

An Open Letter to Ron Paul Supporters

Mencius Moldbug

An open letter to Ron Paul supporters (part 1)

Thursday, January 10, 2008 at 3:30 AM

Ron Paul is wonderful. He is the best thing to happen in American politics in my lifetime. I will vote for Dr. Paul. I think anyone eligible should do likewise.

But I have some questions for my fellow Paulistas.

Suppose Ron Paul is elected President. What makes you think that President Paul can fix the US Federal Government?

What makes you think that *any* President can fix the US Federal Government?

What makes you think that the US Federal Government can be fixed *at all*?

And if you don't think it can be fixed, what do you hope to achieve by voting in its elections?

Obviously, it all depends what you mean by "fix." But obviously, if you support Ron Paul, you think said institution, which down on the Potomac oft assumes the snappy name of [USG](#) — not to be confused with [U.S. Gypsum](#), maker of fine Sheetrock — is in desperate need of an extreme makeover.

When Barry Obama talks about "change," he's talking about a whole new brand of lipstick, a deep restoring facial and maybe even a few collagen shots. With Dr. Paul, the bone saw is a given. We're probably looking at a full maxillary reconstruction, a few rounds of chemo, and perhaps a silver nose, like Tycho Brahe's. Assuming all goes well, our new Old Republic, meticulously recreated from 200-year-old dental records, will resemble the present USG about as much as the latter looks like U.S. Gypsum.

All the better, you say. If your problem is an invasive sphenoid tumor, your solution is not blush and mascara. Our beloved Republic is sick. Deeply sick. She needs the procedure. And in Dr. Paul, the man, the hour and the [rongeur](#) have met.

But have they?

At this point the [soothing, GrÃmaesque voice](#) of the *moderate mainstream libertarian* may be heard, suggesting that Dr. Paul is *unelectable*. Ergo, it will not help to vote for Dr. Paul, because Dr. Paul will not be elected, and your precious vote will be wasted. Rather, if you want to work for *real change*, you should work *within the system*.

Of course, there are only so many desks at the Cato Institute to go around. But if you make your small voice heard, maybe there will be more. Who says libertarians can't have their own Beltway patronage

machine? Uncle Sam beams down benevolently on friend and foe alike. As in Orwell's classic, the two are never far from common ground.

Needless to say, here at UR we have no truck with these shills — who remind me most of the type of house dissident, like [Georgi Arbatov](#), that flourished so in the later Soviet period. But yes, if I had to bet, I would bet that Ron Paul will not be elected in 2008. I don't think he will even win the Republican nomination.

But would I, realistically, rule it out? Fashion is fickle. Even intellectual fashion. And in a democracy, intellectual fashion rules. The age of viral politics is upon us. Is all that stands between Dr. Paul and the White House the right YouTube spot or two? Who the hell knows. Frankly, kids these days baffle me. And even if Dr. Paul doesn't win this year, there will be other years and other Ron Pauls — as Todd Seavey [points out](#).

(I'm not even going to start on this Nazi crap. I refer you to my [post on the subject](#). Anyone who starts playing the Kevin Bacon game with Ron Paul and Hitler, or anyone and Hitler, is required to submit to the same experiment with [Stalin and Mao](#), and is specifically enjoined from using the term "McCarthyism" for so long as they may live. You fuckers. You really don't have any shame, do you?)

So, again: even if Ron Paul — or someone like him, in 2012 or 2016 or 2020 — *is* elected, will he be able to fix USG?

Dr. Paul has described his program very eloquently and straightforwardly. He wants to restore the Constitution of 1789. Or at least this is how he describes it, although probably a better match for the actual Paul platform would be the Constitution of 1889. But no matter. Next to the present situation, the difference is small.

Let's assume our goal is to achieve this result. We would like to convert USG into something which at least bears some vague resemblance to the structure described in the Constitution of 1789, plus of course its duly ratified amendments to the present date, interpreted according to their [original public meaning](#).

Obviously, no one person can achieve this goal. We, the set of people who would prefer this state of affairs to the present state of affairs, will have to act collectively. The question is: is voting for Ron Paul, or someone like him, an effective collective strategy for producing this result — assuming we have sufficient votes to elect Dr. Paul as President?

Actually, this is not a question for me. I know the answer. At least, I think I know the answer. Perhaps I am wrong, but if so I feel quite confident in my error.

And so my actual question is about you — my fellow Ron Paul supporters. Are you voting for — and even better, donating to — the Paul campaign because you seriously believe that, if Dr. Paul is elected, he will actually be able to carry out his extreme-makeover bone-saw program?

If so, let me put it as gently as possible. *You have no idea what you're up against.*

But why should you believe me? Perhaps I am just another enemy of freedom. Surely there are many such, and perhaps I am one. So let's start by looking at what we can agree on.

Since we are Ron Paul supporters, we agree that USG is not, in fact, the organization described by the Constitution of 1789. You have all heard Dr. Paul's spiel. I see no need to repeat it.

In other words, USG operates under an [unwritten constitution](#). To Americans, this sounds paradoxical, sacrilegious, or both. In fact it is perfectly normal.

Under an unwritten constitution, there is one sovereign legislative institution which holds the ultimate power of government, and whose authority cannot be legally disobeyed. The law is whatever this body says the law is. In the UK, this institution is Parliament. In the US, it is the Supreme Court.

USG's unwritten constitution consists of a series of Supreme Court precedents, many of which date to the 1930s — [Footnote Four](#) is perhaps the best example. These are simply laws expressed as judicial decisions. Generally they are very vague and broad. Then Congress writes its own laws within these boundaries. Generally these are quite vague and broad. Then the various agencies and other arms of USG write regulations within the boundaries defined by Congress. Generally these are quite detailed and specific. And this is how the sausage is made. If you don't like it, you can, of course, petition the Supreme Court. If this isn't legislative sovereignty, what is?

Of course, USG is peculiar in having a written Constitution to go with its unwritten one. This has required our rulers to bend their decrees sinuously around the text of this ancient document, an exercise which at least serves to remind us of Mr. Swift's [Tale of a Tub](#). As for the claim that Americans are free whereas Britons live in chains, because we have a written Constitution and they are subject to their rulers' every passing whim, I will have to respectfully disagree. I have never lived in Britain, but I gather the main difference is that they drive on the other side of the road.

Written constitutions were an experiment. The data are in. The experiment has failed. If Dr. Paul would prefer USG to return to the Constitutional interpretation of 1789, or 1889, or 1926, or whenever, he of course is free to say so. And I agree. Certainly, compared to the USG we have today, the structure of 1789 strikes me as quite appealing.

But why should we assume that, if Dr. Paul managed to return the US to the Constitution of 1789, it would stay that way? We once had a Constitution of 1789. Then stuff happened. And now we don't. Does this sound like a success to you?

Let's call this the first crack in the "convince everyone to vote for Ron Paul" strategy for fixing USG. We are still assuming that President Paul can perform the surgery. But will the wound stay closed? And will it heal properly? Does the Constitution of 1789 protect us at all against the possibility that the tumor will

just grow back? Perhaps quite a bit faster than it took to grow in the first place?

What we're questioning here is the commonly held, but thoroughly fallacious, concept of [*limited government*](#). I agree that limited government is desirable. I see no reason at all to believe that it is implementable. Note the curious use of the passive voice in this construction. How can a sovereign authority limit its own power? If it decides to change its mind and take the power back, who exactly will stop it?

For me, 200mpg carburetors, penis enlargement pills, and written constitutions which limit the power of the State are all in the same category. I think they would be great to have. I will believe that they exist when I not only see them working, but understand how it is that they can possibly work. I recognize that both these tests are very difficult. If you want to start by passing just one, my inbox is always open.

One sad effect of this mania for government-limiting constitutions is that it has obscured the previous meaning of the word *constitution*, which is actually much more useful. In normal 18th-century English, the *constitution* of a government (or any other institution) just meant its persistent organizational structure. The term was not prescriptive, but descriptive.

For example, John Adams' [*Defence of the Constitutions of the United States*](#) — well worth a read, by the way — uses the word in this good old descriptive sense. An actual defense of the constitution of the present USG would strain the powers of Lucifer, let alone John Adams. But I would still find it quite interesting to read. Of course, you would need the constitution first.

For example, our written, prescriptive Constitution says nothing at all about the press, except of course that it shall be free — whatever that means. But is it really possible to construct a descriptive constitution of USG without mentioning the [*official press*](#)? The Times and the Post alone are institutions at least as influential and durable as many formal government agencies. Their powers — such as the right to publish leaks — are thoroughly embedded in both law and custom. If they are not even mentioned in the constitution, how descriptive can it be?

And when we ask ourselves what President Paul can do to fix USG, which document should we consult? The written Constitution of 1789 (plus amendments), or the descriptive constitution of 2008? Unfortunately, the latter does not exist, but it is our only option. If the Constitution of 1789 determined the answer, would we need a President Paul?

Therefore, let's consider the powers of the President, in the actual USG as it actually exists.

Sometimes I get the impression that many voters actually believe that the President is in some sense "the leader of his country." As though he was Adolf Hitler, or something. If you are operating under this illusion, it is probably too much for me to dispel, but I will try anyway.

Under the actual constitution of the actual USG as it actually exists today, the President is a relatively

minor official whose duties are primarily ceremonial. The office is not yet utterly impotent, like the British monarchy. But give it a century or two.

Suppose the product of a Presidential election actually was “the leader of his country.” While the term “country” in political discourse is spectacularly meretricious, oscillating between (a) a partition of the planet’s surface, (b) a set of humans or at least hominids, and (c) a sovereign corporation or “government” which exercises sovereign power over (a) and (b), clearly the concept of a “leader” makes no sense in the first context, is too scary for words in the second, and can be understood only in the third.

Thus a “leader” of USG would be a corporate executive, ie, a CEO. This sounds like we are on the right track, because we know there is some association between the President and something called the “executive branch.” Perhaps, if Dr. Paul was elected President, we could think of him as the CEO of USG?

Not a chance. We have slipped away from our actual descriptive constitution, and instead find ourselves back in high-school civics class, reciting pablum.

A CEO of a normal private organization (company, nonprofit, etc) controls four aspects of the company’s operations: budget, policy, structure, and personnel. He or she sets the distribution of funds between units of the institution; tells its employees what to do and how to do it; configures lower-level management structures; and can hire and fire individuals at will.

Forget Ron Paul for a moment. Imagine if we elected not Dr. Paul, but Steve Jobs, as President of the US. He wouldn’t take the job, but imagine if he did.

President Jobs would find himself in a rather unaccustomed position. He could not reallocate funds between agencies, or even between departments, or even between programs. He could not change any organizational structure. He could not tell anyone what to do. He could not fire, promote, or demote any of his employees. What could he do? Look dignified and come across well on TV.

And indeed, this is basically the task of USG’s so-called “President.” His most important function is to pretend to be in charge. And this is the one function in which the entire executive branch, plus of course the White House proper, will enthusiastically assist him.

For a good look at what George W. Bush actually does, I find [this page](#) invaluable. If you are anything like me, your eyes will immediately be drawn to the Executive Order of October 20, 2007: “Protection of Striped Bass and Red Drum Fish Populations.”

This is a fine example of the petty whims by which Chimp Bushitler, notorious fascist and fanatical angler, rules our nation. Bushitler and his notorious, Goeringlike henchman, Dick McDick, when they are not torturing nuns, spend all their time out on the Chesapeake, fishing for striped bass, red drum, and other brackish, white-fleshed piscids. So Bushitler and McDick, [spitting in the face](#) of our economically vital seafood industry, have taken striped bass and red drum off America’s dinner table,

reserving these delicious fish for themselves and their well-heeled sportfishing cronies. Just another day in the Republican reign of terror, kids.

Right. What actually happened? Why did this pearl drop from the President's pen? Because someone put it in front of him, and he signed it.

As I've mentioned a couple of times, I come from a civil-service family. Horrible as it may seem, I was raised and educated on your tax dollars. And if there is one modern production which everyone who I have ever met who had ever been involved in government considers an accurate portrayal of the actual thing as it actually is, it is, of course, [Yes Minister](#). (If like me you are allergic to canned laughter, the scripts are available as a book, which is perfectly readable. But see below.)

The one mystery about YM for me was how the people who wrote it found out. Surely it is not possible, even at the BBC, to be both a senior civil servant and a TV screenwriter. Since, as Lao-Tzu put it, those who talk don't know and those who know don't talk, the existence of this show, isolated example though it is, struck me as implausible. Yet there it was.

As with so many of my childhood conundrums, the Internet has resolved this for me. The principal source for YM is the posthumously-published diaries of [Richard Crossman](#), who was housing minister in the '60s under Harold Wilson. (I can only shudder at the concrete horrors for which he must be responsible — at least, nominally responsible.) As a glance at the first page of his diary will confirm, Crossman simply is Jim Hacker. Other personalities are also quite recognizable.

My edition (abridged, and 750 pages) begins with this entry:

Thursday, October 22nd

I was appointed Minister of Housing on Saturday, October 17th, 1964. Now it is only the 22nd but, oh dear, it seems a long, long time. It also seems as though I had transferred myself completely to this new life as a Cabinet Minister. In a way it's just the same as I had expected and predicted. The room in which I sit is the same in which I saw Nye Bevan for almost the first time when he was Minister of Health, and already I realize the tremendous effort it requires not to be taken over by the Civil Service. My Minister's room is like a padded cell, and in certain ways I am like a person who is suddenly certified a lunatic and put safely into this great, vast room, cut off from real life and surrounded by male and female trained nurses and attendants. When I am in a good mood they occasionally allow an ordinary human being to come and visit me; but they make sure that I behave right, and that the other person behaves right; and they know how to handle me. Of course, they don't behave *quite* like nurses because the Civil Service is profoundly deferential — 'Yes, Minister! No, Minister! If you wish it, Minister!' and combined with this there is a constant preoccupation to ensure that the Minister does what is correct. The Private Secretary's job is to make sure that when the Minister comes into Whitehall he doesn't let the side or himself down and behaves in

accordance with the requirements of the institution.

It's also profoundly true that one has only to do absolutely nothing whatsoever in order to be floated forward on the stream. I have forgotten what day it was — indeed, the whole of my life in the last four days has merged into one, curious, single day — when I turned to my Private Secretary, George Moseley, and said, “Now, you must teach me how to handle all this correspondence.” And he sat opposite me with his owlish eyes and said to me, “Well, Minister, you see there are three ways of handling it. A letter can either be answered by you personally, in your own handwriting; or we can draft a personal reply for you to sign; or, if the letter is not worth your answering personally, we can draft an official answer.” “What's an official answer?” I asked. “Well, it says the Minister has received your letter and then the Department replies. Anyway, we'll draft all three variants,” said Mr Moseley, “and if you just tell us which you want...” “How do I do that?” I asked. “Well, you put all your in-tray into your out-tray,” he said, “and if you put it in without a mark on it then we deal with it and you need never see it again.”

This is the default existence of every politician and political appointee in the modern Western system of government. They simply empty their inboxes into their outboxes. The civil service, which by definition is permanent and cannot be touched by anyone who is contaminated by the deadly stain of “politics,” takes care of the rest. As long as you believe in [democratic centrism](#), this system makes perfect sense.

Of course, life is only easy politicians who are aligned with the civil service. Learning that the inspiration for Jim Hacker MP was a hard-line Old Laborite makes perfect sense to me — the left is always, in every case, the party of the institutional civil service. Crossman's interactions with his “nurses” are comical because they are basically on the same side. If he decides to stop trying to swim and just float, he is unlikely to be horrified by the results. If he manages to flail around and actually get something done, they are unlikely to be horrified.

There are no Ministers or Private Secretaries in DC. Crossman's opposite number in Washington, especially Washington today, would be surrounded by a small platoon of so-called “sched Cs,” known to the punters as “political appointees.” There are a couple thousand of these jobs, which are listed in a wonderful little volume called the [Plum Book](#). From the Beltway's viewpoint, the primary purpose of your vote this November is to decide who shall consume these plums, “so sweet / and so cold.”

My mother was a GS-15 at DoE, working on budget and policy for renewable energy, in the Clinton administration. The other day I asked her about the sched Cs. “They get very nice offices,” she said. “And they can do pretty much whatever they want. They're encouraged to find something and work on it.” A legion of little Jim Hackers. Here in America, everything comes in a bigger box.

Of course, the politicians have another option. They can try to fight. Sometimes this is done by the so-called “Republicans” among them. Perhaps you have seen stories in the press that indicate that some elected mannequin or other is trying to “politicize” the operations of some responsible and professional

arm of USG. This indicates that someone is struggling. Of course, the classic example of an American politician who really went to war with the civil service was old Tailgunner Joe, and we all know what [happened to him](#).

The basic strategy of the civil servant, when attacked by a politician or political appointee, is to make his attacker or the attacker's political sponsor look bad in the press. Since politicians cannot be elected without the cooperation of the press, this strategy always works. Since the press is effectively part of the civil service (if the news desks at the Post, the Times, and CNN were reorganized into a Department of Journalism, perhaps not unlike the BBC, the lives of reporters would hardly change at all), this game is always "on."

(I seem to recall a case recently in which a government employee was penalized for disclosing confidential information to the press. What do you think? Was he a career civil servant, or a sched C? No prizes to the winner.)

The issue is not exactly new. Here is Carlyle, from his [Latter-Day Pamphlet #3](#) (1850):

A mighty question indeed! Who shall be Premier, and take in hand the "rudder of government," otherwise called the "spigot of taxation;" shall it be the Honorable Felix Parvulus, or the Right Honorable Felicissimus Zero? By our electioneerings and Hansard Debatings, and ever-enduring tempest of jargon that goes on everywhere, we manage to settle that; to have it declared, with no bloodshed except insignificant blood from the nose in hustings-time, but with immense beershed and inkshed and explosion of nonsense, which darkens all the air, that the Right Honorable Zero is to be the man. That we firmly settle; Zero, all shivering with rapture and with terror, mounts into the high saddle; cramps himself on, with knees, heels, hands and feet; and the horse gallops--whither it lists. That the Right Honorable Zero should attempt controlling the horse--Alas, alas, he, sticking on with beak and claws, is too happy if the horse will only gallop any-whither, and not throw him. Measure, polity, plan or scheme of public good or evil, is not in the head of Felicissimus; except, if he could but devise it, some measure that would please his horse for the moment, and encourage him to go with softer paces, godward or devilward as it might be, and save Felicissimus's leather, which is fast wearing. This is what we call a Government in England, for nearly two centuries now.

The Parvuli and Felicissimi of Carlyle's time were [giants](#) next to the absurd nonentities who are trying to keep themselves on the horse today. And now it is more like four centuries. Everything else is pretty much the same, though.

So what do you think would happen to Ron Paul if he tries to stay on Carlyle's horse? I'm afraid there are exactly two possibilities. I believe Dr. Paul is an honorable man, so we need only consider the first, which is that he will fight the system and actually try to downsize DC.

Of course, beyond his ability to block Congressional legislation (a courtesy Senate rules grant to [every](#)

[single Senator](#) — people in DC who can stop things from happening are a dime a dozen), his power to nominate Supreme Court justices (who must still be confirmed by the Senate; and note also that Republican Presidents chose seven out of the last four conservative Justices), and his nominal command of the armed forces (whom he can at least order to stop whatever they are doing right now and come home; but so can Barack Obama), President Paul will have no power whatsoever.

But don't worry. He will still have the power to make a fool of himself — at least as portrayed in the eyes of the press. His popularity will descend into the single digits. The result will be that Americans will consider libertarianism “discredited” for at least the next twenty years. Except for the same kinds of diehards who support him now, everyone who voted for Ron Paul in 2008 will realize, by 2012, that they were swept up in a wave of craziness, they had no idea what they were thinking, and they will certainly never think it again.

In other words, the problem with believing in Dr. Paul is that Dr. Paul is a candidate in a democratic election. To vote for him and believe you are doing something meaningful and important, it is necessary to believe not just in one thing — Ron Paul — but in two: Ron Paul and contemporary American democracy.

Obviously, when Paulistas talk about the press and its vicious vendetta against Dr. Paul, we can see that they have no illusions about their enemies. Their illusion is strictly confined to their friends, or those they imagine to be their friends. They huddle round the belief that the American electorate will come to its senses in a great flash of political light, and that once they come to their senses they will remain there. This Damascus experience will be triggered simply by the realization that America is a libertarian country, was founded as such, and has remained as such deep in the American heart.

Excuse my French, but this is crap. Americans are like everyone else. They believe what they're told to believe. They respond to superior authority. For the last 75 years, they have been told that the State is their mother and father. Or possibly both. And now, they deploy the official “we” with gay abandon. Even I have a tough time removing this malignant pronoun from my tongue, and I do try. Americans simply cannot imagine life except in the warm arms of their official universal uberparent.

If you're trying to save the old libertarian America, you've arrived on the scene a little late. Electing Ron Paul is like showing up at an autopsy with a live human liver. Yes, it's true — the patient did die of liver failure. But that was a week ago. I suppose it can't hurt to try and put the thing in, but I really doubt it will do any good.

[Anthony Howard](#), the editor of my Crossman edition, describes Crossman's struggle as a Fabian who also happened to believe in democracy. One might as well be a Catholic who also happened to believe in anal sex, and the permanent cognitive dissonance is characteristic:

The most familiar charge brought against Crossman even while he lived was that of ‘inconsistency’.

Yet in one area, from the days when he was a young Oxford don, he was as constant as the Northern Star. His first, and favourite, book *Plato Today* wrestles with the problem of to what degree British parliamentary democracy is a sham, a fraud or a hoax: and it was a question that Crossman continued to tussle with until the day he died. It made him a highly unusual, not to say unorthodox, politician (his fellow practitioners of the craft being more generally noted for conveying complacency rather than betraying disquiet about a system that at least had had the merit of recognizing their own talents). Crossman, however, as well as possessing ‘the bump of irreverence’ that he was much given to boasting about, had throughout his career a passionate — and at times inconvenient — commitment to the notion of making democracy actually work. His haunting doubt — and this is as apparent in his last public lecture as in his first book — was that in some way the British electorate was being fobbed off with what Plato called ‘the noble lie’: in other words that the British voter, while encouraged to believe that he was part of a self-governing democracy, was in effect — through the device of so-called ‘representative institutions’ — enduring government by oligarchy. The guilty secret at the heart of the British governmental system, Crossman came increasingly to believe, was that it was deliberately designed not to give ordinary people their heads but rather to tame the demon of democracy before it did too much damage.

Indeed.

Of course, as regular readers of UR are aware, the demon is most definitely a demon. Taming it is the most important function of modern governments. There was a time in American history when the President was actually the CEO of the executive branch, more or less. At least, he controlled personnel. This was called the [spoils system](#). It cannot be said to have worked — in any sense of the word. And limiting it to what is now the Plum Book was the [great achievement](#) of the reformers of the 1880s.

So we have established the following facts:

1. Ron Paul is unelectable (being a Nazi and all).
2. If Ron Paul is elected, the civil-service oligarchy will crush him like a bug.
3. The only thing worse than civil-service oligarchy is actual democracy.

What is the alternative? Is there any alternative? Or are we all just doomed? Tune in next week for the stunning, yet obvious, answer.

How to actually defeat the US government

Thursday, January 17, 2008 at 12:16 AM

(This is part 2 of my [letter to Ron Paul supporters](#).)

In part 1, we established that electing Ron Paul, even if it was possible, is not a practical way to convert USG into a libertarian institution. This is because the policies of USG are not set by its politicians, but by its permanent civil service, which tends to prevail in any conflict between the two.

The permanent civil service is [much larger than it looks](#). It is best defined as everyone involved in setting and implementing USG's policies. When we realize that this includes the press, the universities, and the NGOsphere (the brilliant Richard North of [EU Referendum](#), one of the few bloggers who really understands how the modern state works and has not been psychically shattered by the awful truth, describes a typical rat's nest of EU NGOs [here](#)), we start to realize why the battle plays out as it does.

Civil servants defeat politicians because no politician or political appointee can harm any civil servant's career. Since civil servants, in the broad sense defined above, command numerous levers of public opinion — such as, um, the schools, the universities and the press — the converse is not the case. The result is that politicians either become housetrained or lose their jobs, or subsist in tiny backward niches whose voters couldn't give a damn what the Times thinks. (Eg, Ron Paul's district.)

An excellent way to describe any system is to outline its fringes. A fine example of an entity on the fringe of the Polygon, but still within it, is the [Cato Institute](#). Somewhere I had gotten the idea that Cato accepts government funds, but in fact it [does not](#) — its main sponsor is, of course, billionaire [Charles Koch](#). (I thank [Will Wilkinson](#) for the correction.) But when you compare Cato's homepage to that of the liberal [Brookings Institute](#), a classic Beltway bandit, I think you can see how I was confused. I think an alien who understood English could eventually figure out the substantive difference between Cato and Brookings. But it would have to be one pretty sharp alien.

When we look at the homepage of the [Ludwig von Mises Institute](#), which will be on the [Orange Line](#) just as soon as the Metro extends out to Alabama, we can see the difference. The purpose of LvMI is to propagate ideas. The purpose of Cato is to impact policy. Ie: to wield power. Power, of course, can be wielded for good as for ill. But Tolkien knew something about that.

I like Brookings' motto: *Quality, Independence, Impact*. If anyone in Washington would sacrifice the third for the first two, ten others are ready to take his place. *Impact* is the true currency of DC. The social status of a Beltwayite corresponds directly to his *impact*. I suspect this is the real reason that LvMI is in Alabama: it has no impact, and hence no power. And its employees would constantly feel humiliated and scorned, like nerds at a jock party. This might not affect LvMI's mission, but it would be distracting.

Besides, Alabama is really cheap.

What Cato sacrifices for its *impact* is that the set of ideas it can propagate is, by any serious historical standard, enormously narrow. As we've seen in l'affaire Paul, the great fear that haunts the Catonians at night is the fear of losing their legitimacy. Their *impact* would go with it. DC has no pity for cranks and crackpots. The result is a school of thought that can fairly be characterized as pro-government libertarianism.

Sadly, we have no reason to think that this Schlesingerian “vital center” has [any correlation whatsoever](#) with reality. The center defines itself in political terms, not intellectual terms. It is the belief of the average voter. Since the civil service invests most of its energy in managing public opinion, also known as [manufacturing consent](#), the outcome is quite clear. As the center drifts inexorably leftward, fueled by nothing more than the raw personal ambition of a thousand thousand Brookingsites, the likes of a Cato must drift with it — or be excluded from the *policymaking process*. Cato has minimal [cognitive independence](#), unless of course it confines itself to today's goodthink.

This is why we see the level of raw hatred and arrogance that the Orange Line Mafia aims at its redneck rivals. Progressives can be debated with. Paleoconservatives are dangerous cranks who must be ostracized. Cato regularly features progressive essays on its [Cato Unbound](#) series. You will never see an LvMI paleo there — let alone a real live racist, like [Jared Taylor](#) — and if you did the progressives would vanish at once. As would the *impact*. The [invisible procession](#), going by.

Whereas the cranks over at [lewrockwell.com](#) — and there is a lot of serious craziness and pure stupidity that appears there, on a daily basis — can think and say whatever the hell they want. Defend the Confederacy? Why not? Probably no one at Cato wants to defend the Confederacy. But in their hearts, they know that even if they wanted to, they couldn't. And this has got to burn.

I mean, how long has [Jeff Davis](#) been dead? What sensible person could possibly care? How can you carry around an emotional attachment to a 150-year-old war? Talk about lunacy.

The really sad thing is that the Orange Liners can only feel like they have *impact* because DC, being utterly sclerotic and impossible to change, has defined *impact* down to levels derisory to anyone outside the bubble. On Cato's [impact page](#), they list precisely one success: school vouchers in Washington, DC. Well, knock me over with a feather. But really, by Beltway standards, this is not bad for 30 years and 100 million dollars — especially when the product you have to push is an inherently nasty and pointless one, like small government. It's hard to sign people up for abolishing their own jobs.

So the whole Cato disaster provides yet another example of a strategy which cannot possibly succeed in reforming USG. The Cato-LvMI divide has been described as the Stalin-Trotsky split of libertarianism. The ugly truth is that *neither* “Stalinist” Orange Line libertarianism nor “Trotskyite” Ron Paul Revolution has any chance of affecting USG in any significant way.

The stunning, yet obvious answer is that we have *no reason at all* to think that USG can be reformed in anything like a libertarian direction. It is a highly stable system in which all changes tend to be expansive. It shares this quality with *all institutions* controlled by their own employees.

In the immortal words of Arthur Conan Doyle, when we have eliminated the impossible, we are left with the improbable. Therefore, if USG cannot be reformed by either political or institutional methods, it cannot be reformed at all. If despite this we consider it harmful, we have accepted the need not to reform it, but to *defeat* it.

The fundamental case for defeating USG is that USG was established to serve the interests of its citizens. If you are a US citizen, you agree that USG as it is does not serve our interests, and you agree that it cannot be reformed to do so, you are at least ready to support defeating it. And any means whose collateral damage does not exceed the disservice done by USG are acceptable. This is a straightforward strategic problem, and we can solve it as such.

First and foremost, you can support defeating USG without wishing for a state of wild, Somalian anarchy in North America, because we are lucky enough to have a backup system of government: the states. The obvious and straightforward result of defeating USG is to dissolve the Union (as Michael Rozeff proposes [here](#)) and return sovereignty to the 50 states. Probably the existing military should be retained as a continental defense force. Otherwise, independent states can relate to each other much as the US and Canada do now.

There are an enormous number of details to be resolved in any such proposal. In general, the states should assume the financial obligations of USG, even its informal “entitlements” — no one’s Social Security or Medicare need be cut off. Central institutions will be necessary for a few years to ensure an orderly liquidation. To be safe, these should probably be located outside the watershed of the Potomac, and they should probably transition ASAP to an employee set untainted by service with USG or its various tentacles.

Is there any guarantee that state government will be more libertarian than Federal government? None at all (unless we go all the way to [neocameralism](#)). But state governments in a decentralized North America would at least be subject to serious jurisdictional competition. They would be free to compete for desirable citizens on the basis of good customer service. This should put a serious boost of genuine market energy behind libertarian government.

Said product is not one most people think they want now. But I suspect that seeing it would change their minds. If you are a libertarian or anything like it, and you believe that ten years after the abolition of Washington there would be even the slightest shred of affectionate nostalgia for the old Potomac beast, I think you have a serious case of cognitive dissonance. I am quite confident that the reaction would be: “why did we put up with that for so long?”

If you are not so confident, any transition plan could include a ten-years-later referendum on restoring DC — from NRO to HUD, from DEA to NSF, etc, etc, right down to the offices and positions. Of course any such restoration would have to retrieve its employees from the productive sector, where they might find that they actually enjoyed their work. But these, too, are details.

I won't try to outline a transition plan in this post. Even just how to deal with the US dollar is a problem that deserves its own essay, if not its own blog. I hope you'll just accept the lesson of history that change happens, and that it often looks just as inevitable in the past tense as improbable in the future.

The critical problem is: *can we make it happen?* And *if so, how?*

Of course we have to consider the possibility that defeating USG is simply impossible. Perhaps the thing is just eternal. In that case, far better to roll over and think of England.

Still, history does not record any eternal regimes. Nor does it record any regimes that saw themselves as anything but. If UR has convinced its readers of anything, I hope it has convinced one or two people to actually believe in history, at least as more than a series of horrid crimes gradually vanquished by reason and prosperity.

On the face of it, defeating USG seems even harder than reforming it. After all, we are looking at a country full of people who swore a [sacred oath to USG](#), five days a week, for the twelve most formative years of their lives. What kind of superpowers would we need to defeat that? (I love the Bellamy salute. Note how, in [this picture](#), the hand seems to be creeping around to the more anatomically-natural Roman position. Thank you, [Arthur Lipow](#).)

But so what? The same people believe in Social Security, the FDA, and aid to Nepal. Why should it be easier to change their minds partially, than totally? If all you have is bare hands, is it easier to slice a watermelon, or to smash it?

Here at UR, we deal with the sacred-oath thing by shifting our words slightly. Instead of USG, we use the slightly more neutral name *Washcorp*. This reminds us that USG is no more than a corporation in the strict sense of the word, ie, an organization with a virtual identity. In a slightly more outrÃ© move, we translate the old Viking word for USG's continent as *Plainland*, its subjects thus being *Plainlanders*. Thus rather than trying to free the US from the evil clutches of USG — an almost oxymoronic task — we are trying to free *Plainland* from *Washcorp*.

Perhaps you remember how confused you were in high school when you read Hamlet, and found Claudius being called "Denmark"? Did a little lightbulb go off in your head when you realized how nice it is for a monarchy, if its subjects use the same word for both king and country? And when you saluted the flag that morning, which were you feeling? Warm ties of love and loyalty to *Plainland*, or warm ties of love and loyalty to *Washcorp*? It's these little Jedi mind tricks that hold the whole thing together.

They're small, but they add up.

So all we have to do is liquidate *Washcorp*. Corporations are liquidated every single day. Hundreds of corporations are in liquidation as we speak. Typically this happens because they are bankrupt — an adjective hard to define in an entity whose liabilities are denominated in its own scrip, but one I often hear applied to *Washcorp*.

But there's one big difference between liquidating *Washcorp* and liquidating Enron, which is that Enron didn't have the most powerful armed forces in the history of the world. To defeat *Washcorp*, we need to defeat its military. There are a number of plausible strategies for doing so. And none of them involve hunting rifles, Patrick Swayze, or IEDs.

Clearly, to destroy *Washcorp*, we must capture it first. And one of the patterns we're seeing is that the methods which work for a revolutionary capture of the state do not work for a reactionary capture of the state. This pattern is very consistent, and I'm pretty confident that anyone who ignores it is making a tremendous mistake.

For example, one way to see the Cato Institute is to see it as a sort of libertarian [Fabian Society](#). Did Fabian or [Gramscian](#) tactics work as a method for socialists to capture the 19th-century liberal state? Spectacularly. But they worked because they attracted a legion of smart, amoral careerists who saw the near-infinite power and plunder that the hypertrophied state would create. Cato has no such promise. All it has is Koch, and his wallet is finite. Libertarianism does not create jobs.

We see the same pattern when we consider guerrilla warfare against *Washcorp*, either of the classic Maoist rural form, or the newer urban-guerrilla ("terrorist") approach, or simply the strategy of building ominous and threatening paramilitary militias. These strategies work for leftist revolutionaries because they are essentially criminal in nature, and leftism — whose Yeatsian passionate energy is inseparable from its capacity for pure plunder — is fundamentally a criminal movement.

For example, in the early '90s, after the Soviet Union collapsed, it became clear to many Americans that Washington was no picnic, neither. I don't know that anyone took to the hills a la Patrick Swayze — unless you count [Eric Rudolph](#). But perhaps you remember the militia movement of the period, which of course died a pathetic and probably well-deserved death after the [Oklahoma City bombing](#).

As you may remember, no one at the New York Times asked "why do they hate us?" about Timothy McVeigh and his ilk. There was no sudden outpouring over the grievances of agro-Americans. The general national consensus, with which I basically agree, was that the Oklahoma City bombers were sick, crazy rednecks and they deserved to die. The militia movement sensed this feeling, it realized that it had no chance of victory, and it faded away.

Terrorism proper is only half of an effective strategy for seizing power. The other half is an information campaign that convinces the victims of terrorism that they can alleviate it by making concessions,

typically in the form of money, power, or both. This brings the terrorists closer to their objective, which recruits more terrorists. The final result is a criminal state, led by the former terrorists — who are now, of course, statesmen.

(This pattern is the origin of most of today's Third World governments. The political side of the campaign was, of course, our good friends the progressives. The result... do we need to go there? Not today, perhaps.)

And when we look at reactionary terrorist movements in the postwar era, such as the [OAS](#) or the [AWB](#), we see the same pathetic Timothy McVeigh pattern. The OAS has quite arguably been proved right — Arab rule in Algeria has been a murderous catastrophe. The AWB is perhaps [in the process](#) of being proved right. So what? They both got their asses kicked. Like all failed reactionary terrorists, they made the mistake of aggravating the true authorities without having the power to destroy them. As Machiavelli pointed out, if you strike at a king, aim to kill.

Prewar reactionary terrorists, such as the Nazis and Fascists, succeeded because they formed an alliance with the rotting remnants of the *ancien regime*. The *ancien regime* is no more. Case closed. Stormfront kids, I love you for your passion. But really, why bother? Perhaps you could put all that energy into, like, getting a job, or something.

If libertarians controlled the press, schools and universities, libertarian paramilitary movements would be practical and effective. After every bomb went off, the Times could whine about how the root cause of libertarian terrorism is high taxes and Orwellian antiterrorist measures, yadda, yadda. On the other hand, if libertarians controlled the press, schools and universities, libertarian paramilitary movements would be unnecessary.

We are left with exactly one time-honored reactionary military measure: the military coup. Since in all states the military is the final court of appeal whether they like it or not, a coup (contra [Arnold Kling](#)) is always an option, whatever your form of government.

Perhaps through a sort of vestigial anti-Latin prejudice, there is nothing *Plainlanders* — in or out of the military — fear and loathe so much as a coup. On the other hand, if you read a lot of milblogs, which I do, you'll start to notice that there is nothing *Plainland* warfighters fear and loathe so much as *Washcorp*. And they are especially unhappy about the center of its central nervous system, ie, the official press. Since in all states the military is the final court of appeal whether they like it or not, this has some potential.

The *Plainlander* military caste is fundamentally a red-state institution. I wouldn't say that progressives in the military are as rare as conservatives at State, but it might be close. What makes this situation not at all volatile, at present, is that the *Washcorp* military, besides its excellent command discipline, has a strong tradition of conflating *Plainland* and *Washcorp*. (I believe the composite is known as *America* —

apparently there's some sort of colorful "flag" thing. Like a logo, but you can print it on cloth and run it up a pole. A sort of 18th-century version of [Blue Force Tracker](#).)

As someone with no conservative heritage whatsoever, my impression is that most conservatives, while basically sensible, are quite confused about the nature of the modern state. It is hard for me to avoid the conclusion that this confusion primarily serves the interests of their enemies. Perhaps I am right and perhaps the problem will be rectified. However, I don't see any sign of this happening.

For the most part, it's simply pointless for anyone who is not part of the military to think at all about military coups. If the generals want to act, they will act. They won't tell anyone, and they won't ask anyone. And they will probably act only under quite dire circumstances, which it is simply puerile to wish for.

That said, there are some interesting options that could be facilitated by the Internet. For example, suppose someone managed to set up an external site which could verify the identity and rank of military personnel, but keep it anonymous. The result would be an uncensored forum in which soldiers and sailors could speak honestly about their feelings and concerns.

If this platform was scalable enough to hold an actual democratic election in which *only military personnel could vote*, it's quite possible that the outcome of this ballot would have a rather definitive effect on the course of *Washcorp*. For producing truth, justice and competent government, elections are not much. For organizing large numbers of otherwise independent actors for concerted collective action, let's face it — they're the shizzle.

However, this strategy is impractical at present and may never be practical. It is best reserved for the back, back burner. I mention it only because I can imagine very hypothetical situations under which it might work.

This leaves us with the good old-fashioned way of seizing power — convincing people to vote for you. But how is this different from the Ron Paul Revolution? Allow me to explain.

As I've said before, *Washcorp* is best understood not as an electoral democracy, but a *massarchy*. A massarchy is a state in which power is held by those who manage public opinion. The difference between massarchy and electoral democracy is that in a massarchy, the permanent government (ie, civil service) maintains a higher degree of legitimacy than elected politicians. The latter are thus essentially decorative and disposable.

Massarchy works because, with modern broadcasting and polling, the tools available to the civil service for both influencing and measuring public opinion are much more powerful and sensitive than anything in the political system. In the 19th century — at least, the early 19th century — politicians actually purported to change the voter's mind on substantive issues with their speeches and debates. Needless to say, the beliefs of the normal modern voter are either installed via the schools and the press, or (in some

cases) transmitted through peer networks which are incredibly jammed with bogus misinformation, conspiracy theories, etc.

Under massarchy, civil servants have an additional advantage: they can anticipate future public opinion, because the leftward drift of opinion has been so consistently predictable. (Gay rights, for example, is an excellent metric.) It is very easy for a civil servant in 2008 to simply organize his career around the plausible political center of 2018 or even 2028. Not so easy for a politician!

So it's no wonder that the popularity of the permanent government is so high that no pollster even bothers tracking it. Civil servants proper are simply expert professionals who carry out the policies of their masters, the politicians, who are elected by the all-knowing public, whose opinions are right and cannot be inquired into. Nothing to see here. Move right along. The press comes in for a little more flak, especially since first the AM airwaves and then the Internet opened up, but it certainly has power to compensate. As for the universities and schools, who is against science, the arts and letters, or education? No one. There is no opposition. Politics is harmless and contained.

Elections are still informative for one reason: they measure not simple opinion, but motivation and organizational power. A poll will not do this. For example, the fact that Republicans didn't really care for Rudy Giuliani is a fascinating product of the Presidential election. If you had been sure of this a year ago, you could have made quite a bit of money on the prediction markets. What the early polls were indicating was just name recognition, which is often a good indication of popularity, but prone to remarkable errors. The sad fate of Big Rudy tells us nothing about public opinion on any substantive issue. In theory, however, I suppose it could.

Washcorp is also quite capable of bending when it has to. When 9/11 made the White House (which is of course inherently temporary) and DoD (a hotbed of subversive grumbling) unexpectedly popular, we saw a short bull market in hawkishness not just in Congress, but also even in the press (remember Judy Miller?), State Department, etc.

This is easily explained by the theory that the primary goal of everyone in Washington is to attain as much power as possible, and retain it for as long as possible. When public opinion shifts, *Washcorp* shifts with it. In 19th-century Britain, figures who adopted this strategy were called *trimmers*.

Unfortunately, now that everyone (except for Ron Paul) is a trimmer, there is no real use for the word.

This sort of unromantic view of the democratic system is absolutely critical if you want to employ what I think is the only practical strategy for defeating *Washcorp*: capturing public opinion and turning it against *Washcorp* itself. Trimming is no defense against this attack. If *Washcorp* trims, it agrees to commit suicide. If it does not, it loses its invulnerability to attack through the electoral system, and electing politicians who will kill it becomes a viable strategy.

In other words, the only way to actually defeat the US government is for the attacker to actually beat it at

its own game: manufacturing consent. Everything else is a waste of time.

So: to liquidate *Washcorp*, convince as many *Plainlanders* as possible — certainly a majority, and ideally a substantial majority — that *Washcorp* is not acting in their best interests, that in fact it is fundamentally parasitic, and that it needs to be liquidated.

In my opinion, this is nothing but the truth. This helps. It certainly makes the job easier. But the fundamental nature of the task is military, in the Clausewitzian sense. Truth has certain natural advantages over fiction. It has other natural disadvantages. When your product is the truth, you probably don't want to contaminate the message with fiction. When your product is fiction, you are free to add any useful embroidery.

My point is that the goal is to get from point A to point B, and anyone who believes that the truth just does this on its own is reading the wrong blog. If the truth is always victorious on its own, it would already have been victorious, and since it has not been, my view of *Washcorp* cannot be the truth. Either way you are barking up someone else's tree.

So let's say that you have the resources of Ron Paul's war chest (what is it, \$20 million? I hope this hasn't all been spent — I'd like to think it could end up at LvMI), and your goal is to manufacture enough consent to liquidate *Washcorp*.

What would you do? Buy TV ads, for Ron Paul perhaps? Complete liquidation may not be exactly the Ron Paul platform, but surely it's close enough for government work. Perhaps if you start by selling Dr. Paul, you can move on to the more aggressive message.

The idea that any of the “moneybomb” take is being spent on TV ads disturbs me. Short of hand-lettered signs on telephone poles, it's the worst strategy I can think of. Advertising may get you a small amount of name recognition among particularly uninformed voters. These are not the people who are going to vote for Ron Paul, and even if they are they are not the people you want. Inch-deep support is worthless.

For an intelligent and thoughtful person, going from the official press or TV to Ron Paul — let alone to liquidating *Washcorp* — is not a decision that could possibly be influenced by a 30-second spot. Or even a 5-minute spot. It is not quite at the magnitude of a religious conversion, but it comes close.

Most people are not intelligent and thoughtful — anything but. But they know that government is serious business, and they know enough to get their views on government from people they see as intelligent and thoughtful. For most *Plainlanders* today, this chain terminates in the official press, which as we've seen is an essential organ of *Washcorp*. D'oh.

Wikipedia's [reliable source policy](#) is typical:

In general, the most reliable sources are peer-reviewed journals and books published in university

presses; university-level textbooks; magazines, journals, and books published by respected publishing houses; and mainstream newspapers.

What security does this policy provide against political corruption? Absolutely none. What it says is: trust the authorities. The computer is your friend. These are not the droids you're looking for. The tap water is perfectly safe. The procedure is for your own good. Etc.

It is not La Wik's goal to replace or challenge the "mainstream." In fact, I'd say that it is sensible and conservative to not even try. Short of [Uberfact](#), I don't see how it could even be attempted. And the fact that we could not imagine a Wikipedia without these "mainstream" information distributors, which of course are informal arms of the State, should alert you to the scale of the problem. Imagine what this paragraph would look like in a modern Third Reich or Soviet Union. Besides being written in German or Russian, how else would it differ? If you remain confused, perhaps this fine article about [Putin's new textbooks](#) will enlighten you.

From the adversarial perspective, the best way to think of *Washcorp* is as a *cult*. It so happens that this cult is hundreds of years old, and almost all *Plainlanders* believe in it. In fact, they accept it so uncritically that they believe there is nothing to believe in. Their natural response to anyone who shows up at their door — or on their TV — and tries to deprogram them will be to think that it is in fact this person who is trying to suck them into a cult. All cult members believe everyone in the outside world is crazy. And vice versa. This is quite normal.

Who is the cult? The only test is the truth. One of the things I've been trying to do here at UR is construct a set of case studies in how *Washcorp* systematically (and quite unconsciously) propagates and maintains fictional perspectives of reality among *Plainlanders*, to a point at which the very existence of the massarchy is dependent on these fictions.

If you are a new reader, perhaps the just-unearthed [Crick letters](#) are a simple way to shake your faith. *Washcorp* is relatively flexible. It can adjust to many changes in public opinion. But imagine what it would take to adjust to a world in which Crick and Watson were right. Frankly, I can't even begin to fathom it. The gold standard is a trifle by comparison.

I think it's pretty obvious that if all — or even any — of my conclusions in these matters are true, liquidating *Washcorp* in a timely and orderly way is not optional. After water and food, stable government is the next human essential. If you disagree, perhaps Jello Biafra has a [lesson](#) for you. If *Washcorp's* security really is based on lies, so is yours. If this doesn't make you uncomfortable, perhaps you are some kind of weapons expert. I'm afraid I am not.

The problem is that I am not an authority on anything. I am just some dude with a weird fake name. If you are smart enough to reason through my arguments and decide whether you agree with them or not, you plus everyone like you could elect a dogcatcher in Nome. My blog template looks like ass. My posts

are unedited and highly rambling. And I am sure I have made many factual errors which don't involve the Cato Institute.

If you really want to defeat *Washcorp*, you need to do much, much better than this. You need a real institution with real money and a real staff. Your goal is to be *more credible* than the official story. You cannot do this with one person.

You need to build a Web site that anyone with a screen and a mouse can click on, and get an accurate understanding of reality, including all the bits of history, government, economics, science and current events that *Washcorp* doesn't want you to know. With a 5-minute overview for casual readers, and enough depth that a PhD with a standard *Washcorp* education will come away at least gritting his teeth.

You need to hire Steve Sailer and Michael Totten and Greg Cochran and Hans-Hermann Hoppe and Steve McIntyre and Jeffrey Rogers Hummel and Razib Khan and Michael Yon and Jörg Guido Hülsmann. Or at least people who are at least as smart, at least as knowledgeable, and at least as expressive as the above.

You need to produce a coherent corpus of authoritative information, a la [Diderot](#), not just a random jumble of essays. You need to crowdsource, but not without editorial control, so that Conquest's Second Law does not do its thing. You need a place that anyone who speaks English can go to find out what is actually going on in the world, and update that knowledge every day. And above all, you need to be *right*. The task of replacing *Washcorp*'s pile of nonsense with some other pile of nonsense is simply not solvable.

And then you need to wait ten or twenty years. Because this stuff doesn't happen overnight. Your accurate description of reality has to become *more fashionable* than the official "mainstream" truth. Fortunately, the latter is extremely boring, chock-full of pretentious cant and intentional obfuscation, and often transparently self-contradictory. But you also have to be more fashionable than all your "alternative" competitors (see under: [Alex Jones](#)), which is definitely nontrivial. Too bad. It has to be done.

The way to defeat a massarchy is to create and propagate a credible alternate reality that outcompetes the official information network. Fifteen years ago, the propagation part was almost impossible. Today it is trivial. All that's left is the creation, and I bet it could be done in half Cato's budget. Bored billionaires of *Plainland*, you have nothing to lose but your *Washcorp*. Why not give it a shot?

Revipedia: how to defeat the US government, reprise

Saturday, January 19, 2008 at 3:49 AM

As usual there are many excellent comments, some quite critical, on the [last post](#). (I am particularly impressed with [Lugo's criticisms](#), although it's a little unfair because Lugo is whacking me on a subject I punted on — but the observations on the US military are dead right. And TGGP, we love you, but I'm afraid that may have been a typo for “post-sucking moron.” I'm still not quite sure what this means, but draw your own conclusions.)

Reading the comments, however, I don't think I was clear enough in describing the information warfare project I proposed. People described it as a “think tank.” This is nowhere near what I meant. So let me break the every-Thursday schedule, and put up next week's post today.

Think tanks (such as [Cato](#) or [LvMI](#)) are all very well. Perhaps we can see them as replacements for the sclerotic university system. It is an unfortunate consequence of the post-1945 [Bushian *Gleichaltung*](#) of the American university that think tanks cannot actually train students, and this is by no means their only defect. However, the thinkiverse does supply a small, but quite useful, dose of intellectual variety to today's Wal-Mart of ideas.

However, a think tank is not actually a *project*. A think tank sponsors thinkers. It hires them because it thinks they are smart and knowledgeable, and their interests and perspectives coincide with their goals. What it does not do, in general, is *tell them what to do*. Its work is not designed to produce anything like a *product*. Or if it is, the product is simply the set of all the papers produced by all the thinkers. This may be useful, but it cannot be coherent.

The administrators of a think tank are not in any sense project managers. They are support staff. All they do is give the thinkers a place to think. (And, presumably, write said thoughts down.) And a think tank does not have an *objective*. It has a *mission* — quite a different thing.

Take LvMI, for instance. I'm sure most of the folks at LvMI would be quite delighted to see the last of old *Washcorp*. However, is defeating the US government the *objective* of LvMI? Not at all. It has no objective. Rather, its *mission* is to sponsor Austrian economists and libertarian philosophers, who get a chilly reception in the normal groves, either because they are cranks and whiners, or because they are in possession of inconvenient truths. (Mises and Rothbard spent most of their careers in the academic equivalent of broom closets.)

Perhaps, like me, you are a software engineer. I have never worked at Microsoft, but I have a pretty good idea of how Microsoft works. If I were to be hired at Microsoft, I would be hired in one of two very different departments. One is product development, which gives us glorious gazillion-line cathedrals of

code such as Windows and Word. The other is [MS Research](#), which is basically the CS equivalent of a think tank. Ie, it hires PhDs who don't want to teach or can't get a good teaching job, and sponsors their research.

MS Research employs a lot of smart people and I'm sure it's produced something useful, although I can't think of any examples offhand. (Okay, I know one — [ClearType](#) — though subpixel rendering is hardly Edison's lightbulb.) If the lack of a PhD did not clinch it, I'm sure that after reading [this](#) MS Research would not touch me with a ten-foot pole. Since I would not touch MS product development with a ten-foot pole, I don't think there is a fit. But I digress.

In any case, what I'm imagining is squarely on the product side. It demands not just sagely thought, but actual management. We are not used to thinking of sages as people who can work as part of a team. I'm afraid most sages are not used to thinking this way, either. But I have seen it done and I know it can be done. And if you don't trust me, trust the [Manhattan Project](#).

Let's call the product *Revipedia*. The purpose of Revipedia is to be like Wikipedia, except that it serves as a reliable source on all topics, no matter how technical or controversial, and no matter how detached from reality the centrist mainstream may be.

If Revipedia can be built, there are two possibilities. Either (a) it will confirm that the [centrist mainstream](#) is significantly detached from reality, or (b) it will confirm that it is not. *Washcorp*, by actively supporting that mainstream, not to mention deprecating and ridiculing its competition, has staked its legitimacy on (b). So (a), if accepted by a sufficient subset of *Washcorp's* subjects, is sufficient to defeat it.

In other words, (a) by definition convicts USG of the crime of [Lysenkoism](#): propagating a fallacious interpretation of reality as a mechanism of political control.

This is a capital offense. There is no way for a government, or any institution for that matter, to excuse or apologize for Lysenkoism. Like cancer, it must be excised completely. When in doubt, throw it out. There is no good reason for an official monopoly whose modus operandi includes the propagation of misperceptions to continue to exist. If the institution performs other functions which are indeed useful or even essential, it is still probably easiest to liquidate it, and build a replacement from scratch.

Replacing organizations is simple. Purging individuals or subunits from existing ones is impossibly time-consuming, tendentious and pointless. If you wanted to convert Tony Soprano's mob into an actual, legitimate waste management company, what would you do, start by replacing Paulie Walnuts with some guy from McKinsey? When in doubt, throw it out.

Note the difference between institutional mendacity and its far more benign political cousin. Ebola and the common cold are both viruses. There the analogy ends.

Politics is modular by definition. If LBJ or Nixon or Bush or any other democratic politician lies to the American people and gets caught, the latter have a straightforward mechanism by which to replace him with some other lying jackass. This is not a perfect cure for political mendacity, but at least keeps the problem under control. When we combine this with the fact that the entire system greatly exaggerates the power of politicians to affect actual policy, we can see that political lies are little more than a cosmetic defect.

But if the New York Times and the Washington Post and the Wall Street Journal, every other serious newspaper, every TV station, every public school and every major university, and of course every department of *Washcorp* proper, choose to present their subjects with bogus information, we have a much more serious problem. Because there is no way you can go to your little voting booth and register your disapproval of these fine institutions. D'oh!

Moreover, if this is the case, we should not expect these institutions to correct themselves. Since any detection of Lysenkoism is delegitimizing, since it is grounds for not merely “reforming” but in fact liquidating the institutions responsible, no one has any conceivable incentive to own up. The optimal strategy is stonewalling — simply because no one can gain anything by defecting, and joining the cranks, whiners and malcontents.

If you believe that this can't happen, or that if it does happen any appearance of the truth will quickly outcompete any conceivable fiction, you believe in (b). That is, you believe that the centrist mainstream is basically providing you with an accurate perspective of reality. Is this the case? Vamos a ver.

Let me share my own small piece of experience in the matter. I know exactly when I lost my faith in the mainstream. It was in August 2004, during the [Swift Boat affair](#). I was perhaps something of a neocon at that time, and so I was plugged in to the vast right-wing conspiracy. At least, I was a regular reader of [Power Line](#), as I still to some extent am.

Reader, there are two links in the above paragraph. I guarantee that if you follow both of them, you will end up in different realities. One of them is real. The other is the [Truman Show](#). Do you have an opinion as to which is which? I do. (If your faith in La Wik remains strong, scroll to the end of [this section](#), then read [this](#). And remember who [still refuses to release](#) his military records.)

But this is all after the fact. Because I was plugged into the vast right-wing conspiracy, I was reading about the whole affair, in exceedingly gory detail, well before the counterspin started. I have been reading unauthorized information on the Internet for well over half my life, and I think I am pretty good at distinguishing between reality and crap. And the simple explanation — that Kerry is a blowhard who told tall tales about his sailor days — struck me as compelling.

So I wondered: how will they handle this? What happens when, three months before a presidential election, it comes out that one of the two candidates has publicly prevaricated about his military record?

Obviously he will have to drop out of the race. But who else will the Democrats select? And how will they select him? Will they hold an emergency convention? Or will it just be Edwards? I supposed it would probably just be Edwards.

[Althouse](#), whom I don't think I was reading at the time (and still don't — she is a fine writer and has much to say, but she twitters), [knew better](#):

So it seems that Kerry's idea for how to deal with this huge Swift Boat Veterans problem is to churn up a swirly mass of impressions and imputations and then hope that he is the one who looks clean in the end. The Kerry people seem to be hoping that people are too dim to understand that a group of Bush supporters could operate independently or conspiracy-minded enough to think they all coordinate behind the scenes in plain violation of the law. There is a separate point Kerry has made that Bush should openly denounce the ads and that his failure to do so signifies a willingness to reap the advantages they bring him. That's the clean point, but it has been made, and it apparently hasn't done well enough, because we now see the campaign boat steering over the border into right-wing-conspiracy land.

And there it has remained. I never dreamed that the Kerry campaign would be crazy enough to just plain stonewall. I certainly could not have imagined that it would work.

At least, for some values of the word "work." Kerry lost, of course, in a close race. Perhaps the SBVT affair made the difference. But perhaps it actually helped Kerry. Who knows?

But what I mean by "work" is that the Kerry strategy, just as Althouse describes, has *entered public memory as the truth*. At least, among most thoughtful, reasonable Americans. (Most thoughtful, reasonable Americans voted for Kerry.) And certainly among most professional historians. (Almost all professional historians voted for Kerry.) It has not just entered La Wik and the history books. Via "swiftboating," it has actually entered the *English language*.

Mindboggling! And this is a tiny, tiny detail in history. Almost nothing turns on it. (Except, of course, the small question of whether you can [trust the Computer](#).) But how confident does this make you — say — that what you know about [Joseph McCarthy](#) is accurate?

Click that link, too. It's interesting. I have read the Evans book. I can't really recommend it, mainly because it is a work of polemic, not of history. Evans did a lot of archival work and his notes, I'm sure, will be of use to any real historian who wants to study the period. But his subtitle rather gives the game away. I trust his results as far as they go, but I don't trust Evans to include any bit of evidence he might find that would suggest to the reader that McCarthy was, in fact, a major-league asswipe.

Since I strongly suspect that, whatever the truth of his "fight against America's enemies," McCarthy *was* a major-league asswipe, I remain unsatisfied. Evans' book does convince me quite effectively that McCarthy's enemies were at least as unscrupulous as anything you've ever heard about McCarthy

himself — eg, from [La Wik](#). From what I know of *Washcorp*, this is hardly a surprise. (And if the subject interests you, you may enjoy this [reviewer exchange](#).)

The McCarthy drama is a far bigger, far more complex story than anything involving John Kerry. And, as we see, it remains quite debatable. How about, say, the Civil War? Lately I've enjoyed some of the writings of [Charles Francis Adams](#), [James Randall](#), [Claude Bowers](#), [William Dunning](#), and [Benjamin Hill](#) on the period. I believe I've previously recommended [Edgar Lee Masters](#), [Albert Beveridge](#), and of course [John Burgess](#). Suffice it to say that the mid-to-late 19th century as described by these gentlemen has little or nothing in common with the reality purveyed by La Wik or other reputable contemporary sources. And yet they were there — or at least knew people who were. Talk about the [Old Reckoning](#)...

And this is just history. We have not even started on [economics](#). Or the [art of government](#). Or [human biology](#). Or [climatology](#). Heresies abound! Are they right? Are they wrong? Who the hell can tell? Quit trusting authority, and you are alone on a black sea in a black night. The truth is out there. But you have not a thousandth of the time, money, or mind you would need to find it on your own.

And every one of these fields, and many more, affect the profit and power of *Washcorp*. Because you vote, your judgment of them matters. And as we have seen over and over and over again, *Washcorp* has motive, propensity and opportunity to manage that judgment in directions favorable to itself. Nor does such management require any central planning or “conspiracy.” All it would take is a thumb on the scale in the marketplace of ideas. Which does not, of course, prove that any such thumb exists.

The other day I was bowled over by a simply stupendous book: [Chronicles of Wasted Time](#), the autobiography of [Malcolm Muggeridge](#). (Only the first volume, *The Green Stick*, is essential.) Please allow me to quote at length from this book. It is not famous. It should be. Page 19:

“I desire to set before my fellows the likeness of a man in all truth of nature, and that man myself,” Rousseau begins his Confessions, and then proceeds to construct a vast, serpentine edifice of lies and fantasies. The hazards in the way of telling the truth are, indeed, very great. Seeking it, one can so easily become enmeshed in lies; “A truth that’s told with bad intent / Beats all the lies you can invent,” Blake wrote. Every man the centre of his own universe; insensibly, we sub-edit as we go along, to produce headlines, cross-heads, a story line most favourable to our egos. How indestructible, alas, is that ego! Thinking to have struck it down once and for all, I find its hissing cobra-head lifted again, deathless.

Yet even so, truth is very beautiful; more so, as I consider, than justice — to-day’s pursuit — which easily puts on a false face. In the nearly seven decades I have lived through, the world has overflowed with bloodshed and explosions whose dust has never had time to settle before others have erupted; all in purportedly just causes. The quest for justice continues, and the weapons and the hatred pile up; but truth was an early casualty. The lies on behalf of which our wars have been fought and our peace treaties concluded! The lies of revolution and of counter-revolution! The lies of

advertising, of news, of salesmanship, of politics! The lies of the priest in his pulpit, the professor at his podium, the journalist at his typewriter! The lie stuck like a fish-bone in the throat of the microphone, the hand-held lies of the prowling cameraman! Ignazio Silone told me once how, when he was a member of the old Comintern, some stratagem was under discussion, and a delegate, a newcomer who had never attended before, made the extraordinary observation that if such and such a statement were to be put out, it wouldn't be true. There was a moment of dazed silence, and then everyone began to laugh. They laughed and laughed until tears ran down their cheeks and the Kremlin walls seemed to shake. The same laughter echoes in every council chamber and cabinet room, wherever two or more are gathered together to exercise authority. It is truth that has died, not God.

I often wonder how, in such circumstances, it will ever be possible to know anything at all about the people and the happenings of our times. Such masses and masses of documentation! Statistics without end, data of every kind, eye-witness accounts, miles and miles of film, video abounding. Surely out of all this, posterity, if so desiring, will be able to reconstruct us and our lives. But will they? I think of [Sidney and Beatrice Webb](#) [Muggeridge married Beatrice's niece] down at Passfield, patiently collecting and collating every scrap of information they could lay hands on about the Soviet regime. Travelling about the USSR to the same end. As experienced investigators, so rigorous and careful. And the result? — a monumental folly, a volume of fantasy compared with which Casanova's Memoirs, Frank Harris's even, are sober and realistic. Or I think of the messages of Our Own Correspondents, here, there and everywhere, and of all the different factors which shape them and slant them and confection them. I remember the yellow ticker-tape piling up in my office at the Washington National Press Building, and delving into it to pull out a nugget to whisk off on my own account to New York and London. Will this be much help to posterity? I doubt it. Comment is free, but news is sacred, was C.P. Scott's great dictum for *The Guardian*. Yes, but whose news?

This Life's dim Windows of the Soul
Distorts the Heavens from Pole to Pole
And leads you to Believe a Lie
When you see with, not thro', the Eye.

There never have been such adepts at seeing with, rather than through, the eye, as the purveyors of Scott's sacred news; inducing their readers, all too willingly, to believe a multitude of lies.

Or, again, I think of a camera crew on the job. Sound recordist and cameraman umbilically linked as they back away from their commentator, sedately walking and communing; their producer anxiously hovering behind to prevent them from stumbling and falling. Moving with a kind of pas-de-deux step, rather like a matador approaching his bull. Are they holding a mirror up to nature? Cinema vérité or falsité? Where's the plastic grass? Or, as I once saw written on a can of film — surely the perfect celluloid epitaph: 'Dawn for dusk.' The eye is the window of the soul; film an iron-shutter,

says Kafka. On the day that Harold Wilson became Prime Minister for the first time, I happened to be in Chicago, and stood in Michigan Avenue with a camera crew and a microphone asking passers-by what they thought about him and our change of government. To my great satisfaction, I was unable to find anyone, old or young, black or white, smart or stupid, who had heard of the event or cared anything about it. Behind where I was questioning them, up above the *Tribune* Building, there was one of those devices whereby news flashes by in fiery letters. Every minute or so it repeated: DOUGLAS-HOME RESIGNS... HAROLD WILSON NEW BRITISH PREMIER... A fine background to cut to! In Moscow when the great purges were on, some moon-faced Intourist, trying in good liberal style to be fair to both sides, asked one of the British newspaper correspondents there — A.T. Cholerton of the *Daily Telegraph* — whether the accusations against the Old Bolsheviks were true. Yes, Cholerton told him, everything was true, except the facts. It fits, not just the purges and Moscow, but the whole mid-twentieth-century scene. Perhaps some astronaut, watching from afar the final incineration of our earth, may care to write it across the stratosphere: *Everything true except the facts.*

Yet again, supposing a wish on the part of posterity to know what some of our great ones were really like. John F. Kennedy, say. In the archive, trainloads of material. Photographs and profiles without end; abundance of tape, both video and sound. We can show you him smiling, walking, talking. On stage and off, as it were; relaxing with his family, addressing the nation, eating, dozing, praying. We have his jokes, we know the books he read; you can see and hear him delivering his great speeches, or fooling with his kids. You can pretty well see him being assassinated; you *can* see his assassin being assassinated. What more do you want? Isn't that the man, the whole man, and nothing but the man? Well, not quite. It's like a nightmare I once had. I was calling on someone I loved dearly; the door open, the kettle boiling, a chair drawn up to the fire, spectacles laid beside it. But no one there. Maybe upstairs. With growing anxiety I climb the stairs. Not in the bedroom, though clothes are scattered about; not in the bathroom, though it's still moist and misty from a bath recently taken. Downstairs again; really terrified now. Maybe gone to post a letter. To exercise the dog. Listening for every footstep, starting at every sound, the tension becomes unbearable, and I wake up. In the same sort of way, the methods of representation include every detail, leaving out only the person to be represented. In a sense, they're too perfect. Simulation becomes what it simulates; the image becomes the man. In Kennedy's case, even his signature was done for him by a machine which so exactly reproduced the hand signing his name that experts cannot distinguish between the real signature and the mechanical ones. In the excitement and distress of the Dallas tragedy, no one remembered to turn the machine off. So the President went on signing genial, 'personalized' letters after he was dead.

In this Sargasso Sea of fantasy and fraud, how can I or anyone else hope to swim unencumbered? How see with, not through, the eye? How take off my own motley, wash away the make-up, raise the iron shutter, put out the studio lights, silence the sound effects and put the cameras to sleep? Watch

the sun rise on Sunset Boulevard, and set over Forest Lawn? Find furniture among the studio props, silence in a discotheque, love in a strip-tease? Read truth off an autocue, catch it on a screen, chase it on the wings of *Muzak*? View it in living color with the news, hear it in living sound along the motorways? Not in the wind that rent the mountains and broke in pieces the rocks; not in the earthquake that followed, nor in the fire that followed the earthquake. In a still small voice. Not in the screeching of tyres, either, or in the grinding of brakes; not in the roar of the jets or the whistle of sirens; not in the howl of trombones, the rattle of drums or the chanting of demo voices. Again, that still small voice — if only one could catch it.

Typically when I start to write this way it means I've had a glass of wine, or three. But I still think it's pretty good. Trust me — the book has actual content, as well.

Revipedia is not, of course, a magic oracle. It is a tool to help you, the curious and intelligent person, find that still small voice. Here's how it works. It's really quite simple.

Revipedia — or at least my idea of what Revipedia should be — is best seen as a cross between Wikipedia, [Climate Audit](#), and [Uberfact](#).

According to most scientists, 98% of the facts in Wikipedia are true. Studies have shown that 90% of the rest are accidental errors, vandalism, or other mistakes of the sort that La Wik is designed to correct. Thus precisely 0.2% of Wikipedia pages are contaminated with Lysenkoism, ie, politically constructed distortions derived from “sacred news.” Sadly, this is more than enough.

Of course, since Wikipedia is not at all immune to Conquest's second law (every organization not explicitly reactionary tends to become progressive), and since all serious and effective Lysenkoism in the modern era is progressive, this percentage will tend to increase. Now that La Wik is much more than a toy, she wields real power. And power attracts [reptiles](#).

Wikipedia is not a toy, but it succeeded because it started as a toy. It established a pool of amateur, dilettante administrators who, by and large, were foolish enough to care only for the truth. This is very nice, and I personally have found it quite useful. But it is not sustainable.

Banal as these old chiralisms are, the fundamental difference between the modern left and the modern right is that the left is the party of victory, and the right is the party of defeat. In the history of the last two centuries, it is almost impossible to find any issue on which the right has stood and won. Even the exceptions, such as the revival of capitalism in the last few decades, have served the greater interests of the left. Without Thatcher, there could be no Blair. There was no future in the [Winter of Discontent](#).

“Conservatism,” so called, is a bargain that trades personal success for substantive destruction. It produces jobs for quacks, each with some patent remedy against the [wind of change](#). No such remedy has ever worked, but the Laetrile market is eternal. And perhaps conservatives have helped here and there in holding us [back from Niagara](#), or at least shored up the barrel staves. In exchange, however, they have

deceived us about the true nature of power in our society. Your mileage may vary, but I find this bargain dubious at best. The unfortunate truth, in my extremely dodgy opinion, is that the only way our civilization can survive leftism is to abolish it completely — along with the political structures that inevitably spawn it. This is not a conservative attitude but a reactionary one, and I see no choice but to accept the label.

So, to a reactionary, Wikipedia is a dangerous ally indeed. However, given the 98% of it that is true, and the vast quantity of human labor that went into constructing that 98%, Revipedia needs to bootstrap as a Wikipedia mirror. When you use Revipedia, every page that has no Revipedia revision just redirects to La Wik. Of course it appears marked as such, to indicate its generally low trust level.

(Note the difference between a mirror and a fork. A mirror remains live and propagates updates, ideally instantaneously. Sadly, not only does La Wik lack any proper data API, provide no diffs but only dumps, and only on a [ridiculous every-two-months schedule](#), she actually goes out of her way to [block live mirrors](#). Perhaps there are some good reasons for this. I can also think of plenty of bad ones. Her image dump is also [broken](#), which is simply unacceptable. Probably the easiest way to fix this would be to fix La Wik herself, if she cares to be fixed. Hey, I said this would take real money.)

Furthermore, when it creates its revised pages, Revipedia tries wherever possible to use the Wikipedia namespace. For example, imagine what the [GNXP](#) crowd would do to the [scientific racism](#) page, or [Climate Audit](#) to the [temperature record of the last 1000 years](#), or [LvMI](#) to [fractional-reserve banking](#). Of course, if needed Revipedia can create de novo, but La Wik would have to be very tricky to sustain Lysenkoism based only on devious categorization. Sharing the namespace also helps limit fork conflicts, which are always a problem.

But anyone can edit Wikipedia, right? So why don't they do what they want to do now? Who needs this Revipedia thing?

Yes, anyone can edit Wikipedia. (Annoyed by a particularly horrendous Gouldian fiction, I myself slipped a reference to [Gray & Thompson 2004](#) into the “scientific racism” page, where it looks rather odd but seems to have lasted — knock on wood.) In practice, however, [most serious editing](#) in Wikipedia is done by Wikipedians, who by definition are people with the patience to withstand and win [edit wars](#). Most of us are not Wikipedians and will never be Wikipedians. It appears to be quite the time sink.

And once more, as that last link points out: *Wikipedia is founded on the principle that an open system can produce quality, neutral encyclopedic content*. This “principle” may well be true, and it has certainly proved more or less true up till now.

However, it is fatally dependent on the policy of [no original research](#). Which is a perfectly good policy, except that it in turn is fatally dependent on the policy of [reliable sources](#). Which leads us straight to the arms of the foe:

In general, the most reliable sources are peer-reviewed journals and books published in university presses; university-level textbooks; magazines, journals, and books published by respected publishing houses; and mainstream newspapers. As a rule of thumb, the more people engaged in checking facts, analyzing legal issues, and scrutinizing the writing, the more reliable the publication.

This second sentence is especially fascinating. It is perhaps the principal erroneous belief of modern democracy. If you believe that the more people believe X, the more likely X is to be true, you are a demotist by definition. Demotists distrust anything individual, but especially individual decisions, which they hate like the Devil hates garlic. The universal organizational panacea of 20th-century society is the committee. No wonder its buildings were so ugly.

Against this great tide of consensus, I have only two words: one is [grouphink](#), and two is [this word](#). And if you think [Citizendium](#) is an even better idea, follow [these two](#) links. Paging Dr. Lysenko! [Trofim Lysenko](#) to the white courtesy phone? I Risch my case.

So the goal of Revipedia is clear: produce a coherent picture of reality by selective, external revision of Wikipedia. Revipedia does not edit — it *audits*. It digs as deeply into the facts as is needed to demonstrate the truth. It supplies whatever subjective perspective is necessary to convey the whole truth of the matter. It takes nothing for granted, and it has no mercy.

By its very nature, auditing is not an open and unstructured process. If nothing else, to survive Conquest's second law, Revipedia must be explicitly reactionary. Since the masses fear and loathe reaction and reactionaries, the masses are not welcome.

However, there is a small problem: to defeat *Washcorp*, we must capture the support of the masses. Obviously, Revipedia is no private club — anyone can read it. But can anyone write it?

Yes. But in Revipedia, the distinction between editorial staff and mere users is clear. Nothing that presents itself as a truth machine can possibly succeed without some sort of [crowdsourcing](#). But inviting the masses is one thing. Surrendering to them is another.

At first, the only people who will care about Revipedia are other reactionaries, who will simply be happy to have a place to go where everyone agrees with them. As long as they are edited by reactionary administrators, to prevent any progressive slippage, these readers will be just as valuable as Wikipedia's, and the community will grow in the same way — although it will, of course, be much smaller. Reaction is not for everyone. At least, not at first.

So Revipedia is still much like Wikipedia. But its source policy is very different.

First, no source which does not provide open, online access is meaningful. A “link” to an ISBN number is garbage. You might as well say “I read it somewhere.” If the source is not freely available, it cannot be publicly scrutinized and it cannot contribute to an audit. Not only is this policy essential to any fair

pursuit of truth, it benefits from the avalanche of pre-1922 content that Google has blessed us with. This lends a wonderful reactionary bias to the whole effort. 1922 is actually quite progressive by the standards of 1822, but it will do.

Second, no source is trusted on the basis of authority, either personal or institutional. It can only be judged on its own merits. So what if people come to you with crackpot physics? I can't recognize crackpot physics, but any decent physicist can. There is no substitute for administrators.

Third, all sources need to be mirrored, so that links don't break. Disk space is cheap. Truth is expensive. As I said: real money.

And finally, as Revipedia becomes influential, it will develop [enemies](#). This is good. Adversaries are both a sign of success and a necessity for eventual victory. Revipedia greets them with flowers, and invites them to contribute.

But not, of course, without identifying themselves as such. Contributors to Revipedia come into two broad, voluntary alignments: friends and opponents. Within these parties, an [uberfactious](#) design can create an arbitrarily deep and complex hierarchy of cults and clans.

The presence of adversaries is essential to the production of truth. It demonstrates that all claims are tested. When you look at a Revipedia page, you can click a tab and see any or all hostile responses. Adversaries can and should develop editorial and administrative structure to make their responses as effective and convincing as possible. A situation in which edited content competes with illiterate drive-by peanut-gallery taunts is not a fair fight.

Ideally, in a healthy and successful ecology, the original Revipedia admins become just one faction among many. Like any other faction, they may splinter. Progressives, Scientologists, creationists, Moonies and other nutjobs all come with their own revisions of reality. As long as an authentic reactionary perspective is available, it needs no special distinction. The truth has a still small voice of its own. If you can only hear it, you'll find yourself listening.

As usual, I've registered the domain and will give it to anyone who is seriously interested.

How to defeat the US government: summary

Sunday, January 20, 2008 at 3:24 PM

I thought it'd be fun to write a quick summary of the [last three posts](#).

We start with the perception that *USG*, or *Washcorp*, is a problem. Its problem is that the interests *Washcorp* serves seem quite a good match for its own. They do not seem to match the interests of the residents of the territory *Washcorp* owns, central North America or *Plainland*. (Using these neutral names helps us separate ourselves from symbolic emotional attachments, which also serve *Washcorp's* interest.)

The predictable result of this divergence in incentives is that *Washcorp* has become quite large, inefficient and intrusive. And it continues to grow. This bothers some of us. If it bothers you, please read on.

The traditional remedy is to persuade *Plainlanders* to use their collective democratic powers to elect a politician, such as Ron Paul, who promises to restructure *Washcorp* so that the result does in fact serve their interests. The typical promise is to replace the existing organization, which is the product of informal political evolution, with the formal design specified by the literal text of the Constitution.

There is no reason to think this remedy is effective. There are many reasons to think it is not. Thinking deductively: even if Dr. Paul is elected, the White House's influence on the executive branch is small, its influence on the judicial branch is only effective after decades of continuous control, and its influence on the legislative branch is nil. (Elections can also replace the Congress, but [incumbency rates](#) indicate that this is extremely difficult, and [partisan transitions](#) seem to have minimal effect — perhaps due to the [iron triangle](#) effect.) Thinking inductively: all previous democratic attacks against the civil service, press and universities have failed, often with high [backlash](#). Of course, if the remedy is ineffective, any energy invested in it serves the interests of *Washcorp*.

I propose a different strategy: persuading *Plainlanders* that *Washcorp* is totaled. It neither serves their interests, nor is realistically reformable. Their only practical option is to liquidate it. The only practical way to liquidate *Washcorp* is to spin off its 50 local subdivisions, or “states,” by restoring their sovereignty. If the new nations agree to honor *Washcorp's* financial obligations, the transition can be relatively seamless. The obvious historical analogy is the liquidation of the Soviet Union, which I think most people would agree was a good thing.

For better or worse, *Washcorp* remains a democracy. If enough of its voters decide that it is totaled, they certainly have the power to liquidate it. In fact, because *Washcorp* is far more responsive to direct and instantaneous polls than indirect, periodic elections, sufficient public support for liquidation will

probably cause it to liquidate itself. The liquidation of the Soviet Union did not follow elections. It preceded them.

Liquidation has one obvious advantage, which is that if it succeeds it is very hard to reverse. Given the historical evolution of *Washcorp* as it is today from what it was in 1789, I find this advantage quite compelling. Restoring the Old Republic has a nice sound to it, but the Old Republic developed — not without collateral damage — into what we have now.

It also has an obvious disadvantage. The proposition that *Washcorp* is totaled strikes most *Plainlanders* today as even more implausible than the proposition that they need to vote for Ron Paul. It seems impractical to persuade more than a small minority of *Plainlanders* to vote for Ron Paul. Persuading them to liquidate *Washcorp* must be even harder.

But is it? If you, dear reader, agree that *Washcorp* is totaled, you must agree that persuading anyone to agree with this proposition means persuading them to agree with the truth. Furthermore, you must agree that persuading *Plainlanders* to vote for Ron Paul means persuading them to agree with a fiction. Therefore, we must choose between propagating an unlikely fiction, and an even more unlikely truth.

Both problems are hard. But I suspect the latter is easier.

The fact that *Washcorp* is totaled is not only difficult to grasp, but extremely large. Clearly, it cannot be explained in a TV ad, or any other superficial means of communication. To succeed, this strategy requires a very high percentage of *Plainlanders* to accept factual propositions that they cannot verify personally, value judgments that contradict their traditional assumptions, and philosophical arguments that they have neither the capacity nor the training to follow.

But the same can be said of their present belief system. To believe that *Washcorp* is *not* totaled, a *Plainlander* must accept numerous unverified facts, judgments and arguments. This process is called *trust*. It is perfectly normal and healthy.

At present, most *Plainlanders* feel that *Washcorp* is a productive institution which serves their interests, and whose occasional errors are correctable. They believe this not because they have thought the question through themselves, but because they have (quite sensibly) delegated it to credible information sources, whom they trust.

Their error is that these organs — press, universities, etc — are not in fact independent of *Washcorp*. Indeed, they are arguably the most influential power structures within it. At least if we define influence as control over policy, and we define “within” according to reality rather than symbolism.

If this analysis is accurate, *Washcorp* can be defeated by the following steps:

One: construct an information source more accurate than *Washcorp*’s official organs.

Two: there is no two. If the argument above is correct, the rest will happen on its own.

First, if we are correct that *Washcorp* is pernicious and irreparable, and our information source is accurate, it must produce the same conclusion.

Granted, the proposition that *Washcorp* is totaled is not an “objective” result. It is neither a pure matter of fact, like the half-life of carbon-14, nor a product of irrefutable argument, like Darwinian evolution. Like any other meaningful conclusion about human society, it depends on facts, arguments, and subjective judgments. It is not a proof, but a perspective.

However, the same can be said of the proposition that *Washcorp* is *not* totaled. Since this proposition is false, it is likely to depend on incorrect facts or invalid arguments, and indeed it does. Refuting these will leave the surprised reader unusually open to new judgments.

There is no reason that a new, more accurate source of facts and arguments cannot also supply this demand. The mainstream organs which *Plainlanders* trust today produce a vast quantity of perspective, which seems objective only because it is conventional. If our new source can break this trust, it can remove the mainstream’s camouflage and compete on a level field.

Therefore, after step one (actually building the new authority), our only problem is to persuade most *Plainlanders* to accept it as accurate — or, at least, much more accurate than the authorities they presently trust.

Assuming a generally uncensored Internet, this problem solves itself. While most people are not capable of sustained analysis, they are quite capable of assigning personal credibility. If the new authority is genuinely more accurate than the official organs, it will attract the support of the smartest and most credible people in society. As this [1337](#) attracts followers, the normal forces of intellectual fashion will do the rest.

We are left with step one: creating an accurate information source.

Why do the press and universities produce inaccurate information? The problem is not that their employees are not extremely intelligent, knowledgeable, and even well-intentioned. The problem is that they are also ambitious. Their first deception is always of themselves.

Within the mainstream organs, employees who propagate “progressive” perspectives, which lead *Plainlanders* to perceive *Washcorp* as a benign institution whose errors can be corrected, tend to outcompete employees who propagate “reactionary” perspectives, which represent *Washcorp* as pernicious and incurable. *Washcorp* creates this Darwinian pressure by subsidizing the universities, supplying the press with informal confidential information (leaks), and forming its policy around the preferences of both (influence). Subsidies, leaks and influence will naturally favor the friends of *Washcorp*, creating a selective bias. This bias is subtle, but not new. Over time it has produced some

quite remarkable [perspectives](#).

Of course, our new authority must be absolutely independent from this system. This means it must ascribe zero trust — neither positive nor negative — to the products of the mainstream. This contradicts [Wikipedia's policies](#). Thus the new authority — which I've called [Revipedia](#) — can be expected to contradict Wikipedia. It also has a much harder problem to solve than Wikipedia, because it must examine every question on its merits without trusting authority.

If this problem is solvable, I suspect it can only be solved by deploying the full intellectual capacity of the Internet, and applying it in a structure which is not consensual but [adversarial](#). Revipedia maximizes accuracy and credibility by presenting the strongest arguments, on every controversial subject, from every point of view. Moreover, it presents them separately but comparably, eschewing Wikipedia's unreadable and easily-gamed “he said, she said” style.

Strong arguments can only be produced by editing. A strong system of adversarial arguments demands editors who not only disagree with each other, but do so in a structured and predictable way. An unedited argument, or one edited by unsympathetic editors, is not an argument but a strawman. It adds no credit to its competition. And the difference can only be discerned if the sympathies of the editors are known.

Thus, strong adversarial arguments can only be constructed by a system of [formal factions](#). Nothing of the sort exists at present, either within the mainstream organs or outside them. While this does not demonstrate that this design can create a public information authority of unprecedented accuracy and credibility, it certainly does not refute the proposition.

Furthermore, if there is an error in the argument above (which is certainly quite complex, and largely deductive rather than empirical), it may follow that *Washcorp* is actually benign, or that it is pernicious but a strong information authority is insufficient to defeat it. However, this does not imply that such an authority is undesirable. It's hard to see how it could be.

Since neither Revipedia nor anything like it exists, I conclude that someone ought to build it. I'm afraid my plate is full. But is yours? Imagine being the Jimbo Wales of the next century. It won't be me. It could be you.