

Kiss your Democracy Goodbye (But Did You Ever Have One?)

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“There are ... potentially desirable limits to the indefinite extension of political democracy ... A government which lacks authority ... will have little ability, short of cataclysmic crisis, to impose on its people the sacrifices which may be necessary” (1975 Trilateral Commission Report on the Governability of Democracies)

Just how pervasive is the myth of our ‘inalienable rights’ is illustrated by the following quote from an article in the Independent that even as it warns of the “drift...toward a police state”:

... the Government is undermining freedoms citizens have taken for granted for centuries and that Britain risks drifting towards a police state. - [‘Judges liken terror laws to Nazi Germany’](#) By Marie Woolf, Raymond Whitaker and Severin Carrell, The Independent, 16 October 2005 [my emph. WB]

Contrary to popular myth, the democratic process, the universal franchise, habeas corpus, the ‘inalienable rights’ and so on and so forth that the pundits spout on about, far from being an ‘inalienable right’ extending back to the Magna Carta some eight hundred years ago, our extremely limited democracy is barely one hundred years old and is something that is by no means ‘taken for granted’ as events in Northern Ireland revealed nor the raft of laws such as the infamous ‘D’ notice which is no more than an ‘agreement’ between the owners and managers of the media not to print or broadcast stories that might be embarrassing to the state, under the guise of ‘state security’.

With literally hundreds of laws that collectively the state paradoxically likes to call our ‘unwritten constitution’ and without recourse to a clearly defined set of rules that sets limits on what powers the state possesses over its citizens, until the UK — reluctantly and with all kinds of provisos — signed the European Union’s Human Rights Act, the state could pretty well do whatever it pleases. And now, under the guise of fighting the ‘war on terror’, it wants to opt out of key sections of the Act.

In fact, the UK is probably the most regulated, controlled and surveilled of any of the so-called democracies. With an estimated 6 million video cameras installed across the country over which there is no oversight, indeed, no controls whatsoever as to what happens to the footage, who sees it or who ends up possessing it, the state’s control over its citizens is almost complete.

And if anyone has any doubts about the perilous state of our ‘democracy’, the vote on ID

cards on 18/10/05 had only 20 Labour MPs voting against it, and most of those on the grounds of cost of the project. Public debate on the issue is virtually non-existent. The government has consistently misled the public on the real nature of the ID card, hiding entirely the real reason, namely the creation of a national database on its citizens, an allegation it of course, strenuously denies. The vast cost of creating a national database on 60 million people, a database that will contain information of all kinds, not merely the kind that will allegedly stop 'identity theft' or allegedly identify 'terrorists', 'benefit cheats' and those participating in 'organised crime' but to add insult to injury, one that we will be forced to pay for.

So what is going here? Nobody could deny that indeed the state is undertaking fundamental attacks on the limited civil rights we have won over the past century or so of struggle but firstly, why are elements of the legal profession and the media only now waking up to the fact? Could it be that as long as it was only 'extremists' and other 'fellow travellers' who were the alleged subject of the attacks, our 'liberal intelligentsia' were not that troubled, but now they see their own positions of privilege threatened, they have at long last spoken out?

What is revealed here is something a lot more fundamental and a lot more insidious, for these self-same people who now talk of a "drift toward a police state" have seen the writing on the wall for at least past eight years, yet said nothing and indeed were quite content to accept the 'drift' so long as it didn't affect them.

Moreover, it reveals the incestuous relationship between our so-called intelligentsia and the state, why else do they continue to peddle the line that what is happening is some kind of encroachment on these mythical 'rights' that we are supposed to have had for centuries?

The uncomfortable truth is that democracy, even the limited form we currently have, exists for only as long as it's convenient to keep it. And it's a 'democracy' that is extremely narrowly defined, namely a two-party system that exists within a structure defined by an inherited and entrenched state bureaucracy that is, we are told, neutral and independent of the political process.

Yet the 'Establishment' as it is referred to, is a recognised institution composed of people who control the organs of the state; the judicial system, the civil service, the police and security services, education, the armed forces, and through their connections, the media and big business. These are people who are connected via the schools and universities they attended; the clubs they belong to and via family and business relationships.

However, the 'Establishment' is rarely, if ever referred to as being central to the maintenance of the State's power. Instead, it is presented to us as an amorphous and inherited set of relationships that are intrinsically 'English'. The illusion is complete and reinforced by the assumptions made about its 'inevitable' nature, hence the statement "freedoms citizens have taken for granted for centuries" flows logically from such assumptions.

The role therefore of the intelligentsia is to maintain the illusion of a society ruled by people who have some kind of 'natural right' to rule, benignly you understand, to suggest otherwise is to be 'un-English' and it goes by the name of a 'meritocracy', those who rule through ability alone, at least that's what we are told. The Establishment is so powerful that it easily absorbs even those who 'rise through the ranks' and end up belonging to it, such as those

who head up the current 'Labour' government, regardless that they come from working class backgrounds.

Why this is important to the current onslaught on our 'inalienable rights' becomes apparent when we trace the trajectory of our governments, especially since the end of WWII and that of the Labour Party, whose historic role has been to manage capitalism when the traditional party of capital and of the Establishment, the Tory Party, eventually became a redundant force.

There could be no clearer example of the obsolete nature of the Tory Party than the current 'contest' to find a Tory Blair. Hence, aside from the ineffectual Liberal Democrats, we now have a de facto one-party system. Thus it is imperative to establish a 'legal' framework to enshrine the one-party system, in other words, the corporatist, security state, so beloved of Mussolini, a state that if it is rule, needs an absolutist framework of laws with which to protect itself and with which to control and repress any opposition.

The role of the 'war on terror' therefore, is to justify a state that has lost all legitimacy and must perforce rule by force, admittedly without recourse to an English equivalent of the SS and given the fact that the majority of the citizens have opted out of a political process over which they have no say, won't be needed — yet; except of course to repress those who fulfill the role of 'enemies of the state', Muslims, 'extremists' and other malcontents, who can be safely handled by existing organs of the state, MI5, MI6 and the various and sundry 'security' services (in authoritarian regimes, they get called the secret police) all administered with the 'anti-terror' laws. Throw in a complicit corporate and state media, which is only too happy to maintain the illusion of a democracy and we have a 'very English' police state.

Goodbye Social Contract

What is referred to as the 'social contract' between capital and labour, formulated by the post-war Labour government as the response by the state to the demand by working people for a greater share of the wealth and for a genuine participation in the political process, has finally been abandoned. The reasons are complex but not inexplicable.

In the first place, the crisis of capital that came after the first 'oil crisis' of the early seventies, precipitated the attack on working people represented by the Thatcher/Reagan so-called neo-liberal agenda that sought to address the issue of the falling rate of profit by taking back the gains that working people had won during the 'golden years' 1945-75, the longest period of consistent growth the Western world had ever experienced.

In addition, the defeat of the US in Vietnam signalled to the developing world that in spite of the US's overwhelming military and economic power, imperialism could be defeated, admittedly at great human and material cost, and perhaps at a cost that in long run it could not bear. This was a defeat that the US simply could not tolerate and one that had to be answered and in my opinion anyway, led directly to the US intervention in Afghanistan and the subsequent and final 'proxy' war between the US and the Soviet Union, a war the Soviets lost.

There can be no doubt that the rise of the 'social contract' was in no small part due to the success of socialism's attraction to working people and, following the disasters of the 1920s and 30s, the failure of capitalism to solve the recurring crises that beset it. For proof of this

we need look no further than the roles of successive Labour governments throughout this period to 'manage' capitalism. But each successive Labour government moved further and further to the right and at each turn, it abandoned chunks of its historical mandate as the 'party of labour' as the allure of socialism faded, due not only to the failures of Soviet Union but also to the propaganda of the Cold War.

Ultimately, the Thatcherite 'counter-revolution' which hinged on the deregulation or the abandonment of the state regulation of the 'market' that enabled capital to move unhindered across the planet and which in turn enabled the state to mount a frontal assault on the organised working class as industrial production moved to un-organised, cheap labour markets, most often in repressive regimes of one kind or another, where the lack of labour and environmental laws didn't get in the way of doing business.

However, the frontal assault on working people did nothing to alter the fundamental crisis of capital, if anything it exacerbated the problem as it led not only to an increasing flood of products, but products that fewer and fewer people could afford to purchase. Capital's response to this crisis was to invest the surplus of capital into the financial markets, also now deregulated. Thus increasingly, profit was generated through speculation, especially in the currency markets that further destabilised the weak and vulnerable economies of the world – the developing countries.

In turn, failing a genuinely progressive alternative, created the conditions for a variety of 'fundamentalist' movements to fill the political vacuum, some no doubt created by imperialism using classic divide and rule tactics, others out of sheer desperation.

It can be seen therefore, that there is a direct and organic relationship between repression abroad and repression at home; they are two sides of the same coin and result from the same process, the crisis of capital. Without once more entering into and engaging with the political process, I think it's safe to assume that failing an organised and coherent opposition to the current Labour government-led regime, and one that's not led by a posse of self-serving 'liberals', whose position of privilege is only now recognised as being threatened, the omens are seriously bad. And, if you'll forgive me for repeating myself, it's up to you to break free from the illusion, so cleverly constructed, that the attacks on our rights only apply to 'extremists', as they'll come knocking on your door in the morning, of that you can be sure, history has taught us that, over and over again.

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