

## Trodding the '39 Steps: Bush Before the Conflagration

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**ICH** - Bernard Weiner - And so, facing little effective opposition, the Bush juggernaut continues on its rampage. How to explain this? Certainly, one could point to a deficient mass-media, to the soporific drug of TV, to having to work so hard that for many there's no time for activism, to education aimed at taking tests and not how to think, to the residual fear-fallout from 9/11, to a penchant for fantasy over reality, to the timid and unimaginative Democratic leadership, to scandal-fatigue, etc. But I would suggest that even more disturbing answers can be found by examining recent history.

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### **Slicing Away Liberty:** **[1933 Germany, 2006 America](#)**

Bernard Weiner

The Crisis Papers

I must confess that I'm utterly baffled by the lack of sustained, organized outrage and opposition from Democratic officials and ordinary citizens at the Bush Administration's never-ending scandals, corruptions, war-initiations, and the amassing of more and more police-state power into their hands.

Just so nobody misunderstands what follows: I am not saying that George W. Bush is Adolf Hitler, or that the rest of his Administration crew are Nazis. What I am saying is that since history often is opaque (making it difficult to figure out the contemporary parallels), when the past does offer a clear lesson for those of us living today, we should pay special attention.

What happened in Germany in the 1920s and '30s can teach us much about how a nation in a few years can lose its freedom in incremental slices as a result of a drumbeat of never-ceasing propaganda, strong-arm tactics, government snooping and harassment, manufactured fear of "the other," and wars begun abroad with the accompanying rally-'round-the-flag patriotism.

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In America of the 1980s and '90s, it was extremists on the far-right fringes who believed the country was moving toward "black helicopter" authoritarian rule in Washington, and often blamed big-government liberal Democrats. Now, as a result of just four-plus years of the Bush Administration (supposedly anti-big government, conservative Republicans), huge segments of American society, including many in the mainstream middle, wonder what has happened to our democratic republic, our civil liberties, our time-honored system of government.

### THE ENABLING MANTRA OF 9/11

The Busheviks defend the Administration's harsh, sweeping actions as necessary in a "time of war." The U.S. was attacked by forces representing fanatical Islam, this reasoning goes, and the old rules and systems simply don't apply anymore -- they are old-fashioned, "quaint." Instead, we are expected to inculcate the "everything-changed-on-9/11" mantra, the effect of which is to excuse and justify all. Defense of the fatherland comes first and foremost, trumping all other considerations, including the Constitution, checks-and-balances in the three branches of government, separation of powers, the Geneva Conventions, international law, etc. etc. (The Busheviks refuse to believe that one can be muscular in going after terrorists and do so within the law and with proper respect for the Bill of Rights and Constitutional protections of due process.)

Not only do the Busheviks pay no attention to modern history, but they seem to have forgotten how our very nation came into existence and why: Our Founding Fathers rebelled against a despotic British monarch, a George who ran roughshod over their rights and privacy and religious beliefs. Learning that hard lesson, they established a system of government that scattered power so that no person or party or religion could easily reinstate authoritarian rule. Politicians and citizens would have to compromise and cooperate in order to get anything done. It's a slow, cumbersome system ("Democracy," said Churchill, "is the worst form of government ever invented, except for all the others"), but the system they devised served this nation well for more than two centuries, making American government a model for much of the rest of the world.

And now, using the fear of terrorism as justification for all their actions, the Bush-Rove-Cheney-Rumsfeld crew within just a few years have moved America closer to a militarist, one-party state, led by a ruler in whom virtually all power is vested. In '30s Germany, this was called the Fuhrer Principe, the principle of blind obedience to the wise, all-powerful Supreme Leader. We've seen other such examples in Stalin's Soviet Union, Kim's North Korea, Mao's China, Saddam's Iraq, etc.

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### THE GOOD, THE BAD & LOTS OF UGLY

To the Busheviks, there is pure Evil and pure Good, and because we Americans are pure Good, especially blessed by God, we can do anything in the service of fulfilling God's plan, which only we understand. If you're not with us, you're against us; get on board or get out of the way.

And so, under BushCheney, we've become an America that has codified torture in official state policy, that admits it went into a war under false premises but continues to keep our targeted troops there anyway, that spies on its citizens without court orders, that is willing to out a covert CIA agent (one who was probing the extent of Iran's nuclear program) for reasons of political retaliation, that "disappears" American citizens into military jails and doesn't permit them any contact with the outside world, that flies suspects in its care to secret prisons abroad and "renders" others to countries that use even more extreme torture measures, that passes laws permitting police agents to "sneak and peek" into citizens' homes, phone records, computer databases, library requests, e-mails and medical records without permission or even informing those whose privacy had been violated, that neuters the Congress by saying it will listen to "suggestions" but that the ultimate decisions are to be made by the Chief Executive, that emasculates the political opposition in Congress by cutting them out of the key decision-making processes, that declares the president has the right to violate the law whenever he so chooses and Congress and the courts have no role to play in reining in that power-grab, that keeps America on a permanent war footing in a never-ending battle against a tactic (terrorism), and on and on.

Even though much of the above transpired in secret and is only now being revealed, not all of this desecration of the American ideal happened overnight. As in Germany in the 1930s, the extremists placed in charge of the government said one thing in public and did another in private, slowly slicing away at rights of the citizenry, to avoid triggering a popular uprising.

### THE SLICING MACHINE

In the beginning of their rule, the Nazis would announce restrictive policies aimed at marginalized citizens (the mentally handicapped, for example), and if no great uproar of objection came from any power centers such as the churches or hospitals or political parties, the Nazis would proceed to the next slice aimed, say, at Communists or homosexuals or Jews or Gypsies. All of these moves were carefully couched in terms of saving the "national security"

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of the Reich or purging the country of "non-productive" or "destructive/dangerous" elements in society. The Nazi propaganda machine was clever, intense and all-pervasive, using the Big Lie technique masterfully -- endlessly repeating its falsehoods until the drummed-upon populace came to accept them as truths.

Many ordinary "good Germans" and moral arbiters went along with these violations of civil rights and liberties either because they inwardly agreed with the propagandists or because they were afraid to disagree in public. Those few leaders in academia, the church and the press who courageously or even tentatively demurred or asked too many questions tended to be punished -- demoted, fired, their honors revoked, etc. -- and so more and more citizens got the message to "watch what you say." The Nazi juggernaut pushed on, widening its list of what was forbidden, issuing harsher and harsher edicts, and treating any dissidents roughly.

Hitler, leader of the rabidly rightwing Nazi party, was installed as Chancellor in 1933, even though his party was not in the majority, in the hope that he could bring some order and stability to a society still reeling from the horrendous economic/social Great Depression that had devastated the country during the '20s and early-'30s. Given the reins of power, Hitler felt free to unleash policies that most citizens earlier had rejected as way too extreme. He had written about them in his book "Mein Kampf," but many thought he would modify his demented views once he was inside the establishment corridors.

The "Enabling Act" that gave Hitler total control of the organs of power in Germany was passed in 1933, following the burning of the German Reichstag (Parliament), an arson that was blamed on Communist "terrorists." Hitler "temporarily" suspended civil liberties during this "national emergency," which of course never ended. Hitler lied to the Reichstag about his true intentions in order to obtain approval of the Enabling Act. Shortly after its passage, Hitler began rounding up tens of thousands of political enemies and sending them to concentration camps. Democracy was dead in Hitler's Germany.

The corporate titans, seeing that there might be profit to be gained from Nazi economic and military policies, supported Hitler's rise and rule; those who had objections to what he was doing thought they could tame his passions through their immense influence. But slowly, and then quickly, the Nazis took over one institution after another; totalitarianism was in full force. To stamp out any hint of dissent, all citizens were to spy on each other -- "each one of us the Gestapo of the others," to use Sebastian Haffner's scary phrase -- and the security forces arrested and tortured at will. (To learn more from Haffner's contemporaneous account, see "Germany in 1933: The Easy Slide Into Fascism").

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Arming itself to the teeth, Hitler's military forces carried out lightning-quick wars of conquest ("Blitzkrieg") on weaker nations and the fascist German empire spread over Europe and, in alliance with Japan, in Asia as well. More than 40 million human beings would die in the resulting World War II. Hitler's arrogant belief in his own intuition and infallibility led to his downfall, as, against all common sense and advice and military history, he invaded the Soviet Union and wound up in a destructive quagmire of the worst sort.

### THE PARALLEL UNIVERSE

Again, what follows here is not to allege one-for-one comparisons to Nazism, but to note certain parallel events and tactics that require special consideration if we are to avoid imitating disastrous history even more fully.

In our time, a Leader (who, we later learned, probably lost the 2000 election) was installed in the White House by a far-right majority faction of the Supreme Court. The HardRight had been laying plans for a restoration of Republican rule after Clinton won re-election; first they made sure Clinton would be unable to concentrate on his political agenda by constant iterations of supposed scandals that, as various probes demonstrated, revealed no illegality. When Clinton handed the Republicans an opening by engaging in a sexual dalliance in the White House, they engineered an impeachment and trial by the Senate; it didn't really matter that Clinton was not convicted, as the requisite damage had been done, with a side benefit -- his Vice President and presumable successor, Al Gore, was tainted by being close to Clinton and thus weakened politically.

The point of all this is that the HardRight restoration forces were planning for a Bush administration far in advance of the actual 2000 election. There was no one person's "Mein Kampf," but other writings had laid out in stark terms what this neo-conservative cabal had in mind for the country's foreign/military policy should they return to power, especially in the reports of The Project for The New American Century: "pre-emptive" wars of conquest, permitting no rivals for influence, control of energy sources, etc. (See "How We Got Into This Imperial Pickle: A PNAC Primer", where PNAC lays out the sole-Superpower strategy for achieving "benevolent hegemony" around the globe.)

Some of that planning included an invasion of Iraq. Even though Cheney still won't reveal which oil executives were part of his secret energy task-force, we do know that at least part of that

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panel's meetings in early 2001 involved the question of Iraq, with discussion and a map of which companies might get exploration blocks after Saddam was removed from power. Further, former Treasury Secretary Paul O'Neill revealed how astonished he was that at the first meetings of the Bush Cabinet in early-2001, much time was spent on the need to invade Iraq.

The terror attacks of 9/11/2001 served as the equivalent of the "Reichstag Fire" -- or, seen another way, as a "new Pearl Harbor," the phrase lifted from a 2000 PNAC document. The Bush Administration's "Enabling Act" came in several key bills passed by Congress: the unread and barely-debated Patriot Act, which gave virtually unlimited police powers to the government in rooting out "terrorism," and the Authorization for the Use of Military Force (AUMF), written so broadly as to give the "commander in chief" authority to take whatever unspecified actions he considered necessary against those responsible for 9/11. Attorney General Gonzales recently claimed that the AUMF, in conjunction with Article 2 of the Constitution, permits Bush to authorize both the torture of prisoners and spying on American citizens, without the need to seek any court warrants, thus over-riding the Fourth Amendment and the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act that states in no uncertain terms that ALL such eavesdropping requires court permission.

### REINING IN DISSENTERS & THE INTERNET

Even though the mainstream, corporate-owned media by and large does the bidding of the Bush Administration, ignoring and playing down bad news and hyping the Administration's spin points, full control of the mass media is still not complete -- even with the Bush Administration spending \$1.6 billion tax dollars last year on its own public-relations spin. The few insurgent media outlets and reporters, and the unruly analysts on the internet, are still to be dealt with. (FEMA has contracted with Halliburton and others to build several hundred detention camps around the country, ostensibly to house illegal immigrants but easily convertible for malcontents of one sort or another. See Maureen Farrell's "Detention Camp Jitters".

Likewise, the Judiciary. Bush&Co. have placed nearly two hundred of its HardRight jurists on the federal appeals courts, and got its new Federalist Society justices onto the Supreme Court -- presumably tipping the balance in favor of more rightwing decisions -- but more work needs to be done to lock down total control of the Judiciary.

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The democratic institutions that possibly could still backfire on the Bush agenda are approaching terminal weakness: the Republican-controlled Congress has become a rubber-stamp appendage of Karl Rove's political office; the Democrats are essentially marginalized with no real power except to whine and complain and embarrass.

Plus, and most importantly, election votes are counted by the same GOP-friendly corporations that controlled (and appear to have manipulated) the vote-tabulations in 2002 and 2004, that manufacture the computer-voting machines, and that own the secret, proprietary software.

The one dangerous element that cannot be fully controlled are the human beings who are the public face of the HardRight elite. Bush is a simpleton who often says more than he should, giving away the game; Cheney is a callous Rasputin whose penchant for secrecy and power-lust as he runs the government constantly gets the group into hot water; Rumsfeld is a media-savvy incompetent whose dirty fingerprints are all over the Iraq disaster and the torture scandal; Rove, a brilliant dirty-pool tactician (his grandfather reportedly was an active Nazi Party supporter in Germany), is likely to be indicted in the Plamegate scandal. Others Administration heavies, such as Condoleezza Rice and Alberto Gonzales are little more than toadies for the big boys.

### WE'VE BEEN WARNED

So, let's see: a Supreme Leader who has taken his country into blitzkrieg ("shock & awe") attacks on foreign nations, bogging down in an ill-advised invasion quagmire in Iraq; who has traded historic civil rights and liberties for defense of the fatherland; who has destroyed or rendered toothless his nominal opposition party; who has wrapped himself in the flag and questioned the patriotism of those who raise questions about his policies; who has engaged in a Big Lie propaganda strategy to move his agenda; who has demonized internal enemies; who violates the law to get what he wants and claims that he serves a higher power in doing so; who has marginalized the other two branches of government; who effectively controls the voting process; and so on.

What's scary is that it didn't take much verbal stretching to come up with those parallels, even admitting that life in Bush's U.S.A., however comparable in many areas, can scarcely be equated to life in Hitler's Germany.

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Even so, history has presented its warnings to us. Will we understand and act in time to return our country to a more moderate balancing point, thus making us better protected in terms of national security? It's up to each of us.

This bungling Bush crew seems to have a reverse Midas touch; virtually everything they touch turns not to gold but to foul-smelling waste matter. They are so out of touch with the American mainstream that they've brought their own poll numbers down into the 30s, and key Republicans in self-defense are racing to separate themselves from BushCheney before the November elections. Bush&Co. may be reckless bumblers, endangering America's national security and economy and environment, but they still wield the levers of power and they're not about to give them up; indeed, it appears they are willing to take us all down with them as they fall.

That's our challenge, to get rid of them as quickly as possible -- by agitating for impeachment hearings now, or moving for impeachment and a Senate trial after taking back the House in November -- and help bring America out from its current dark cave to the bright light of hope and civility and reality-based governance.

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