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UFO UpDates Mailing List

Re: Book Burnings & Conspiracies

From: Greg Sandow <gsandow@prodigy.net>
Date: Mon, 17 May 1999 19:01:57 -0400
Fwd Date: Mon, 17 May 1999 21:03:09 -0400
Subject: Re: Book Burnings & Conspiracies

>Date: Sun, 16 May 1999 10:10:27 -0500
>From: Alfred Lehmborg <Lehmborg@snowhill.com>
>To: UFO UpDates - Toronto <updates@globalserve.net>
>Subject: Re: Book Burnings & Conspiracies

>Couched in the manner of your presentation, sir, the rational
>person would be reluctant to continue down the slippery slope
>that you depict. But, it would appear to seem that it may be
>as you suggest (up your debating sleeve), that knee jerk
>dismissal of conspiracy is irrational.

Knee-jerk thinking is not terribly rational, no matter what it's about. But who, exactly, is dismissing conspiracy with a jerk of the knee?

>Not just government, Mr. S. -- big business (including their
>doctors, lawyers, and policemen), the spawner of the government
>you allude to.

Now we have a distinction to make -- between conspiracies and simple dominance of government by the powerful, which is not exactly news. Well over 100 years ago, Marx said that the government, in capitalist societies, was "the executive committee of the ruling class."

But even he -- and let me state, so as not to be criticized for anything I'm not, that my politics are quite left; I'm quite sympathetic to Marx -- never said this executive committee had any sort of formal organization. He was speaking metaphorically. I used to make jokes (around 20 years ago) about what a real conspiracy would be like. The "executive committee" would have formal sessions. "Ladies and gentlemen, we've now settled the course of the stock market for the next year, and determined which team will win the World Series. Now may I ask Mr. Leonard Bernstein to outline his plans for classical music?" That -- or something like that (jokes about the world series aside) -- is what I've thought conspiracy theories allege. Which is a very different thing from mere haphazard domination by the rich and powerful.

>>It's not exactly news that (a) governments
>>have perfectly normal reasons for hiding what they do, ranging
>>from genuine issues of security to disreputable attempts to
>>cover their asses, and

>A priveledge very likely abused horrifically, and without
>oversite of any kind.

Really? No oversight at all? Then how do we know about government scandals?

>>(b) that governments sometimes resort to
>>illegal means to keep themselves in power, or to enrich their
>>supporters.

>Why has that ever been instituted and once instituted, tolerated
>-- Why didn't Ike just admit that the russians were scaring
>the hell out of us, and deserved every bit of over flight they
>got. Was our own behavior something less than pristine? Why
>tolerate a violent right wing government over a more peaceful
>and only slightly more left one?

Good points, all of them, but hardly proof of any conspiracy.
The mere fact that governments lie and cover up doesn't prove
that there's a conspiracy.

>>All this is obvious enough without conspiracies. It's much worse
>>in the third world.

>This is supposed to be America! Is it something other than
>what it depicts itself to be?

Of course it is! This is news?

>>And, interestingly, it used to be much worse
>>in the United States, generations ago.

>Few know that, though. Evidence of some kind of educational
>conspiracy?
>Perhaps.

Hardly. Few people know much, in any detail, about history of
any kind. The information, in any case, is hidden in plain
sight. You don't have to read deep in scholarly historical
studies to learn, for instance, that published budgets for
cities and states in the US are relatively new (allowing all
kinds of possibilities for corrupt spending), that police
corruption in New York City used to be more the norm than the
exception (I'm talking about the 1920s, not the more recent
pre-Serpico era), or that the press used to support government
in America far more uncritically than it does now.

The mere fact that something isn't known doesn't prove or even
suggest a conspiracy.

>>Does anyone remember
>>political bosses in big American cities?

>How about the one in Suffolk county New York right now!

Suffolk County's Republican party bosses have been widely
written about. One of their main MO's (as reported widely in the
New York press in the '80s) was to require all employees of
county government to make donations to the Republican party.

One reason this got reported, however, was that it's relatively
rare these days. Two generations ago, most big cities were
controlled by political bosses affiliated with the Democratic
party. Mayor Daley of Chicago was the most notorious, though
it's worth noting that often these bosses didn't hold office.
They'd get jobs for working-class citizens, and perform other
public services -- the understanding being that the citizens
helped would vote the straight democratic ticket. The election
results were partly fabricated, in any case, with many stories
circulating about people voting more than once, or dead people
being retained on the election rolls.

These bosses exercised fairly iron control over the political
apparatus in their cities. They could dictate who'd be the
Democratic candidate for mayor, and sometimes even for governor
of their states. Once elected, these politicians did what the
bosses wanted.

But those days are long gone. I remember vividly when Ed Koch,
later to be mayor of New York, overthrew the last remaining New
York political boss, Carmine di Sapio. I wouldn't claim there's
much more small-d democracy in New York than there used to be
(in the sense of direct control by the citizens), but government
is conducted much, much more openly than it used to be. To

cite just one vivid change: You won't be beaten by thugs, or, in extreme cases, even killed if you speak up strongly against the party in power.

>>"Smoke-filled rooms" in
>>which political parties here decided on presidential candidates?

>You suggest that that has disappeared? No, just changed its
>form. The common woman still has very little input into the
>process than to vote for who the the business community provides
>for her to vote for.

There are many business communities, and many of them don't think they've got the ideal candidates, either. Where, for instance, is the candidate calling for an end to the trade embargo with Cuba, something that many US corporations dearly want to see (so they can join European and Asian companies in doing Cuban business)?

Business control of politics and candidates is fairly haphazard. And one decisive change has been the role of presidential nominating conventions. A generation ago, nominations were actually decided there. Not any more -- the extensive primary system more or less guarantees that by the time a convention starts, one candidate will have locked up enough votes to win. That, anyway, has been what's happened for several elections now.

The old days were very different. Remember, we're talking here about evidence for conspiracy, not the more general notion that the people of the US don't have much control of their government. When political conventions still had power, a few political bosses could lock themselves up in that classic "smoke-filled room," and decide who should be nominated. They'd conspire, in other words.

Before the 1952 elections, the moderate Northeast bankers and Wall Street executives who mostly controlled the Republican party were able to persuade Dwight Eisenhower to run as a Republican, and then were able to get him the nomination (despite strong opposite from conservatives who supported Robert Taft, the candidate of the midwest and the west, the areas which now, along with the south, have supplanted the Northeast moderates from their pre-eminent position in the party, proof right there that the thing isn't run as a steel-tight conspiracy).

Nowadays, no group of bankers could do that. They'd have to bankroll their candidate through all the primaries, and if the voters didn't like him, they'd lose. Not fully democratic, I'll grant, but much more open than things used to be.

>>"Robber barons" around the turn of the (last) century who
>>controlled congressmen, senators, and entire state legislatures?

>I think we can safely admit that they have not disappeared,
>either. There are whole communities in the world suffering
>miserably at the hands of a business ethic gone mad outside the
>borders of the United States, and only slightly less mad inside
>it's borders.

But of course they've disappeared. They've been replaced by far more impersonal corporations, which do their dirty work far less systematically. In the old days, you really could say that John D. Rockefeller conspired to put his competitors out of business. No longer.

>>My impression, after watching American politics for 40-odd years
>>and after much reading, is that politics and government are in
>>many ways -- in everything, I'd guess, that's not concerned with
>>foreign policy and the military -- more open than they used to
>>be.

>But certainly not as it could be, assuming an honesty, a
>forthcoming attitude, or a respect now in such short supply.
>Hell -- we should be living in the asteroid belt by now -- a
>thriving collection of autonomous individuals combining into
>teams of much more capability and efficacy!

Sure. But that doesn't mean there's a conspiracy.

To repeat the point I've been trying to make: If the world is really run by a small conspiratorial group, they've messed up badly by making things more open and less conspiratorial than they used to be. That, at least to me, suggests that the conspiracy probably doesn't exist.

>>Does that mean the conspiracy has less power?

>No -- just refined lo these many years! <g>. Even Lincoln said >that as a result of the civil war our corporations were >enthoned, and total power would fall to fewer and fewer hands >until the republic was destroyed.

Sure, and around 1945 Theodor Adorno, the left-wing German philosopher, then living in the US, said that corporate control had spread to every nook and cranny of society, and couldn't be increased any further.

But what does either quote prove?

Besides, corporate power is not the same thing as a conspiracy. To my mind, there's only a conspiracy if you can prove that corporations make detailed plans together and cooperate in carrying them out -- and that, I think, can pretty well be disproved simply by reading the business section of any good newspaper.

Greg Sandow

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