

Eternal Vigilance

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The price of liberty is eternal vigilance.

Not vigilance of us by the State, although the State has always done its utmost in this regard. The State, for its purposes of control, of violence, and of domination, is driven to monitor, to eavesdrop, and to accumulate private information, as if driven by paranoid delusions. For the State, as in institution, is a paranoid and a delusional institution. Even in a democracy, whichever elite party is in power. It can be tamed by popular pressure, it can be reformed; but its fixations remain regardless. The institution, its bureaucracies and its roles, act in this way by their very nature.

No, not vigilance of us by the State. The State has means to control information, to manipulate information, to propagandise, to indoctrinate. It always assures us of the noblest of its purposes: but what a sterile array of virtues this is! We used to cry for *liberty, equality, fraternity, and solidarity* — but that is because we are motivated by love and by the dream of social liberation: how far these are from the motivations of the State, which smothers society, smothers liberation, and smothers trust and connection between its citizens. The State can be brought to bear on social problems; State activities can alleviate some of the worst afflictions of capitalism; State programmes of health, social welfare and public works made capitalism minimally tolerable for some. But when the State acts not as the vehicle of social change, not cajoled by its people, but as the *State per se*, under its own momentum, what does it cry? *Security, stability, order!* Whichever party is in power. Whosoever has their hands on the trigger, the State remains a pistol.

Security — by which, any threat, any enemy, domestic or foreign, will be blown out of all proportion. It will be railed against, decried as evil, denounced as a depraved enemy of freedom and of civilization. It may be the communists, the fascists, the terrorists, the fundamentalists. It may also be the freedom fighters, the principled disobedients, the protestors, the progressive intellectuals, the resistance, the Parisian communards, the Spanish libertarians, the Chilean socialists, or the independent nationalists in the Congo, in Vietnam, in Venezuela, in Bolivia, in Brazil, in Iran, in Guatemala, in Nicaragua, or anywhere else. The precise identity does not matter. The enemy will be demonized, the enemy will be stripped of any humanity. All legitimate grievances will be rewritten as the

incoherent ravings of a psychopath. And then the enemy will be provoked, it will be inflamed, it will be undermined and subverted and attacked. And if the enemy strikes back, or responds to the provocation, it will be pilloried in the State's courts, in the corporate media, in the view of all respectable opinion. All opposition to the State's noble crusade will be demonized also: as unpatriotic, as treasonous, as seditious. The State relies on its citizens' reflexive adherence to its myth of essential nobility so that dissent will be dismissed offhand. It is for this reason that blind chauvinistic patriotism is possibly the greatest obstacle to the survival of the human race. All threats will therefore be magnified, and, by the identification and provocation of them, *increased*. This is the State's version of security: the promulgation of insecurity and fear.

Stability. In the present day, at least in the West, the State has such overwhelming means of violence that it can crush all unrest like an insect. But in the present day, the greatest threat to its stability consists not of those who pose a threat to its survival, but to its *legitimacy*. It is not only violence and terrorism which constitute threats to security: the State knows this well, and it has always acted accordingly. The State depends for its survival on a balance of power, terror, consent, apathy, and misinformation. Sufficiently vehement, sufficiently trenchant, sufficiently radical and incisive criticism undermines the balance: it is the most dangerous threat to its existence, for it is persuasive, and it is uncompromising. *And it is true.*

A fully informed populace in any powerful State in any period of history would be so outraged, so shaken by the inhumanities carried out in their name, so angry, so indignant, so riven by the betrayal of their governments, so justified, so supported by evidence, and so *unarguably righteous*, that in the ensuing peaceful and principled uprising no State would stand a chance. Every powerful leader has been a criminal; every powerful nation has been at best a bully, at worst psychopathic; every powerful politician has been at best a charlatan, at worst a purveyor of atrocities; every expression of State nobility is a facade for criminality. Peaceful social revolution and the establishment of better institutions — the bringing of the administrative functions of society under direct popular control and the direction of foreign and domestic policies towards humane goals — is the inevitable consequence of the sufficient spread of information. Therefore, this is the State's version of stability: the manufacture of consent; the marginalisation of dissent; the containment of knowledge of the awful history and continuity of State practices; control and secrecy over damaging information; and the projection of violent physical force.

The same applies not only to states, but to other powerful illegitimate institutions. The practices of large corporations are often criminal too; these command planned economies, these private tyrannies display not even a pretence of democracy; and many are more economically powerful than States. In the pursuit of profit they will submerge all other considerations as they see fit, or as it becomes necessary: workers' rights; democracy in the workplace; environmental, community and social concerns; the public good; these only enter consideration as far as they affect the bottom line, if even then. Government is still the shadow cast on society by big business, and they will ensure the

impingement of socially beneficial regulation remains at a minimum. Their bureaucracies become every bit as stifling as those of the State, with less redress, less freedom of information and more secrecy. They will suck the life out of the world. Their advertising is pure manipulation, stimulation of neuroses, and the creation of unnecessary wants. They will pillage the third world in search of the cheapest labour and most permissive regulation; they will incite subversion to protect against nationalisation; they will cooperate with the most brutal despots when it suits them; they will lobby and enact trade rules in their favour to the crushing expense of the impoverished majority of the human race. The corporation's version of stability, therefore — indeed that of global corporate capitalism in general — is not too different to the state: the overwhelming transmission of falsehoods instead of useful information; the marginalisation of embarrassing truths; the containment of democracy and progressive regulation; the maintenance of the international trade regime which cripples the earth; and the hysterical protection of sacrosanct, massively unequal private property from the horrors of social justice.

And order — by which is meant, the reign on the streets of the policeman's baton, and the reign across the planet of military power projection; a balance of terror. Order looks down at us through the barrel of the gun; only today it is not only the gun, not only the tank, not only the fighter and bomber and cruise missile, but the ballistic missile. Order haunts us with the spectre of nuclear apocalypse. Order will beat peaceful protestors; order will ally with ruthless dictators; order will do what it takes to maintain access and control over resources and energy. Order is imperial; order is the maintenance of unsustainable social arrangements.

Before there can be justice, says the State, there must be order. And for there to be justice, says the State, the people must be obedient to the State. Laws are inviolate, no matter how illegitimate, how oppressive or discriminatory or unconstitutional. No matter how pressing the crisis, how imminent the emergency, how cataclysmic the danger, as far as we are concerned, it will stick to its road. It will reassure us with false promises: we all know that all governments lie. It will insist upon redress through its own channels: it will stamp out alternative sources of action and authority and establish for itself the monopoly of power and violence, by power and violence. It will smother us, channelling us through its courts, with its bureaucracy, with its procedure, biased at every step in its favour. To protest the barbarisms of the State any more vigorously than standing in an officially approved protest pen holding placards and chanting slogans will be a crime — and all will cheer as the heretics are punished, for they have flouted the ultimate taboo and profaned the holiness of the State and the Law. To reveal damaging information from the government will be a crime, no matter how weak or non-existent the threat to national security. To criticise the State in time of war — correctly — will be an act of sedition. Truth is no defence to seditious libel: so says the law, so says the State. But no person says this; no person seeking justice says this; no human being says this. The human being values truth, and the human being provided with meaningful, shocking truths will act upon them. Therefore, this is the State's version

of order: unthinking obedience and chauvinistic patriotism; submission before State procedures and bureaucracies; docility in the face of crisis; and barbarism and war. The rumble of the tanks is never far away.

No, we do not cry *security, stability and order*. We still cry *liberty, equality, fraternity, and solidarity*. We cry for *information*. We cry for *understanding*. We cry for *knowledge*. We cry for *mutual respect*. We cry for *democracy*, for real participatory democracy and popular control over the political and economic institutions of society. We cry for *social connection*, for *meaningful society*, for *a sane society*. And we cry for *love*: reflexive, instinctive, species-wide, genetically inherited, all-encompassing titanic and oceanic love of every human being in existence; love that weeps with intolerable pity at the suffering of humankind. *Above all, we cry.*

For we are human, and we can see what is happening to the human race. No person who understands history can fail to be rocked to the core of their being by the horrors of global capitalism and State actions. In foreign affairs especially — where States have not yet been tamed by popular pressure — of our world remains at a level of barbarity which ought to be a source of shame to every human being. As a global civilization, we are not worth the name.

Even in the most peaceful and democratic of nations, as ever, all protests are ridiculed by all respectable opinion, peaceful dissidents are infiltrated and criminalised, protest action is repressed by the fear and reality of State force, innocent conversations are wiretapped, the internet is monitored wholesale, whistleblowers and critical journalists and academics and protestors lose their jobs, lose their freedom, and go to jail. Such is the paranoia of the State. But we know from history that the State can be brought to heel; at the domestic level, representative democracy, social programmes and institutions can be implemented; they exist in the sectors of education, of welfare, of health today, though they are under unrelenting attack.

There is therefore, today, something to lose. In the present era, in fact, with the fate of the entire global environment at stake, there is everything to lose. Unless the institutions of society can be brought to serve social purposes, and not those of State power and corporate profits, the prospects of the human race are grim indeed. It is, in fact, a planet at stake; we have the whole world to lose. But there is still, as ever, a world to win.

We must educate ourselves, we must seek to understand our situation, we must seek to project human values — not institutional values of domination, authority and control — into the world we live. We must unceasingly pressure, coerce, and oversee those institutions which possess the ability, and the institutional inclination, to do the most damage to our world: the State and its bureaucracies, but also large corporations and their minions, and the international economic and financial institutions. We must spread the information; we must understand; and once we understand, the game will long have been up.

The price of liberty is not eternal vigilance of us by the State. The price of liberty is eternal vigilance of the State — and other powerful institutions, corporations, and bureaucracies — *by us*.