

THE NATURE OF GOVERNMENT

By Karl Hess

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Government has gone wild.

Today, in the land we like to think of as the most free on earth, government reaches into every level of our lives. It controls and it coerces, it bullies and it brags, it browbeats and it blusters. It grows and it grows, feeding without restraint on the energy, the talents, the hopes, the fears, and the futures of the people.

Endless arguing about, or even rigorous voting for "better" government has not altered and can not alter the fact that it is the nature of government, the state itself, that has shown itself in such a dark light. For it is in the nature of the state and of government as it has developed to do all of the things that it now is doing — regardless of which partisans, which technicians, operate it at any given point.

After each American election there are the weeks and months of elation in which partisans euphorically tell one another that "problems are going to be solved" by the "good" and "strong" and "wise" men about to take office. The losers, meantime, say just as flatly that the world is going to hell in a breadbasket.

And very little changes.

In terms of actual change, as a matter of fact, there hasn't been an election in the United States since its inception that has driven the country solidly onto a course toward less government and more liberty. Each, rather, has driven the country toward more government and less liberty.

Parties and promises notwithstanding, this is the way it is. To not recognize that one overpowering fact is to let the meaning of the entire political history of our time utterly escape you.

The nature of the state, the growth of government has been unchanged by politicians.^[1] Only the politicians themselves have changed.

Too many Americans for too long have been diverted by the changes of faces and factions. They have permitted their attention to be diverted from the unchanging problem of government itself.

To the extent that they continue to be so diverted, government has a free hand to continue its development toward despotism.

Particularly now, with one more election and with one more chorus of paeans and complaints, one more magic-lantern display of changing images in an unchanging show, those who profess an interest in liberty need to turn away from illusions and shadows and look at the actual and concrete facts of government here and around the world.

They need to ask not whether it is possible simply to tame government, or to make it more economical, or to make it more favorable to this or that

ideology, class, or interest; they need to ask the most fundamental questions about government. What is its purpose? What is its limit? What is its legitimacy? What is its relation to liberty? To the individual?

Those who weigh the cost of government only in dollars will vote for the most economical government, the most efficient — perhaps not bothering to ask if that efficiency is in the service of or to the detriment of liberty.

Those who assess the value of government only in terms of its output of "good" programs will vote for the most active government — perhaps not bothering to ask if the action serves the need or greed of some men, or the liberty of all.

Others may measure government only by its arms and martial spirit, praising the way in which it guards the borders or the outposts but remaining curiously uninterested in the garrisons it may be building at home.

Some will ask only that government benefit them, protect them, comfort them, preserve their status quo and suppress any who would disturb it. And they too will have forgotten to ask any question at all about liberty.

Questions about liberty have, of course, long been most notably neglected by those who have called themselves liberals in America. One result has been that the entire liberal position now stands discredited and, even more humiliating to its leadership, hopelessly outdated and irrelevant.

"Questions about liberty have, of course, long been most notably neglected by those who have called themselves liberals in America."
But the same is more and more true of those who call themselves conservative. They too, more and more, ask simply who controls the government ("our" guys or "their" guys) rather than what we should do about government itself.

It has become, as a result, a political truism of our time that the differences between the two major political parties are marginal at best. One editor recently pointed out that in terms of sheer differences of political approach there now is more difference between factions behind the Iron Curtain than between the major political factions in the United States. It is not altogether fanciful to say that the United States has, finally, become a one-party state.

And it is merely common sense to observe that, beyond it all, government rolls along — widely accepted, widely supported, largely unquestioned as the father of us all, the focus of life, lever of all power.

Riots in the streets may concern some. Riots on the campus may concern others. But it is the riotous, growing power of *government* gone wild that should preoccupy the serious and concerned friend of liberty in this land once so hopefully dedicated to freedom.

It is in that dedication, as a matter of fact, that may be found that inspiration to return to concern about government itself and not simply to its current cost or management. For in that dedication we can clearly see a time when men, serious men, were concerned very candidly not with who should run the government but with how to restrain, repress, and even eliminate government. They were concerned with purpose, not merely with program.

The deepest concern then, as it should be now, was not the sort of law to impose upon citizens, not the sort of order to impose upon citizens, not the sort of privileges and prerogatives to bestow upon government, not the tasks to assign it or the titles to enhance it. No. The concern was to impose law *upon* government.

It was to curb government; to cut it back and cut it down.

The concern was liberty.

The Declaration of Independence

The Declaration of Independence says it all and says it well.

... that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, that whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it. To the men who founded the United States, that Declaration was the essence of the law insofar as the state was concerned. There were among those men some, perhaps many, who had little sympathy for the state at all. They accepted it as a necessary evil. Others conceived it only as an evil and not actually necessary at all.

All finally agreed, however, that they could live under or at least coexist with an agreement of government, an agreement of lawful government that established the sole function of government as in "securing" the "rights" of the people: life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Government would, in effect, be merely an instrument, voluntarily subscribed to, that would prevent *anyone* (including governments) from taking or abridging life, liberty, or the pursuit of happiness. That is all.

It has been the constant breach of that law that has marked the development of the state ever since then.

It is the gathering momentum of more and more breakage of that law that marks the only crucially important political question facing Americans, or, indeed, people anywhere. This is no longer a problem of any one state. It is a threatening reality in all states, around the world.

The Omnipotent State

Government, gone wild in growth and its powers, has gone also above and beyond the law. Today it is widely accepted, as a matter of fact, that *Government Is The Law*. Just as a "divine" king once could say, "I am the state," governments today everywhere say they are the law, even that they are the people.

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Each citizen can ask himself the most grave questions in this regard. Frank self-answers should be revealing.

Do you feel that the state is more important than you are?

Do you feel that the state should enjoy freedoms that you do not?

Do you feel that the state should be able to rise above the law?

Do you feel that you could not live unless the state protected you?

Do you feel that you could not thrive unless the state nourished or subsidized you?

Do you feel that service to the state is more desirable or more noble than service to your self, your family, your neighbors, or your own ideals?

Do you feel that it actually *is* a privilege to pay taxes?

Do you feel that since the government, the state, is more important than any one man, that every single man should be prepared to give his all, even his life, to or for his government?

Do you feel that the state is something with a life and identity of its own, beyond the men who might hold office in it?

Do you feel that "the government" and "the country" are the same?

Do you feel that, when all is said and done, your life belongs to your government?

Do you feel that your "rights" are given to you by government?

Do you feel that, when all is said and done, if big problems are to be solved in this world that government will have to do it?

The crucial separation between men today is not anything more or anything less than the separation between those who answer yes to those questions and those who answer no. The only important gradations in the thinking that separates men today will be found along a scale of how *many* yes and how many no answers are given.

"Do you feel that man actually is incapable, as an individual, of knowing what is right or wrong: and that only the wisdom of "society" can establish such values?"

My own position is a resounding NO to every single one of these questions.

The demonstrated purpose of both major political parties, and including the new, conservative administration is yes to at least a majority of the questions.

And it probably would be fair to say that the response of most Americans, sincerely and in heartfelt patriotism, also would be yes.

That the so-called liberal response has been yes all along does not require exposition at this point. Readers of average care know this is true from a generation of reform-liberal, New Deal-type programs in which every action of government has been condoned and expanded. "Liberal" programs have, without exception, strengthened government, and have rejected by their very actions one particular approach to problem — solving. That approach is

liberation; the liberation of people *from* political control rather than simply trying to advantage them by political favoritism.

Conservative Contradictions

Conservatives, it now turns out, have little to crow about either. They have howled at the expenditure of tax-taken money for welfare programs but have jumped to support vast outpourings of the same sort of money for the entire panoply of the military-industrial complex and the garrison state; many supported racial laws at the state level but wept when reverse-racial laws became Federal; many gleefully seek government subsidy and protection of business even when they rail against government protection of unions; many ask tariffs to protect their particular interest; few object to farm boondoggling when it gives millions to a man with vast acreage, but many decry the support of another man with a small and unproductive plot.

The examples abound; examples of inconsistency, of outrage at government when it benefits someone else, and of red-white-and-blue support for government when it's "on our side."

Particularly today, the conservative contradiction is glaring. Of a sudden, as though smitten by righteous lightning, conservatives are discovering that government is good and big government is even gooder. Where is the conservative voice being raised to ask, of the new administration, that it use its every power not to "improve" government but to, quite literally, get it off the backs of the people altogether.

Instead, the talk most popularly is of such things as "tax incentives," as though letting a man keep some of the money he has earned is an act of supreme wisdom and charity on the part of the government. Only those who, deep down, believe that the government actually does have first claim on everything legitimately, can find inspiration in a system that merely uses taxes to "pay off" this or that class or faction.

Where, instead, is the conservative voice that says do not simply reform the tax system; replace it!

There are few such voices to be heard. Ironically, only on the libertarian right and in some portions of the New Left or among true anarchists are there voices crying against not programs and not against personalities but against government itself.

It is in this very context and against this very background, of the widespread acceptance of government as good, that liberty must beg, must implore all with some concern for her to pause, to reflect — ultimately, to resist.

The Nature of Man

Philosophically, the resistance to government has roots running to the very nature of man himself. There are questions to be asked, in care and conscience, on that score just as on the political score.

Do you feel that your life is unimportant when compared to the lives of others?

Do you feel that the noblest thing you could do would be to give your life for someone else?

Do you feel that the value of each man is simply what "society" says it is?

Do you feel that man actually is incapable, as an individual, of knowing what is right or wrong: and that only the wisdom of "society" can establish such values?

Do you feel that the life of each individual person belongs in large part to society?

Do you feel that individual men are nothing, but that "mankind" is everything?

Do you feel that man's reasoning mind is just a veneer and that under it he is only another animal, very much like all others?

Do you feel that man is basically bad?

Do you feel that if man didn't have restraints he always would run amuck?

Do you feel that man's mind is so limited, in the long run, that it just isn't safe to think you know anything for sure?

Do you feel that your life is swept along, determined by invisible forces over which you have no control?

The person who answered no to the liberty-degrading questions listed earlier should answer no also to these life-degrading questions. But the sad truth is that, to a greater or lesser degree, the most acceptable answer has become yes, yes, yes.

Just as liberty has become a low order of priority for concern politically, so has the individual become a low order of priority for concern philosophically. And, of course, it follows. The collectivist view of society, which dominates politics of both parties and most people today, also dominates the view of man himself. In both instances the word of the day is that men must be ruled, that they are unworthy of liberty, and that progress is only possible through the programs of a special elite, the politicians.

To the abiding discredit of most of us, the fundamental question of liberty and man, of man versus the state, has been neglected, rarely even asked as the right and left, liberal and conservative, Democrat and Republican have preoccupied themselves with the lesser questions of political spoils.

The challenge to liberals today is whether they will mutter in their tents about the amounts of welfare programs or the progress of some particular war or whether they will become concerned by the principles of liberty that underlie the programs and the conflict. Liberals cannot have it both ways.

The problems of poverty and prejudice are not solvable by piling official restrictions, more control, and more coercion on top of old, informal repressions. It is to the liberation of people, not their regimentation that liberals should have addressed themselves had they not been swept up in the current concern for political control as an end in itself.

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Nor can liberals have it both ways about war. Wars are waged, solely, by governments. The bigger and stronger the government, the bigger and more likely the wars it will wage. Liberals who worship the state, and forsake liberty, who oppose one war but whoop it up for others (against "bad" guys), are no friends of liberty or of peace.

Conservatives are similarly challenged and they have similarly failed.

After decades of platform ranting about the perils of big government, they have been in the forefront of those who advocate all-encompassing government to protect industry, wage war (against *their* enemies, of course) and, above all, to establish and enforce norms of conduct and morality as they have conceived those norms.

Both liberals and conservatives, to sum it up, become preoccupied with the ways in which to *use* government, each for their own ideological or class benefit.

Neither have offered a body of libertarian doctrine. Neither have, so far, returned to the concern over liberty which marked the founding of the nation.

The Concern for Liberty

Actually, for liberals the question is largely academic. They have slipped so far from the mainstream of concern over liberty — a concern that is stirring the cauldrons of discontent everywhere in the world today — that few take them seriously in regard to anything today. This is particularly true of many activist young people, who abhor the bureaucratic pomposity of the liberals every bit as much as they detest the establishmentarian conformity of conservatives.

For conservatives, or those who have generally been lumped in that category, the question is more tragic than academic. In the face of liberal collapse, when the time was ripe for a message of liberty, conservatives by and large have preferred to talk of status quo and of political platitudes, of problem solving, of "good government" and, woefully, of more government, always more.

The chief and perhaps only difference is that where liberals used to speak of greater government power to enact welfare programs, conservatives speak of greater government power to establish "order," by which is meant status quo.

In both cases power has corrupted, and always will corrupt, whatever good motives may have been present at the outset.

In neither case has liberty become or remained the standard to which good men could repair. In both cases, power has become the goal, the means, and the end.

Where politicians flourish, long history has harshly taught us, people and their liberty wither. Where the state is god and the "public interest" worshipped, individual man will be found bleeding upon the altar.

To what extent has that happened in this land?

When independence was declared in the land, those whose quest for liberty had made them revolutionaries listed the grievances that set them on their violent, illegal, disorderly course.

"Where the state is god and the 'public interest' worshipped, individual man will be found bleeding upon the altar."

The detailed nature of those grievances has changed but the same attitude of grievance rightfully may be leveled against the government today; the government which, by displacing the sovereignty of individuals, has enthroned itself as a political monarchy, giving its subjects the chance only to change the wearer of the crown every so many years.

The monarch "erected a multitude of new offices, and sent hither swarms of Officers to harass our people, and eat out their substance" at the time of the Declaration of Independence.

The Federal and state governments do the same today.

The monarch, then, "kept among us, in times of peace, standing armies." The Federal government conscripts people in time of peace today.

The monarch then suspended "our own legislatures, declaring themselves invested with power to legislate for us in all cases whatsoever."

The Federal and state governments today regularly bypass the legislatures to rule by executive orders and regulation.

The monarch then "endeavored to prevent the population of these states" by land and travel restrictions.

The Federal and state governments today hold vast land areas away from the use of individuals and also closely regulate travel abroad and the conditions of building homes or settling in new places here at home.

The monarch then cut "off our trade with all parts of the world."

State and Federal regulations today straitjacket trade even between cities, much less nations.

The monarch then was opposed "for imposing taxes upon us without our consent."

State and Federal governments today, to be sure, obtain legislative consent for tax rates but then, in administering the rules of taxation with absolute power, actually determine who shall pay what and when just as effectively as though they passed the laws in the first place without consent.

Last Great Bastion?

There are still some (sadly enough, most are conservatives) who argue that despite it all, the United States remains the last great bastion of free enterprise and capitalism. This proposition needs to be examined.

Capitalism, first of all, implies ownership of property and the freedom to use it in noninjurious ways. Where is that freedom today? It is hedged in with so

many bureaucratic regulations and restrictions — including the right of the government to expropriate property or, alternatively, destructively tax it — that capitalism in America can only accurately be described as a version of state capitalism, surely not free-market capitalism.

As to free enterprise, that is part of the very crux of the discussion. How free is it? To what extent are conservatives defending, rhetorically, something which has ceased to exist anywhere except in their own publications? To what extent does the conservative defense of what is a far-from-free-enterprise system actually retard, far from advance, any possibility of moving toward an actually free system?

It is to such problems that those interested in liberty should be seriously addressing themselves, and not merely to whether this or that administration, or state government, is more or less "favorable" to business and industry. The fact that supposed free-marketers have so totally accepted the idea of state capitalism that they accept also, without a blink, the fact that government *can* favor or disfavor a particular enterprise is just a measure of how removed from concepts of liberty are most so-called conservative arguments about the economy.

Of singular significance along these lines is the prevailing attitude toward what is called "black capitalism." As stated by the conservative politicians who have proposed it, this is state capitalism of the most arrant sort. It begins with government guarantees and assistance, on a racial allocation, and it ends with obvious strings of government red-tape laced entirely through it.

Liberals, of course, aren't even that subtle. They attempt to buy off, or co-opt black Americans with unvarnished programs of control, rather than putting them on reservations to the accompaniment of promises of dignity and prosperity — perhaps of the sort enjoyed by that other federally-favored minority, the American Indian.

To view this matter through the lens of liberty is to see an entirely different sort of picture; it is to see the challenge of actually liberating black Americans *from* state control, letting them, if anything, have special assistance in cutting *through* red-tape, in blasting apart the restrictions of labor unions, business and zoning codes and, above all, constant police surveillance over their daily lives. It would mean, for instance, giving more than lip-service to the idea of local control of local schools — a supposedly conservative idea which went up in smoke the moment it was desired not by white Americans but by black Americans.

The same instinct which led some conservatives to defend the right of some schools to teach and practice bias, in accordance with community control of the school, should certainly have led them to support black control of schools in black neighborhoods even if the community wanted to teach Swahili, black supremacy, or whatever.

The issue involved is not the convenience or the customs of "society," the issue is the liberty of individuals and their *volitional communities*.

The issue is whether, when complacency may be so tempting to so many, there still will be men willing to make enemies of the world if they can remain friends of liberty.

There is nothing in the long history of men yearning to be free that indicates the quest or even the goal is comfortable. There is everything to indicate that it is exciting and creative and, depending upon your view of man, rewarding in the only values that are meaningful, self-respect for instance.

Government or Freedom

What then is the legitimate "political" concern of the person interested in a free, volitional, community-based, individually respectful society?

Ideally that interest is reflected in seeking the end of the state itself. Such an interest was, of course, deeply reflected in the debates that followed the Declaration of Independence and preceded the adoption of the Constitution. Men who might today be regarded as rather anarchistic strongly argued against the Constitution, feeling that it rather established a state than guaranteed liberty. The Declaration itself seemed enough to some and, indeed, upon reflection it might seem so to some today.

But, surely, the legitimate concern of a friend of liberty, even if it is not directed frontally toward the ideal of no state at all, cannot be directed in conscience toward *any* actions that would enhance rather than diminish the power of the state, that would free its power, rather than limit it.

Thus, for the friend of liberty, today, yesterday, and tomorrow, the crucial questions and answers always must be — wherever on the ladder of state development he may find himself — "Does this action increase the power of the state? If it does, I shall oppose it. Does this action increase the liberty of, or even the opportunity for individuals and their volitional communities? If it does, I shall support it."

How frivolous, or vicious, seem the arguments of cost, of mere partisan advantage, or of vested interest and special favor, in analyzing legislation, when stacked up against the measurement of liberty itself.

How much sadder, therefore, that liberty is not the constant measure of action — particularly in legislation — rather than only a rhetorical decoration. And, lest it seem a paradox that legislation and liberty can even be discussed in the same breath (most, if not all, legislation being a restriction rather than an extension of liberty) it should be carefully considered that given any freedom of legislative choice at all, it still is conceivably possible to legislate *against* government as well as in favor of it.

"It must be recognized that there now exists in this land of liberty virtually every institution of state power necessary to totalitarianism with the possible exception of a national police force."
Examples could be found in legislation to require the government to obey the law. The recent Freedom of Information Act was such an attempt, although one that has not proven wildly successful. It did attempt, however, to make the government behave as though its public property, which includes mountains of data, were *actually* public and not, instead, the private preserve and property of bureaucracy.

Several court suits are now outstanding to test this law. That government holds all the aces goes without saying.

A greater example, naturally, would be found in the passage of laws to make the tax collectors obey any law at all — such as equal treatment, candor of information — as to their internal memoranda and operations (today, a body of secrets more closely guarded than the atom bomb) so that citizens would know just what the rules might be on any given day; and so forth and so on down a long line of abuses which now mark this profession as the governmental counterpart of the [Black Hand Society](#).

Laws designed to respect, rather than deny the right of every man to his own life, also could be passed — as for example in forbidding government the right to conscript people for any purpose whatsoever.

Laws designed to respect, rather than degrade, the minds of men, also could be passed, as in laws forbidding anyone, particularly any level of government, the right to forcefully practice censorship or enforce conformity. (It goes without saying, of course, that this would scarcely prevent a parent from "censuring" inputs to a dependent child, if the parent felt so unsure of the child as to think he or she needed it, nor would it prevent any other consensual relationships. If some people *want* to let someone else think for them, it probably would be impossible to stop them. But what eagerly should be opposed is their right to extend the action forcefully to cover anyone else!)

It is true that a libertarian concept of a legislature is largely negative. It envisions the only function of government, and voluntary government at that, as lying on the realm of providing, by community agreement, the sort of protection for individuals which, otherwise, individuals could and would provide for themselves. Sound arguments, of course, can be delivered for the achievement of precisely this same sort of protection by nongovernmental means, as through fee services, voluntary arbitration agreements, commercial protective services, and so forth — or for the existence, side-by-side, of competing community and commercial services in all those fields.

The sheerly constructive side of libertarian views of society is in the liberation of men to try voluntarily any and all sorts of daring, innovative social forms, or stick with old ones if they wish.

The real point lies beyond the details. The point is that there is vast and legitimate room to discuss the forms of liberty without forever being bogged down in discussions of the form of the nation-state. The point, further, is that a serious interest in liberty, as opposed to a parlor-protest, rhetorical interest only in how to play the power game, will impel men to exert themselves in what is essentially the revolutionary direction of our own Declaration of Independence rather than in any more polite discussions.

Liberty — The Unsettled Issue

Liberty is not by any means an even-slightly-settled issue in the United States. It is, rather, a deeply *unsettled* issue. When liberals think they serve liberty by confiscatory taxation and when conservatives think they serve the same cause by opposing the ascendancy of individual rights in courts we can see just how unsettled and disturbed the whole question of liberty has become.

Only one matter does seem settled. The state, liberty's arch-foe throughout history, has increased its powers, scope, and — most significantly —

acceptance every single year of the American republic. Each year has brought more and not less state power.

Today, characteristically, the legislature, which is supposed to represent the people, is judged by the majority of citizens on the basis of how many enlargements of state power it passed rather than how many it resisted! The legislature has become, thus, not representative of the people at all. It is just as surely representative, in the main, of the state, of the bureaucracy, as is the executive branch itself.

Or, to put it another way, the issue of liberty can scarcely be thought of as settled when the Great Debate about it becomes the difference between 60 and 70 percent in taxation, the control of many or just some media, or any other such matter which even in its specification shows that liberty is not at issue anyway — but only some degree or another of state control.

At its most grim level, also, it must be recognized that there now exists in this land of liberty virtually every institution of state power necessary to totalitarianism with the possible exception of a national police force. Even there, the growing surge to nationalize the police through anticrime legislation that would, in effect, begin the federalization of all police forces, leaves little room for a comfortable complacency in any area.

This is not to say, of course, that totalitarianism is right around the corner or that we have already passed the corner. That particular corner is one of the most difficult of all political landmarks to recognize. History strongly suggests, as a matter of fact, that the time when most persons recognize it is precisely the time when it is too late to do anything about avoiding it.

For that reason, among others, it strikes some that it would be better to stand up and appear even ridiculous and alarmist right here and now than to be calm, cool, and collected, properly docile, and politically acceptable — while it became too late to do anything else!

The Tax Rebellion

Direct resistance may be the course others will select. Taking every available legal course to harass or even halt government programs is one avenue. Forcing the government to take, in its turn, legal action to compel the individual to comply with a government rule, rather than just voluntarily going along, is another course. Along such lines, of course, for those able to afford it, may lie many useful tests of the legality of government actions, particularly in the high-handed area of executive orders and regulatory law.

Ultimately, of course, every American holds in his hands the most explosive weapon that possibly could be turned against such a government as that of the United States as it has developed. That weapon is the sword of tax refusal.

It is clearly illegal, of course, to defy the government in regard to the payment of taxes. But prior to the clearly illegal areas of tax refusal there are many steps close to the borderline.

"No man, surely, can see the entire future clearly now. But all who put their hands upon the ground can feel the tremors in the earth."

In this area, the unbounded imagination of Americans already has given the revenueurs a massive migraine headache. Tax resistance is a fact. It is a growing reality. It worries the government. Their concern shows most evidently, as they take harsher and hastier action to dampen the flames of this honest, grassroots revolt.

Many will be frightened off by the toughness and the ruthlessness of the revenueurs. Understandably. Yet, there is ample evidence to show that the spirit of resistance overall is rising, despite the repressive and retaliatory lashings of the revenueurs.

Part of that spirit may feed on the earthy American feeling that "they can't put everybody in jail!" Or, in short, there *is* safety in numbers when it comes to fighting City Hall, or the White House itself.

Individual men and women, particularly those who have for so long been cruelly exploited by government — and this includes both the poorest and the most productive of our people — stand today at a point of decision that is made even more crucial because it is so honestly difficult for many to see it as crucial.

Life is, certainly in relation to other lands, good, sweet, and comfortable for many, if not most Americans.

Your Revolutionary Heritage

Many Americans are anxious, somehow fearful, somehow deeply disturbed that the quality of life in the land has lost many of its values, many of its virtues.

Creative and productive Americans of every race, of every degree of energy or education, from the mechanic at a crossroads garage, to the stock clerk in a department store, to the physicist, to the poet, to the musician, to the conscientious parent struggling to speak to a child suffering from the tongue-tied, mind-bent confusions of schools designed not to teach kids to think but to teach them simply to conform — all of these Americans, and their counterparts across the globe, in hut, hacienda, or factory, are chafing under the load of government that has been pressed down upon their shoulders in the name of many causes.

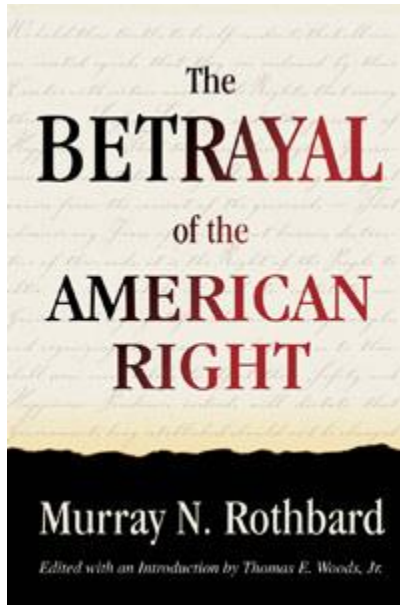
Americans are faced with two vistas.

Across one they see the comforts of life in this lovely land — the barbecues, the patios, the second car, the color TV. Seeing this many will reject out-of-hand any idea that the times now call for the sort of spirit that swept the land in 1776. How foolish to rock the boat, they can rightfully say.

Across the other vista are the clouds, no larger than a man's hand, or fist; the resentments of regimentation, the realization of rising repressiveness in the society, the stark, staring vision of those millions around the world to whom liberty is not just a copy-book exercise but precisely the sort of exercise in which men put their lives on the line.

No man, surely, can see the entire future clearly now. But all who put their hands upon the ground can feel the tremors in the earth. And all who turn

their heads from the familiar tasks before them can hear the wind that is rising.



[\\$24 \\$20](#)

There is nothing so certain as, or seemingly more painful than change. And changes there will be.

Each man now has only to answer whether he will stand pat and be changed, willy-nilly in a world he can wistfully say he did not want and did not make — or whether he will stand up, be counted, be confronted and be committed to the change to which his conscience and his reason dedicate him. There are just those two courses.

My course is clear. It is to stand for, and fight for liberty. For the liberation of man from a lawless state.

For,

when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such government, and to provide new guards for their future security.

That, Americans, is your revolutionary heritage from your Declaration of Independence. It is a proud one. It is right.

[bio] See [AuthorName]'s [AuthorArchive]. Comment on the [blog](#).

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Notes

[1] The references to government, except where otherwise specified, are to government as developed in a nation-state and as representing that state.

Government is defined as the social instrumentality through which, by force, of which it claims a monopoly, the interests of the state are served.

Specifically different from that formal concept of government as used here are the purely voluntary forms of social organization that, even in the absence of a state, most people probably would volitionally construct. Here, as will be obvious throughout, government and the state represent those social forms which rest not at all upon voluntarism but, in the final analysis, upon sheer force. The "government" that did not and could not sustain itself by force would clearly have to be voluntaristic in nature and, as a result, would not be subject to the body of criticism presented in this statement.

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Karl Hess (1923–1994) was an American national-level speechwriter and author. His career included stints on the Republican Right and the New Left before he became a libertarian anarchist. The documentary film [Karl Hess: Toward Liberty](#) won the Academy Award for best short documentary in 1981.