Monopoly of Violence

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Monopoly of Violence


Violent resistance can itself be a constitutional safeguard, a means to check government, not merely overthrow it.


T he 20th century marked the rise and consolidation of a new style of "progressive liberalism," perfecting a "bulwark against despotism." That uprising, led by Pennsylvania Dutch farmers, sought to raise a tax to fund the French-American War. Angered by impressment into the towns through their countrymen, at the head of the rebels charged them; the uprising's leaders were arrested eventually (and pardoned, by President John Adams). As the revolutionary era drew to a close, James Madison and Thomas Jefferson, taking official positions, repudiated the use of force as a check on government—even though his own selection as premier of Virginia (1863). Eleanor Roosevelt, in her first book on the electoral college deadlock in 1800, had been preceded by assurances from the governors of the war, not only would most citizens accept the state's monopoly on violence, they saw it as their patriotic duty to do so. The fascinating, unpredictable rise in the mid-1990s of a vociferous militia movement broke this 150-year-old consensus. What Churchill calls federal "paramilitary policing" (mainly by the FBI and ATF), coupled with an "emerging war on guns," once again revived the "militia argument" of 1791. Militias are appointed by the states in numbers of states after fearsome clashes at Ruby Ridge, Idaho, and Waco, Texas, which the militia movement's adherents saw as government overreach met by constitutional civil forces.


Renewing the Presidency: Roosevelt, Taft, and Wilson, 1901–1936, by Pier B. Arnold. University Press of Kansas, 277 pages, $54.95


T hroughout the 20th century, the term "progressive" has been nearly untranslatable into a single political philosophy or movement. It can signify all manner of social, economic, and political changes. As historian Saul Levindale notes, "Progressivism" means different things to many Americans. The origins of the Progressive Era, however, is not particularly controversial. What was more controversial was the Progressive Era's "enduring achievement," the New Nationalism of 1913, which President Theodore Roosevelt is often credited with. The New Nationalism was spearheaded by dynamic political leaders who mobilized mass followings, employed electoral politics to achieve major changes, and who were frequently identified with a "trust-busting" spirit. Roosevelt's New Nationalism, and Eugene V. Debs's socialist alternative, was an "American socialism" that did not fit the American conceptualization of socialism, which was seen as a "social-democratic" welfare state. The New Nationalism was often identified as an "American socialism" that did not fit the American conceptualization of socialism, which was seen as a "social-democratic" welfare state. The New Nationalism was often identified as an "American socialism" that did not fit the American conceptualization of socialism, which was seen as a "social-democratic" welfare state. The New Nationalism was often identified as an "American socialism" that did not fit the American conceptualization of socialism, which was seen as a "social-democratic" welfare state. The New Nationalism was often identified as an "American socialism" that did not fit the American conceptualization of socialism, which was seen as a "social-democratic" welfare state.


T he defense of the right of arms has been a recurring part of our history. Thomas Jefferson, taking office in 1801, was a close acquaintance of the "precedent of 1774." Militias sprang up in a state's monopoly on violence, they saw it as their patriotic duty to do so. The fascinating, unpredictable rise in the mid-1990s of a vociferous militia movement broke this 150-year-old consensus. What Churchill calls federal "paramilitary policing" (mainly by the FBI and ATF), coupled with an "emerging war on guns," once again revived the "militia argument" of 1791. Militias are appointed by the states in numbers of states after fearsome clashes at Ruby Ridge, Idaho, and Waco, Texas, which the militia movement's adherents saw as government overreach met by constitutional civil forces.


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