



Written by [Steven Yates](#) on July 6, 2009

Tea Parties Across America on Independence Day

The rising Tea Party movement would seem to indicate that my queries are shared by an increasing number of Americans who, though not professional activists, are willing to take to the streets in order to protest what they see as increasingly out of control federal spending and a Washington regime more and more devoted to the exercise of naked power. Tea Parties were held across the country in April, especially on April 15, giving voice to rising protests over high taxes and the ways in which working Americans' tax dollars are being used. Most of the organizers were local, not national, and many now have their own informational websites.



The original Tea Party, of course, occurred on December 16, 1773. It protested what Bostonian colonists considered an unjust and unfair tax imposed by the British government. They boarded ships filled with shipments of taxed tea and threw it into the Boston harbor. This event, which brought retaliation by the British Parliament in the form of demands for reparations for the destroyed tea, was pivotal in leading to America's War For Independence from the British Empire.

Two thousand nine appears to be the year a new Tea Party movement came of age. This past weekend, hundreds of Tea Parties were held across the country, one in every major and in most every medium-sized city. Organizers estimate total attendance at these events at over 200,000. Speakers included both local and national leaders long visible in the freedom movement such as Dr. Alan Keyes, columnist and one-time presidential candidate, who spoke at the event I attended in Boiling Springs, a usually tranquil bedroom community north of Spartanburg, South Carolina.

Liberal Democrats ridicule these events as evidence of sour grapes, following Barack Obama's relatively easy win over John McCain last November in the wake of an economic meltdown many blamed on the Bush administration and on Republicans generally. This ignores the fact that many of those involved with Tea Parties also criticized the excessive spending of the Bush administration. They had long been uncomfortable with the consolidation of power at the federal level represented in such bills as the Patriot Act and the Military Commissions Act, and in agencies such as Homeland Security. Liberals either do not realize — or do not want to realize — that many of the objections to the Obama administration are not that different from objections to the Bush administration. Bush may have been the biggest spending Republican in U.S. history, but Obama's spending so far dwarfs Bush's by comparison! Moreover, Bush never arrogated for himself the role of essentially firing the CEO of a major corporation, as Obama recently did with General Motors CEO Rick Wagoner! The dominant forces in both major parties have long been committed to an ever-expanding federal government, which will either eventually force massive tax increases on the American people or lead to hyperinflation as the government simply prints the money it needs, devaluing the currency.



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In light of this last possibility, more and more attention has turned to the Federal Reserve — which arguably has long held more power over the economy than the White House ever thought of having — and its relationship to the U.S. Treasury Department. Many people are educating themselves about the Fed and are no longer willing to countenance its untouchability. With evidence pointing to Alan Greenspan, not Bush, as the true culprit of the brand of banker-crony capitalism that melted down last year, the Fed no longer enjoys the trust it had for decades. Congressman Ron Paul's HR 1207, the Federal Reserve Accountability Act of 2009, now has over 240 cosponsors in the House of Representatives and may turn still more attention to the Fed in the near future.

There is a strong sense running through the Tea Party movement that we no longer have a government "of the people, by the people, and for the people." It has become clear that government now answers to special interests — especially the interests of a wealthy and privileged elite of "insiders," those who control Wall Street, the big banks and insurance firms (e.g., AIG), and other instruments of the financial "establishment" that were recipients of federal bailout money last year. This is the continuity from Bush to Obama, suggesting that the latter's "change you can believe in" was never meant to be more than good advertising. Moreover, those who followed last year's financial meltdown are particularly upset that the largest federal program in history, the \$3 trillion Troubled Asset Relief Program begun under Bush and continuing under Obama, now either cannot or refuses to account for where all the money has gone. Aggravating the situation is an unemployment rate that continues to rise.

What does the Tea Party movement want? A smaller, less intrusive, and more accountable federal government for one thing. This is something neither major party has even sought to deliver, even though specific candidates (Ron Paul is an example) have spoken in these terms and tried to bring the dominant forces in their parties to heel. Tea Party attendees at the event I attended objected loudly to a "cap and trade" bill that will increase the costs of energy even as it increases the size and scope of the federal bureaucracy in response to a "crisis" of dubious scientific validity. They are suspicious of what appears to be a looming power grab over the healthcare industry and invite people to imagine having the bureaucrats who run Medicare having the power to dictate which medical decisions your doctor is allowed to make on your behalf.

Although the GOP itself has had minimal direct involvement with the Tea Party movement, many of its organizers and attendees are disgruntled Republicans — although a few are ex-Republicans who have turned their allegiance to "third parties" such as the Constitution Party. They are alarmed by the possibility — their fears being reinforced by Homeland Security documents speaking darkly of "right wing extremists" as potential domestic terrorists — that federal power might become something far worse than it is now, something even less accountable to the public. The aforementioned Homeland Security documents, when identifying who is a "right wing extremist," refer openly to those who are pro-life, pro-Second Amendment, Christian, and opposed to expansionist government. This, of course, transforms huge segments of middle America into potential domestic terrorists! And here we thought Homeland Security was about protecting middle America from al-Qaeda!

Where will this movement go? That depends both on its leaders and on whether the federal Congress responds to its legitimate concerns. The onus is on the leaders to respect the rule of law, and to work within the system. The rank and file of Tea Party attendees are not, of course, "revolutionaries" who want to overthrow the government. They are law-abiding citizens who are tired of having their economic lives regulated out of existence and then taxed to pay the salaries of the regulators — if they still have jobs.



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Yet the fact remains: most of those who would go on to lead America's War for Independence against Great Britain thought of themselves as British citizens who would have preferred to patch things up with King George. Then, in early 1776, Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* came along, with its eloquent arguments for the inevitability of an America independent from British rule.

At the Boiling Springs Tea Party I attended, an anonymous document entitled *Common Sense Revisited* was circulating. The document reiterated many of the same arguments Paine had originally articulated, which he didn't invent but borrowed from the natural-law tradition among which are to be found the core tenets of our Western philosophical heritage: that individuals are naturally free, that their rights are God-given, not government-given, that our interactions with our fellows should be voluntary and not coerced, and that government should be limited to a few specific and carefully laid out functions.

These ideas are being rediscovered by "we the people." If the federal government not only refuses to recognize this but essentially declares the advocates of human freedom as the enemy — much as King George had done — then that spells trouble down the road. There have already been secession stirrings within a number of individual states. Texas Governor Rick Perry remarked on the possibility of Texas seceding from the Union a couple of months ago while speaking at a Tea Party. Perry may not have meant it literally — and may have said it to give the "establishment" the opportunity to observe the results. There were none to speak of. Last weekend was our 233rd Independence Day. If the federal government continues on its present road toward indefinite expansion, to be paid for with money it does not have, and if the number of people who consider themselves alienated and unrepresented continues to grow, the possibility exists that the United States will not see its 250th Independence Day intact.

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