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The "New Totalitarianism" now defines a desperate neo-con end game

by *Bob Fittrakis and Harvey Wasserman*
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As the Bush/neo-con kleptocracy disintegrates in a toxic cloud of military defeat, economic bankruptcy, environmental disaster and escalating mega-scandal, its attack on basic American freedoms---its "New Totalitarianism"---has escalated to a desperate new level, including brutal Soviet-style prosecutions against non-violent dissidents and an all-out offensive for state secrecy, including an attack on the internet.

In obvious panic and disarray, the GOP right has turned to a time-honored strategy---kill the messengers. While it slaughters Americans and Iraqis to "bring democracy" to the Middle East, it has made democracy itself public enemy Number One here at home.

The New Totalitarianism has become tangible in particular through a string of terrifying prosecutions against non-violent dissenters, an attack on open access to official government papers, and the attempted resurrection by right-wing "theorists" of America's most repressive legislation, dating back to the 1950s, 1917 and even 1797.

Bush's universal spy campaign is the cutting edge of the assault. The GOP Attorney-General has told Congress both George Washington and Abraham Lincoln engaged in electronic wiretapping. He has deemed the Geneva war crimes accords a "quaint" document and treats the Bill of Rights the same way.

Evidence of no-warrant spying on thousands of US citizens continues to surface. Like all totalitarian regimes, this one believes its best defense is to terrorize its citizenry by intruding, Big Brother-like, into all facets of personal life. Inevitably, it is moving prosecute whoever reveals that spying is going on, including a KGB-style search for the hero who leaked Bush's warrantless wire-tap program.

Along with spying comes official secrecy. The Bush regime is reclassifying millions of pages of harmless, marginal documents to prevent public scrutiny. It demands access to the papers of the deceased investigative reporter Jack Anderson so they can be reclassified. It has moved to prosecute reporters, government officials and even lobbyists who have used documents in ways the administration doesn't like.

In Ohio, the official secrecy has entered the state level. Governor Bob Taft, the first sitting criminal governor in Ohio history, is moving to classify thousands of pages of state policy papers. Taft recently admitted to four misdemeanor crimes involved with Tom Noe, a Republican hack now under both state and federal indictment.

Noe can't explain the whereabouts of some \$15 million in state funds he supposedly invested. Taft says any documents that allow him to make policy are "privileged." As critics point out, if an aide hands him even a copy of a published newspaper, it becomes covered under "executive privilege" in the first time in Ohio history, and its "mis-use" can be a crime.

Should the trend expand, US citizens could find themselves shut out of access to even the most rudimentary official information at all levels, down to the smallest town.

Simultaneously, prosecutions against dissenters have dramatically escalated. Taft walked away from his convictions with a small fine and an apology. But a community organizer here has been sentenced to 119 days in jail for speaking out at a Columbus School Board meeting. A severe diabetic, Jerry Doyle has been temporarily turned away from his jail sentence due to life-threatening health problems. But authorities intend to imprison Doyle while Taft walks free.

Ironically, Doyle was initially charged with trespassing at the podium although he had an authorized speaker's slip. He was complaining about a school official, Sheri Bird-Long who stole some \$200,000 from the school system, pleaded guilty to one felony count of having an unlawful interest in a public contract and one misdemeanor count of unauthorized use of property, a theft-related offense. Unlike Doyle, Bird-Long got no jail time upon conviction.

In Cleveland Heights, Carol Fisher has been charged with a major felony for putting posters on public lamp-posts. The posters are critical of the Bush attack on Iraq. Fisher, who is committed to non-violence, was assaulted by local police who ordered her to take down the posters, then threw her down on the ground and charged her with felonious assault.

"I am 53 years old," she says, "not exactly a spring chicken. A hand comes down to push my chin against the concrete. By this time there are four cops on the scene. My hands

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are tightly cuffed behind my back. They lift me up and shove me onto a park bench and shackle my legs. I am still calling out, telling people what this is about."

Fisher says the police cursed her, shouting "Shut up or I will kill you!...I am sick of this anti-Bush shit!...You are definitely going to the psyche ward." Fisher now faces years in prison and the loss of her livelihood.

Such gratuitous, mean-spirited and overtly repressive prosecutions against non-violent dissenters have proliferated throughout the Bush era, in which ordinary citizens with moderate bumper stickers or t-shirts have been turned away from or arrested at public events.

The clear and present purpose is to spread a climate of totalitarian fear aimed at reversing the sacred American freedoms embodied in the first ten amendments to the Constitution.

The campaign runs in tandem with the attack on academic discourse coordinated by David Horowitz and other haters of open debate. In the guise of seeking "balance," the rightist campaign aims to purge liberals from the liberal arts.

It parallels the industry-centered attempts to clamp down on the internet, which has been the sole grassroots source of reliable information and dissenting opinion in the US for years.

With total corporate domination of the major media, only the internet and a few talk radio shows and liberal magazines have kept alive the American tradition of a free press. Predictably, the administration is using a corporate front to shut off this last source of open "diablog."

Bush has taken the same tack against science itself. As Joe Stalin exiled and killed researchers whose fact-based conclusions seemed to contradict the Party line, so the GOP attacks the overwhelming consensus among climatologists that global warming is real. With true Orwellian flare, the administration disappears official research (and researchers) whose data say the oil barons who define Team Bush must curb their emissions.

The repression has reached new theoretical levels. In recent weeks, right-wing journals such as the National Review have featured articles demanding enforcement of ancient legislation outlawing "sedition." With the US now "at war," the right-wingers say it is perfectly fine for Bush to arrest and imprison those who advocate peace. In particular they cite repressive legislation used in the 1950s to clamp down on "known Communists." They also cite acts passed in 1917, during World War I, and the Sedition Act, passed under John Adams in 1797.

These laws in essence gave the Chief Executive power to imprison American citizens at will. Woodrow Wilson used them to jail Eugene V. Debs and thousands more who resisted US intervention in Europe. Debs was sentenced to ten years in federal prison for urging resistance to a war opposed by a significant majority of the American people (Debs ran for president from his Atlanta prison cell in 1920 and got nearly a million votes). Some dissenters were arrested for carrying posters that quoted Wilson's own writings in favor of peace. Opponents of the military draft were routinely jailed without trial. A "Red Scare" was used as cover to smash the Socialist Party and radical labor movement, debilitating the American left for decades to come.

John Adams's Sedition Act had similar aims. Its reign was brief and less destructive. But according to the New Totalitarians, it remains in force, and should be used to crush opponents of Bush's Iraq attack.

The neo-cons have taken particular aim at generals and other officers who have criticized the Bush military strategy, if it can be called that. The critiques have merely underscored the astonishing incompetence of the Bush junta. They reflect the highest order of courage and patriotism.

But such honor and honesty comprise the New Totalitarianism's worst nightmare. With indictments flowing deep into the kleptocracy, the most anti-democratic of all American regimes has just two tactics. The first is to create a culture of fear while silencing the dissenters, by all means necessary.

The second is to rig voting machines and strip voter rolls to guarantee that no matter how deep dissent actually carries in this country, it will have no tangible impact on who holds the reins of power. In tandem comes the deliberate shrinking of the electorate through repressive ID requirements and digitized voter registration lists. Thus far up to ten percent of the entire Ohio electorate---some 500,000 voters---have been stripped from the state's registration rolls, all from Democratic strongholds.

Today Bush's popularity has sunk to about a third of the population, a level similar to Hitler's percent of the vote when the Nazis took power in 1933. The GOP neo-cons have clearly realized that they can only hold power with old-fashioned thuggery and high-tech Tammany.

Having lost the public debate on its suicidal military, economic, environmental and social

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policies, all-out repression and stolen elections are the two remaining pillars of the New Totalitarianism.

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Harvey Wasserman and Bob Fitrakis are co-authors of HOW THE GOP STOLE AMERICA'S 2004 ELECTION & IS RIGGING 2008, available at www.freepress.org. They are co-editors, with Steve Rosenfeld, of WHAT HAPPENED IN OHIO?, upcoming from The New Press.

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