



Turnabout Is Fair Play

by Tom Bethell

The old political blocs, frozen during the Cold War, really are breaking up, as the events following the Oklahoma City bombing showed. In some respects there has been an almost comic reversal of allegiance; President Clinton, the croaking mouthpiece of liberalism, has been talking up law-and-order. Conservatives have been reminding us of our civil liberties. "No one has the right to run law enforcement officers down," Mr. Clinton said at one point. Don't have the right, Mr. President? Er, what does the ACLU have to say about that? I checked some recent issues of the *Nation* magazine, and Alexander Cockburn seemed positively perky about right-wing disenchantment with federal law enforcement.

The "official" news media have begun to worry about . . . the media. All those awful people out there are beginning to communicate with one another without asking anyone's permission! That is more or less the complaint of *Washington Post* columnist Jessica Mathews, who worries about "our over-faxed society." Thank you, communications revolution. The attempts by *New York Times* columnist Frank Rich to "connect the dots" between anti-abortionists and right-wing groups brought to mind analogous attempts by the John Birch Society to connect up the left-wing dots.

The National Rifle Association discovered "a sickening pattern of sexual harassment" and "institutional racism" within the ranks of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms. So now we oppose sickening patterns. Anthony Lewis of the *Times* reminded us that "the First Amendment gives us responsibility along with freedom"—just the kind of thing Reed Irvine of *Accuracy in Media* used to say. The Oklahoma City bombing, Lewis added, makes us think about the "consequences" of hateful speech. That's funny, I don't

remember him saying that at the time of the 4,000-odd bombings by the Weathermen and related groups in 1969-70. He was too busy excoriating U.S. policy makers in Vietnam to worry about the consequences of speech. Lewis, who has often accused people of hate without evidence, now realizes that "words matter."

"Ideas Have Consequences" used to be the quintessential conservative slogan. It was long repudiated by liberals, who thought ideas were "persecuted" and denied that legitimizing pornography and irresponsibility (via welfare) would affect the wider culture. Now they point to Newt Gingrich's comment that Democrats are "the enemy of normal Americans," and remind us that opinion leaders are responsible for "the consequences" of their words. We'll buy that.

Oklahoma reminded me of conversations in the 1960s. America was so sick and racist that trying to change the law was futile, some said. Don't give up, the liberals would reply. "Work within the system." That's what I find myself saying today: "Work for change within the system." Meanwhile, liberals seek to preserve their "gains": the massive expansion of federal power they engineered over the last sixty years. They may have been critical in the past, but now is the time for all good lefties to come to the aid of Big Brother, Ellén Willis said in the *Village Voice*. The post-Cold War idea that the right was in disarray because it had lost its enemy may have been wishful thinking by liberals.

President Clinton seized the opportunity to appeal to patriotism, but with an inappropriate argument. "There is nothing patriotic about . . . pretending that you can love your country but despise your government," he said at Michigan State. Oh? Peggy Noonan put it best, on NBC's "Today" show: "Americans love their country and fear their government. Liberals love their government and fear the

people." (By the way, I have heard it said that in light of recent rhetoric Dr. Johnson's famous adage should be amended: Scoundrels find refuge today not in patriotism but in children—whom budget cuts will hurt the most.) As the *Wall Street Journal* noted, Clinton himself once claimed a patriotic basis for anti-government sentiment, in his 1969 letter to the Arkansas ROTC director. The draft system was "illegitimate," he said, because no government "should have the power to make its citizens fight and kill and die in a war they may oppose . . ."

He was right about that, but he should realize that the government over which he presides has illegitimate features. The federal government has steadily accumulated a vast amount of unconstitutional power over the last sixty years, with the connivance of judiciary and press. Until this usurpation has been corrected, patriotic Americans will continue to fear their government. It's a measure of the extent to which the Constitution has been subverted that liberals no longer need amend the document in order to achieve anything they want. Responding to the liberal will, Supreme Court justices have acted as *federales*, imposing federal law on the states, overturning state law at will, and almost always waving congressional enactments through the constitutional checkpoint without a second glance. On term limits, they once again acted as the Beltway's reliable ally.

There was admittedly a rare exception in April. The Court ruled 5-4 that the Commerce Clause of the U.S. Constitution was insufficient justification for a federal law outlawing gun possession near schools (see page 55). "The High Court Loses Restraint," the *New York Times* angrily responded. Restraint? That's one way of describing what the Court has been doing for these many years—cracking down on the states and giving the Congress carte blanche. Since the 1930s, the Commerce Clause has been one of the most important

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rationales for the centralization of power in Washington. Its abandonment would indeed be counterrevolutionary, but that would be too much to hope for.

In May, George Bush emerged in his true colors. First he agreed that the GOP should drop its anti-abortion plank, then he won a round of easy applause by attacking the NRA. Clinton followed suit, reminding us that we are in the second half of the Bush-Clinton administration, and that for years we had something close to a one-party system in Washington. Some things admittedly never change. The Oklahoma City bombing was a disaster and therefore construed as an opportunity to expand federal power. New anti-terrorist legislation would have to be rushed through Congress as quickly as possible.

SCENE: The White House

Aide, entering Oval Office: "Mr.

President, we have a disaster . . ."

President: "Increase federal power!

What did you say the disaster was?"

Aide: "Some people think the Feds have too much power, and . . ."

President: "Increase it all the more!"

Abe Rosenthal of the *New York Times* drew attention to one of the great modern-day political asymmetries. Liberals have had the luxury of "no enemies to the left." Fidel Castro, for example, is no better than a mass murderer, but liberals risked nothing by admiring his good intentions, his alleged health-care achievements, his soaring literacy rates. Notice Castro's royal progress through the higher Parisian echelons recently. Liberals could nonchalantly share the podium with guerrilla leaders from El Salvador and members of the Communist Party. "Guilt by association" was strictly forbidden. Any attempt to connect those dots was called McCarthyism.

Conservatives, on the other hand, have been expected to repudiate anyone to their right. That's the world we have lived in for decades. Now Rosenthal worries that conservatives are daring to copy the liberals: "No enemies to the Right." It seems we do now have a right, which is a novelty. Personally, I don't regard them as my enemies, although I do disagree with them. They have no power of coercion, no desire to spend my money or take my property. They do not accuse me of greed, tell me whom I may or may not

associate with, contribute to the delinquency of minors, or pose incessantly as my moral tutors. Those armed with legal powers are bound to be more of a threat than those with firearms alone, as we saw at Waco, and Ruby Ridge, Idaho.

True, those on the far right often are terribly misguided—believing in a U.N. plot to take over the United States, for example. In reality the U.N. is a waning institution—a cushy sinecure for the politically well connected. Rightists would be closer to the truth if they saw it as a tool of the U.S. rather than the reverse. The far right also believes some sad, poignant things, such as the existence of a plan to rescind the U.S. Constitution—as though it were not already in tatters.

We should also remember that those who disparage U.N. plots to take over the U.S. are precisely the people who hoped that one day the U.N. would take over not just the U.S. but the whole world, and do so openly. Jessica Matthews's ridicule of conspiracies to "make the nation states disappear" would be more persuasive if she had not herself argued that climate change and other "trends" are "undermining sovereignty in ways we cannot restore."

It's not so much the notion of a one-world goal as the conspiratorial attainment of it that leaves liberals aghast with disbelief. And rightly so, for those in power have no need of conspiracies. With the law on your side, you can proceed legally. Right-wingers are deluded indeed if they think their opposition is so hemmed in by the law that it is reduced to clandestine and illegal subterfuges. The shoe is more nearly on the other foot.

Repeatedly, conservatives have denounced the Oklahoma City bombing as a shocking and immoral act. What I have not seen is any acknowledgment by liberals that maybe the federal government has accumulated too much power, and needs to back off. Clinton's response has been entirely along the lines of: "How dare they suggest . . . How dare they criticize . . ." He has been surprisingly partisan—openly on the side of Big Brother and the recipient classes. These admittedly were the people who voted for him. Unlike Bush, he has the political sense to shore up his own base. For two months Clinton has been moving to the left rather than the center, obviously heading off a challenge from within his own party. There has been little acknowledgment that he is, as they used to say, president of all the people.

What all this tells me is that the liberals, unlike the Communists, are not going to give up without a fight. They have long intended to re-educate us, remake our lives, shape our thoughts, our habits, and our bank balances, and they are not about to abandon the effort just because the country is in what they see as a "cynical" mood. We, of course, will keep pressing for peaceful change, working within the system. As we do so, let us bear in mind the words of John F. Kennedy: "Those who make peaceful change impossible will make violent change inevitable." □

New Respect for Hatch

In a quiet ceremony in Washington D.C., Orrin Hatch, the senior Republican senator from Utah, received the Strange New Respect Award. The presentation was made by his good friend and Senate colleague, Edward M. Kennedy of Massachusetts. The award is given annually to Republicans who arrive in Washington with a conservative outlook, but "grow" in wisdom and understanding and eventually view the world with an Inside-the-Beltway perspective. Previous winners have included Sen. Pete Domenici of New Mexico and Justice David Souter.

At the ceremony, several points were noted in Hatch's favor. "Orrin gave us David Kessler at the FDA, and we owe you for that, Orrin," Sen. Kennedy said in a brief speech. More recently, Hatch offered no protest to the promotion of Larry Potts to be deputy director of the FBI. "The *New York Times* objected, but not Orrin Hatch," Kennedy joshingly pointed out. Potts had been censured for his supervision of the assault on Randy Weaver's mountain cabin in Idaho. Sen. Hatch has also opposed calls for Waco hearings, which won him the admiration of senior journalists in Washington. Some serve on the Strange New Respect committee. How strange it was, they said, to find that for once they preferred Hatch to Sen. Arlen Specter (who supports Waco hearings).

The award is expected to help Hatch win the support of liberal senators in the event that he is nominated to the U.S. Supreme Court, the position he has long sought. Hatch, 60, was elected to the Senate in 1976.

—T.B.



My Favorite Career Pol

Gov. John Engler has brought conservatism to power in his home state, but is there life for him after Michigan?

by Robert D. Novak

Whenever I am asked, out on the lecture circuit, who I would like to see the Republicans nominate for president next year, I reply: John Engler. The glazed look that usually follows implies a further question: Who is *he*?



John Engler is the governor of Michigan and the secret weapon of the Grand Old Party. Whether or not Republicans ever use his enormous talents on the national scene, his performance at the state level over the last five years is a model for molding seemingly discordant elements into a genuine majority party. While Engler remains an unknown quantity to the vast majority of voters beyond the borders of Michigan, he has attained an almost mythic stature inside the narrow world of national politics. What is remarkable is the *scope* of his support. House Speaker Newt Gingrich cites Engler as an exemplar of steadfastness to buck up the faint of heart. Ralph Reed, executive director of the socially conservative Christian Coalition, sees Engler as an ideal running mate for Sen. Robert J. Dole—or anybody else. Socially liberal New York Mayor Rudolph Giuliani considers Engler a role model. Supply-sider Jude Wanniski has been pushing Engler as a vice presidential candidate to team with publisher Malcolm S. Forbes, Jr.

In an age of television, Engler-for-president is not practical. Pudgy and certainly not handsome, he could pass for a good deal older than his 47 years. The compacted primary schedule could also be expected to argue against running. His second wife,

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