

Freedom of Expression in an Era of State Terror

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Theme: [Police State & Civil Rights](#)

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The contemporary political scene is remarkable for the cascading effect of the propaganda of the “ war against terror”, which has engulfed so many countries of the Western and Eastern Hemisphere. Not a single continent remains unscathed, not even the European Community, despite high sounding ideals and conditions imposed, to secure human freedom as a precondition for membership. The events of 9/11 , the work of less than 20 terrorists has altered the entire post - war social compact . Across the Atlantic in North America, in the heart of liberal democracies such as England and France, in Germany, in Italy, in West, Central and South Asia, and beyond to Indonesia, the Philippines and Australia, the global television networks controlled by monopoly media companies, corporate newspapers, government leaders, those representing the coercive instruments of state power, the police, paramilitary, the military and bureaucracy, would have the world believe that their societies face imminent attack from “terrorists “, and that the very existence of their societies are threatened by terrorists , projected as Muslim and / or Arab, people hailing from those very regions , where hydrocarbons, petro-dollars, among other resources, are stolen by war , occupation , by political threats, or by installing quisling governments in those regions .

What are the implications for the freedom of _expression, freedom for political discourse, on which the political, social and cultural health of a society and its development and civilization depend ; for democracy, for the freedom of the press, freedom for political organization, in this environment of fear and hostility in more than one country being incited against racial and religious minorities , migrants , against the backdrop of the “ War against Terror”, even as citizens see no credible enemy ; and whether correctives are possible , within the existing political and constitutional structures to overcome grave deprivation of rights by those very institutions established to protect citizens .

It is also necessary to assess in the context of historical experience, whether governments allied with elite interests have been successful in the long term in suppressing freedom of thought and _expression, as this is not the “ end of history”, and what we are witnessing may be a fierce struggle between financial and corporate oligarchies , controlling most mainstream political parties in government and some political formations represented in legislatures as the “ Opposition ” on the one hand, and the masses of the citizenry on the other, including in countries where the military/ bureaucracies have arrogated to themselves the right to influence judicial and other institutions , to determine whether expressions of citizens in speech or the written form is a patriotic act or not .

These struggles will determine whether there will be progress or regress in the evolution of erstwhile liberal democracy, which had not as yet attained its promise of economic and social equality for all citizens even in the erstwhile liberal democracies of Europe and North America . Some of these governments are now undergoing authoritarian and even fascist transformation, in an attempt wipe out all traces from their political systems of the earlier protracted democratic and socialist struggles , influenced by the great revolutions in Europe and epic national liberation movements , which had compelled governments to concede freedom of _expression and public discourse , now increasingly and progressively restricted and controlled by extensive corporate media networks and the big business press , even as monopolies have advanced, dominating and controlling extensive resources /geographical areas of the world, leaving limited room for citizens, independent journalists , co-operatives of journalists , or a radical political press , with the capacity to represent peoples interests in disseminating information and news , without deflecting , diverting or controlling public discussion .

Yet it would not be truthful to project that before the declaration of the “ War Against Terror”, freedom of _expression and of public and political discourse was in an ideal state, in the affected and other countries, where political organizers, workers, writers, artists, public spirited citizens have been openly or subtly persecuted, and faced loss of livelihood apart from incarceration for their truthful reflections and articulations in public, historical, aesthetic or artistic interest . The situation differed from one society to another. Whereas the existence of foreign military bases had resulted in subtly restricting or wholly destroying freedom of _expression in most countries where these bases were located . Other governments and societies have politically distorted the evocative appeal of religion to preserve the status quo of economic exploitation and the global covert alliances of an oligarchy , to prevent political change ,and to suppress democratic aspirations. We have witnessed the creation of so called Islamic terrorist groups and organizations , admittedly funded by Western and other Intelligence Agencies with a view to control and dominate regions and whole societies, in a manner similar to which Operation Gladio was used in Europe, by covert forces after the second world war .

The ” essence of Operation Gladio was to attack civilians , the people , women , children , innocent people , unknown people far removed any political game . The reason was quite simple: to force ...the public to turn to the state to ask for greater security “. *(**Chris Floyd, Operation Gladio**)

It is not without coincidence that it is in those countries where governments are most closely allied with US and British imperialism, in particular in the Arab world and elsewhere, where men and women have been oppressed and excluded completely from public discourse and political space, women doubly , by distorted interpretations of religious texts and dogma justifying theocracy, dictatorship , monarchy and segregation. However this fascist and sectarian misuse of religion to control closed political societies and prohibit dissent in a covert alliance with imperialism , must be clearly distinguished from “Liberation” theology used by revolutionary priests in Central and Latin America to organize people against brutal dictatorships abetted by special forces of the United States, and the genuine nationalist resistance to foreign military occupation and aggression witnessed in Iraq and in some other countries , where the Islamic concept of ” struggle against injustice ” is being used politically , yet in a non sectarian manner , as part of a broad peoples movement opposing foreign occupation and against dictatorship or military rule and control ; as these organizations have emerged due to historical reasons,

because secular and nationalist political formations were denied political space during earlier periods of dictatorships .

In the context of this discussion, the experiences in the former USSR and the Peoples Republic of China cannot be glossed over for a better perspective of contemporary events the world over. As in these two societies, the early promise and objective of liberating working people and all humanity , using the tools of scientific analysis and philosophy, was gradually subverted over decades, by first circumscribing and then denying all freedom of public discourse by dictatorial party bureaucracies, usurping and distorting political concepts, denying public space to the very people who created and supported the revolutions and its phenomenal achievements, leading to the political capitulation and dismemberment of the former USSR by the politburo of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union for and on behalf of an oligarchy of financial and corporate interests ; with the entire privatization process referred to by the eminent World Bank economist and Nobel prize winner in economics (2001) Dr. Joseph Stiglitz as a “briberization ” process , leading to immense human misery with millions who had known complete social security , plunged overnight below the poverty line , by the destruction of peoples savings and assets created over 60 years in the post revolutionary period , through currency conversion and flight of capital to Western banks all without public debate , a process assisted by Mafia “oligarchs” without any public discourse . The reintegration of the People’s Republic of China into the “market economy ” has also been a decision taken by party bureaucracies . Both these transformations ignored the people, despite the path breaking humanistic endeavours and historical contribution of the people in both societies, which enabled millions to cross hitherto insurmountable barriers of poverty, hunger, unemployment and degradation, that people of these societies had faced during their pre revolutionary period, and despite the determination and superhuman resolve with which peoples from these societies combining with resistance forces in occupied countries, defeated fascism in Europe and militarism and occupation in Asia . In China to-day companies like Wal-Mart influence policies much more than the working citizens of China who have contributed in terms of long working hours, to what is being termed as an “economic miracle ” , even as hundreds of workers die in factories and mines every month , where no safety regulations or environmental norms are being observed to maintain astonishing growth rates .

However, the reason for the present focus on the post 9/11 situation is that even those societies and countries, which hitherto ,constitutionally and legally paid homage to freedom of _expression, the very foundation and basis for public discourse and culture, political , social, aesthetic and condemned other societies for the lack of it, as a part of cold war “rhetoric ” against a different political system , have now seriously regressed from their erstwhile positions on “freedom”, using “terrorism” as a smoke screen.

After 9/11 with the Patriot Act legislated , the United States of America ,once held out incorrectly as the role model of democracy (which it never really was ,as borne out by the early history of genocide of millions of the Native American people and seizure of their lands and territories by settlers , the slave trade and slavery imposed on the African- American people for the accumulation of economic surpluses , the nature of race relations thereafter to date , the treatment of immigrants and working people, with women as commodities) , has undergone a constitutional and legal transformation of dramatic proportions and a retreat even from what is broadly termed as limited ” liberal democracy ” . It has been reported that the Patriot Act was not even printed for reading of the US legislators before it was passed , with provisions not read by a majority of legislators when it was voted on

.The erosion of “ democracy “ and “ freedom” is now complete and includes emasculation of the “ freedom of speech” . The Patriot Act has become permanent law as of 2005, and the recent changes are now referred to as Patriot Act II, passed with the unanimous vote of the Senate . The objective of this Act which abrogates the freedom of organization , right to freedom of speech , right to legal counsel among other rights , is not the pursuit of a few “ terrorists “, who were permitted to enter and function in the USA with impunity, as the disclosure of project “ Able Danger” and other evidence of US Intelligence and other official agencies reveal .Neither is the Act for the pursuit of Bin Laden and his extended family, who were provided special aircrafts to assist them in leaving the United States even as flights for other citizens of the United States were restricted ; it is not for the Carlyle Corporation in which the bin Laden family had investments along with leading political families of the United States , but for the large majority of the citizens of the United States . Among other measures implemented through the Patriot Act to deter freedom of _expression and organization, it is now permissible for the FBI to request all kinds of personal and private information, including library lists of the person under investigation ,an unprecedented measure for any society which claims to rest its foundation on a scientific temper and a spirit of inquiry . The office of Homeland Security is immune from the scrutiny of Congress and functions under executive fiat in direct violation of the Constitution of the United States, which provides for checks and balances. The nature of measures conferring extensive powers on the FBI and other intelligence agencies have transformed the United States into a Police or a fascist State. That the Patriot Act was not a response to any kind of terrorism by alleged Muslim or Arab terrorists is established from the fact that the Patriot Act was never used to bring to justice any of the so called terrorists responsible for 9/11 even after it was passed, though more than 5000 minorities of Muslim or Arab descent, who were residents and domiciled in the USA and innocent of any terrorist act, were immediately illegally detained without the knowledge of their families and friends, many incommunicado .

The vast increase in domestic spying powers over the past five years and more, the illegal detentions without a right to Habeas Corpus , the setting up of Military Tribunals without a right to appeal are on the lines of the Spanish Inquisition , the English Court of Star Chamber , and the Letter de Cache of the French monarchy , justified as a part of the “ War against Terror” which appears to be in retrospect the “Reichtag fire ” in terms of its implications ; yet there are hardly any terrorists in the United States of America or elsewhere, where similar legislation is being enforced ; exposing that the main objective is to extend the capacity of Intelligence Agencies to monitor groups and individuals , including lawyers opposed to government policy and people demonstrating against acts of military aggression and the colonial occupation in Iraq , Afghanistan , Haiti , in defense of humanity, against erosion of social security and health care and in exercise of their right to free speech . Even the nature of donations to all organizations , the nature of advise tendered and assistance given including by lawyers to clients , are all monitored . It must be recalled that John Ashcroft officially stated that the President as a Commander-in- Chief is a war time dictator , as the Congress had conferred on him the power to declare war though such provisions do not exist in the Constitution of the United States, which does not provide for the suspension either of the Writ of Habeas Corpus or for the suspension and abrogation of other freedoms .

Prime Minister Tony Blair has adopted the same political approach towards the liberty and freedom of speech, and the “New ” Labour party emulating President Bush has declared that Britain is on a war footing. British involvement in Yugoslavia, Afghanistan and Iraq are unrelated to “ terrorism “ and represent its integration into the colonial and military strategy

of the United States and NATO. The anti-terror law in Britain makes civil liberties and the freedom of speech of the British citizen depend on the Police and Security services . Despite the failure of Prime Minister Blair to gain support for a period of 90 days detention without judicial sanction, the anti-terrorism bill has obtained approval for preventive detention for a reduced period without Judicial scrutiny and review. The law interalia criminalizes the mere _expression of opinion deemed unacceptable to the Home Secretary and makes illegal the “ glorification of the preparation or commission of terrorist acts “ an offense so vague that it enables the government to arbitrarily outlaw political dissent .

The media baron Rupert Murdoch’s paper the SUN, backed the 90 day preventive detention proposal, and his flagship newspaper denounced the Members of Parliament of the Labour, Conservative and Liberal party who voted for a reduced period of detention without judicial scrutiny, as “traitors ” though this anti- Terrorism Act of the UK is in breach of the 1950 European Convention on Human Rights, and contravenes the essential provisions of the British law enshrined in the Habeas Corpus Act of 1679 originating in the historic Magna Carta of 1215 . The new law provides that the Human Rights Act of the UK passed to conform to the European Convention on Human Rights be disregarded or bypassed in the event of a conflict with the anti-terrorism legislation, severely restricting freedom of speech. It is significant that no political leader has been under detention for “ hate speeches” against immigrants though the spreading enmity and hatred are prohibited under this law .As a consequence of the UK legislation, anti-war reporting can be termed a glorification of terror by giving succour to the Iraqi Resistance. The Act has invited the widespread criticism from civil rights groups , opposition parties , sections of the judiciary and from former Law Lords . The real objective of Prime Minister Tony Blair is to prevent a revolt from the working class as wages are lowered, and the hire and fire policy for workers is implemented ruthlessly, with erosion and elimination of social security, and when new countries are invaded and occupied in furtherance of the policy of “ New ” colonialism and military occupation for the plunder of resources of other countries, hence the anti -terrorism measures.

The third case study of emasculating democratic rights,in particular freedom of _expression is the Howard government’s draconian anti- terrorism bill ,which emulates the Patriot Act and the anti-terrorism laws introduced in British parliament; this has aroused large popular opposition and reactions to the bill in Australia . The new sedition laws are not aimed against terrorism as hardly any act of “terrorism” has taken place in Australia as distinguished from racist attacks by white supremacist forces with covert support from the government to provoke retaliation ; on the other hand the anti - sedition laws prevent free speech and the indefinite and secret detention of individuals would allow intelligence organizations to organize the “ disappearance of citizens “permanently, as in Argentina and Chile. The Australian bill desires to silence political dissent by making it an offense to promote feelings of “ ill will or hostility between different groups” and conduct of assisting an “ organization or country engaged in armed hostilities “ against the Australian military, whether such a war is declared or not, to enable the Australian government to justify military occupation of Afghanistan, Iraq, and future colonial interventions in the Solomon islands, Papua New Guinea, in Indonesia and the Philippines, that is regions where front rank political leaders have openly alleged that the Bali and other bombings were the result of military collaboration in these countries .

A letter in the Sydney Morning Herald is relevant to assess the nature of terrorism as against the propaganda articulated by governments from Washington, London, Tel Aviv ,

Paris, Australia , Karachi , New Delhi , Djakarta, and Manila, among other capitals:

“ John Howard is right. Terror surrounds us the terror of growing inequality between aboriginal and white society; the terror of poverty and prejudice against minority groups; of the displaced, of the alienated, homeless and the indefinitely detained; of the elements of the deterioration of public utilities and essential services; of the decline in the quality of leadership; of government management; of the government’s proposed work changes. Last but not the least we face the terror of government by stealth, deception and self -interest.”

To justify highly unpopular measures, on 9th November 2005, 850 Federal and State Police and intelligence personnel heavily armed broke into 23 homes in the working class and immigrant districts of Sydney and Melbourne in Australia and arrested 17 Muslims, on the ground that they were contemplating terrorism. The Defense lawyer has described the charges as “ scandalous “ stating that there was no evidence that any terrorist act was being planned. Since it was more than obvious that these measures were unjustified, the Australian government can always fall back on its racist immigration policy and manufacture racial strife or an “ Operation Gladio ” , ironically in an Australia which does not belong legally to races other than the Australian Aborigines, from whom it was stolen by colonization .

Even France has succumbed and invoked a state of emergency under the pretext of rioting in immigrant ghettos, significantly under a 1955 law, a product of the brutal colonial subjugation of Algeria and its national liberation struggle, not astonishing in view of the restlessness of the working people of France resisting the onslaughts on social security and being roped into an Economic Community committed to destroy rights of working people and middle income groups. Moreover, France which initially opposed the Iraq war has supported military onslaughts and neo-colonial and colonial projects in Yugoslavia, Haiti, Afghanistan, and Africa , and now contemplated in respect of Iran and Syria, among other regions. Under the French law government can carry out raids, censor the media and ban demonstrations. The real motivating factor in the declaration of emergency is not the genuine discontent of immigrants which occasionally manifests itself , or contrived violence or the discrimination against citizens of African and Arab origin, but the social unrest against privatization and erosion of social security uppermost in peoples minds and the strike action in response ; apart from the fact that the French people voted defying most organized political formations in government and the opposition overwhelmingly against the European Union Constitution ,which they perceived as antagonistic to their social security for which their liberties are being taken away . Incidentally this emergency law was proposed in public by Marie le Pen, the daughter of the neo -fascist leader le Pen herself a member of the neo -fascist National party .The nature of remarks by the Interior minister referring to the immigrants involved in the incidents, as “scum “and “gangrene ” reveals a policy to deliberately divide and polarize not only the French people but the European Community to “divide and rule “, as in other countries like Australia, where the immigrants have been referred to as the source of all problems . The government in France shut down the internet ,increasingly seen as an alternative global media surmounting the Corporate media’s agenda to “manufacture consent”, and impose censorship on the issues of the day affecting citizens, by coverage which is not truthful , which neglects to highlight and emphasize issues of priority concern, which does not reveal the connection between policy imposed by private corporate interest and the criminilization of the economy and siphoning of public resources , which sensationalizes matters of little concern to society , and which renders frivolous news reports using the pretext of media ‘s role in entertaining .

In Germany it is reported that authors and others are increasingly facing pressure, detention, loss of employment for reproducing or even circulating extracts from journals and other literature, which is on a list of prohibited publications not known to the public. Italy is also among the countries which has substantially altered its parliamentary and other constitutional structures, in the face of massive peoples demonstrations against economic policies and predatory wars

The countries referred to are not the only ones which have enacted such measures, these examples have been given as some of these governments talk the loudest about "freedom" and "democracy", and yet have killed and mutilated the people of Palestine, Iraq, Afghanistan, Haiti, Congo, former Yugoslavia among others, depriving whole nations of their right to freedom of expression and public discourse. Yet one cannot in the process, condone other societies and political systems, using the leverage of their phenomenal growth rates and investments to impose their agenda for censorship of internet, courtesy Bill Gates among other IT Companies.

What we are witnessing is an era of state terrorism in erstwhile liberal democracies. Terrorism is referred to as a camouflage, though these rag tag groups and neo-fascist gangs, are trained by the very intelligence agencies of these governments, as an instrument of their state policy, to justify mass state terrorism against people mobilizing, to express political opinion on a range of policies which affect them, which mainstream political parties are declining to raise as a part of their compact with an oligarchy of financial and corporate interests. Some of these trained groups are also used as instruments for subversion of rival governments and societies if these societies resist external manipulation of their policies.

Historically mankind has revolted against systems which have been oppressive and which attempted to enslave groups or nations, in particular when the reasons and causes for the enslavement became known, and the dominant political system became cruel and repressive. In the present situation the reversal of freedom of expression and freedom of public discourse, on issues vital to the survival of millions in countries, will not be acceptable to those who have lived under constitutional and legal structures which permitted discourse albeit when there was no threat to the status quo of the existing economic system, which under the regime of "Neo-Liberal globalization" a higher stage of Capitalism, has destabilized societies and economies, altered the post World War II compact between Capital and labour, the equation between the metropolitan countries and former colonized countries known as the peripheries, and has resulted in a revolt of civil society from country to country in all hemispheres, which the political capitulation of the former USSR and the integration of China into the "Market economy" has not assisted in quelling, as the nature of finance capital and corporate operations throughout the world, pauperize people including in the erstwhile economic and financial citadels, increase unemployment as operations shift easily and swiftly from

country to country, even as Companies pursuing economies of scale and increasing profits, search for cheaper labour and resources from one country to another, rendering desolate, hitherto vibrant economic regions, driving down wages everywhere, increasing hours of work, increasing the age of retirement, imposing genocidal conditions on small farmers as a consequence of the pressures from giant and powerful agri-business companies searching for markets and monopolies over seeds; and abolishing hard won social security and public health systems leaving millions without any health cover. We live in a world where even sections of the middle classes face the prospect of bankruptcy if faced with job losses. The prospect of militant mass mobilization in the context of worsening economic conditions, with

new measures to be imposed by governments reducing living standards of working people, has resulted in the recent coercive and fascist measures, to curb freedom of _expression and public discourse and dialogue, to prevent a mass revolt from country to country, as mainstream national parties succumb to the interests of the Oligarchy. With millions marching against the new slavery of peoples and nations under “globalization “, and the militarization of their societies for wars of aggression for which soldiers from underprivileged and middle income families are being recruited as “canon fodder “; has raised an alarm among those sections who would enslave humanity for profits by any means including war , who have passed anti-terrorist laws in their own interest , to protect themselves from expressions of individual and mass protest.

Have they succeeded in suppressing public debate? It is too early to tell. Yet the signs are that there is no capitulation. Citizens of the United States continue to mobilize on vital issues individually and collectively , through civil disobedience and other forms of political and cultural _expression. Though the bomb blasts and its aftermath in England, the murder of the innocent Brazilian Jean Charles de Menezes by special police forces resulted in stupefaction and subdued public reaction in England ,shocked at the turn of events, yet immediately thereafter there was dissent and the voting in Parliament which even though it only reduces the period of incarceration from 90 days originally contemplated , and does not eliminate the anti-democratic measure , revealed the fissures however narrow, that this is not an easy road to a neo-fascist state, and there is considerable unease in society and no consensus on the strangulation of the voice of the people , precisely when they most wish to express themselves . In Australia as per news reports from the corporate media and press more than 500, 000 were out demonstrating against new punitive industrial laws, with the potential to pauperize the working class even in the backdrop of the tabling of anti-terror legislation and so called terrorist raids deliberately staged in the immigrant working class residential areas in Muslim homes to foster a racial divide, to whip up support for the draconian measure. The people of France historically having erected so many barricades at the cross roads of history for liberte, egalite and fraternite will not be left far behind ,to regain their freedom of _expression and public discourse even as legitimate strike actions against privatization and rolling back of social security have been prohibited from one industry to another , from one city to another .

It would be illusory and mistaken for people and organizations to place their trust entirely in existing institutions, whether the judiciary or in mainstream political parties in the government or even some in the opposition, who have in the past capitulated in the face of these measures. History it is said “is what we look back to and then take forward” in understanding social and political forces. The anti-terror laws are the reaction not of triumph, but of increasing fear , apprehension and insecurity on the part of the “Oligarchs ” of Finance Capital and Monopoly Companies and their quisling governments , in the face of indictments being drawn up by people from continent to continent , of war crimes , crimes against humanity and genocide being laid at their door, with the apprehension that the growing understanding of the present productive processes in society and the use to which they are being put, with increasing economic and political marginalisation for those who contribute most to the accumulation of surpluses, increasing penury and pauperization, and the degenerate use of the public wealth of societies and brutal use of wars to steal resources and profiteer sacrificing the lives of millions , will alter equations if truth is not suppressed .

When the New York Times referred to the anti-war marches, as a new “super power “,

the message went home and “anti-terror ” barricades have been erected by oligarchies in many countries, though all these strategies are hopeless and cannot defeat ideas once considered far in advance of their time, with historical conditions ripe for their acceptance as the technological, scientific and economic organizations and institutions are in place to enable mankind to partake of these tremendous surpluses generated by the global economy in an equitable manner , and the present political and economic systems have nothing to offer except repression , penury , and insecurity to large sections of humanity .

In such a historical period genuine public discourse is a threat to those who would freeze and fossilize the onward progress and evolution economic, political and cultural of society, by the creation of new enemies, new fears, new wars, new racial and ethnic hatreds . This has to be resisted democratically, by forging the widest consensus possible among people on the nature and kind of resistance to these measures, as anti-human political and economic systems

Even in these grim times it is necessary to remember what Bertoldt Brecht wrote “ Man Can Think”, and has more than any other specie, the ability to influence events and alter his/her own destiny , in what are testing times for human solidarity across continents.

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