons, psychiatrists, orthodontists, anesthesiologists, radiologists, pathologists, and upper-level managers and directors.

According to Salary.com, the median annual firefighter salary, as of April 2017, is \$44,770, with a range usually between \$33,578 and \$55,963. That does not include “bonus and benefit information and other factors that impact base pay.” In states such as California, median salaries are generally higher. And even then, it depends on the city. For example, the median annual firefighter salary in Los Angeles is \$49,490, with a range usually between \$37,118 and \$61,863. Again, that does not include “bonus and benefit information and other factors that impact base pay.” Thanks to

an abundance of overtime pay opportunities, some firefighters in Los Angeles make significantly more.

Chief Donn

According to Transparent California, a watchdog project of the Nevada Policy Research Institute, a free-market think tank, there are thirty employees of the Los Angeles Fire Department (LAFD) who made more than \$315,000 in base pay plus overtime last year. But three Los Angeles firemen — Charles Ferrari, James Vlach, and Donn Thompson — each made more than \$300,000 just in overtime pay last year. Total pay and benefits in 2016 were more than \$483,000 for Ferrari and Vlach and more than \$439,000 for Thompson. But it is Thompson who may be the most well-paid firefighter, not only in Los Angeles, but in the entire United States.

Just as surprising as the amount of overtime pay, was that most of the money was not spent dealing with fires or other emergencies.

As reported on *Reason's* “Hit and Run” blog, in a 1996 *Los Angeles Times* story, Thompson was highlighted as a prime example of what the newspaper called “paycheck

generosity” at the LAFD. It turns out that from 1993 through 1995, Thompson had made \$219,649 in overtime pay at a time when the LAFD was spending more than \$58 million annually on overtime pay. The newspaper reported that this “budget-wrenching” amount far surpassed what fire departments in other big cities were paying. So well-known was the LAFD’s reputation for paycheck generosity that one Houston fire official commented, “We’ve all heard about what they have going there. I don’t know of any other department that has it quite that lucrative.” What the *Los Angeles Times* found just as surprising as the amount of overtime pay was that most of the money spent was not spent dealing with fires or other emergencies. Most of the overtime pay was for firefighters to replace “those who are out because of vacations, holidays, injuries, training, illnesses or personal leaves” or “to firefighters on special assignments, such as in-house training and evaluation programs.”

In 2009, it was reported by the *Los Angeles Daily News* that the LAFD’s overtime budget had “soared 60 percent over the last decade while its ranks grew just 17 percent.” The newspaper’s analysis found that Los Angeles firefighters

averaged “six times more overtime than their counterparts in Chicago, five times more than in Houston and two times more than in San Diego.” Fifty-six firefighters “earned at least \$100,000 in overtime on top of their annual salaries.” This 2009 newspaper article also singled out Donn Thompson as the king of overtime earners. He had pocketed \$570,276 in overtime over the previous three years.

Last year there were 439 LAFD employees who made more than \$100,000 in overtime.

In 2016, the *San Diego Union-Tribune* featured Thompson in a story about runaway overtime costs at California fire departments. According to Transparent California, he received overtime pay of \$286,536 in 2014 and \$286,733 in 2015. Thompson, a fireman for 34 years, said that he “never spent that much time at home,” and “basically lived at the fire station.”

Last year there were 439 LAFD employees who made more than \$100,000 in overtime. Thompson pocketed \$307,541 from California taxpayers. The LAFD spent more than 38 percent of its budget on overtime pay. In contrast, New York reported spending less than 20 per-

cent, and other major fire departments reported even lower percentages.

Privatization

The millions of American workers who don't have any overtime opportunities, don't always work 40 hours in a week, live paycheck to paycheck, and struggle to make ends meet undoubtedly view the paychecks of these California firefighters to be obscene. Even doctors, lawyers, and managers who make six-figure incomes might be inclined to agree — especially when, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the occupations of loggers, fishermen, roofers, garbage collectors, miners, truck drivers, construction laborers, electrical workers, pilots, and taxi drivers are much more dangerous than that of a firefighter.

When things such as the huge paychecks of LAFD firefighters are brought to light, there is always talk about the need to reform the system, reduce government bureaucracy, have more effective management, curtail the power of the unions that represent government workers, and make municipal governments more accountable to the taxpayers. Sometimes the privatization of fire departments is even sug-

gested. This entails the shifting of functions and responsibilities from the public sector to the private sector. There are two forms of privatization that need to be distinguished: public-private partnerships and free-market competition.

Over the past few decades, more and more state and local governments have privatized certain “public services.”

In a public-private partnership, government entities contract out the provision of some service such as maintenance, facility management, or garbage collection. Study after study has documented the cost savings to municipalities achieved through this practice. Over the past few decades, more and more state and local governments have privatized certain “public services.” Opening up the provision of a service to competitive bidding allows a government to secure the performance and cost-saving benefits that come with competition. Privatization allows government entities to control costs without sacrificing quality. In many cases, quality is even improved because companies want to ensure that their government contract is renewed. Yet, as pointed out in a Reason Founda-

tion report, “Fire Protection Privatization: A Cost-Effective Approach to Public Safety,” “For the most part, however, there has been no shift toward private contracting of fire service in cities with well-established municipal fire departments. The fire service is one of the most tradition-minded of all public services. It is also heavily unionized, and fire-fighters’ unions have strongly resisted attempts to contract out existing fire department services to private firms.”

There is, of course, one glaring problem with privatization by means of public-private partnerships: services are still publicly funded by tax dollars. Those using services the most might actually be paying the least or not at all. Some people end up paying for services that they never use. And no one has the option to change to a different service provider.

With free-market competition, no government at any level has anything to do with providing a “public service.” No contracting, no funding, no oversight, no interference, no regulation, and no control. Many firms have a chance to provide services. Firms compete with one another for customers on the basis of price, quality, customer service, and the range of services offered. Prices

for services are set freely by the forces of supply and demand. Customers choose what services they want to pay for. Prices are allowed to adjust according to economic conditions. New firms can freely enter the marketplace. Customers have a choice in what firm they want to purchase a service from. Firms that cannot compete or fail to meet the needs of their customers go out of business. No one firm has a monopoly on providing a service.

Fire stations need to be freed from government funding and control and treated just like any other business.

Fire stations need to be freed from government funding and control and be treated just like any other business. But high salaries, generous benefits, lots of overtime, and firefighter unions are not the reasons why. In fact, even with free-market competition, firefighters may earn high salaries, receive generous benefits, have lots of overtime, and belong to unions.

History, facts, and figures

As relayed by Annelise Graebner Anderson in an article in the *Journal of Libertarian Studies* (“The Development of Municipal Fire De-

partments in the United States”), “In 1852 not one city in the United States paid its firemen; they were all volunteers. By 1880 most of the cities with more than 10,000 people — and many with fewer— had municipally paid fire departments.”

The first volunteer fire company was organized by Benjamin Franklin in Philadelphia in 1736. By 1752, Philadelphia had six volunteer fire companies and eight fire engines. Many leading citizens belonged to these fire companies, as was the case with social organizations. The fire companies were extremely competitive. Each fire was a contest to see whose engine would arrive first and pump water most efficiently. The volunteer companies, which were not profit-making enterprises, had several sources of financing: “contributions from grateful persons on whose property the company had put out a fire; donations from citizens; funds from benefits given by the volunteer firemen; contributions, dues, and fines of members; the city government; and the fire insurance companies.” In time, however, “many cities gained considerable control over the volunteer fire companies, and often paid the chief engineer whom the volunteers elected and perhaps a few other full-time people.” The

country's first paid fire department was established in Cincinnati 1853. Within twenty years, Providence, St. Louis, New Orleans, Louisville, Chicago, Boston, Baltimore, San Francisco, New York, Pittsburgh, and Philadelphia were all staffed by career firefighters.

Anderson concludes that “the steam fire engine, the telegraph alarm and potential insurance rate reductions resulting from lower losses probably led to a significant increase in the attractiveness of fire protection provided by a paid department.” She asserts that “government activity in the area of firefighting and in related areas was inimical to the development of private enterprise.” Gradually, “fire prevention and fire protection were accepted as proper functions of a municipal government.” And so they are today.

According to the U.S. Fire Administration (an entity of FEMA),

- There are 27,211 fire departments listed with the National Fire Department Registry. That is about 91 percent of all U.S. fire departments.

- Registered fire departments represent approximately 50,908 fire stations across the country.

- Ninety-six percent of the registered departments are local fire

departments which include career, combination, and volunteer fire departments and fire districts.

- Four percent of the registered departments are state and federal government fire departments, contract fire departments, private or industrial fire brigades, and transportation authority or airport fire departments.

Of the registered fire departments, 9 percent are career (all firefighters are career), 5 percent are mostly career (more than 50 percent of firefighters are career), 16 percent are mostly volunteer (more than 50 percent of firefighters are volunteers), and 71 percent are volunteer (all firefighters are volunteers).

It is a myth that volunteer fire departments don't receive tax money and don't pay their firefighters anything.

It is a myth that volunteer fire departments don't receive tax money and don't pay their firefighters anything. Some, of course, don't. But others are financially supported by local taxes in addition to fundraising, private donations, corporate donations, and federal grants. And some reimburse their firefighters for expenses, give them a small

stipend, pay them on a per-call basis, or provide free training and certification.

Private fire departments are few in number, but they do exist. According to a report by industry research firm IBISWorld,

The Private Firefighting Services industry includes privately operated companies that charge a subscription fee to homeowners and business owners to provide fire prevention and suppression services. In addition, companies provide fire-protection services to airports and industrial facilities on a contract basis or are employed by insurance companies or government agencies. Over the past five years, the number of private sector firefighters has grown at an average annual rate of 15.0% to an estimated 16,880 employees.

The Private Firefighting Services industry is expected to continue expanding, with industry revenue projected to rise through 2017. Continued state and local budget shortfalls are anticipated to lead to greater outsourcing to the private sector. Moreover, insur-

ance companies offering private firefighting services to homeowners in the West and Southwest regions will be a continued source of growth for the industry over the coming five years.

The National Wildfire Suppression Association (NWSA) represents more than 150 private-sector contract companies in 16 states.

Observations

There is absolutely no reason why the provision of firefighting services cannot be handled by the free market.

Although firefighting is an “essential service,” that doesn’t mean that it has to be supplied by government.

First of all, according to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), of the 33,602,500 calls to fire departments for service in 2015, 2,533,500 were false alarms, 21,500,000 were for medical help, and only 1,345,000 were for actual fires. The provision of emergency services should be separate from the provision of firefighting services. And as Ryan McMaken of the Mises Institute points out, “An

enormous number of firefighters could be replaced by paramedics — using much less-expensive vehicles — and no one would notice.

Second, although firefighting is an “essential service,” that doesn’t mean that it has to be supplied by government. Hospitals provide an essential service, but they are privately owned. Doctors provide an essential service, but they don’t work for the government. In many large cities, taxi companies supply an essential service, but they are not owned by governments. The provision of food is certainly one of the most essential services throughout the United States since only a very small percentage of Americans are farmers. Yet the provision of food is entirely left up to grocery stores competing with one another for customers on the free market.

Third, the fact that 71 percent of all fire departments are already staffed entirely by volunteers clearly demonstrates that government firefighters do not need to staff fire stations.

Fourth, it would not be redundant to have more than one fire department in a city or town any more than it is redundant to have more than one gas station, restaurant, clothing store, strip mall, barber-shop, grocery store, nail saloon, bar, or movie theater.

Fifth, competition among firms is necessary to ensure low-cost quality services for consumers. By nature, a government monopoly does just the opposite.

Sixth, it is because of government that Americans don’t have private firefighting services, not because of market failure. Government interference always distorts the market.

Seventh, it is not the purpose of government to provide services. Libertarians alone consistently maintain that if we are to have a government, its role should be strictly limited to the protection of life, liberty, and property from the violence and fraud of others.

It would not be redundant to have more than one fire department in a city or town any more than it is redundant to have more than one gas station or restaurant.

Eighth, if the government is to provide firefighting services, then where does it end? Once firefighting is accepted as a proper function of government, what logical argument can then be made against the government’s providing pest-control services, lawn-mowing services, hair-cutting services, eye-exam services, house-painting services,

accounting services, banking services, nanny services, insurance services, or travel-agent services?

Ninth, putting out fires is a job — just as digging ditches, mining coal, selling cars, editing magazines, mowing lawns, managing a company, truck driving, writing books, running a cash register, and waiting tables are jobs. There is nothing special about firefighting. Yet, government firefighters are regularly held up as heroes just for doing their jobs.

And tenth, to say that the private funding and private provision of firefighting services “just won’t work” simply manifests the statist thinking and anti-market bias that is all too prevalent in American society. It “works” for a host of other services that Americans use every day and wouldn’t begin to think that the government should provide.

The fire stations in the United States should be freed from government funding and control as a matter of principle. To focus only on firefighter salaries, benefits, overtime, and union membership is to miss the big picture — that of service provision in a free society.

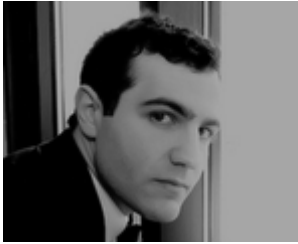
These things may be important from the standpoint of how taxpayer dollars are used, but they are not sufficient in and of themselves to prove that fire stations should be free. That is the same mistake conservatives make when they call for the elimination of some government funding, program, or agency because it has a liberal bias, funds pornographic art, is inefficient, performs abortions, has a lot of waste and fraud, or is too intrusive, instead of arguing that it shouldn’t exist in the first place.

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NEXT MONTH:
“Feeling Helpless against
the IRS?”
by Laurence M. Vance

Wartime Tyranny Against Eugene Debs

by David D'Amato



Civil rights do not fare well in wartime, tested against the feverish jingoism of the martial spirit. As the old adage goes, *inter armas silent leges* — in war the law is silent. In the United States, liberty has too often been sacrificed (without hesitation, we might add) to the gods of wars, forced to prostrate herself before them, accede to their demands. But never completely is liberty's light extinguished; undaunted and filled with righteous indignation — and, perhaps, naivety — a few idealists always stand as her partisans, prepared to sacrifice their own liberty in their own kind of war.

Eugene Debs, whatever his faults, was one of this kind, a true believer. He was born in 1855 in Terre Haute, Indiana, a town west

of Indianapolis and near the Illinois border, the son of immigrants from the French region of Alsace. Far from steeping the young Gene Debs in left-wing radicalism, his parents owned a small grocery store and led a quiet life devoted to their many children. But Debs was curious, compelled toward literature, debate, and the world of ideas. From humble beginnings, he would go on to become, in the words of Max Eastman, “the spiritual chief and hero of American Socialism,” but he is important to the libertarian tradition, too, as a symbol of free speech. His trial in 1919 represents a travesty of justice, an egregious affront to the individual's inviolable right to speak his mind. It also speaks to the fragility of mere words on a page, confronted with the power of a growing modern state in the hands of Progressives. Woodrow Wilson's administration embraced centralized government power enthusiastically, seeing in it an expression of the true social organism.

Passed the year that the United States entered the fray in the Great War, the Espionage Act of 1917 was one of several successive attacks on liberty and the constitutional order during Wilson's presidential tenure. Lest the title of the law cause confusion, it addressed itself both in theo-

ry and practice to a range of activities that few would readily associate with spying. Together with the Sedition Act, an addendum passed the following year, it gave the federal government broad discretion to prosecute virtually any speech critical of the government or the war. Under the statute's vague, overbroad language, even the faintest criticism of U.S. participation in the war could be considered an attempt to aid the country's enemies or otherwise hinder the war effort.

Even the faintest criticism of U.S. participation in the war could be considered an attempt to aid the country's enemies.

It was to this draconian law that Debs, outspoken in his anti-war convictions, eventually fell victim. Intellectually and morally abased by the hysteria of war, the American political and media establishment could conceive of no way one could be so unreservedly critical of the war without also being “an agent of a foreign power.” Distrust of foreigners in general reached new heights. The war rendered the nation amenable to the most extreme public-policy expressions of nativism and anti-immigration sentiments, already, in the words of

Thomas C. Leonard, “a chronic, debilitating illness” in American public life. German-Americans, widely treated as a presumptively suspect other, were now the subjects of sweeping registration requirements, with thousands interned at camps across the country.

The immigration and naturalization laws, too, were weaponized against free speech in the years prior to the war, wielded against war dissenters and those (such as anarchists and the Wobblies) whose political opinions tended to the radical. At this juncture, it is important to note that Debs was decidedly not among the more militant elements of the American Left. Though he had helped found the Industrial Workers of the World, he parted company with the organization because of the methods it had begun to adopt. He regarded the tactics of violence and on-the-job sabotage as “reactionary, not revolutionary,” not only immoral but strategically inexpedient, likely to turn the public against worthy reform movements. Always insistent that his fight was with the capitalist social system, not with particular individuals, he denounced political assassinations and in particular that of William McKinley, murdered by the anarchist Leon Czolgosz. The

prosecution of Debs — who had always favored nonviolence and respect for the democratic process — for his political statements thus stands out as particularly outrageous.

Schenck, Debs, and Abrams

The Canton, Ohio, speech for which Debs was indicted damned “Prussian militarism” and argued that socialists had everywhere and always fought it. Much of the speech was not even concerned with the war itself, but addressed to the listeners a heartfelt plea for the socialist cause. Here was a citizen, idealistic and motivated by a deep desire to change society, speaking freely to his fellow Americans, appealing to the conscience of each member of his audience. Whether or not one agreed with his message, certainly Debs was just the kind of incendiary for whom the First Amendment was adopted. Upon his conviction in September 1918 — less than two months before the armistice that ended fighting on the Western Front — Debs called the statute under which he was convicted “a despotic enactment in flagrant conflict with democratic principles and with the spirit of free institutions.”

His economically retrograde socialism notwithstanding, Debs had

the spirit of a libertarian, an unshakable commitment to free speech and expression and a well-founded lack of trust in leaders and rulers.

**Debs had the spirit of a
libertarian, an unshakable
commitment to free speech and
expression.**

The Debs case is remarkable both for the briefness of the Court’s opinion and for its lack of a dissent. Satisfied that Debs’s First Amendment theories were effectively “disposed of in *Schenck*,” Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes spent much of his opinion merely repeating Debs’s words, as if their incantation alone should suffice to damn Debs. Its language stilted in a self-conscious search for a way to condemn Debs, the Court mocked the freedoms guaranteed by the Amendment atop the Bill of Rights. The jury, the Court’s majority held, was warranted “in finding that one purpose of the speech, *whether incidental or not does not matter*, was to oppose not only war but this war, and that the opposition was so expressed that its natural and intended effect would be to obstruct recruiting” (emphasis added). Never mind the question of Debs’s intent, the im-

portance of which the Court suggests earlier in its opinion, or the pesky fact that the First Amendment allows an individual to express his disapproval of even a specific war effort.

Even on the Court's own terms, the exhortations of Schenck's leaflet should have been deemed protected speech.

Decided just one week before *Debs*, *Schenck v. United States* had presented the Court with similar facts, the socialist defendants distributing print literature expressing opposition to the war. Unlike Debs, though, Schenck's leaflets urged opposition specifically to military conscription, described in the pamphlet as a violation of "the most sacred right of personal liberty" and as "belong[ing] to a bygone age." In terms similar to those of Debs's Ohio speech and under the headline "LONG LIVE THE CONSTITUTION OF THE UNITED STATES," Schenck's pamphlet decried the war as a conspiracy against the working man, undergirded by the lies of "a mercenary capitalist press."

It was in *Schenck* that the Court articulated (which is to say, invented) its well-known "clear and pres-

ent danger" standard. Writing for a unanimous Court — as he would again in *Debs* — Justice Holmes concluded that the words at issue in the case created such a danger, threatening to encourage a crime that the Constitution empowers Congress to prevent. The opinion admits that the leaflet, in its encouragements against conscription, "confined itself to peaceful measures" such as protest and petition. Even on the Court's own terms, then, the exhortations of Schenck's leaflet were innocuous and thus should have been deemed protected speech. But the Court, in cases such as *Schenck* and *Debs*, was engaged in the rather unabashedly political (as opposed, perhaps, to legal) project of damning radicals and purging the public conversation of critical thinking and rigorous debate about the merits of the war. That is to say that the Court had willingly abandoned its post as the constitutionally assigned source of independent judicial review, had instead taken up a position as a concocter of cynical rationalizations for a fundamentally illiberal regime.

The 1919 Supreme Court case *Abrams v. United States* similarly reflects the government's flagrant contempt for individual rights,

freedom of speech in particular, during the World War I era. The socialist-anarchist defendants in the *Abrams* case had disseminated radical missives, signed “revolutionists,” deprecating “the coward of the White House” and calling on the workers of the world to acknowledge their true enemy, capitalism, and to go on a general strike.

Though *Abrams* also resulted in convictions (in a 7-2 vote), it has become famous for its dissent.

Yet just as Debs had in his fateful speech, the *Abrams* defendants offered, together with their impassioned pleas for worker revolution, a kind of disclaimer. “It is absurd,” they said, “to call us pro-German,” assuring the reader of their hatred of “German militarism,” a principled hatred unmatched by that of America’s “hypocritical tyrants.” Though *Abrams* also resulted in convictions (in a 7-2 vote), it has become famous for its dissent, which arguably represents a remarkable change of course for its author, Justice Holmes. While Holmes was careful to distinguish the facts in the *Abrams* case from those in the speech cases for which he had been on the side of the majority, it is nevertheless plausible to

read his dissent in this later case as an attempt at redemption. The attempted distinctions are, after all, rather thin. Had Schenck and Debs really demonstrated any more intent to obstruct the prosecution of the war than *Abrams* and his friends? As we have noted, even Holmes’s opinions in those cases bespeak some doubt.

What is clear, in any case, is that by the time of the *Abrams* decision, almost exactly a year after the Allies had won the war, the U.S. political climate had changed considerably. The war having reached its conclusion, prosecuting Americans for the expression of their political opinions became less tenable. In a letter he wrote in May 1919 to Herbert Croly, one of the founders of *The New Republic*, Holmes all but admits that he betrayed his own conscience in *Debs* and *Schenck*. “I hated to have to write the *Debs* case,” Holmes reflects, “and still more those of the other poor devils before us the same day and the week before.” Holmes even suggests that if he had been a member on the jury in these cases, he “should have been for acquittal,” condescendingly adding that he was philosophically inclined to favor the ventilation of “all effervescing convictions” — if only to “[let] them get flat.”

Of course, this private letter was no consolation to Schenck, Debs, or others convicted under the anti-speech espionage and sedition laws.

Debs's conviction did not mark the end of his activism. Indeed, in the election of 1920, almost a million voters cast their ballots in favor of Debs, who sat imprisoned in Atlanta, allowed, according to historian J. Robert Constantine, to issue one campaign statement per week from his cell. As Constantine writes in a biographical sketch of Debs in his collection *Letters of Eugene V. Debs*, Debs's presidential campaign, though it predictably failed to make him president, galvanized a movement for his release and that of "hundreds of other men and women found guilty of violating one of the federal or state espionage, sedition, or syndicalist laws." Constantine notes that the American Legion and similar groups met the groundswell of support for Debs with a "well-financed 'Keep Debs in Jail' program."

But Debs's optimism and idealism were beyond the reach of the carceral state. Even behind bars, he retained his famously good-natured disposition, winning the affection

even of his jailers. Warren G. Harding and his running mate, Calvin Coolidge, won the White House handily that November, propelled by Harding's humble calls for "healing" and "normalcy." To his credit, President Harding commuted Debs's sentence, though by then Debs had already served several years' time.

These cases and their repressive results supply much of the most important political-speech precedent that came in the latter half of the twentieth century. It is important to recall those dark days of First Amendment jurisprudence to remind us that, absent the widespread belief in the importance of individual liberty, no constitution can protect us. The freedom of speech does not originate in government; government is more likely to violate that freedom than to protect it.

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Integrity and Leadership

by Leonard E. Read



Some years ago the public relations officer of a large corporation summarized for me his guiding principle: “Find out what the people want and do more of it; find out what they don’t want and do less of it.”

While seldom so succinctly stated, such an external, “other directed” guide to behavior is finding ever wider acceptance in American life. Implicit in its acceptance is a flight from personal integrity; and here may be found an important explanation for some of the mischief presently besetting our society.

Doubtless, this is good enough as a formula for getting rich. However, if an individual looks upon wealth as a means to such higher ends as his own intellectual and spiritual emergence or realizing

those creative potentialities inherent in his nature, then the formula has its shortcomings: in certain areas, it is downright destructive.

This is a serious charge. Let’s explore it. In order to get this matter into perspective, contemplate the countless specialized subjects known to mankind. Take any one of them — landscape painting, for instance — and arrange the population according to proficiency or quality. There would be some one person at the very peak. Under him would be a few competent landscape painters; there would follow perhaps one million having a discriminating appreciation of such art; after which there would be the great mass — millions upon millions, unconscious, unaware, utterly ignorant of the art or the standards by which its perfection could be attained or judged.

Rearrange the population in proficiency pyramids for all of the countless subjects that engage human interest and each of us would find himself near the base of most of the pyramids. Few are leaders or among the highly competent — except rarely and momentarily, if at all. Each of us has a potential for growth and development — especially if advantage is taken of the help available from those on higher levels.

With this in mind, let us explore the implications of integrity to the situation we are contemplating. It involves the accurate reflection in word and deed of that which one's highest insight and conscience dictate as true and right. Now a person's concept of what is true may not in fact be truth, but it is as close to truth as he can get. It is the individual's closest approximation to truth, his most faithful approximation, the most accurate reflection of his best lights.

With the pyramid picture and this conception of integrity in mind, let us now observe what happens when the skilled in any subject — the competent who are near the peak — adopt the practice of finding out what the people want in order to “do more of it” and finding out what they do not want in order to “do less of it.” In such circumstances, from whence comes the instruction for which each of the skilled is to do? From the best that is in each skilled person or available to him? From the highest conscience of each? Indeed not! The instruction and leadership in such circumstances is tailored to the level of the “know nothings” of the given subject, to the values at the base of our imagined pyramid where over 90 percent of the people

are. Integrity is forsaken. Potential leadership is diverted from higher aspiration and, instead, panders to the tastes and foibles of the ignorant ones....

One's highest conscience is sensitive to the way one treats it.

When an individual, in his thinking and actions, unhitches himself from integrity, he “lets himself go,” so to speak. He is anchored to nothing more stable than whimsy, momentary impulses, mere whiffs of fickle opinions. He is adrift and without compass. This shows through in much current art, music, poetry, and unquestionably accounts, in a very large measure, for the rapidly growing socialism, collectivism, decadence — call it what you will....

American economic progress has been truly phenomenal. But this progress has been founded on inspiration from the highest insights of individuals, not on advice from the lower levels of ignorance. In this manner the masses progressively are freed from poverty and slavery, free men's material needs gratified as never before, and opportunities opened to everyone to pursue and develop those creative potentialities inherent in his own personality. If

we would succeed with our political institutions, we have in the productive process a model to emulate. However, we must understand how this process really works: it finds its power in highest conscience and the accurate reflection thereof, in short, in integrity.

One's highest conscience, regardless of the step it occupies on the Infinite Stairway of Righteousness and Wisdom, is sensitive to the way one treats it. Lie about it, distort it, reflect it inaccurately, take contrary instruction from inferior sources or yield to the temperature of fame or fortune or popularity or other weaknesses of the flesh at its expense and it will become flabby and flaccid and will be incapable of rising to higher levels.

Now and then we observe individuals who can be depended upon to state accurately that which they believe to be right, persons un-

moved by fickle opinion, by the lure of applause, or by the sting of censure. We may disagree with such persons, but be it noted that we trust them. For their creed appears to be:

This above all, to thine own
self be true;
And it must follow, as the
night the day
Thou canst not then be false to
any man.

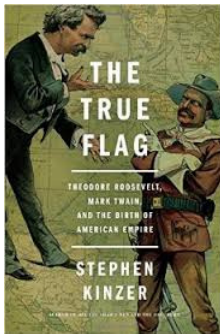
Such persons are possessed of integrity, an essential ingredient of libertarian leadership.

Leonard Read (1898–1983) was founder and president of The Foundation for Economic Education. This is an excerpt from his book Elements of Libertarian Leadership.

America's Turn Toward Empire

by Matthew Harwood

The True Flag: Theodore Roosevelt, Mark Twain, and the Birth of American Empire by Stephen Kinzer (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2017; 320 pages)



Sen. Mark Hanna, a Republican from Ohio and President William McKinley's campaign manager, couldn't contain himself. How could the delegates to the Republican National Convention not see through the man wearing a sombrero as streamers rained down from the ceiling? He was dangerous. "Don't any of you realize that there's only one life between this madman and the presidency?" he said presciently to a delegate after the man's triumphant entrance to

the convention. "What harm can he do as Governor of New York compared to the damage he will do as president if McKinley should die?"

The man Hanna referred to was none other than Theodore Roosevelt, the newly nominated vice president of the United States in the campaign of 1900. Hanna believed Teddy was deranged. A man who loved war and associated peace with weakness. A man who, with the help of his lifelong friend Sen. Henry Cabot Lodge of Massachusetts, would use the Spanish-American War to make the United States into a brutal overseas colonizer and inaugurate the American century of global hegemony.

In *The True Flag*, former *New York Times* journalist Stephen Kinzer tells a personality-driven tale of how Roosevelt and Lodge persuaded the American public to betray their anti-imperial ideals — always more imagined than real — in favor of the "large policy," or U.S. expansion beyond its shores, over the objections of a nascent anti-imperialist movement. The isolationists, led by industrialist Andrew Carnegie; America's most famous writer, Mark Twain; and Carl Schurz, a former abolitionist who was once secretary of the Interior under Rutherford B. Hayes, would

struggle in vain to stop the outright theft of nations “liberated” by Uncle Sam during the Spanish-American War.

Kinzer wisely rescues the forgotten Schurz from historical oblivion. The author of the maxim — “My country, right or wrong; if right, to be kept right; and if wrong, to be set right” — he was the movement’s conscience and best propagandist. He would lose the argument, as Kinzer skillfully recounts, outmaneuvered in Congress by the wily Lodge and in public by the demagogic Roosevelt.

“He wants to be killing something all the time.”

Fear of Roosevelt wasn’t just confined to Hanna. Twain, who would slowly emerge as a fierce anti-imperialist during this period of U.S. expansion, thought Roosevelt was “clearly insane” as well as “the most formidable disaster that has befallen the country since the Civil War.” Through Roosevelt’s own words and those of his friends and enemies, Twain’s appraisal proved correct.

Roosevelt, a sport killer of animals, was bloodthirsty. A Harvard friend wrote that “he wants to be killing something all the time.” Before the Spanish-American War,

Roosevelt was bored with peace. “I should welcome almost any war, for I think this country needs one,” he wrote. At first, he wanted to fight indigenous people in faraway lands because “the most ultimately righteous of all wars is a war with savages.” Then he spoke of fighting the Germans, welcoming an attack for its educational value. “The burning of New York and a few other sea-coast cities,” he wrote a friend, “would be a good object lesson in the need of an adequate system of coastal defenses.”

For Roosevelt and Lodge, America was ready to rule the world.

For Roosevelt and Lodge, America was ready to rule the world, and they found their instruction manual in Alfred Thayer Mahan’s book *The Influence of Sea Power upon History, 1660–1783*. In his classic work of naval history, Mahan argued that powerful countries controlled the seas and used naval might to open markets and secure them. This was the right book at the right time. After the Depression of 1893 and the resulting social strife, many business and political leaders argued America needed overseas markets to sell its surplus products. Roosevelt and

Lodge agreed, and Mahan showed them the way.

On February 15, 1898, the two men got the opportunity for America's rush toward overseas empire when an explosion ripped through the *USS Maine* anchored in Havana, Cuba. The warship had been sent by McKinley as a warning to the Spanish Empire to tread lightly in Cuba, whose people wanted independence. The yellow press, led by William Randolph Hearst, whipped up war frenzy by declaring the explosion the work of a Spanish mine. (The cause of the explosion was later determined to be the triggering of the ship's ordnance by sparks from a coal bunker.) The expansionists used Spanish atrocities — both real and fabricated — as an argument for humanitarian intervention to oust Spain from Cuba. “We are there because we represent the spirit of liberty and the spirit of the new time,” declared Lodge during a Senate speech.

Roosevelt said, brandishing a pistol, “When I took it to Cuba I made a vow to kill at least one Spaniard with it, and I did.”

War beckoned, but the anti-imperialists shrewdly amended Lodge's war resolution, which de-

manded that Spain free Cuba or face U.S. military power. The amendment written by Henry Teller from Colorado stated that the United States had no imperial motives behind its intervention. On April 19, 1898, the war resolution, along with the Teller Amendment, passed both houses of Congress. McKinley signed it the next day. Within seven days' time, a dying empire and a rising empire had declared war on each other.

“Holy Godfrey, what fun!”

Roosevelt, however, was no chicken hawk. After war broke out, he resigned his post as assistant secretary of the Navy to Lodge's chagrin and was commissioned by the territorial governor of Arizona as a lieutenant colonel. Teddy Roosevelt's “Rough Riders” were born.

On July 1, 1898, he would cement his legend, commanding his Rough Riders up a hill under enemy fire in what became known as the Battle of San Juan Hill. During the fight, he exclaimed, “Holy Godfrey, what fun!” Upon arriving home after his victory, Roosevelt once again gave the public a glimpse of his warlike mindset. As reporters and well-wishers swarmed him on Long Island, he said, brandishing a pistol, “When I took it to Cuba I made a

vow to kill at least one Spaniard with it, and I did.” The crowds ate it up.

The United States would go on to demolish Spanish forces and establish its rule over Spain’s former subjects. “In a ravenous fifty-five-day spasm during the summer of 1898,” writes Kinzer, “the United States asserted control over five far-flung lands with a total of 11 million inhabitants: Guam, Hawaii, Cuba, the Philippines, and Puerto Rico. Never in history has a nation leaped so suddenly to overseas empire.” The question now was what would the United States do with its new-found possessions: liberate them or make them American subjects?

During the summer of 1898, the anti-imperialist movement began to stir, supported financially and ideologically by Carnegie. On June 15, 1898, the isolationists packed into Boston’s Faneuil Hall to, in the words of Gamaliel Bradford, “insist that a war begun in the name of humanity shall not be turned into a war for empire.” In an August 1898 essay, Carnegie challenged Americans to forgo empire. “Are we to practice independence and preach subordination,” he wrote, “to teach rebellion in our books yet stamp it out with our swords, to sow the seed of revolt and expect the harvest of loyalty?” In another essay a month

later, Shurz lamented that American imperialism would give aid and comfort to democracy’s detractors. “Will not those appear right who say that democratic government is not only no guaranty of peace, but that it is capable of the worst kind of war, the war of conquest, and of resorting to that kind of war, too, as a hypocrite and false pretender?”

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Principled arguments failed, however. On December 10, 1898, the anti-imperialist movement received its first of two crippling blows. The United States and Spain signed the Treaty of Paris. For \$20 million, Spain ceded Guam, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines to the United States while forfeiting sovereignty over Cuba. Then came the coup de grâce on February 6, 1889, when the Senate voted 57 to 27 to ratify the Treaty of Paris — more than the required two-thirds majority. The anti-imperialist movement campaigned hard against annexation, losing by only two votes.

Two days before the treaty’s ratification, the already simmering Philippine islands exploded in vio-

lence. Led by Emilio Aguinaldo, the Filipino nationalists weren't about to let Uncle Sam slide into the role of occupier without a fight. The Philippine-American War had begun.

"We never asked their consent."

According to Kinzer, the presidential campaign of 1900 could have been a referendum on American imperialism as violence in the Philippines worsened. The contest pitted the incumbent McKinley, a convert to expansionism, against the populist Democrat William Jennings Bryan, a passionate anti-imperialist and free-silver enthusiast. If Bryant had won, he would very likely have acceded to the desire of the Philippines, Cuba, Guam, and Puerto Rico for independence. Unable to drop his commitment to free silver, however, Bryan lost badly as his monetary policy divided the anti-imperialist movement, whose leaders were mainly prosperous northeasterners, such as Carnegie. But even if Bryan had dropped the free-silver plank from the party platform, Roosevelt and the imperialists probably would have won. They had the more pragmatic and historically accurate arguments for expansion.

During the campaign, it was the vice presidential nominee, Roo-

sevelt who hit the trail to make the case for the McKinley-Roosevelt ticket. Overseas expansion was a core issue, and Roosevelt honestly and chillingly described why he was an imperialist. In one speech, he spoke of being "for expansion and anything else that will tend to benefit the American laborer and manufacturer" by opening up foreign markets for American surplus goods protected by U.S. naval might.

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In another, he said that the Republican Party's large policy was "only imperialistic in the sense that Jefferson's policy in Louisiana was imperialistic, only military in the sense that Jackson's policy toward the Seminoles or Custer's toward the Sioux embodied militarism." Like many who believed in Anglo-Saxon superiority, Roosevelt saw other races as inferior and, if they were lucky, could be taught civilization by the white man's "benevolent assimilation."

Imperialists were fond of throwing the true nature of U.S. foreign policy into the faces of their oppo-

nents, noting the westward expansion of the country and its violent annexing of Indian and Mexican land and ruling it without the consent of the original inhabitants. And they were right: What makes crossing an ocean to conquer foreign lands any more ghastly than subduing a large swath of North America that wasn't U.S. soil? It's an answer the anti-imperialists as well as even Kinzer, whose anti-imperial sympathies shine through the pages, never adequately answer. The United States was an imperialist nation long before its exploits during the Spanish-American War. The difference at the turn of the 20th century was that America didn't just want to dominate the Western Hemisphere. Now it wanted dominion over the world.

Hundreds of thousands of civilians died in the war, mostly from disease.

It is then no surprise, then, that the McKinley administration didn't believe the Constitution followed the flag. For the people of Cuba, Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippines, the Bill of Rights didn't exist. The Supreme Court agreed in a series of 1901 rulings known as the "insular cases," which gave judicial

blessing to the idea that the United States could rule foreign countries by decree. Instead of being governed by the Constitution, those people existed under something approximating martial law, according to Kinzer.

In the Philippines, the result was the dehumanization, slaughter, and torture of the islands' peoples. "It is not civilized warfare, but we are not dealing with civilized people. The only thing they know and fear is force, violence, and brutality, and we give it to them," wrote one reporter for the *Philadelphia Ledger* approvingly.

In 41 months of war, writes Kinzer, the U.S. military captured Aguinaldo and killed an estimated 20,000 "insurgents" fighting for their freedom. Hundreds of thousands of civilians also died because of the war, mostly from disease. More than 4,200 American combatants would die, as well as the commander in chief: on September 6, 1901, an anarchist, Leon Czolgosz, assassinated McKinley at the Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo, New York. The 28-year-old unemployed steelworker's motive: American crimes in the Philippines. "Now look!" exclaimed Sen. Mark Hanna on the funeral train back to Washington. "That damned cow-

boy is president of the United States!”

“The stars replaced by the skull and cross-bone”

For Twain, all was lost.

“It was impossible to save the Great Republic,” he wrote privately. “She was rotten to the heart. Lust of conquest had long ago done its work.” American atrocities led Twain to bitterly propose a new flag for the Philippine Islands under U.S. military control. “We can have a special one — our States do it: we can have just our usual flag, with the white stripes painted black and the stars replaced by the skull and cross-bone,” wrote Twain.

That black flag full of skulls and crossbones now flies over the U.S. Capitol, and it isn't coming down any time soon. The United States is an empire with no recognizable domestic opposition. The imperialist Theodore Roosevelt was right: many Americans believe it is the right of the U.S. government to rule the world. But the anti-imperialists such as Carnegie, Schurz, and Twain

were also correct. Empire will be our undoing, for it is not a reflection of our greatness and benevolence, but of our weakness and savagery.

Kinzer has written an important book on a well-trod area of American history because it's a reminder that large segments of the American population were ardent anti-imperialists and that isolationism wasn't always a dirty word. Instead, anti-imperialists, as Kinzer notes, “were conservatives who looked back to old virtues, not ahead to global power.” Whether Americans can rediscover and recapture their founding philosophy of noninterventionism remains to be seen. If they don't, a reckoning is coming, and it's long overdue.

Matthew Harwood is a writer living in northern New Jersey. His work has appeared at The American Conservative, the Guardian, Reason, Tom-Dispatch, and others. He is senior writer/editor at the American Civil Liberties Union.

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