

Beyond Orwell: The Electronic Police State, 2010

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A truism perhaps, but before resorting to brute force and open repression to halt the “barbarians at the gates,” that would be us, the masters of declining empires (and the chattering classes who polish their boots) regale us with tales of “democracy on the march,” “hope” and other banalities before the mailed fist comes crashing down.

Putting it another way, as the late, great Situationist malcontent, Guy Debord did decades ago in his relentless call for revolt, [The Society of the Spectacle](#):

“The reigning economic system is a vicious circle of isolation. Its technologies are based on isolation, and they contribute to that same isolation. From automobiles to television, the goods that the spectacular system chooses to produce also serve it as weapons for constantly reinforcing the conditions that engender ‘lonely crowds.’ With ever-increasing concreteness the spectacle recreates its own presuppositions.”

And when those “presuppositions” reproduce ever-more wretched clichés promulgated by true believers or rank opportunists, take your pick, market “democracy,” the “freedom to choose” (the length of one’s chains), or even quaint notions of national “sovereignty” (a sure fire way to get, and keep, the masses at each others’ throats!) we’re left with a fraud, a gigantic swindle, a “postmodern” refinement of tried and true methods that would do Orwell proud!

Ponder Debord’s rigorous theorem and substitute “cell phone” and “GPS” for “automobile,” and “Internet” for “television” and you’re soon left with the nauseating sense that the old “infobahn” isn’t all its cracked up to be. As a seamless means for effecting control on the other hand, of our thoughts, our actions, even our whereabouts; well, that’s another story entirely!

In this light, a new report published by Cryptohippie, [The Electronic Police State: 2010 National Rankings](#), delivers the goods and rips away the veil from the smirking visage of well-heeled corporate crooks and media apologists of America’s burgeoning police state.

“When we produced our first Electronic Police State report” Cryptohippie’s analysts write, “the top ten nations were of two types:

1. Those that had the will to spy on every citizen, but lacked ability.
2. Those who had the ability, but were restrained in will.

But as they reveal in new national rankings, “This is changing: The able have become willing and their traditional restraints have failed.” The key developments driving the global panopticon forward are the following:

- The USA has negated their Constitution's fourth amendment in the name of protection and in the name of "wars" against terror, drugs and cyber attacks.
- The UK is aggressively building the world of 1984 in the name of stopping "anti-social" activities. Their populace seems unable or unwilling to restrain the government.
- France and the EU have given themselves over to central bureaucratic control.

In France, the German newsmagazine [Spiegel](#) reported that a new law passed by the lower house of Parliament in February "conjures up the specter of Big Brother and the surveillance state."

Similar to legislation signed into law by German president Horst Köhler last month, police and security forces in France would be granted authority to surreptitiously install malware known as a "Trojan horse" to spy on private computers. Remote access to a user's personal data would be made possible under a judge's supervision.

While French parliamentarians aligned with right-wing President Nicolas Sarkozy insist the measure is intended to filter and block web sites with criminal content or to halt allegedly "illegal" file sharing, civil libertarians have denounced the legislation.

Sandrine Béllier, a member of the European Parliament for the Green Party, said that "when it comes to restrictions, this text is preparing us for hell."

Additionally, the new law will include measures that will further integrate police files and private data kept by banks and other financial institutions. French securocrats cynically insist this is a wholly innocent move to "maintain the level and quality of service provided by domestic security forces," Interior Minister Brice Hortefeux told [Spiegel](#).

Generalized political measures such as these that hinder free speech and expression, whilst enhancing the surveillance capabilities of the state, also indicate that so-called "Western democracies" are not far behind beacons of freedom such as China, North Korea, Belarus and Russia when it comes to repressive police measures. Indeed, Cryptohippie's rankings place the United States a mere 2/100ths of a point behind Russia when it comes to Internet and other forms of electronic spying.

The top ten scofflaws in 2010 are: 1. North Korea; 2. China; 3. Belarus; 4. Russia; 5. United States; 6. United Kingdom; 7. France; 8. Israel; 9. Singapore and, 10. Germany.

A Profit-Driven Panopticon

In a capitalist "democracy" such as ours where the business of government is always business and individual liberties be damned, gifting North American and European telecommunications and security firms, with much encouragement and great fanfare from their national security establishments and a lap-dog media blaze the path for Western versions of the sinister "Golden Shield."

Recently in the United States, whistleblowing web sites such as [Cryptome](#) and [Slight Paranoia](#) have come under attack. Both sites have been hit by take down notices under the onerous Digital Millennium Copyright Act for posting documents and files that exposed the close, and very profitable arrangements, made by giant telecommunications firms and ISPs

with the American secret state.

In Cryptome's case, administrator John Young had his site shuttered for a day when the giant software firm, Microsoft, demanded that its so-called "lawful spying guide" be removed by Young. All five files are currently back on-line as Zipped files at Cryptome and make for a very enlightening read.

But the harassment didn't stop there. When Young published PayPal's "lawful spying guide," the firm froze Cryptome's account, in all likelihood at the behest of America's spy agencies, allegedly for "illegal activities," i.e., offering Cryptome's entire archive for sale on two DVDs!

Why would the secret state's corporate partners target Young? Perhaps because since 1996, "Cryptome welcomes documents for publication that are prohibited by governments worldwide, in particular material on freedom of expression, privacy, cryptology, dual-use technologies, national security, intelligence, and secret governance—open, secret and classified documents—but not limited to those. Documents are removed from this site only by order served directly by a US court having jurisdiction. No court order has ever been served; any order served will be published here—or elsewhere if gagged by order. Bluffs will be published if comical but otherwise ignored."

In previous [reports](#), Cryptohippie characterized an electronic police state thusly:

1. It is criminal evidence, ready for use in a trial.
2. It is gathered universally ("preventively") and only later organized for use in prosecutions.

Silent and seamless, our political minders have every intention of deploying such formidable technological resources as a preeminent—and preemptive—means for effecting social control. Indeed, what has been characterized by corporate and media elites as an "acceptable," i.e. *managed* political discourse, respect neither national boundaries, the laws and customs of nations, nor a population's right to abolish institutions, indeed entire social systems when the governed are reduced to the level of a pauperized herd ripe for plunder.

How then, does this repressive metasytem work? What are the essential characteristics that differentiate an Electronic Police State from previous forms of oppressive governance? Cryptohippie avers:

"In an Electronic Police State, every surveillance camera recording, every email sent, every Internet site surfed, every post made, every check written, every credit card swipe, every cell phone ping... are all criminal evidence, and all are held in searchable databases. The individual can be prosecuted whenever the government wishes."

"Long term" Cryptohippie writes, the secret state (definitionally expanded here to encompass "private" matters such as workplace surveillance, union busting, persecution of whistleblowers, corporate political blacklisting, etc.), "the Electronic Police State destroys free speech, the right to petition the government for redress of grievances, and other liberties. Worse, it does so in a way that is difficult to identify."

As Antifascist Calling and others have pointed out, beside the usual ruses deployed by ruling class elites to suppress general knowledge of driftnet spying and wholesale database indexing of entire populations, e.g., "national security" exemptions to the Freedom of

Information Act, outright subversion of the rule of law through the expansion of “state secrets” exceptions that prohibit Courts from examining a state’s specious claims, one can add the opaque, bureaucratic violence of corporations who guard, *by any means necessary*, what have euphemistically been christened “proprietary business information.”

In a state such as ours characterized by wholesale corruption, e.g., generalized financial swindles, insider trading, sweetheart deals brokered with suborned politicians, dangerous pharmaceuticals or other commodities “tested” and then certified “safe” by the marketeers themselves, the protection of trade secrets, formulas, production processes and marketing plans are jealously guarded by judicial pit bulls.

Those who spill the beans and have the temerity to reveal that various products are harmful to the public health or have deleterious effects on the environment (off-loaded onto the public who foot the bill as so-called “external” costs of production) are hounded, slandered or otherwise persecuted, if not imprisoned, by the legal lackeys who serve the corporatist state.

How does this play out in the real world? According to Cryptohippie, the objective signs that an electronic net has closed in to ensure working class compliance with our wretched order of things, are the following:

Daily Documents: Requirement of state-issued identity documents and registration.

Border Issues: Inspections at borders, searching computers, demanding decryption of data.

Financial Tracking: State’s ability to search and record all financial transactions: Checks, credit card use, wires, etc.

Gag Orders: Criminal penalties if you tell someone the state is searching their records.

Anti-Crypto Laws: Outlawing or restricting cryptography.

Constitutional Protection: A lack of constitutional protections for the individual, or the overriding of such protections.

Data Storage Ability: The ability of the state to store the data they gather.

Data Search Ability: The ability to search the data they gather.

ISP Data Retention: States forcing Internet Service Providers to save detailed records of all their customers’ Internet usage.

Telephone Data Retention: States forcing telephone companies to record and save records of all their customers’ telephone usage.

Cell Phone Records: States forcing cellular telephone companies to record and save records of all their customers’ usage, including location.

Medical records: States demanding records from all medical service providers and retaining the same.

Enforcement Ability: The state’s ability to use overwhelming force (exemplified by SWAT Teams) to seize anyone they want, whenever they want.

Habeas Corpus: Lack of habeas corpus, which is the right not to be held in jail without prompt due process. Or, the overriding of such protections.

Police-Intel Barrier: The lack of a barrier between police organizations and intelligence organizations. Or, the overriding of such barriers.

Covert Hacking: State operatives copying digital evidence from private computers covertly. Covert hacking can make anyone appear as any kind of criminal desired, if combined with the removing and/or adding of digital evidence.

Loose Warrants: Warrants issued without careful examination of police statements and other justifications by a truly independent judge.

Sound familiar? It should, since this is the warped reality manufactured for us, or, as Debord would have it: "The spectacle cannot be understood as a mere visual excess produced by mass-media technologies. It is a worldview that has actually been materialized, a view of a world that has become objective."

That such a state of affairs is monstrous is of course, an understatement. Yet despite America's preeminent position as a militarist "hyperpower," the realization that it is a *collapsing* Empire is a cliché only for those who ignore history's episodic convulsions.

If, as bourgeois historian Niall Ferguson suggests in the March/April 2010 issue of [Foreign Affairs](#), the American Empire may "quite abruptly ... collapse," and that this "complex adaptive system is in big trouble when its component parts lose faith in its viability," what does this say about the efficacy of an Electronic Police State to keep the lid on?

Despite the state's overwhelming firepower, at the level of ideology as much as on the social battlefield where truncheons meet flesh and bullets fly, Marx's "old mole" is returning with a vengeance, the "specter" once again haunting "rich men dwelling at peace within their habitations," as Churchill described the West's system of organized plunder.

Against this loss of "faith" in the system's "viability," Debord points out, although the working class "has lost its ability to assert its own independent perspective," in a more fundamental sense "it has also lost its illusions." In this regard, "no quantitative amelioration of its impoverishment, no illusory participation in a hierarchized system, can provide a lasting cure for its dissatisfaction."

Forty years on from Debord, sooner rather later, an historical settling of accounts with the system of global piracy called capitalism will confront the working class with the prospect of "righting the absolute wrong of being excluded from any real life."

As that process accelerates and deepens, it will then be the "watchers" who tremble...

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