

1. Either a flat tax or a value-added tax could sharply increase private savings and investment and permit the abolition of an exceedingly wasteful and intrusive IRS. Neither need be excessively regressive if accompanied by a negative income tax for those falling below a certain line and heavy excise taxes on energy and luxury goods (fur coats, jewelry, yachts, private airplanes, entertainment, and expensive restaurants, for example. The VAT, if adopted, should exclude basic foodstuffs and inexpensive clothing.) Income taxes designed to "soak the rich" are always a boon to accountants and lawyers while encouraging inefficient use of great wealth and capital flight. A principal objective of tax policy should be to redirect national resources into prudent investment.

2. Military/intelligence expenditures are enormously wasteful and heavily distort national priorities and even values. Agricultural subsidies have outlived their original rationale. Resources going into those areas should be diverted into investment in mass transit and education. (Health care also requires long-term attention, but the bungled treatment of that issue in 1994 probably reduces the value of rational health proposals as a vote-getter in 1996.)

3. Reducing the budget deficit will also reduce the so-called "trade deficit." That is, as long as

government expenditures exceed government revenues, the difference will mostly be made up by imported financial instruments, which will be used to pay for an excess of imports over exports.) With this in mind, we need to rethink many issues associated with international trade.

• **An anti-corporate bias will defeat a third party coalition.** Profit is not an evil: it is the measure that divides success and failure in the private sector. Unfortunately, there is no comparable gauge of government utility, which is why exceptionally inefficient government bodies can survive and prosper, especially when totally non-accountable. Tax, liability, anti-trust, environmental protection, worker and consumer safety, and other laws and regulations -- and their vigorous enforcement -- should be the instruments for ensuring responsible corporate behavior.

(It's especially nice to receive your thoughts on disc; either size and any of the major formats will do)

The Weather Report

The semiotics of Oklahoma City

That we live in a post-modern world where the symbolic and the abstract easily supplant the tangible and concrete was brought home sharply by the Unabomber's letter to the *New York Times*. In its letter, the FC group defined its goals as: "the destruction of the worldwide industrial system. Through our bombings we hope to promote social instability in industrial society, propagate anti-industrial ideas and give encouragement to those who hate the industrial system." To this end, the group demanded that the *Times* (or other national media) publish a long article or a small book written by the organization. In short, its demand was not for the resignation of a government, payment of a ransom, release of prisoners or general amnesty, but rather for the dismantling of a symbolic construct known as a system

and for the distribution -- upon the printed page -- of the group's own symbolic analysis.

There is an inference here that society has become too complex for such traditional forms of insurrection as regicide, assassination or even revolution. Certainly, power no longer is concentrated in individuals or in clearly defined institutions; rather it is held within great, amorphous "systems" bearing more similarities with, say, the Milky Way or a biological organism than with a specific government or ruler. Was it accidental that the Oklahoma City target was not a headquarters of anything, but instead represented the bland, faceless, ubiquitous intrusiveness of the "federal system?" And was the building itself the real target or only a means of access to the symbolic distribution system of the mass media?

And it is not just targets that have become elusive, but also those who aim at them. Paramilitary literature proposes organization by "leaderless resistance," i.e. small cells devoted to certain general principles but autonomous in tactics and timing. Meanwhile, these cells talk to each other (like, increasingly, the rest of us) through an amorphous system known as the Internet. Thus we find leaderless resistance to leaderless oligopolies, each using a leaderless electronic network for communications. To describe it all, we really need something more akin to a Tolkien saga than an AP dispatch or FBI investigative report. It is not surprising that we find our way to truth strewn by myth; facts by

themselves have proved too weak, deceptive and uninformative.

For such reasons, we should pay attention to the symbolism being used these days, for in these words we can find some of the forensic evidence of our times. A few cases in point:

Terrorism and terrorists: These are words that serve well those carrying out bombings and assassinations, but what purpose do they serve the rest of us? Do they make us braver, wiser, more resolute? Or do they tend to intimidate, inflame and encourage hysteria? Why are politicians and the press so enamored of these words? Who is trying to terrify whom and why?

Conspiracy theories: Within hours, the mass media strongly suggested that the bombing was the result of a Middle-Eastern plot. Connie Chung reported early in the story, "A US government source has told CBS News that it had Middle East terrorism written all over it." When this lead turned cold, the media leaped on purported connections between the bombers and civilian militias, despite the fact that the best that could be proved was a sort of guilt by attendance -- one step removed even from guilt by association. How do such mass media conspiracy theories differ from those, say, of the civilian militias? If a network anchor can speculate at will without ridicule, can't ordinary Americans do so as well? Aren't theories just the mind waiting for facts to arrive?

Conspiracy theories often fail not merely because they are factually incorrect but because they assume more order to the world than actually exists. It makes far more sense to examine the military, the paramilitary, the rightwing talk shows, the media violence industry, bombastic politicians and so forth, as ecologically supportive elements of a holistic environment rather than to attempt to find out who is in charge. Once the right ecology is established, after all, no one needs be in charge. Things will just happen. Don't ask the FBI; ask any biologist.

Paranoia: Our country overflows with deceptive symbols, disinformation and misleading data. The semiotician Marshall Blonsky says we are living in a "semiosphere, a dense atmosphere of signs triumphantly permeating all social, political, and imaginative life and, arguably constituting our desiring selves as such." In such an environment -- in which grow spin doctors, chronically disingenuous politicians, hyperbolic talk shows and incessant, inescapable marketing -- there is little firm ground for the truth. Much of what we hear and see is, at some level, false. A natural response to this phenomenon is a high level of skepticism. Yet often the official and media response to this skepticism is not to provide supportable facts, but to brand the skeptics as paranoids. For example, why -- given the reliability and lack of information provided by the government and the media concerning Waco -- should one reasonably expect other than the sort of speculations that have occurred? The cure is not ridicule or demands for an end to doubt;

the cure is to provide answers or some reasonable manifestation of the search for the same.

Extremism: Much media attention is paid to the notion that extremism is extreme, far less to what it is an extreme of. The solution to alienation is not to stamp out the alienated but to mitigate the causes of alienation.

Militant training

From a description of training sessions conducted by one of America's armed paramilitary groups in the upper midwest:

"Women participants were called 'hon' or 'babe.' Other women were referred to as 'bitches;' black women were termed 'brown sugar.'" [Janet] Reno was called a 'bitch,' and a 'fucking dyke' and she and first lady Hillary Rodham Clinton were described as 'getting together and doing each other.' "Seminars opened with a macho promise to participants that 'when you men get home, you are going to fuck like you've never fucked before . . . It's going to be a brutal fucking assault.'" "A trainer said that detonating explosives 'will give your a chubby,' or erection. An instructor spoke of getting 'horny' unless he kills regularly."

The armed paramilitary group in question is the Drug Enforcement Administration and the description comes from a sexual harassment suit filed by three women police officers, as reported in the April 24 *Legal Times*.

Short quiz

Where do large numbers of Americans go to hear people plotting to blow up buildings and see exciting pictures of the results? (A) Civilian militia meetings. (B) Talk radio studios (C) Their local movie theater or television set.

Short list

Here's a short list of current schemes at the White House and on Capitol Hill to restrict citizen freedoms in order to make sure that no more US Army-trained drifters blow anything up: "Revise the posse comitatus act that prevents the military from engaging in civilian law enforcement" "Provide a half billion dollar subsidy to telecommunications companies to make their equipment wiretap friendly." "Make it easier for law enforcement agencies to tap phones." "Give the federal government far greater access to private credit and financial records." "Allow the deportation of immigrants based on secret evidence." "Outlaw fund raising in support of international groups the president considers terroristic, a law that might well have been used to prevent US organization against South African apartheid."

Where does the Cato Institute hold its maneuvers?

From the *Washington Post*: "Jack Rickard, the editor and publisher of *Boardwatch Magazine*, said that out of about 65,000 on-line bulletin boards nationwide, he has heard of about 300 for libertarian and 'paranoid' groups."

Apocalypse who?

As during the Waco disaster, we're hearing much these days of "apocalyptic visions." What we're not hearing is that such views are popular well beyond the paramilitary right. The *Washington Times* points out, for example, that the Oklahoma City memorial service attended by Bill Clinton was led by Billy Graham. The *Times* quotes James Tabor, professor of religion at the University of North Carolina, as saying, "Billy Graham, the center of the culture, is an apocalypticist. He writes books on it and preaches it as every crusade. But nobody thinks he's going to bomb a building. The *Bible* is a very radical document, and we've got to face the fact that it's a big part of our culture." Tabor was a consultant to law enforcement officials during the Waco siege. He unsuccessfully tried to get them to take seriously the Branch Davidians' "end time" beliefs in order to bring the crisis to a peaceful conclusion.

What do you call it when someone really is following you?

Mindless of the corporate media's warning against paranoia, 39% of respondents told the Gallup folks that they agreed "the federal government has become so large and powerful it poses an immediate threat to the rights and freedoms of ordinary citizens." The poll found roughly the same degree of concern from liberals and conservatives, and within the different geographic regions of the country. Gallup thought the figures might be a little funny and so tried the question again without the qualifier *immediate*. Those agreeing jumped to 52%

Land of the free

When Robert Novak asked Labor Secretary Robert Reich whether the attack on Waco hadn't constituted terrorism, Reich replied, "We're talking about acts of violence, Americans against Americans." Novak: "Wasn't [Waco] an act of violence?" Reich: "We're talking about acts of violence that are absolutely without purpose, without morality, that are cruel, that are evil."

Forgotten facts

The FBI used tear gas at Waco of a variety that has been banned for military use by the Chemical Weapons Convention of 1993. The gas was used for six hours. The

Washington Times quotes a chemical expert as saying that children in the attack would have been "panicked, their eyes would have involuntarily shut, their skin would have been burning, and they would have been gasping for air and coughing wildly . . . [They] would have been overcome with vomiting in a final hell."

Oops!

Just when the public hysteria and the anti-terrorism legislation was rolling along nicely, here comes a State Department report that finds that last year international terrorist acts had sunk to a 23-year low.

Clinton's Bill of Whatever He Wants

The Clinton White House has the worst record on civil liberties of any recent Democratic administration. Clinton seems to regard the Bill of Rights as just another executive order to review and revise at will. Thus, when the Supreme Court sensibly pointed out that the federal government had no constitutional basis for its school yard firearms ban, he promptly ordered up legislation to circumvent the ruling.

Clinton also told his attorney general, FBI chief and national security council head to come up with a presidential directive that will authorize "any and all [sic] further steps necessary to combat domestic terrorism."

If you think Jimmy Carter was mad before . . .

From Bill Clinton speaking in Iowa: "I am the only president who knew something about agriculture when I got there."

Drug busts

The Maryland State Police have agreed to end race-based drug courier profiling, traffic stops and searches. The agreement came as part of a settlement following the highway stop of Robert L. Wilkins, who agreed to a search of his car only after troopers told him that he and his family would be detained in the rain until they consented. Wilkins turned out to be not a drug courier but a DC lawyer and Harvard Law graduate.

Whitewater ripples

As most of the media continues to downplay Whitewater, two retired NY police investigators have said their review of the Vincent Foster death shows that murder can not be ruled out. Their report, financed by the conservative Western Journalism Center, said there was overwhelming evidence that Foster did not die where his body was finally found in Ft. Marcey Park. Many of the anomalies reported by the investigators have been noted before, although not in the mainstream press. In

addition, detective Vincent J. Scalice said that in nearly three decades of police work he couldn't remember "ever running across a situation where we found a body in a case of suicide that was so neatly arranged, with the gun so conveniently positioned in the hand in such a straight, orderly fashion."

Field notes

The 1995 National Green Conference will take place July 27-30 at the University of NM in Albuquerque. Then on Aug. 18-20 there will be a National Independent Politics Summit to be held in Pittsburgh. This conference is sponsored by a number of groups including the National People's Progressive Network, the Campaign for a New Tomorrow, and the Greens/Green Party USA. Info for Green Conference: New Mexico Green Party, POB 22955, Santa Fe, NM 87502-2955. 505-986-2071. Moore@santafe.edu. For the Independent Politics Summit: c/o POB 170610, Brooklyn NY 11217. 718-643-8265.

Public Citizen has released a report stating that more than half of the nuclear reactors in the US are not economically competitive with other forms of power. 202-833-3000.

Equal Exchange is a gourmet coffee company which calls itself an alternative trade organization. It

bypasses the conventional marketing system and deals directly with Latin American coffee farmers and co-ops. By cutting out the middle merchants, the farmers get a higher price. EE is a limited dividend company: when it makes a profit, investors will get a maximum 5% return; the rest will be reinvested or paid to its workers. Equal Exchange, 101 Tosca Drive, Stoughton, MA 02072. 617-344-7227.

Roadsigns

Percent of 1992 federal drug offenders who were high level dealers: 11%. Percent who were street-level dealers, bodyguards or couriers: 55%. [US Sentencing Commission]

Number of federal wiretaps in 1981: 106. Number in 1994: 554. Average cost of a wiretap: \$66,783. Number of wiretaps federal judges have refused in the last six years: 0. Number of wiretaps that have produced incriminating evidence: 17% [Electronic Privacy Information Center]

Number of acres of farmland in US: 833 million. Percent owned by just four percent of all farmers: 47%. Number of farms run by blacks in 1954: 472,000. Number in 1987: 23,000. [Neighborhood Works]

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