

Bush crime bill: on the road to fascism

by Kathleen Klenetsky

George Bush has turned his attention to the domestic front, with a series of announcements that is making manifest to the entire world how hollow a pretext was the cover of "enforcing international law" behind which the slaughter of an estimated half a million Iraqis was carried out in "Operation Desert Storm."

The giveaway as to what Bush has in mind for the home-front is the renewed emphasis which he has placed on "fighting crime." In four separate public statements during the first two weeks of March, the President pointed to the crime rate as the number-one problem facing the United States, and promised to establish a "real" death penalty to deal with it.

International jurists who hesitated to condemn the Persian Gulf action, out of fear they might appear to be condoning Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, must now confront the reality that the Bush White House is waging a sweeping offensive within its own borders, against the right of *habeas corpus*, one of the most fundamental civil rights in any nation, and demanding "a workable and enforceable death penalty," at a time when Eastern Europe's newly freed nations abolished the death penalty as one of their first steps out of the dark night of communist barbarism.

"The kind of moral force and national will that freed Kuwait City from abuse can free America's cities from crime," Bush bragged to a gathering of 650 law enforcement officials on March 5. He repeated this rhetoric in a nationally televised address to Congress on March 6, and in several other highly publicized addresses.

Sen. Joe Biden (D-Del.) says that the Democrats are "ready right now" to approve virtually all the elements of the White House bill, as long as the President signs on to new federal controls on assault weapons.

Listening to Bush's oratory, you would never know that the United States might have a much more fundamental prob-

lem, of which crime is only one result: a depression that has thrown millions of people out of work, and hundreds of thousands onto the street.

Yet evidence of the continuing collapse of the economy is overwhelming. The same day that Bush gave his triumphalist speech to a pathetic, slaving Congress, his administration released new unemployment figures, which showed that the *official* jobless rate had soared to 6.5% in February (in supposedly prosperous California, the unemployment rate shot up to 7.4%).

In the following week, Maryland, which borders Washington, D.C., announced that it would slash welfare benefits to nearly 100,000 people statewide, many of them to people who are permanently disabled. In the Washington metropolitan area, shrinking funds and an eroding tax base have forced deep cuts in food aid to thousands of undernourished children and mothers.

On March 13, a group of big-city mayors told a congressional hearing, "We have liberated Kuwait, but are in danger of losing New York, Philadelphia, Detroit, and other cities" because of dwindling federal aid, loss of jobs and population, and a collapsing tax base.

These problems could be taken care of relatively easily, were the United States to revive "American System" economics of investing in infrastructure and agro-industrial production.

But Bush is wedded totally to the policies of usury and speculation which created the country's economic mess in the first place. He will not abandon them.

Instead, he has adopted a two-pronged strategy: 1) crack down on any effective political opposition to these crazy policies; and 2) attempt to divert the population's attention from the deteriorating economy through the same "bread and circuses" tactics employed by oligarchs down through the

centuries, from pagan Rome's Caesars, to fascist leaders Mussolini and Hitler, whom Bush is coming to resemble more and more.

(It is instructive that Bush's professed ego-ideal, former secretary of war and establishment insider *par excellence* Henry Stimson, thought very highly of Mussolini and his adviser, Dino Grandi, while Bush's father worked for one of the leading New York investment banks that bankrolled Hitler.)

The consequences of this distinctly fascist tenor of Bush's postwar orientation means more savage forays against Third World countries, and, at home, an increasing brutality and scapegoating of the multitudes thrown on the garbage dump by Bush's "kinder, gentler" administration.

Bush propagandists hope to get away with this by conveying the same message to Americans that they did to justify the slaughter in Iraq: Just as Arabs are not "like us," and therefore not truly human, the American unemployed, homeless, addicted, AIDS-afflicted, are not "like us," either. Thus, it is fine to ignore their suffering, or to kill them because they are getting in our way.

Crime bill a crime

This is the sick rationale behind Bush's demagogic push on crime, a key element of which is the Omnibus Crime Bill. The major features of this bill are the expansion of the death penalty and the elimination of constitutional rights for those accused of crime.

Submitted to Congress on March 11, the Comprehensive Violent Crime Control Act of 1991 represents a criminal assault on the U.S. Constitution. Its most egregious features include its restrictions on *habeas corpus* and its demand to extend the death penalty.

"The Nation needs a workable and enforceable death penalty," says a fact sheet on the bill issued by the White House. The bill "addresses . . . deficiencies for existing capital offenses [i.e., closes any loopholes] and authorizes imposing the death penalty for several additional aggravated federal crimes."

The bill calls for applying the death penalty to a wide range of crimes, including the *attempted* assassination of the President, the murder of certain foreign officials, kidnaping where a death results, and the terrorist murder of American nationals abroad.

The measure also proposes to an arbitrary one-year time limit on federal *habeas corpus* applications by state prisoners, and a "good faith" exception to restrictions on illegal searches and seizures. This second measure would "permit the admission of evidence if the officers carrying out a search or seizure acted with an objectively reasonable belief that their conduct met Fourth Amendment requirements." With the right corrupt judge, of course, any search becomes "reasonable"—which is why the Founding Fathers took such care in drafting these protections in the first place.

The worse aspect of Bush's push for the death penalty is

what it says about the American people. The cultural banality and pursuit of hedonism which have characterized American society, especially since the end of World War II, are now intersecting a massive economic collapse, and the result is that many Americans are turning into barbarians.

Neither Hitler nor Mussolini would have come to power without mass-based fascist movements behind them; the only reason Bush has been able to get away with his immoral foreign and domestic policies for the past two years, is that too many Americans not only tolerate them, but even like them. The widespread acceptance of euthanasia—killing one's grandmother because she is too much trouble, or one's handicapped relatives because they are draining too many scarce resources—underscores how close to the edge of civilization the United States has come.

A similar process occurred under the fascist regimes of Hitler and Mussolini. Behind the pageants and shows of support for martial victories, and so forth, was an increasingly powerful machine of mass oppression. The more the population fell in line with the "celebrations," the more defenseless they became before the repressive machinery. Eventually, it became virtually impossible to challenge the dictatorship from within.

It gets worse

But Bush's crime bill is only the beginning of the end of constitutional rule in the United States. Harsher measures have already been introduced on the Hill, with worse ones waiting in the wings.

For example, Rep. Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.) has teamed up with Sen. Phil Gramm (R-Tex.) to propose a National Drug and Crime Emergency Bill, which, if passed, would mandate the President to declare a five-year state of emergency, in which mandatory minimum five-year jail sentences would be handed down to anyone accused of a drug crime, or of another class of crime in which the mere *threat* of violence occurred. An aggressive panhandler could find himself in jail for five years under Gingrich's monstrosity. The bill anticipates so many new prisoners, that it calls for using abandoned military bases and erecting tent cities to house the influx.

The same hint of fascist repression can be seen at work in the McCarthyite tactics being deployed against those who opposed going to war in the Gulf. So great is the pressure, that a number of widely read newspaper columnists, along with other influentials, have come forward in recent weeks to publicly recant, and to slavishly praise Bush's leadership and the victory in the Gulf.

The same bloodletting is taking place in Congress, where the Republicans, backed by hard-core Bush Democrats, are lambasting those who voted against the use of force as appeasers and traitors. The ubiquitous Newt Gingrich, for example, demanded on March 10 that Democratic members of Congress who voted against the use of force in the Gulf publicly confess their mistake. Phil Gramm backed him to the hilt.