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Bird's Eye

KARL ZINSMEISTER

The Fearsome Master

WERE WE DIRECTED FROM WASHINGTON WHEN TO SOW, AND WHEN TO REAP,
WE SHOULD SOON WANT BREAD.
—Thomas Jefferson

I'm sure some readers, upon seeing this issue of *The American Enterprise*, will ask themselves, "Socialism? Isn't that a dead topic?" Well... Have you ever heard of people losing use of their land because of some environmental control?...Are there farmers in your area receiving crop subsidies?...Do you know anyone who surrenders 50 percent of his income to taxes?...Do your children seem to be getting heavy doses of multicultural ideology at school these days? If so, then you've seen the 1990s face of socialism.

Socialism—the demand for equal outcomes, engineered by political elites enforcing strict rules—has taken on many new forms in recent decades. But one consistent marker is always present: an emphasis on government control. Equally consistent are socialism's eventual effects: arrogant bosses, frustrated citizens, and a backlash against state domination. Which is where our socialism theme links in interesting ways to current political sentiments—please read on.

The fall of the Berlin Wall and the discrediting of Marxism that followed obviously took a lot of the thrill out of being a socialist, and for some years to come people with newly opened eyes will be throwing bits of socialist furniture overboard. Just this April, Britain's Labour Party finally scrapped its longstanding commitment to the nationalization of British industry, substituting instead a statement paying homage to "the enterprise of the market and the rigor of competition." In another little sign, Washington State recently dumped its "universal coverage" health care plan that forced people to accept standardized, centrally managed medicine (as President Clinton's proposal would have—the Washington State proposal was known as "Hillary Lite"). These are signs of healthy resistance to socialist nostrums.

On the other hand, are you aware that of the Eastern European nations who dumped communism five years ago, all but three (Albania, Slovenia, and the Czech Republic) have voted their former Communist managers back into power after growing weary of the disciplined independence that non-socialist rule demands of individuals? Likewise, the great wave of economic liberalization that was supposed to surge through Japan when that nation's electorate threw out the Liberal Democratic Party and its "corporate socialism" in 1993 has so far proved to be little more than a damp ripple.

And here in the land of Jefferson, plenty of destructive socialist practices persist. On pages 42–52 we outline the socialist origins of America's multi-billion dollar farm programs and describe some of the ways they damage our agricultural sector. Socialism's controlling impulse is very strong in the current environmental movement, as our "Enviro-socialism" feature and the brief item in SCAN on Gareth Porter and Alexander Cockburn indicate. The Clinton administration's attempts to establish a national "industrial policy" have given Japanese-style central planning a toehold in Washington (see our "Business Welfare" feature, the *ECONOMIST*, and SCAN). And of course progressive taxation (which geometrically increases the tax payments owed by each higher income group, a socialist dream ever since it was proposed in *The Communist Manifesto*) has been clung to in this country even when other forms of taxation would raise equivalent amounts of money in fairer and more efficient ways. (With the arrival of serious flat tax proposals, however, this could change in the next year or two—see our definitive guide to tax reform starting on page 57.)

Finally, the socialist impulse has survived by taking on new, non-economic forms. As the participants in our Roundtable suggest (pp. 28–35), much of the energy and activism, and many of the same people, that used to go into economic socialism are now channeled into movements that seek to “free the oppressed” in areas such as race, ethnicity, age, sexual activity, disability (broadly defined to include people like drug addicts), even body weight. Thus our current bloom of causes like multiculturalism, gay liberation, feminism, literary “deconstructionism,” even an “animal rights” movement that liberates beetles, minnows, and owls into equal status with humans. *National Review* editor John O’Sullivan has usefully defined socialism as “an attempt to construct an egalitarian society by state action.” And that is exactly what all of these new “cultural” radicalisms do.

GOVERNMENT IS A DANGEROUS SERVANT AND A FEARSOME MASTER.
— George Washington

In the essay where O’Sullivan provides his definition of socialism, he goes on to point out that the use of state power to enforce egalitarian goals “will inevitably set government on a collision course with large numbers of its citizens whose individual ambitions do not coincide with official aims.” And the more thoroughgoing the egalitarianism, the harsher the state controls must be.

Linger on O’Sullivan’s image of a collision course—of a state in such dogged pursuit of ideological ends that it comes into serious conflict with its own cursedly independent citizens in the process. Is that at all familiar?

One side effect of the awful events at Oklahoma City has been to make the national establishment in this country realize that a large portion of the populace feels seriously threatened by their own government. Last year, 73 percent of all Americans were telling Luntz Research pollsters they thought the federal government had “too much power.” Sixty-nine percent were complaining to Times Mirror investigators that “government controls too much of our daily lives.” But many in power just shrugged off such findings: “People don’t really mean it.” “Not in a literal sense.” “Just a political mood.”

Then came the stunning polls of late April and early May (see INDICATORS). Even while the U.S. president and many in the media were linking any criticism of the government with support for the villains who carried out the evil crime in Oklahoma, up to half of all Americans continued to say they felt threatened by their federal establishment. A disturbing result.

And not one confined to angry white males. Survey research finds that women and Democrats are every bit as fearful today of government as men and Republicans. Liberal political activist Carol Moore, author of a book on Waco, recently pointed out to *USA Today* that “the whole idea of tanks smashing into a home is a traumatizing experience for everyone. Nothing like that has happened in the history of the country, and they could get away with it.”

Even as members of the nation’s leadership class have finally be-

IF WE WANT TO REDUCE THE NUMBER OF AMERICANS WHO ARE FRIGHTENED OF THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT, THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT MUST STOP FRIGHTENING SO MANY.

come aware of how estranged millions of citizens are from their rulers, many still can’t fathom why. “To my amazement, there are voices that claim repression by government, and fear of government,” exclaimed FBI director Louis Freeh in a commencement address on May 13.

It isn’t just the fatal excesses of Mr. Freeh’s own bureau that the amazed ones can’t see. They’re even more likely to overlook the pervasive little day-to-day tyrannies committed by

government agencies like the EPA, the EEOC, OSHA, the “wetlands” guardians at the Army Corp of Engineers, various “fair housing” authorities, the IRS, Child Protective Services, state and county “Human Rights” commissions, local building and zoning authorities, and others who wield increasingly intrusive police powers against the public. As a service to director Freeh and other Washingtonians who don’t have a clue as to what’s irritating so many Americans today, here are some random snapshots that may provide a hint.

HE HAS ERECTED A MULTITUDE OF NEW OFFICES, AND SENT HITHER SWARMS OF OFFICERS TO HARASS OUR PEOPLE, AND EAT OUT THEIR SUBSTANCE.
— *The Declaration of Independence*

- “Our membership has become very anti-government in recent years,” says Drew Hiatt of the National Business Owners Association. “There are over 132,000 pages of government regulations on the books,” he points out. “How is a small business owner with two or three employees supposed to keep up with all that?”

- Cliff Gardener, who has battled a mushrooming list of environmental restrictions on his Nevada ranch over the last two decades, tells an interviewer from the *Washington Times* that his animosity toward the government grows out of bureaucratic red tape strangling his way of life, not the Waco or Ruby Ridge assaults. Nonetheless, he can place himself in the position of Randy Weaver: “They destroyed his family just the same as they’re destroying our livelihood,” said Mr. Gardener, his voice rising. “That’s the kind of government action we’re seeing these days.”

- Tom Baker was a construction contractor in the mid-1980s and claimed a \$300 tax deduction for a truck cap he bought to protect his tools. That started a battle with the IRS that led to years of fighting, a seizure order on his vehicle, and garnishment of his wages. He went bankrupt. “It totally ruined me,” he told *USA Today*.

- Forty million Americans will clash with the IRS this year.

- The Tax Foundation calculates that the average American worker must now toil until May 5 just to pay off his taxes. Only after then is he working for himself and his family.

- Writer Virginia Postrel quotes a California plumber describing the change he has witnessed in regulators’ attitudes. “It’s not enough with OSHA that you have a safety program. It’s not enough that you’re trying. Now they’re increasingly looking not just to get the bad guys, but to scare the [expletive] out of everybody.”

- In his inaugural press conference, the Clinton-appointed

chairman of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission observed that businessmen are frightened when they get a call from the IRS or EPA. "By the end of my term, I hope people worry when they get a call from the EEOC."

- There are currently 22,000 gun laws in America. They haven't prevented criminals from having easy access to weapons, but they have made it impossible for many shopkeepers and homeowners to defend themselves from violent predations, loss of liberty and property, and even death.

- There are today whole new categories of crimes that didn't used to exist. Floridians Ocie and Carey Mills recently spent close to two years each in prison for filling in swampy areas on their own land with clean sand. John Pozsgai of Pennsylvania got a three-year prison sentence and \$202,000 fine for placing clean fill on land across the street from his truck repair business. Remember the New Jersey man who had to face a judge last year after killing an alley rat in his own back yard? Remember the brother landlords hauled into court after explaining they preferred not to rent their apartment to an unmarried couple?

- Whole new agencies are getting into the order-giving business. Once sleepy organizations like the Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management can now seize the use of land and close down businesses and towns. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service recently caused 1,500 angry citizens to turn out for a hearing in the tiny town of Llano, Texas (they were protesting a plan to declare large swatches of central Texas as critical habitat for the golden-cheeked warbler). That is a serious warning of public discontent.

- And not an isolated one. What moved 1,000 people in the quiet little town of Meadville, Pennsylvania to attend a meeting in February 1995 with speakers from the Michigan Militia?

- Restaurant owner Sarah McCarthy of Pittsburgh has described to *TAE* how a collapsed romance between a waitress and a bartender at a popular local business led to a "sexual harassment" complaint that bankrupted the owner and closed the facility, despite testimony from other female employees that it was "the best place they had ever worked." McCarthy remarks, "I'm a businesswoman living in urban Pittsburgh, married to a college professor, and when I hear someone say today that they are 'afraid of a government out of control' I have no trouble whatever in identifying with them."

One need not be an investigative journalist to collect incidents like the above. Most Americans have by now had personal experience with the stress, frustration, and heavy financial costs that intrusive government can inflict. Rigid tailpipe testing on the family car. Harsh tax audits. Exhausting building permit ordeals before you're allowed to put a bathroom on your own house. False child abuse charges in divorce cases. Small businesses closed down for lack of some foolish bureaucratic permit. Government liens placed on your property for consulting as an architect, looking after a neighbor's child, or otherwise conducting business at home. These are not figments of paranoid imagination. They are real occurrences—within my own daily experience and that of most readers.

My best friend from high school, a kind, principled man who is the fifth generation to run his family business, was recently forced to pay a large five-figure blackmail bribe to a disgruntled woman who had filed a discrimination complaint with the state Human

Rights commission after a male employee with a much better record and more education was given a promotion she coveted. Given the "guilty until proven innocent" rules under which these Human Rights commissions have been set up by government, defending oneself against a witchhunt can be extraordinarily expensive and traumatizing. "I had literally an 18-inch pile of paper on my desk, and the demands were never-ending," says my friend. He gave up when his case stretched into its *seventh* year and well over the \$25,000 mark in legal costs. Just to get the woman out of his business (where, protected by her pending case before the government, she had all the while been poisoning morale with vicious workplace complaints), he told his lawyer to make the settlement payoff.

Another friend, who is a college professor, got into considerable trouble with the authorities and had a beloved foster son taken away when he and his wife didn't let the child go to summer camp after he binged away the money the family had required him to save for that purpose. A third family I know are Mennonites who adopted two street orphans from Guatemala and ended up in grave legal trouble with the state of New York after trying to discipline one when he became violent as a teenager. The incident and its aftermath eventually led to jail terms for three extended family members, including the adoptive mother of the children. These are humble, enormously decent dairy farmers who tithe, do missionary work, and live quiet, thoughtful lives.

For those American leaders genuinely concerned that millions of citizens now express dread for their state apparatus, I can do no better than to invoke the message of David Kopel's feature article later in these pages: If we want to reduce the number of Americans who are frightened of the federal government, the federal government must stop frightening so many.

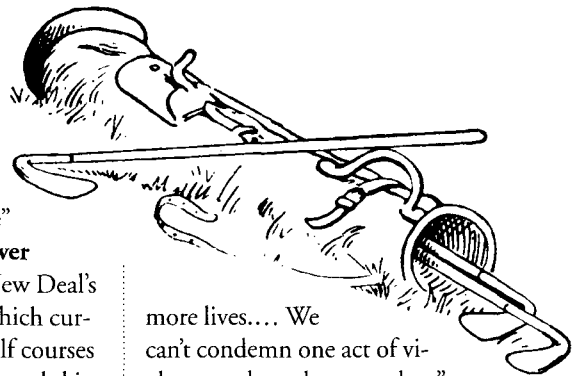
ABOUT THOMAS HART BENTON

Four works by the great American painter and muralist Thomas Hart Benton provide the visual signature for this issue of *The American Enterprise*. In the first decades of his life, Benton painted highly abstract modernist pieces, was teacher to Jackson Pollock, and voted Communist. He counted among his close friends Boardman Robinson, who traveled with John Reed in Russia, and Bob Minor, founder of the American Communist Party. In the mid 1920s, when Benton was in his mid-30s, he plunged into a series of long back-to-the-roots rambles across the United States, and emerged with an idealized but realistic painting style that celebrated everyday Americans. At the same time, he abandoned socialist politics and began to criticize his old leftist comrades for "twisting reality for the sake of their beliefs." By the middle of the 1930s he was equating socialism with fascism, because both encourage "the primitive leader principle" and ignore democratic rule of law. From his own experience he dismissed followers of Karl Marx as "dogmatic, self-righteous, and humorless"—and determined to force art and thought "into the stereotypes of propagandist pattern." In 1935 Benton left New York City, his home of more than 20 years, describing it as "a highly provincial place" whose artistic and intellectual life had become dominated by political extremists, the querulous, and homosexuals. He lived the rest of his days in the Middle West, painting monumental works with an especial interest in American folk life and biblical themes.

Spotted in Fort Lauderdale, Florida: a beggar whose sign read, "Hell, why lie? I need a beer!" ☛ Convicted tax cheat **Richard M. Hersch** loves the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC). He told the Senate it should stand for Easy Income for Tax Cheats. . . . Taxing Differences: In 1903, the IRS's 400 employees collected \$230 million; today the IRS's 114,000 employees collect about \$1.2 trillion. ☛ In an "affectionate critique" of his hosts at the Newspaper Association of America, House Speaker **Newt Gingrich** had blunt words to describe newspaper editors: "They are socialists. Oh, they may not technically believe in government ownership, they just believe in government control." ☛ **Timothy McVeigh's** friend **James Nichols** complained to his state representative that he was entitled to more than the \$36,522 in farm subsidies that he'd received in recent years. ☛ During Congress's first 100 days, the network evening news ran a combined total of 34 stories supporting government spending while each network aired only one story on the need to downsize government, the Media Research Center reports. ☛ **Bob Dole** and **Bill Clinton** both used to attend Foundry Methodist Church in Washington, but Dole moved on after the Rev. **J. Philip Wogaman** arrived. The new pastor has drawn fire for past statements that praised socialism's "modest but real economic success" in China and Cuba. ☛ '60s Radicals and Their Children: **Tupac Shakur**—gangster rapper and multiple offender currently serving 4½ years for sexual assault—is the son of a proud former Black Panther mother. "I'm happy they're expressing their anger," she says of her son and his colleagues. . . . The Borough of Manhattan Community College had planned to name scholarships in honor of **Assata Shakur**, a Black Panther convicted of killing a police officer, and Vietnamese Communist leader **Ho Chi**

Minh, but after press criticism the college changed its mind. ☛ As "corporate welfare" comes under attack, author **Grover Norquist** draws a bead on the New Deal's rural electrification programs, which currently subsidize electricity for golf courses at Hilton Head, South Carolina, and ski resorts in Aspen and Vail.

Rep. Sam Brownback (R-Kan.) on the difference between conservatives and liberals: "Do you agree with **Sonny**—or **Cher**?" ☛ Sen. **John Ashcroft** (R-Mo.) has introduced legislation that would send welfare funding and responsibility to the local level, where private organizations can best help the needy. Under his plan, the most successful private charities would not have to "expunge their crucial spiritual elements." That way, "government shekels would not become government shackles." . . . Inspired by welfare analyst **Marvin Olasky**, the Ashcroft reforms also feature substantial tax credits for volunteer work with the poor, because "money alone" is not enough to help the needy. . . . New York insurance broker **Johnson & Higgins** celebrated its 150th anniversary by closing all 120 offices around the world so employees and their children could perform over 50,000 man-hours of volunteer work. ☛ Sweden's Parliament plans large spending cuts and social-welfare reform in this year's budget, as well as reductions in the value-added tax on food from 21 to 12 percent. ☛ Actor **Jack Nicholson** told *Cigar Aficionado* magazine he opposes abortion because his young, unmarried mother—who to her death he believed was his sister—might have aborted him if it had been legal. "I think it would be comically incorrect for someone in my position to be for abortion," he said. . . . Attacking hate speech, President Clinton declared, "We need not abuse our freedom so cavalierly. We need not snuff out



more lives.... We can't condemn one act of violence and condone another." His audience was EMILY's List, a pro-abortion PAC. ☛ Though pundits and polls regularly invoke poll numbers to prove what's "politically impossible," about half the public admitted to pollsters that they'd never heard of the Republicans' Contract with America just as the House of Representatives held final votes on it. . . . Only about one in four Americans rates **FDR** one of our greatest presidents, a Harris poll reports. ☛ A *Los Angeles Times* article on summer camp advises L.A. kids not to pack X-rated magazines, pagers, cellular phones, or \$500 spending money.

Even though pro scouts say he'd go in the third round of the NFL draft, BYU's 330-pound offensive tackle **Eli Herring** says he won't turn pro after college because playing on Sundays would violate the Sabbath. He'll teach high school math instead. ☛ Leaving his Washington, D.C. home in a camouflage uniform, an Air Force reservist was asked by a perturbed neighbor, "Are you in a militia?" . . . Last year, servicemen at the 29 Palms Marine Corps base were given a "Combat Arms Survey" that asked whether they "would fire upon U.S. citizens who refuse or resist confiscation of firearms banned by the U.S. government." ☛ **Chris Gross**, a 26-year-old financial analyst in California, plans to put up over one-year's salary to start a college scholarship fund for children who lost a parent in the Oklahoma City bombing. His employer, Applied Materials, is matching his \$54,000 donation.

—SW