The Fallacy of "Neither Left nor Right": Militia Fever

Janet Biehl

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At a time when the political sands have shifted massively to the right nearly everywhere, when the right is riding high while the left languishes in debris, it is increasingly common to hear the cry "Neither left nor right!" Few right-wingers issue this cry — but then, why should they? Their political label is the toast of several continents today. The fact is that the strongest political winds are blowing many leftists, like the rest of the society, toward conservatism and a glorification of the market.

Although the cry has become more common since the collapse of the Soviet system, it did not originate in this era. Realo Greens were known to define their party as "neither left nor right" in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Much earlier in this century, in the interwar years, European fascists who intended to reject both capitalism and communism used a related concept to find their supposed "third way." During the Spanish Civil War, the Falangists thought of themselves as "neither of the left nor right nor centre," according to one farmer:

> We were a movement with our own spirit, out not to defend the rich but also not to put the poor above the rich. In many points we agreed with the socialists. But they were materialist revolutionaries and we were spiritual ones. What differentiated us most was that we lacked the hatred of capitalism which they exhibited. The marxists declared war on anyone with wealth; our idea was that the right must give up a part in order to allow others to live better.[1]

In recent months the insurgent militia movement has occasioned still more rejections of the left-right dichotomy. In the leftist *Nation,* Alexander *censored*burn describes a "Patriot" rally in Michigan as "amiable."[2] *The Boston Globe* advises its readers that the "Freemen" movement of Montana, with its ties to the militias and to apocalyptic religiosity, is "so far off the generally accepted political scale that terms like 'left' and 'right' do not apply" (3/30/96). Jason McQuinn, formerly editor of *Anarchy: A Journal of Desire Armed* and currently editor of *Alternative Press Review,* denounces left and right as two sides of the same problem:

> Left and right have both proved their bankruptcy throughout this century. And neither can lay legitimate claim to our loyalties. It's way past time that both traditions received the scathing critiques they deserve, so that we can take what is best from them and discard what is worthless. It may be true that the left has often added far more of value to the defense of community and international solidarity than the right has ever been able to

[1] As Alberto Pastor, a Falangist farmer, told Ronald Fraser for his *Blood of Spain: An Oral History of the Spanish Civil War* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1979). I'm grateful to Gary Sisco for pointing out this passage.

[2] Alexander *censored*burn, "Who's Left? Who's Right?" Beat the Devil, *Nation* (June 12, 1995), p. 820.

> conceive. But both left and right have ultimately colluded in their support for the two "opposing" sides of capitalist development.[3]

Meanwhile libertarian author and publisher Adam Parfrey objects to leftists who would uphold distinctions between left and right, who "stump for the division of anti-establishment rightists and leftists," since they are ultimately serving the interests of the ruling system.[4] In the wake of the Oklahoma City bombing, he argues, the militias have lamentably "become a scapegoat, a justification for intelligence agencies' headlong rush into technocratic dystopia, where every financial transaction is instantly monitored by computers operated by the Fortune 500 and its omnipotent police force." Those who criticize the militia movement, like the Anti-Defamation League, the Southern Poverty Law Center, and Political Research Associates, ultimately serve the conspiracy itself. Chip Berlet of Political Research Associates demands "ideological purification" that "creates divisions between individuals," while Holly Sklar, in her book on the Trilateral Commission, advances a "crypto-Socialist theology." So runs Parfrey's argument.

That Parfrey's neither-left-nor-right approach has found a congenial home in the pages of McQuinn's *Alternative Press Review* reflects the drift of a major American anarchist editor away from the movement's leftist roots. Meanwhile, some militia members themselves are happy to meet Parfrey and Quinn halfway in their rightward lurch. Bob Fletcher, chief propagandist for the Militia of Montana, is reassuring: "We don't want to hear about left and right, conservative and liberal, all these bullshit labels. Let's get back to the idea of good guys and bad guys, righteous governments — the honest, fair, proper, American government that all of us have been fooled into believing was being maintained."[5]

To some extent, Americans of all political stripes have received a libertarian education. The United States was born in a revolution, and some of its most revered Founding Fathers extolled the right to make one. A too-obvious betrayal of the main pillar of the American promise — the ideal of democracy — could potentially inspire rebellion, even at a time when capitalism is deeply embedded in American social life.

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[3] Jason McQuinn, "Conspiracy Theory vs. Alternative Journalism?" *Alternative Press Review* (Winter 1996), p. 2.

[4] Parfrey defends the militias by exculpating them from any connection with Oklahoma City bombing (which he equates with the Reichstag fire). His far-fetched speculations are designed variously to dissociate the militia movement from McVeigh and to show McVeigh innocent of the bombing. Thus we learn that intelligence agencies used doubles to implicate McVeigh and Terry Nichols in the militias, and that McVeigh's buttocks were implanted with a "microchip" that allowed his location to be charted. Parfrey goes beyond merely making a principled defense of the militias against the corporate-governmental-techno-cartel, as he claims; he seems in fact to share many of their views. He even finds reason to support the existence of the notorious black helicopters. Adam Parfrey, "Finding Our Way out of Oklahoma," *Alternative Press Review* (Winter 1996), pp. 60–67, esp. pp. 63, 67; reprinted from Adam Parfrey, *Cult Rapture* (Portland, OR: Feral House, 1995).]

[5] Quoted in Michael Kelly, "Road to Paranoia," *New Yorker* (June 19, 1995), pp. 60–75, esp. 63.

Antidemocratic forces that serve the interests of a privileged few rather than the people as a whole find that they must either mask their activities entirely or else stupefy the population by using the mass media. Still, suspicion of government persists, even intensifies today, as the institutions of the American republic are ever more palpably hocked to capitalist masters. Distrust of capitalism has not kept pace with distrust of government, even though corporate rapacity has at times been so extreme as to beget movements like the Populists of the 1890s that cast capitalism's "creative destructiveness" as a betrayal of the American promise.

It was a year ago this month that the militia movement came to national attention, denouncing "the tyranny of a run-away, out of control government."[6] In the wake of bungled government attacks on a militant separatist at Ruby Ridge (where an FBI sniper killed two people) and on an apocalyptic preacher and his followers at Waco (in which more than seventy people died), sentiment ran high that the government was out to divest ordinary Americans of their rights as citizens. In particular, the right to bear arms seemed under threat by the passage of the Brady bill, which authorized the beginnings of gun control. These smoldering resentments were intensified by real grievances among working-class people in the American heartland, where global and domestic restructuring was bringing downsizing, declining real wages, and permanent layoffs. Resentments burst into flames, and militia groups were established in at least forty states.

This movement swore to uphold American sovereignty against an array of international forces that seemed intent on diminishing it: the "new world order." The Trilateral Commission, the Council on Foreign Relations, the Federal Reserve, international trade treaties like NAFTA and GATT, and the United Nations had all at one time or another been castigated by the left; now the militias saw these institutions as components of a "new world order" subverting American sovereignty. They perceived, and still do perceive, a global conspiracy in which unseen but powerful hands are manipulating the American government and economy.

Conspiratorialism has a long history, as Michael Kelly recently wrote in *The New Yorker,* one that dates back to the late eighteenth century, when some began to believe that conspirators have been at it for more than two thousand years, perpetuating their plots through a succession of secret and semisecret societies arcing across time and cultures from the early-Christian-era Gnostics and the Jewish Cabalists, and on to the Knights Templars of the twelfth century, the Rosicrucians of the fifteenth, the Bavarian Illuminati of the eighteenth, and from there, through the Freemasons, to the schemers of the twentieth — the Council of Foreign Relations, the Bilderbergers, and the Trilateral Commission. Along the way, step by step toward one-worldism,

[6] Militia of Montana Web site: www.nidlink.com

the plotters have caused everything from the French and Russian Revolutions to the creation of the Federal Reserve, the United Nations, and the Gulf War.[7]

In the nascent militia ideology, black helicopters, the Hong Kong police, microchips inserted under the skin, and programs to change the weather all become parts of the world-conspiratorial plot. An army representing the "new world order," composed of United Nations troops and inner-city gangs, was soon going to occupy America and reduce its citizens to slaves. The Militia of Montana, one of the earliest and most influential of the militia groups, warns that "the Conspirators to form a *socialist one world* government under the *United Nations* are ... at work treasonously subverting the Constitution in order to enslave the Citizens of the State of Montana, The United States of America, and the world in a socialist union."[8]

The remnant left objects with equal ardor to the ongoing globalization and centralization of social, political, and economic forces, but its warrant is not that these forces are threatening American sovereignty; it makes no appeal to patriotism. Nor would the old leftist analysis perceive a sinister conspiracy manipulating the course of events. Rather, it rightfully argued, a specific social force is siphoning off people's control over their lives and pulverizing their communities, commodifying social life and despoiling the biosphere, enervating convivial relationships and reducing people to wage slaves when they are at work and to mindless consumers the rest of the time. That system is capitalism.

To be sure, elite planning bodies do exist, according to Holly Sklar, author of *Trilateralism,* but they are not conspiracies:

> Going back to the early 20th century, there are organizations that have placed fundamental role — not conspiracies but elite planning bodies, there's a fundamental difference — in planning not just U.S. policy but global policy. I want to distinguish how I see the Trilateral Commission from a conspiracy theory. It's not a conspiracy that pulls puppet strings and controls everything and everybody. It is the single most important international planning and consensus building organization among people from Western Europe, Japan, the U.S. and Canada who represent the interests of global corporations and banks — corporations like Exxon, General Motors, Sony, Toyota, Siemens, etc... Too many think there's either a grand conspiracy that controls everything all the time, or there are no important institutions whose motives and goals we need to understand. Too many people look at the Trilateral Commission that way. Either it's a conspiracy or it's a joke. That's completely absurd.[9]

[7] Kelly, "Road to Paranoia," p. 61. Kelly's article, however, seems to disallow the possibility that people could have genuine social grievances and genuinely seek to redress them. For Kelly, even a leftist social revolution against capitalism would appear to be based on a conspiratorial analysis.

[8] Militia of Montana Web site, ibid.

[9] David Barsamian, "Militias and Conspiracy Theories: An Interview with Chip Berlet and Holly Sklar," *Z Magazine* (Sept. 1995), pp. 29–35, esp. 30.

Some leftists have apparently suspended this rational understanding of social and economic forces to find a certain sympathy with the militias. The siren song of conspiratorialism, with its facile explanations and its occasional relish for dystopia, makes it all too easy to forget the overwhelmingly structural social forces that have produced misery in the world today. "This is the terrain," as Philip Smith puts it, "where the Liberty Lobby meets the left, where the Trilateral Commission runs the world, and one-time Vietnam War protesters join militias to fend off the New World Order." Distinctions between left and right can fall by the wayside, on the "climb toward the speculative heights where Communism and Capitalism are merely facets of the *one great conspiracy*."[10] Avowed anarchist McQuinn maintains that while we must always remember our social analysis, we should not shut our minds to conspiracies: he would investigate and expose "the workings of the real world, whether this leads down the road to conspiratorial or structural explanations, or both." Meanwhile Parfrey, a true conspiratorialist, defends the militias as kindred albeit misinformed spirits, since "the militia man with his Manichean conspiracies and apocalyptic dreams" presents a challenge to the "interlocking network" of government, private corporations, foundations, universities, and media.

Militia Antistatism

Militia members do share some views with traditional leftists, including left-libertarians. Indeed, militia ideology shares with traditional anarchism not only an opposition to a "new world order," however one may define it, but a commitment to resisting government tyranny in defense of individual rights. In a passage that could have come from any leftist who takes seriously the legacy of the American Revolution, the Militia of Montana states that it intends to "put at odds any scheme by government officials to use the force of the government against the people.

When the codes and statutes are unjust for the majority of the people, the people will rightly revolt, and the government will have to acquiesce without a shot being fired, because the militia stands vigilant in carrying out the will of the people in defense of rights, liberty, and freedom. The purpose of government is in the protection of the rights of the people, when it does not accomplish this, the militia is the crusade who steps forward, and upon it rests the mantle of the rights of the people.[11]

In statements that would not have been outlandish in the traditional left, the militia movement calls for the people to be armed, in defense of individual rights:

> The security of a free state ... is found in the citizenry being trained, prepared, organized, equipped to and lead [sic] properly so that if the gov-

[10] Philip Smith, "Off the Shelf" (book review section), *CovertAction Quarterly* (Spring 1996), pp. 64–66, esp. 64.

[11] Quoted in Kenneth S. Stern, *A Force Upon the Plain: The American Militia Movement and the Politics of Hate* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996), p. 76.

> ernment uses its force against the citizens, the people can respond with a superior amount of arms, and appropriately defend their rights... Remember Thomas Jefferson's words that the primary purpose of the second amendment was to ensure that Americans as a last resort would be able to defend themselves against a tyrannical government.[12]

Although the notion is distasteful to many on the left today, calls for an armed people were once well known at that end of the political spectrum. At a meeting of the Second International in Stuttgart in August 1907, the congress adopted a resolution co-authored by Lenin and Luxemburg that called for the establishment of militias:

> The Congress sees in the democratic organization of the army, in the popular militia instead of the standing army, an essential guarantee for the prevention of aggressive wars, and for facilitating the removal of differences between nations.[13]

Structurally, as a loose network of small groups rather than a centrally controlled organization, the militia movement calls to mind traditional anarchist movements. The local groups are to be coordinated "using correspondence committees, which is the traditional method."[14] "These committees do not attempt to act as regional, state, or national organizations, but only to facilitate communications among local units, the sharing of literature, and the building of a consensus for action." The whole movement "must be committed to the same cause ... but specific tactics should be left up to the individual elements."[15] In other words, militia members are to think globally but act locally.

Again echoing anarchist opposition to hierarchy and leadership elites, militia ideology advocates a concept of "leaderless resistance." According to this concept, "All individuals and groups operate independently of each other, and never report to a central headquarters or single leader for direction or instruction." Reflecting this decentralization, the movement was organized overwhelmingly through Internet newsgroups and fax networks, which allowed for a wide dissemination of ideas and dispensed with the old former necessity for a demagogic, crowd-stirring leader. The purpose of "leaderless resistance" is "to defeat state tyranny... Like the fog which forms when conditions are right and disappears when they are not, so must the resistance to tyranny be."[16]

Decentralized in structure, tactics, and action, the movement's purported aims are decentralist as well. Militia members look with favor upon local political units, indeed define themselves in terms of their locality, denying the legitimacy of political entities beyond. According to the Constitution Society:

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[12] Ibid., p. 71.

[13] Quoted in J.P. Nettl, *Rosa Luxemburg,* abridged ed. (New York/London/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), pp. 270–71.

[14] Constitution Society, "What Is the Militia" (1994), Web site: www.scimitar.com

[15] Quoted in Stern, *Force,* p. 37.

[16] Quoted in ibid., p. 36.

> The militia, like citizenship, is fundamentally local. We are first and foremost citizens of our local community. The word "citizen" has the same root as the word "city." Although people may also be concurrently citizens of larger political entities, such as states or the nation, and although those entities may be considered to be composed of their citizens, they are essentially composed of localities, and it is the local community that is the basis for the social contract, although it may be considered to include a certain amount of surrounding territory. Today we would usually identify the locality with the county.[17]

The county as the highest level of legitimate government is a notion that has a long currency in the far right. It ultimately derives from the Posse Comitatus, a white supremacist movement that rejected government authority and called for popular sovereignty. Today a county supremacy movement has brought direct legal challenges to the authority of the federal government over public lands, asserting that these lands should be subject to county control. Talk of direct democracy is scarce, however, in the militia movement. The sheriff is to be the highest elected official — but the nature of his power and his accountability are undefined, leaving open authoritarian possibilities. No inkling do we glean of community self-management, and little is said of self-government in towns and cities, where most people live today.

Here it is instructive to compare militia ideology with libertarian municipalism, the political dimension of social ecology. Social ecology, a legatee of the traditional left, looks to the neighborhood, town, and city as the locale for popular direct democracy. Its first political aim is the development of free, democratic cities through a process of civic education, creating citizens out of present-day constituents and taxpayers, showing disempowered people the power of citizenship in assembly, exercising their powers of self-government, and expanding the latent and existing democratic institutions of the municipality at the expense of the state. As readers of *Green Perspectives* are well aware, libertarian municipalism calls for these freed, democratized cities, increasingly scaled to human dimensions, to confederate, constitute a dual power, and ultimately eliminate the existing nation-state.

It is a quintessentially social revolutionary process. The militia movement, by contrast, speaks of no such process and proffers no concept of citizenship or civic education. Nor does it explain how society is to be organized — socially, politically, economically — in a county-dominated polity. Instead, the tactical emphasis is on an armed people — and by armed people, it most often appears to mean armed individuals who perform individual actions, like refusing to pay taxes, get social security numbers, or use driver's licenses or license plates. Its heroes are strong, even Rambo-esque individuals like Bo Gritz, who was David Duke's running mate in his 1992 presidential campaign for that electoral battalion of neo-Nazis and Klan members known as the Populist Party.

[17] Constitution Society, Web site.

Another such action is to declare a local area, even an individual farm or dwelling, to be sovereign — outside the legal jurisdiction of the United States. An obscure theory (known as "allodial title") dating from feudal times and advanced in Militia of Montana literature purports to validate claims that individuals who own land outright can be considered sovereign. Hence the so-called "Freemen" enclave in northeastern Montana, renamed "Justus Township," and dozens of other such enclaves around the country.

When it comes to defining its enemies, militias tend to confuse individuals with institutions. That is, they "take aim" not at a social order but at individuals, threatening to murder members of specific group of people — government employees, simply by virtue of their holding government office. Militias have sent death threats to senators and local officials alike. In 1995 the "Justus Township" members of the "Freemen" placed a million-dollar "bounty" on the sheriff of Garfield County — they said they would try him in one of their own "common law courts" and hang him if he were found guilty. They threatened to hang the county attorney by a rope from a bridge, without even the nicety of a "common law" trial. Two other "Freemen" issued a death threat against a U.S. district judge in Billings. Such tactics are calls not to social revolution but to private acts of cold-blooded murder.

Constitutionalism

Despite their belief in government at the county level and below, militia members commonly say they uphold the U.S. Constitution and the Bill of Rights. To fight the takeover of the United States by the New World Order, the Militia of Montana announced its aim "to defend the Constitution of The United States of America and the Constitution of The State of Montana against All Enemies, Both Foreign and Domestic."[18] In a country that still basically reveres its Constitution after two hundred years, such language falls well within the range of conventional political discourse. In fact, so ardently do militias champion the Constitution that an influential group within the Militia of Montana call themselves Constitutionalists. To libertarians like Parfrey, the militias' apparent commitment to civil liberties is a point in their favor. "Militias remain largely defensive," he writes, "chartered to protest the erosion of constitutional rights... Militias are sure to react as the government continues to overturn the Constitution, discarding the right to keep and bear arms, suffocating the right to free speech, or roping off the right to public assembly."[19] Progressives may even feel a measure of sympathy for people so committed to upholding the Bill of Rights that they are even willing to sacrifice life and limb.

These assertions of fealty, however, are not what they seem. Militias like that of Montana recruit new members precisely by using such unimpeachable language in the course of championing broadly popular conservative causes like the assault on gun

[18] Militia of Montana Web site.

[19] Parfrey, "Out of Oklahoma," p. 67.

control or environmental regulation or abortion. The Constitution and Bill of Rights that these militia members are actually supporting is not the one that constitutes the fundamental law of the United States today. The latter, Constitutionalists believe, is an illegitimate document. Only the original Constitution, as it came out of the Philadelphia convention in 1787, is valid, in their view, along with the original ten amendments that make up the Bill of Rights. The Constitution is to be interpreted strictly, as it was originally written, much as fundamentalists read the Bible. And it is to be read in the context of its time, not according to any later judicial interpretations. At the time the original Constitution was adopted, most citizens were white Christian men, enjoying rights with which God endowed them — they were what the militias call "state" or "organic" citizens. It is almost certainly these citizens to which the Militia of Montana refers when it says it is "dedicated to the preservation of the freedoms of all citizens ... of the United States of America."[20] Since Jews are not Christians, they would not be part of the polity defined by the original Constitution. Contrary to widespread conservative belief, however, the original Constitution gives no preference the Christian religion; the First Amendment prohibits Congress from making laws "respecting the establishment of religion."

The later constitutional amendments that followed after number ten — like the ones that protected the rights of newly freed slaves and gave the vote to women — were not part of the original Constitution and as such are considered neither legal nor binding. People who gained their citizenship only by these later amendments are called "Fourteenth Amendment" citizens and have rights and duties only under the amended Constitution. The additional amendments, however, invalidated the Constitution, and somehow therefore white males need not obey it or defer to it. Indeed, inasmuch as they were given neither rights nor duties by the Fourteenth Amendment, they are not necessarily citizens under the amended Constitution.

In fact, to disclaim their association with the present governmental system all the more dramatically, a number of militia members have publicly renounced their citizenship. One group that did so explained their reasons to the local newspaper in Ravalli, Montana:

> in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, [I] solemnly Publish and Declare my American National Status and rights to emancipate absolute my "res" in trust from the foreign jurisdiction known as the municipal corporation of the District of Columbia, a Democracy. Any and all, past and present, political ties implied by operation of law or otherwise in trust with said democracy are hereby dissolved. By this emancipation I return to an estate of primary sovereignty and freedom that preexists all government(s).[21]

Presumably they were returned to the "state of nature" — the ultimate sovereign individual, exempt from the necessity of obeying any laws apart from the "common law,"

[20] Militia of Montana Web site.

[21] Quoted in Stern, *Force,* p. 82.

the governments they set up for themselves, and the Bible. Indeed, white Christian males are supposed to be exempt from paying federal income tax, presumably on the grounds that the IRS was created by a later amendment. Since the "Internal Revenue Code is completely in violation of the Constitution," individuals have the right to defend themselves against the IRS when it intrudes on their sovereign territory.[22] The IRS, of course, as a tool of the state, would not be part of the moneyless, post-scarcity society toward which social ecologists strive; "taxes" would be relevant only when people in assemblies decided they were necessary in some form and imposed them on a face-to-face, democratic basis. But "Freemen" need not pay taxes for a different reason, as one of those in the 1996 Montana farmhouse siege, Rodney Skurdal, explained in 1994: "[If] we the white race are God's chosen people ...and our Lord God stated that 'the earth is mine,' why are we paying taxes on 'His Land'?"[23] (Because of his own refusal to pay taxes, Skurdal's own property had previously been confiscated by the IRS.) If "Freemen" are tax exempt, however, "Fourteenth Amendment" citizens aren't so fortunate — they must pay the income tax. In fact, an outrageously twisted reading of the very amendments that guaranteed blacks freedom is interpreted to mean that blacks must return to slavery.

In the United States today, overtly racist words are unacceptable in broad political discourse, so that those who wish to express racial hatreds must use code words as a substitute. Most recently, in the Republican presidential primaries, Patrick Buchanan referred to Latinos using the codeword "José" and to Jews by invoking "Goldman Sachs" and "Brandeis students"; he expressed his ethnic preferences not by using words derogatory to blacks but by supporting the flying of the Confederate flag. Similarly, the "Constitutionalism" of the militia ideology is in its essence an oblique vehicle for expressing racism. A large number of white supremacists today use this vehicle, designating themselves Christian Patriots and advocating the "Constitutionalist" exclusion of blacks, Jews, and women from the American polity.

The "Freemen" in the Montana farmhouse, too, are a Christian Patriot or Constitutionalist group, and it is by virtue of these beliefs that they have their own "common law" court system that issues bounties for the "arrest" of county officials. Nor need Christian Patriots obey existing American laws, according to Skurdal.

> How many of the People of Israel (Adam/white race) have rejected the words of Almighty God, and rejected their "faith" (surety) in Almighty God, to worship man made laws, "color of law," such as applying for a social security card/number, marriage licenses, driver's licenses, insurance, vehicle registrations, welfare from the corporations, electrical inspections, permits to build your private home, income taxes, property taxes, inheritance taxes, etc., etc., etc... Once you have applied for these benefits ... you

[22] Quoted in ibid., p. 51.
[23] Quoted in ibid., p. 89.

> have voluntarily become their new "slaves" to tax at their will, for you are no longer "free," i.e., a "freeman."[24]

At this writing, the "Freemen" under siege by the FBI have given notice that they will defend their sovereign land by force if necessary: "Our Special orders ... is for our special appointed constables and our Lawful Posse to shoot to kill any public hireling or 14th amendment citizen who is caught in any act whatsoever of taking private property."[25] Here, "Constitutionalism" has become a shoot-to-kill license against people that "Freemen" despise, simply because they despise them.

The militias oppose laws, too, because they are the laws of a state that they abhor. But judging by their pronouncements and their actions, the new political units that would replace the state would be at least as bad as the existing one. The death penalty would remain in place, and private property would be preserved. People would be excluded on the basis of ethnicity, and women would lose the franchise. Environmental conservation, land-use planning, and zoning would recede to dim memory. The individual would be so disencumbered of community responsibilities and obligations that the atomized, self-interest-maximizing, egotistical individual of classical liberal political theory would seem the soul of benevolence by comparison. At the same time, a fundamentalist Christian religion would be established, available to justify any exercise of authority as divinely sanctioned.

Christian Identity and Anti-Semitism

Lest there be any doubt, this is not a leftist ideology; nor is it one that leftists should touch with a ten-foot pole. Nonetheless, some may be ignorant of the militias' racism and find sympathy for them as insurgents against the "new world order." Whatever they — or George Bush — actually understood the phrase "new world order" to mean during the Gulf War, it has burgeoned with a family of meanings that have little to do with a leftist critique of capitalism and everything to do with a new version of the conspiratorialism described by Kelly. And as is so commonplace in the history of that conspiratorialism, the unseen secret elite that conspires to pull the strings of world events is made up of Jews. Donald Ellwanger, a Patriot in Washington state, expressed the scenario this way in 1994:

> a "British Banking cartel (Rothschilds Bank of London and Berlin)" owns 52 % of the stock in the deceptively named "Federal Reserve System," which is also a Foreign Private Corporation and controls the IRS. The IRS is the Federal Reserve System's private collection agency. The remaining 48%

[24] Quoted in Stern, *Force,* p. 89.
[25] Reuters, Mar. 27, 1996.

> of the Federal Reserve System stock is held by foreign and domestic subsidiaries of the Rothschilds Bank of London.[26]

This Jewish-controlled international banking system, with its "collection agency," is to be fought at all costs, including its "supporters" inside the United States, according to the anti-Semitism typical of the far-right milieu in which the militias exist.

Kenneth Stern, who studies hate groups for the American Jewish Committee, argues that although many people join militias innocently, for reasons that have nothing to do with hating Jews and blacks, anti-Semitism and racism are nonetheless "essential to the movement."

> Many of the movers and shakers of the militia movement are anti-Semites [like John Trochmann]... It would be nearly impossible to attend any militia meeting in the United States, even one run by a group without an anti-Semitic history or agenda, and not encounter literature from anti-Semitic and white supremacist individuals and groups [like Bo Gritz and the anti-Semitic Liberty Lobby's *Spotlight*]... The conspiracy theories that underlie the movement are rooted in the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* [which] ... posits that Jews are secretly plotting to run the world.[27]

Militia anti-Semitism derives in great measure from Christian Identity, a "religion" that holds that "Aryans" are the lost tribes of Israel and hence are the authentic Jews, while those who call themselves Jews today are actually the spawn of the Devil — and people of color are "mud people." It is hard to know with certainty how many militia members adhere to Christian Identity, but it too is endemic to the milieu that fostered the militia movement. Aryan Nations, White Aryan Resistance, remnants of the Posse Comitatus, Christian Reconstructionists (who call for a religious dictatorship), militant antiabortionists, and Constitutionalists all make up this milieu. So do members of the Christian right who accept the worldview of Pat Robertson's 1991 *The New World Order,* a book intended to show that a conspiracy of secret elites controls the world, using the UN as a tool. Loosely known as Patriots, these various groups also gave the militias key points of their ideology, which also has antecedents in the John Birch Society and the Ku Klux Klan. The militias, says Chip Berlet, are "the armed wing of the patriot movement."[28] The concept of "leaderless resistance" was in fact drawn up by Louis Beam, a leader and theorist for the Aryan Nations and former head of the Texas Emergency Reserve, a private Klan army.

And anti-Semitism and racism have been endemic to this milieu from its beginnings in the 1970s, when the California neo-Nazi Richard Butler led a group of Christian Identity "church" members to Idaho; the other name of his church was the Aryan

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[26] Quoted in Stern, *Force,* p. 84.

[27] Stern, *Force,* pp. 246–47. Stern gives a fourth reason for the militias' "essential" anti-Semitism and racism: that calls for local control are merely "covers for bigotry." This reason is less tenable; left-libertarian and social anarchist calls for local control have sought local control as a way to attain popular self-management, not as a pretext for excluding people of one ethnicity or another.

[28] Barsamian, "Militias and Conspiracy Theories," p. 29.

Nations. The "races" should live apart, Butler maintained, and he ranted against the Zionist Occupational Government, by which Jews supposedly controlled America, and against Jewish plots to take over the entire world and build a "new world order." He called upon his fellow white Christian males to take up arms against them — to "eliminate Jewry." On the walls of the office he established at Hayden Lake, Idaho, he hung swastikas and pictures of Hitler.

Conspiratorialist Adam Parfrey, libertarian defender of the militias, agrees that the various Patriot groups are anti-Semitic: "the usurpation of Hebrew identity by the Christian right-wing is correctly identified as a threat to Jews, since Identity types believe Jews to be Satanic impostors." But he implies that neither Jews nor anyone else should go so far as to raise objections to this admitted threat:

> Unfortunately, the sensationalizing of Identity groups by watchdog organizations and their persecution by government authorities, have simply justified the Identity Christians' own persecutorial and millennial beliefs. In my opinion, Identity Christians are best left alone in the same way adherents of Nation of Islam ideology are allowed to practice their own religion without the same level of harassment. Continued friction can only increase the likelihood of causing a volatile reaction.[29]

Never mind that the anti-Semitism of the Nation of Islam, especially Louis Farrakhan, is well known and widely criticized; why militias should be exempt from similar scrutiny is unclear. Parfrey goes on to say that "perceived anti-Semitic overtones in militia conspiracy literature" are "at least partially due to Jewish oversensitivity... The presumption of anti-Semitism in the militia movement is overstated."[30]

If any single person can be said to have founded the militia movement, it is John Trochmann, who co-founded the Militia of Montana in February 1994. Although Trochmann himself denies being an anti-Semite or a racist, the ideology with which he infused the militia movement is rife with anti-Semitism. When asked who is behind the threats to American sovereignty, he replies: "The Warburgs and the Rothschilds. International finance. The Federal Reserve, and its chairman Alan Greenspan. 'The Anti-Christ Banksters.'"[31] Trochmann has been a featured speaker at Aryan Nations meetings and has frequented the Aryan Nations compound; as a Christian Identity adherent, he is seeking to link that "faith" with the militias. "I am following God's law," he told one interviewer. "Blacks, Jews, are welcome. But when America is the

[29] Parfrey, "Out of Oklahoma," p. 63.

[30] Ibid., p. 67. These statements were published in *Alternative Press Review,* a periodical edited by Jason McQuinn. In 1992, McQuinn himself minimized the number of Jews murdered by the Nazis to "hundreds of thousands." "It's undeniable," he remarked in an outrageous contribution to Holocaust revisionism, "that 'The Holocaust' has been magnified into a larger than life tale of historical racial persecution." ("Holocaust or Bust?" in *Anarchy: A Journal of Desire Armed,* no. 34 (Fall 1992), p. 17.

[31] Quoted in Stern, *Force,* p. 71.

new Israel, they'll need to go back where they came from. It's just nature's law — kind should go unto kind."[32]

Trochmann's anti-Semitism and racism are of the greatest concern because he aggressively has spread the militia ideology. According to Kenneth Stern, "Of all the militia groups that formed across the United States in 1994 and 1995, Trochmann's was not only the first significant organization, it was also the most active disseminator of militia propaganda around the country."[33] His group sent out a wide variety of literature and videos through its expansive mail-order program and spread its ideas over talk radio, TV, and the Internet. Trochmann and his associates helped build the Michigan Militia, whose spokesman Mark "Mark from Michigan" Koernke often praised the Militia of Montana over his shortwave frequencies.

In his recruitment literature, Trochmann waters down his propaganda drastically, talking about relatively innocuous issues like the Second Amendment. He thereby attracts people who care about gun control and Waco and Ruby Ridge. Only after they have responded does he send out literature propounding anti-Semitic conspiracy theories based on the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion.* Thus it is that many militia members may not know exactly what kind of movement they belong to. Those who accept the racist and anti-Semitic theories may gradually find that they are no longer merely gun-control activists but have joined a racist hate group.

Conclusion

Not all militia members share Trochmann's racist ideology fully; nor are all militias connected to hate groups. No one knows for sure how universally accepted among militia groups is the ideology on which the movement was originally based. But those who accept it are indeed hate groups. It seems certain, given the culture from which the movement sprang and the views of its key organizers, that a great many do in fact seek to return American society to a time when white Christian males were the exclusive political actors.

At a time when left-libertarians themselves are increasingly withdrawing into lifestyle and cultural concerns, it is deeply troubling that antistatism has been adopted by a movement of insurgent hate. At a time when the left has been declared all but dead, the very existence of the militias makes crystal clear the need for a left. Left-libertarians should know what this movement is and criticize it rather than look for affinities with it.

Turning to conspiracies for explanations is an anodyne, the equivalent of turning to Prozac to ward off depression. Yet the temptation to take the conspiracy pill is itself a symptom. With the dearth of leftist theory today, much of the work that the remaining leftists are doing is to report on abuses and injustices — by the IMF

[32] Quoted in Daniel Voll, "At Home with M.O.M.," *Esquire* (July 1995), pp. 46–52, esp. 48.
[33] Stern, *Force,* p. 74.

and World Bank, by transnational corporations, by the American government, by the CIA. Such journalism is indubitably and absolutely necessary. Yet without theory and analysis to account for those abuses, to explain them according to a rational theoretical framework, the drift toward conspiratorialism and thence to the right can be surprisingly easy.

More than ever in this era of globalization and downsizing, a serious leftist expression of the libertarian tradition is much needed to render populist distrust of corporations progressive rather than reactionary. Lacking such expression, its potential dynamism will continue to find expression on the right. The fact is that the left has nothing to learn from paranoid racists, no matter how psychedelic their conspiracies may be.

Janet Biehl
The Fallacy of "Neither Left nor Right": Militia Fever
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