



## Book Burners and Gun Banners

By Richard W. Rahn

FASCISTS HAVE SET THEIR SIGHTS ON THE FIRST AND SECOND AMENDMENTS

Environmental zealots and the politically correct have become modern-day book burners in their attempts to criminalize and repress the speech of those who disagree with them. The Nazis and other dictatorial regimes used the old practice of book burnings and gun seizures as a way of maintaining control and intimidation. Burning books is most often done to censor materials that the authorities consider to be offensive to the cultural, religious or political order. In the digital age, it becomes almost technologically impossible to destroy information, even though restrictions on its legal possession and dissemination can be imposed and people can be prosecuted.

In the modern world, those who have power, but not the ability to convince others, often resort to censorship, or attempt to legally or forcibly ban ideas, products, like guns and sugary drinks, or practices that they disapprove of. A couple a months ago, a number of Democratic attorneys general initiated an effort to go after certain corporations, advocacy organizations and think tanks for allegedly disseminating “false” information about global warming. In fact, the information in question has been open to considerable scientific debate and, even if it was not, dissent from the views of the power elite is protected by the First Amendment. Even more disturbing is a quote from the Reason

Foundation’s Shikha Dalmia that the Democrats, as part of their party platform, have pledged to use the “Department of Justice to investigate alleged corporate fraud on the part of fossil fuel companies who have reportedly misled shareholders and the public on the scientific reality of climate change.” This is nothing more than an attempt to use government force to quash dissenting views.

In the past, some religious fundamentalists were advocates of censorship and book burnings. Perhaps the most famous in America was Anthony Comstock, who created the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice in 1873. He and his followers destroyed books and other materials they considered “lewd.” Congress even passed the Comstock Law to make such destruction and repression legal. Thus, it is most ironic that many of those who were part of the free speech movement in the 1960s and 1970s, fighting such laws, have now become a real threat to freedom in their insistence on political correctness and willingness to prosecute those who do not conform.

There are too few individuals and organizations willing to take on the micro-aggressive fascists who seek to ban and repress those who occasionally tell racist, ethnic or sexual jokes, or make “inappropriate” comments. One can say that such comments are not nice and walk away, but liberty, in part, means tolerating the speech of others that you disagree with. It is particularly disheartening to see even some libertarian organizations buckle under to political correctness and the speech police owing to the fear of being sued by those who care more about their power and pocketbooks than the Constitution. The offensiveness of a joke or comment is totally subjective, and once government is given the power to restrict some speech, it quickly morphs into political speech restrictions — e.g., dissenters on global warming alarmism.

Cars, trucks, airplanes, guns, knives and computers are not supposed to be used in a criminal act; yet, every day they are. Last week, a terrorist in Nice, France, managed to kill more people with a truck than has any single mass shooter. Yet, no one is calling for a ban on trucks. According to the FBI, Hillary Clinton’s private, non-secure computers were

probably hacked by hostile foreign governments, which could result in a massive cost and loss of life. Yet no one is calling for banning nongovernment-controlled computers.

Only guns are demonized by demands to restrict or eliminate them. Privately owned guns, not trucks or computers, are protected by the Second Amendment. The American Founders gave guns their special protection because they understood that freedom of speech, the press and religion provided for in the First Amendment would only continue if the people had the right to bear arms to protect themselves. Those who wish to restrict First Amendment freedoms are well aware that the Second Amendment is an impediment to their goals which, in part, explains their never-ending hostility to it. It is estimated there are more guns than people in the United States. Crude but effective guns are relatively easy to make, and new technologies like 3D printers will only make it easier. The good citizens of Plano, Texas, are reputed to have about the highest per capita gun ownership rate in the country, but no gun murders. Guns and trucks are not the problem — it is people who misuse them who are the problem.

The book burning-gun banning mentality is alive and well in the political establishment, and is now manifested by increasing restrictions on political and workplace speech, and attempts to limit the ability of the people to defend themselves. The American Founders were risking everything in their fight for liberty. We do not have to resort to arms, but if many of us just refuse to comply with speech codes and other unreasonable regulations and restrictions on our constitutional rights, we can regain liberty. We may have to pay some financial price, but at least we will have our dignity.

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