

Grounds for Hope and Despair

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Theme: [History](#)

My February 16 column, [A Country of Serfs Ruled By Oligarchs](#), received confirmation from high places on the very day it appeared. Popular Indiana Democratic U.S. Senator Evan Bayh announced that he was quitting the Senate. Yahoo News [gave this account](#):

“In an interview on MSNBC this morning, newly retiring Sen. Evan Bayh declared the American political system ‘dysfunctional,’ riddled with ‘brain-dead partisanship’ and permanent campaigning. Flatly denying any possibility that he’d seek the presidency or any other higher office, Bayh argued that the American people needed to deliver a ‘shock’ to Congress by voting incumbents out in mass and replacing them with people interested in reforming the process and governing for the good of the people, rather than deep-pocketed special-interest groups.”

In short, Senator Bayh got tired of being a whore for the corporate lobbyists who rule the U.S.

As Shamus Cooke [noted](#) the same day, in the last election voters gave the Democrats a super majority in the mistaken belief that Democrats would remove U.S. policy from the corporate/[neocon](#) grip only to find that the result was a surge in America’s wars of aggression.

There are grounds for hope in the fact that some of the Tea Party people understand that Americans have been betrayed and abandoned by both parties.

An unusual candidate has emerged for governor of Texas. [Debra Medina](#) is doing well with popular support without machine politics. She has an intriguing idea to [abolish the property tax in Texas](#).

Medina makes the valid point that the property tax is a permanent government lien on a person’s home. A person never owns his home even after the mortgage is paid off, because he has to continue paying government for the right to live in his home.

Many elderly people have found that a lifetime of inflation and rising real estate assessments have pushed up the tax on their homes so much that it accounts for a large percentage of their retirement incomes. In Alexandria, Virginia, for example, the local government has a program by which the elderly can avoid property tax in exchange for letting the government inherit the property. It is the heirs who are dispossessed.

The Texas Public Policy Foundation studied Medina’s proposal and concluded that a rise in the Texas sales tax from 8.25 percent to 8.8 percent would allow the property tax to be abolished as long as some untaxed services, such as mining services, drilling services, legal services, and limousine services were brought into the tax base.

If Medina is a real representative of the people, she comprises a threat to the oligarchy. The oligarchy will go after her with every known dirty trick. Will Texans stand by her?

Grounds for hope are not easily come by, but plentiful are the grounds for despair. My recent article, [It Is Now Official: The U.S. Is A Police State](#), also received confirmation on February 16 with the appearance of Pulitzer prize-winning American journalist Chris Hedges interview with Russia Today on Information Clearing House. [[Video](#)]

Asked about the Fahad Hashmi case, Hedges pointed out that Hashmi is a U.S. citizen whose every constitutional right has been violated just as if he were an “enemy combatant,” a designation used to justify holding non-Americans [in indefinite detention](#). Moreover, Hedges reported that Hashmi is not being prosecuted for committing or planning an act of terror. He is being prosecuted “for what he believes,” or to be more precise Hashmi is being prosecuted for expressing dissent. The government’s evidence against him is tape recordings of speeches he made at Brooklyn College as a student activist denouncing U.S. policies.

These tapes will be played to a patriotic jury likely to convict him for being a Muslim and an anti-American.

As Hedges emphasizes, Hashmi’s conviction would make expression of dissent an indictable offense. If expressing dissent is a crime, then thinking it will also be a crime. The government will produce manuals for its police on how to read body language and facial expressions as indicators of thought crimes.

The rapidity with which the U.S. is being transformed into a police state is astonishing. It has occurred under the guise of “the war on terror,” itself a product of 9/11. Americans were told that the police state regime was only for terrorists, but like RICO’s asset freezes, which were only for the Mafia, and the war on drugs’ asset forfeitures, which were only for drug lords, the suspension of constitutionally guaranteed civil liberties now extends to all.

Americans regard such warnings as hyperbole. They think they are safe as long as they are not doing anything wrong. In other words, they think that anyone the government picks up must be guilty.

This view shows a remarkable ignorance of the 20th century. Nazi concentration camps and the Soviet Gulag were full of people who had done nothing wrong. Many were people demonized for being of the wrong race and class. Others were people reported by envious neighbors or by someone settling a score. The system didn’t care, because it existed independently of any concerns about justice or security.

In the 1990s I saw a Russian movie about the Stalin era. The main character was a Soviet war hero, personally praised by Stalin. In his home area he had enormous authority and could order off Soviet military maneuvers that impinged on the collective farm’s crops. One day a KGB agent shows up who wants the war hero’s beautiful wife. The war hero is amused that a mere KGB agent thinks he has power over him. “Wait until Stalin hears about this,” he says as he comes out in his military uniform with his medals and confidently drives away with the agent to be beaten and disappeared into the gulag. Even if Stalin would have cared, he would never have known.

Police states remove accountability from those in authority. One result is to remove

constraints on behavior. Even when there are constraints, some spouses abuse one another and some parents abuse children. Some people abuse animals. Even many Americans have abusive tendencies as Abu Ghraib makes completely clear.

It starts with little things and works its way up. Tens of thousands of people have experienced unsatisfactory encounters with the Transportation Safety Administration, otherwise known as the airport police. In a recent case a police officer and his wife were taking their 4-year-old son to Disney World for his birthday. The child has to wear [leg braces](#) due to problems associated with his premature birth. The TSA screener ordered the braces removed before the boy could walk through the detector. But, of course, the boy could not walk without the braces. The police officer and his wife were stunned to find that TSA cannot tell the difference between an American police officer and his disabled child and a terrorist threat.

A police state has no need to differentiate. Those Americans who don't care what happens to Fahad Hashmi, Aafia Siddiqui, Omar Khadr, and countless others are opening themselves to similar treatment and the rest of us along with them.

Paul Craig Roberts [[email him](#)] was Assistant Secretary of the Treasury during President Reagan's first term. He was Associate Editor of the Wall Street Journal. He has held numerous academic appointments, including the William E. Simon Chair, Center for Strategic and International Studies, Georgetown University, and Senior Research Fellow, Hoover Institution, Stanford University. He was awarded the Legion of Honor by French President Francois Mitterrand. He is the author of [Supply-Side Revolution : An Insider's Account of Policymaking in Washington](#); [Alienation and the Soviet Economy](#) and [Meltdown: Inside the Soviet Economy](#), and is the co-author with Lawrence M. Stratton of [The Tyranny of Good Intentions : How Prosecutors and Bureaucrats Are Trampling the Constitution in the Name of Justice](#). [Click here](#) for Peter Brimelow's Forbes Magazine interview with Roberts about the epidemic of prosecutorial misconduct. His latest book, [How The Economy Was Lost](#) , has just been published by CounterPunch/AK Press.

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