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Anarcho-Tyranny Unleashed in the United States



Newspaper front pages with former U.S. President Donald Trump are displayed at a news stand in New York on March 31, 2023. (Ed Jones/AFP via Getty Images)



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Print

Commentary

The terms anarchy and tyranny seem like they are in contradiction. Anarchy means no state. Tyranny means nothing but state. What possibly could anarcho-tyranny mean?

It's a phrase coined by the right-Hegelian political theorist Samuel Francis, whose dark worldview was never my cup of tea, to say the least. Even so, he was insightful, especially concerning the ambitions of the left.

He said that if they get their way, the United States and much of the Western world will descend not to "socialism" classically understood but to anarcho-tyranny, which is arbitrary law as the normal way of conducting public life. No one can count on any rules. Everything is fluid and constantly changing. There is only one feature we can expect: whatever happens, it will be compulsory; that is, backed by the threat of violence.

The violence can be of the mob but it will be behaving as a proxy for power, like the Red Guard under Mao. When the mob quiets down, powerful public officials step up to pronounce what they did as good or bad depending on the political priorities of the moment. Bad mobs (those opposing the left) get locked up but good mobs (those who shout down university speakers or trans activists breaking into the Tennessee Capitol) are defended and valorized.

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In the Franciscan view, the left was already trending in the 1990s toward a deeply nihilistic loathing of the rule of law as a universal principle, just as they had come to despise free speech, equal protection, freedom of association, and other values we associate with the Enlightenment and the Western idea of freedom. Herbert Marcuse was on the edge in the 1960s but is mainstream today.

In this Marcusean view, “freedom” itself was purely an illusion fabricated by a structurally racist and fascistic system of overlords. There is no “free market,” no “free speech,” no “freedom of religion.” These are just slogans deployed as a mask for a system deeply oppressive to all non-normative groups. The only way to achieve authentic freedom, in this view, is to undertake a complete dismantling of the rule of law, first by intellectual efforts, then grass-roots efforts, and finally regime efforts to dismantle Western codes of law, including restraints on government.

The social system they envision is not a “dictatorship of the proletariat” but a dictatorship of elites who buy into the upside-down and convoluted worldview of the woke left and its Joker-like ambitions to tear it all down. In the Franciscan analysis here, genuine freedom depends fundamentally on Constitutions, traditions, a people educated in a classical tradition, respect for norms, and a robust culture depending on faith, family, and community.

Samuel Francis believed that all of this was more fragile than people believed. Dismantling it was possible once the foundations of civilized life were eroded through ideological indoctrination—not of the old left but of the woke left, and there is a massive difference—and the mass cultivation of ignorance. He predicted that we might wake one day and find that everything we take for granted had crumbled beneath our feet, and we would be left only with arbitrary dictates. Courts would not work to bring fairness and justice but rather to impose inequality and partisan rule.

The phrase anarcho-tyranny is the opposite of what America was founded to be. We had a republican form of government that established strict limits on government power. The people would be in charge through their elected representatives. We had checks on power. There were balances within government. Elections would assure that the power would never finally be taken away from the people.

What we are witnessing is a fundamental subversion of this vision and its replacement, for now, by anarcho-tyranny. It's government that knows no limits to its power and even disregards its own laws, spreading chaos as far and wide as possible. At least under plain anarchy people would be able to cobble together their own orderly system of social, political, and economic interaction without interference. The tyranny part even prevents that.

The phrase came to mind as I watched the news unfold of the indictment of former President Trump on utterly ridiculous charges that a conventional payment made in the usual legal extortion racket was really a campaign-finance expenditure and therefore criminal.

The whole thing is obviously absurd since such payments go on daily, hourly, in corporate life. Maybe the man on the street doesn't know this but it has become the way business is conducted. That is what companies and individuals are forced to do, even if the complaints are wholly made up, to avoid high litigation costs. You pay people to go away. It's tragic but perfectly legal even if it is a form of extortion.

So it takes some doing to twist this into a campaign-finance violation. It seems rather obvious that this is nothing but a banana-republic-style persecution of a political enemy. People say it will backfire and help Trump in the end, which is also likely. It is also likely that at least some people pulling the strings know this and intend it. It's all a gamble that Trump as candidate will bring out Democrat voters in record numbers just as before.

There is a lot of speculation going on concerning the real motives. But such is life in anarcho-tyranny: we are all left to speculate about the underlying rationale behind the chaos, shock, and awe. Whatever the truth is, people wisely assume, it is not what they are saying.

It's heartbreaking to see this great country descend so quickly into such madness. But keep in mind that this kind of arbitrary law became codified as the norm three years ago when an Emergency Declaration enabled the overriding of all principles of the Bill of Rights.

When I saw parents arrested for taking their kids on playdates, pastors cuffed for daring to hold worship services, hairdressers jailed for accepting customers, and a beer joint in rural Texas broken up and patrons arrested by a SWAT team, it seemed perfectly obvious to me that COVID controls had already institutionalized a form of anarcho-tyranny. And for want of doubt, the elites made this plain by greenlighting super-spreader events in the summer of 2020. This was their way of mocking us for our compliance. They effectively told us that day that it was all a ruse. That was also when Trump himself began to suspect that he had been trolled into approving the biggest attack on American civil rights in a century or more.

Something terrible was unleashed in this period. Public officials and even courts came to believe that they had all the power. And maybe they do. Voters, if they have any control remaining, only have influence over a fraction of what governs us. The rest is the administrative state that was unleashed in those fateful days.

Now they are testing their power under a new system, which is not the American system, but something directly in conflict with it. Let's please not be naïve that this is merely the persecution by one party of the leader of another party. There is much more going on. The American system of liberty under law, and government by and for the people, is being shredded. However bad you think this emergency is, it is worse.

There is hope but only if we realize the darkness of the present moment.

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