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Theocracy Alert

Onward, Christian theocrats: The Yankee Taliban on the attack

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June 11, 2005—There's no escape: religious moralism and promotion of Christianity are everywhere.

Turn to classical music on your radio and you'll be treated to an ad recruiting for a fundamentalist congregation in exurbia. Switch the dial to a news or talk station and you'll hear the latest diatribes against loose women, depraved homosexuals, treasonous liberals, and godless secular humanists.

Evangelicals like Randall Terry, founder of anti-abortion Operation Rescue, are endeavoring to accomplish nothing less than replacing the U.S. Constitution with biblical law. Intrinsic to their aim of creating an American Taliban is eliminating the separation between church and state, in tandem with a host of other freedoms and protections.

"Our goal is a Christian nation," says Terry. "We are called by God to conquer this country."

For corporate interests who must hold down the wages and conditions of workers and stifle dissent at home in order to compete against the European Union for world markets, the religious right is a literal godsend. It provides them the ideological cover they need to advance their objectives.

The Wall Comes Tumbling Down

The U.S. Constitution's First Amendment begins, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof...." Thomas Jefferson famously called this the "wall of separation" between church and state.

The wall has never been absolute. U.S. religious organizations, for example, enjoy tax-exempt status, worth an estimated \$185 billion in *annual* revenue. Their combined assets now exceed \$331 billion; one can only imagine what the fisherman of Galilee would think.

Today, however, religious extremists brazenly assert that the constitutional separation of church and state is a myth—"a lie introduced by Satan and fostered by the courts," according to Rick Scarborough, head of a group of "patriot pastors" and a close ally of House Majority Leader Tom DeLay.

The new crusaders are gaining ground in their efforts to openly shape public policy. They dominate in the executive and legislative branches of federal government, and their influence everywhere is spreading.

- Bush's "faith-based initiatives" pour billions into religious groups, although these organizations cannot supply even a fraction of the social services formerly provided by the government itself. The \$20 billion allocated to them for the next 10 years is less than what the federal government used to spend *annually* on Aid for Dependent Children alone.
- The faith-based groups can refuse to hire gays, employ only Christians, and deny social services to anyone who won't participate in daily prayers and Bible readings—discriminatory practices defended by the Justice Department although countless lawsuits are pending.

- “Pro-choice” John Kerry and zealot Rick Santorum are joint sponsors of a Senate bill to legalize pharmacists’ refusal to fill prescriptions for birth control and emergency contraception that “violate their beliefs.” Four states already have such laws; in other states, pharmacies restrict women’s access to these drugs by not stocking them.
- The House approved a bill making it a federal crime to avoid parental consent laws by taking minors across state lines for an abortion. Senate approval is expected.
- Abstinence-only programs are the only sex “education” for which federal money can be used, even though teenagers in these programs have the highest rate of sexually transmitted diseases.
- Teachers in a dozen states cannot legally mention evolution unless “creationist” or “intelligent design” theory is presented as equally valid.
- In April, a Washington state bill to prohibit anti-gay discrimination was defeated for the 29th time in as many years. Microsoft Corporation dropped its long-standing support for the bill under threat of a boycott by a local evangelical preacher. (A backlash caused Microsoft to reverse course two weeks later, after the bill had already died.)
- Although same-sex civil unions are now legal in a few states, right-wing appeals to the U.S. Supreme Court are pending.

Partnership for Power

What is the relationship of the religious right to reactionaries who don’t fly under the banner of God? The convictions they hold most strongly in common include opposition to the rights of women and sexual minorities, contempt for unions, hatred of socialism, and reverence for “free enterprise,” private property rights, and authority. And these two components of the right wing grow cozier every day.

Fundamentally, the goals of the right wing are economic, and their sights are now set on the judiciary. As legal theorist Richard Epstein asserts, “There are many blatantly inappropriate statutes that cry out for a quick and easy kill”—including the minimum wage, Social Security, and laws governing the environment, occupational safety, and child labor.

Two of Bush’s now confirmed nominees for lifetime federal judgeships, who have invariably ruled in favor of business, are Janice Rogers Brown and Priscilla Owen.

Currently on the California Supreme Court, Janice Rogers Brown is an African American with a long record of rulings against affirmative action and anti-discrimination laws. She assails the New Deal of the 1930s, which created Social Security, as “the triumph of our socialist revolution.”

At an April meeting of Catholic legal professionals, Brown tagged opponents of Bush’s nominees as atheists and secularists hostile to religious traditions. This witch-hunting intimidation tactic, reminiscent of McCarthy-era red-baiting, is becoming standard for religious rightists and those currying their favor.

Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist, for example, attacked Senate Democrats trying to block Bush’s nominees as “against people of faith” in a videotaped address to an April 25 rally of right-wing churches in Louisville, Kentucky. In the same speech, Frist specifically went to bat for Priscilla Owen, a Texas Supreme Court judge elected with the help of donations from large corporations including Enron—obligations she consistently repays from the bench.

It’s worth noting that this April gathering of Christian marauders prompted hundreds of other religious folks in Louisville to hold a counter-rally.

Window of Opportunity

The religious right is gaining steam because the troubled capitalist system needs its help and cover.

Polls show that the majority of Americans believe the economy is getting worse, and with good reason. Over the last three years, while corporate profits have shown an annual growth rate of 14.5 percent after inflation, wages and salaries have grown less than a tenth as fast. Outsourcing and layoffs have eradicated better-paying jobs; unemployment is rampant; the Iraq war, at *\$4 billion a month*, is draining U.S. taxpayers; and the social safety net is in tatters.

People are fearful, and they want answers. The religious right defends corporate interests by deflecting people's anxieties onto scapegoats and by providing moral justification for inequality, sexism, racism, homophobia, and poverty.

And, should the system's crisis worsen, the religious right offers the potential to rally a mass movement around a program for fascism—capitalism's weapon of last resort.

Canadian communist writer David Lethbridge notes that in 1930s Europe, "religion and fascism formed a united front of terror: a cross in one hand, a machine gun in the other." Despite the USA PATRIOT Act-era devastation Bush and his cohorts have wreaked on civil liberties, that reality is not yet ours today. But to guarantee that a fascist movement does *not* arise again, *now is the moment* for opponents of the political agenda of the Christian right, especially other religious believers, to unite and take action.

This article was originally published in [Freedom Socialist newspaper](#).

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