

Fascist America: Reflections on Orwell

By T. M. Hoy

Today we live in a nation where government operatives can secretly abduct you, break you mentally and physically, then dispose of your body, and it's perfectly legal, respectable even. How many people as the government caused to disappear? How many people does the government kidnap, torture, and murder each year? No one knows, and the numbers the government provides (claiming captives in the low hundreds, while watchdog agencies like Amnesty International suggest the number may be five or 10 times as high) are an obvious lie. All we can be certain of is that there is nothing the government cannot do; no act from which is prohibited. Government power is absolute once it invokes "national security", and legally we are at their mercy.

George Orwell (pen name of Eric Blair [1903-1950]), one of the more prescient thinkers of the 20th century, saw this coming and did his best to avert it. In works such as *1984* and *Animal Farm* he laid bare the stratagems and methodology of fascist states, and painted a terrifying picture that closely resembles many aspects of the modern US and UK.

Orwell's vision was of a government intruding into every niche and crevice of private life, invading one's thoughts as aggressively as it does to one's physical space. In *1984*'s dystopian hell (so similar to the reality we inhabit), the government manipulates the media and other forms of communication, changing the past to suit present political needs, and shamelessly distorting the way the present is perceived to gain its ends. "Big Brother" reaches into every home through a TV like device, which brainwashes citizens with its messages as it spies on them. Frighteningly, technology has made decision possible, and government powers are expanding to embrace it.

In Orwell's novel, the population is encouraged to hate and fear the ever shifting "enemy", and the government strives to keep them in a constant state of anxiety and uncertainty. The supposed ever-present danger of enemy attacks is used to justify the disappearances, the torture, the grim claustrophobic stranglehold of the police state.

In essence, Orwell saw governments dominating their people through the use of fear. Convincing people they will suffer terrible harm unless they give up their freedom and obey the government "for their own protection", is an ancient trick. It is a simple thing, as Orwell put it, to "neutralize popular discontent by changing it into war hysteria". This use of hysteria to control the masses was a device of state well-known to civilizations of antiquity, and present-day governments have not been shy about using it, especially the United States.

The cynical use of fear and hysteria by the state is not an oddity or an aberration. Rather it is part and parcel of a much broader phenomenon – the fact that governments reserve the right to use force to themselves. Threatening and coercing people into obedience is a normal part of the business of government.

Coercion and the use of force to maintain society's rules have become so ingrained into the social fabric they are no longer recognized as impositions. Such as the incredible amount of coercion required by the 13 year (K – 12) training regimen called the education system, in which children are indoctrinated to sit down, shut up, and obey at the command of "authority". Or the so-called "justice system", awash in

methods of physical torment and restraint, from iron locks and bars to chains and handcuffs, imposing its will through the guns and Billy clubs worn by its agents, announcing that you will be shot or beaten, and possibly killed if you disobey. The same coerciveness dominates every aspect of society. Every human relationship in the West is viewed through this badly skewed lens of control and power.

The never-ending litany of government demands for obedience, enforced by threats and violence, inevitably generates a backlash. People react violently when they are coerced and abused, and when freed of government oppression (or when pushed beyond their ability to cope) take revenge anyway they can.

One of Orwell's profound insights was that society exists only because of coercion. The only difference between societies, as far as Orwell was concerned, was the degree of violence used by states against their own populations.

A moment of reflection is sufficient to show the truth of Orwell's insight. A few minutes without electricity at night in an average US city is enough to spark looting and riots; the absence of law enforcement in urban areas, if advertised as in a police strike, quickly devolves into incidents of violence and mayhem, and sadly the threat and use of force by the authorities is the only thing restraining the mass robbery and theft of property (and even so, robbery and theft are exceedingly common).

Not only does the social contract evaporate at the first sign of disorder, but society itself has grown incredibly violent and unstable, becoming deformed under the pressure of intense coercion felt in every realm of human interaction. Delays in traffic are sufficient to ignite homicidal rages and attacks on other drivers; mass murders, typically massacres at workplaces, schools and malls, and serial killings have become very ordinary throughout the US, and hundreds of thousands of people are wounded and killed annually by guns in the US. These are symptoms of the society convulsed by violence, reacting violently to all the coercion from which people suffer, and maintained only by the threat of more violence still.

The culture is a crazy quilt of patterns of dominance and aggression, and the government reflects this by carrying the cultural sickness to its logical end. Consider the powers the government has arrogated to itself which have transformed the US into a virtual police state.

The government currently sets up and runs secret prisons where it tortures and kills people. The US also makes a habit of kidnapping people it doesn't like in foreign countries, and dragging them off to dungeons in "friendly" nations where they are tortured and made to "disappear". The US openly assassinates people using Predator drones without apology, often killing innocents along with the targets (when the targets are even present, a matter of some doubt), and murders countless civilians – it doesn't even bother to keep track of the numbers, as part of "normal" military operations. This is just the tip of the iceberg; far more nefarious activities are taking place that the government keeps secret.

Domestically the US now claims the right to hold people as prisoners indefinitely, without legal process or recourse. The government has given itself the power to secretly search citizens' homes and businesses; decides who can and can't travel by air, bus, or train; seizes property and assets from people on mere suspicion (and returns them only after costly, hard-fought lawsuits, if at all), and strips people of their citizenship at will. The court system, in a mockery of justice, has consistently upheld these hideous abuses of power as legal.

All of this takes place at the behest of an unknown, secret bureaucracy whose decisions can be challenged, acts without evidence, and operates without real oversight. The US has become a totalitarian state through its laws, though an illusion of freedom is maintained because the majority of the middle class is not severely affected, where the poor (who are) have long become accustomed to fascist oppression and no longer consider it remarkable.

The social climate is likewise that of a minimum security prison. School children are treated like felons, with metal detectors placed at school entrances, searches of students by police with drug sniffing dogs, and regular “lockdowns” where students are confined to rooms on one pretext or another, good training for life in a penal colony. At work, drug tests by urinalysis have become a humiliating norm, polygraphs are frequently used at hiring interviews, and background checks are standard. Cameras are everywhere in public and private, and spyware is routinely installed on computers to monitor workers activities.

Police have morphed into paramilitary units, carrying assault rifles and brutally invading people's homes, well SWAT teams are called out on the slightest excuse. Life sentences are routinely handed out for minor crimes like shoplifting if a person has a felony record, and the prisons are bursting with parole violators who've only broken petty rules, not laws, such as getting a traffic ticket, or being caught drinking a beer. Society is intent on ratcheting up the violence against the poor and any who defy the rules.

This totalitarian nightmare has been imposed on the population, then sold to them as waging a “War on Drugs”, and more recently, a “War on Terror”. What everyone knows or suspects about these excuses for fascism, the unspoken “truths” no one wants to face, can be plainly seen regardless of the relentless media campaign trying to convince people otherwise.

Truths such as the fact that declaring war on drugs has resulted in epic levels of violence and corruption in the US, and has spawned a plethora of evils in law, politics, and tens of millions of people's lives. Equally stupid and futile is the war on terror. Attacking a strategy is the act of a fool, were that its true purpose. Strategies such as terrorism are a standard part of asymmetric warfare (where one side is vastly stronger than the other, and the weaker uses means designed to nullify that advantage). Attack one strategy, and enemy will just shift to another.

Further a war on terror ignores the obvious truth that the US is itself a rogue state, either supporting those who use terrorism as a weapon, such as Israel and Indonesia, or directly engaging in terrorist attacks itself, as with the many unprovoked wars it has pursued in South and Central America, in Asia, and in the Middle East. There are few countries around the world that have avoided serious destruction and military bullying by the US at one time or another. That the US government has the gall to declare war on terrorism would be comic, if it weren't so loathsome and hypocritical.

Another unwelcome but widely recognized truth is how malleable the definition of “terrorist” tends to be. On the one hand, old CIA terrorism, like the assassination of Salvador Allende in Chile in 1973, or the atrocities committed by CIA trained, armed and sponsored troops in the civil wars in El Salvador and Guatemala, are not considered terrorism at all by the US, and those committing war crimes are safely shielded from ever facing justice in foreign tribunals.

Conversely, activities that are a “normal” part of warfare when committed by US enemies are seized upon as outrages, such as in the never-ending tit-for-tat viciousness in the Israeli – Palestinian conflict. The atrocities perpetrated by Israel, condemned around the world, torture in its prisons, assassinations

abroad and in the Occupied Territories, murderous attacks on civilians, etc., are never criticized and are often justified by the US government, whereas Palestinian military actions – bombings and kidnappings, are always “terrorism” that must be punished.

Domestically anyone daring to dissent against US corporate/government policies may be labeled a terrorist. This includes those merely defending their land against invading FBI or ATF agents, such as the American Indian movement in the 1970s, or the attack on the Dravidians at Waco, on to animal rights advocates and environmental activists today, so-called “ecoterrorists”(despite the fact that these eco-movements have never killed, and very rarely harmed anyone, except corporate property and profits).

It is also well known and taken for granted by the majority that the war on terror and the war on drugs, are thinly veiled justifications for government racism, xenophobia, and attacks on those the elite deem a threat. In general this includes blacks, Latinos, the poor of every ethnicity, and anyone opposed to corporations and their proxies.

Civil disobedience, like poverty, has been criminalized, and challenging corporate control of the government or the right of the military-industrial complex to hog the nation's resources is grounds for immediate violent retaliation by government agents.

Civil liberties have been crushed, the Bill of Rights swept away as an archaic irrelevancy, as corporations and governments have conspired to create a surveillance state. The entire life of today's citizen is laid bare, utterly exposed to the merciless stare of the state, and subject to immediate arrest if deviant behavior is detected.

Control is imposed by marshaling near inconceivable amounts of information, which are now routinely collected and scanned for their resemblance to various patterns. From common patterns of consumer purchases and preferences targeted by advertisers, to patterns of financial transactions that implicate drug dealers and criminals, to patterns of fund transfers that suggest terrorist financing.

These patterns have proven adept at predicting behavior, and knowing the intimate details of a person's life is tantamount to knowing a person's thoughts, beliefs, and activities. Corporations in the US are freely able to collect and manipulate veritable mountains of personal data, and transform that data into predictions of the consumers behavior with manic enthusiasm. Bank cards, credit and debit cards, shopper loyalty cards, RFID tags(radiofrequency identification microchips) embedded in a host of products, all yield an ocean of information. Time and type of purchase, amounts spent, your location at a particular time and place, your patterns of shopping, all this and more becomes a corporate dossier or on every consumer. This is then matched up with other records gathered either openly or surreptitiously. Credit history, medical and dental records, property ownership, insurance records, auto registration and driver's records, court records or criminal history, utility usage and payments, travel records, book purchases and library selections, and many more types of information are compiled and collated for easy scanning and use.

These dossiers are purchased by the US government, and their combined with a massive database of info gathered by the NSA(National Security Agency). This is a staggeringly large horde of data, the raw product of every phone conversation, every e-mail, all Internet searches, and a significant portion of all online activity, hundreds of billions of messages and exchanges daily. A software program called Echelon is known to perform this amazing(and monstrous) feat. The data is then sifted and important bits plucked out for the attention of higher ups in the NSA.

The resulting super dossier is enhanced with yet more data; a person's movements in real time, culled from tracking cell phone GPS monitors in cars (such as the "On-Star" tracking "service"), RFID chip data, public and private surveillance cameras, and so on.

All this information provides a detailed profile of your life history, your preferences, likes and dislikes, habits, relationships, and the minutiae of daily life. This is scanned and analyzed by "intelligent agents", also called 'bots', software programs that imitate brain activity. They are able to learn from experience, and constantly search for patterns that are abnormal or revealed deviance. Bots have long been used by insurance companies to sniff out fraud and by investment banks searching for market patterns. Most are familiar with bots through services like Jeeves, the track every online purchase and notify you when an item you favor goes on sale, or services that customize searches for information. Whatever patterns these bots discover are added to your digital dossier, from a tendency towards overextending your credit, to sexual deviancy, to radical leanings in politics, all is revealed.

As if this weren't enough, the US government is envious of the "Ring of Steel" the British government has in place in London; over a million virtually indestructible cameras surveilling over 98% of public spaces, networked together and monitored from a central facility. The images are tracked from camera to camera, and are matched with software for facial recognition, gait recognition, thermal imaging, and other technologies to recognize individuals, in turn linked with databases of images of known persons. Hundreds of or thousands of people new to the system are added daily. Michael Bloomberg, Mayor of New York City, has announced his intention to build a similar ring of steel in New York after the Times Square bomb attempt provided a likely excuse. As is generally the case with repressive measures, other major US cities will soon follow in installing networks of cameras in public places to track their populations.

The US government already uses satellites and software programs similar to Google Earth(available to the public, where one is able to zoom in on any spot on the planet, and see what's happening in that neighborhood), to track and observe people all over the world, limited only by the time it takes to sift through the immense volume of information it collects.

This is not a nightmarish fantasy or some sci-fi vision of the future. This is the current, normal level of surveillance applied to US citizens and residents. A huge dossier or in cyberspace follows a person's every purchase and activity, exposing one's hopes, dreams, aspirations, one's weaknesses, and one's intimate relations with others.

Should you become an object of suspicion, however, a whole new level of intrusive surveillance can be put in place with ease. This includes such devices as x-ray scatter machines which enable one to see through walls and other solid obstacles; instruments that can listen in on conversations in rooms from miles away by converting the vibrations in window glass into sound; the use of cell phones, which can be activated surreptitiously and remotely, both for eavesdropping and for covert viewing, if the cell phone has a built in camera, as the majority now do. There are hundreds, possibly thousands of other such devices of this nature, designed to enable government agents whether in intelligence agencies, police, or the alphabet soup of law enforcement agencies, to secretly hear, see, and follow a person at a distance without that person ever suspecting they are being observed.

And just what is the point of it all? Certain programs hint at it, like the Total Information Awareness System (after a public outcry, it was renamed the Terrorism Information Awareness System, but was otherwise unchanged), whose goal is to track and hopefully predict the actions of anyone deemed

suspicious by the US government. The secret, ultimate purpose of the whole scheme is to control every person on the planet, and to manipulate them in ways favorable to US government policy. Failing that, the minimum goal endlessly striven for, is to continue the pattern of US exploitation of the world's natural resources; maintain the grossly unequal distribution of wealth, keep the poor powerless to affect any meaningful change, all for the benefit of the elite owning both US corporations and government (insofar as there is any difference between the two).

The elite themselves are not a monolithic group, of course, and many within it desire a fairer and more decent world, and the end of totalitarian government control. But the majority of the elite support the US government and its policies, and actively aided and abetted in its many crimes.

400 families in the US on assets equal to the combined assets of the bottom 20 million. 49,000 people in the US on assets worth more than \$100 million. Within this select minority are those who effectively own the state. Add to these perhaps another 50,000 crucial functionaries – CEOs and CFOs of corporations, top managers and those in key executive positions within government bureaucracies, including members of Congress and Senate, their staffers, top military brass, and those in crucial posts in academia, the media, and so forth, and you have the core of those who direct the activities of the US government.

They maintain their control and a myriad of ways; a complex system of rewards and punishments that enmesh the entire world. Abroad, the US imposes its will directly to the threat or use of force, relying on its gargantuan military machine, with Army bases around the world, a vast naval force patrolling the seas, and an Air Force controlling the skies – all the trappings of Empire, without the name. It's on a permanent war footing, forever fighting a war against weaker states on one pretense or another, in order to frighten other nations into compliance with US interests. The US furthers its foreign ambitions indirectly through financial and military aid as a form of bribery, and manipulation of the agendas of international agencies such as the WTO, the UN, the IMF, and the World Bank (to name a few) as a more subtle method of coercion.

At home, the US government rules directly with the threat and use of force via the machinery of state repression – what might be termed the prison industrial complex; courts, law enforcement agencies, and the swollen American version of the gulag archipelago. The state rules indirectly through kind of bribery of the populace – the beguiling carrot of comfort and convenience, and through mind control by the media with all its tricks, distortions, and power to influence and persuade.

Thus the US uses means both obvious and subtle to perpetuate its dominance. Those who obey and help the US are rewarded with money, goods and services, weaponry, praise, and – for a privileged few, fame and fortune. Those who disobey or threaten the US are punished whenever possible with all the horrors of war (violence, torture, and death), with misery and imprisonment, poverty and outcast status, every effort being made to keep these dissenters voiceless and powerless.

As Stanley Diamond put it, conquest abroad and repression at home. Fear and greed, the two forces driving capitalist markets, are also the tools used by the state to rule. Threaten the world with violence, frighten and coerce them into doing your will. Where this is impractical or prohibitively expensive, entice them into compliance with the offer of gain, appealing to their materialistic urges.

Second only to the brute power of military might, the propaganda/media organs are the decisive factor in the machinery of power. The media help implant beliefs and repetitively reinforce them. Owned by the same corporations that dominate the government, their interests neatly coincide. Nine vast, bloated

corporations control over 85% of the US media markets (and over 60% of foreign English-speaking media markets), including the content providers, distributors, and producers of television, movies, radio, music, publishing and book stores, magazines and newspapers.

This incredible concentration of power to shape the opinions and thoughts of the population is put to uses as simple as they are insidious. First and foremost, the media work constantly to betray US corporations and government as benign entities, generous, well-meaning, promoting “progress” and higher standards of living in the US and around the world. The fact that this is a mirage, proven daily by events to be a lie, matters not at all. The destruction of nature, atrocities and war crimes against innocent peoples, corporate robbery and corruption, government viciousness and incompetence, are whitewashed as excusable “mistakes” and “accidents”; one-off errors that won't be repeated, despite the glaringly obvious truth that these crimes are typical behavior, not isolated instances of wrongdoing.

Corporations may regularly cheat, abuse, even maim and kill their customers and employees; they may rape and poison the natural world; may act like psychopaths in pursuit of profit and power, but these activities are treated as “un-newsworthy”. Where corporate sponsored disasters and criminal acts are so terrible they can be ignored, they are downplayed, and reports are kept focused solely on the immediate problem. Well the culprits of the moment may be condemned, the system itself is never questioned.

Likewise, government atrocities and evils are ignored for as long as possible, and when the cries of outrage become deafening, are treated as minor errors that “inevitably” occur as the US brings “democracy and freedom” to every corner of the world. Orwell's brilliant coining of the term “doublethink” (where people are trained to believe two diametrically opposed things at the same time, though only one can be true), is here demonstrated. For example, the US may attack a neutral country, murdered tens or hundreds of thousands of civilians, destroy the nation's infrastructure, wipe out the military and police, create chaos and misery for millions, and then make the patently absurd claim it does so on behalf of the people it maims and murders!

The actual reason for the attack may be to gain control of some natural resource it wants to plunder, such as oil, or it may be to eliminate some threat to US corporate interests, such as an indigenous freedom movement proposing nationalization of minds or utility companies. The intervention, however vicious it may be, is always painted as an attempt to make the world “freer”, better, more peaceful. This is classic doublethink, with Americans trained to believe the government's intentions are good, while simultaneously knowing the government's actions are evil.

The media must therefore work overtime to promote the false belief that capitalism is fair, that corporations can be trusted, and that government intervention – domestic and foreign, is a positive force.

The media's second and equally important function is to instill the belief that materialism is the key to happiness. Again, the fact that this is demonstrably false is irrelevant. Though everyone knows subconsciously that human relationships are the source of happiness – love and friendship, sharing, creativity and connection, the media does its best to manipulate and distort this fact so as to support consumption.

The message is repeated so often and in so many ways the indisputable truth that the message is a lie is papered over and forgotten. If you buy this, you'll be loved! If you buy that, you'll be treated as someone special. Buy things, and you'll be happy. The media betrays relationships as depending on things, with giftgiving an essential element, where his real relationships flourish with intimacy and

attention, gifts that cannot be bought. The media mantra of endless shopping and buying is a recipe for indebtedness and alienation.

The astounding size of the budgets devoted to advertising by corporations and government make plain how crucial – and difficult – this brainwashing process is. Consumers are harmless, they are the ideal citizens, obeying the authorities, numbly laboring for wages which are then spent with corporations for goods and services (often unnecessary and superfluous ones), busy pursuing an advertiser's vision of paradise. It keeps people focused on apolitical activities that benefit corporations, and is an effective strategy for creating a pliable, distracted population. That it also creates a spiritually empty life, devoid of meaning, absent of the relationships they can bring true happiness, is conveniently ignored.

A third and vital function of the media is to distract people from the crises which surround them. There are so many evils and perversities bred by the system known as industrial capitalism it's difficult to list them all. Some of the worst include government oppression of the poor and minorities, and the criminalization of poverty; the government crushing of civil liberties; corporations squandering the Earth's resources and poisoning the world with chemical toxins and pesticides; the diversion of the nations wealth away from the needs of the people and into the coffers of the military-industrial and prison industrial complexes, and many more.

These evils have terrible effects on the vast majority of the population. These include a tragic and enormous (and entirely avoidable) increase in cancers, birth defects, and other diseases due to environmental pollutants; tens of millions of broken lives filled with anguish and despair due to needless poverty; the mass extinction of plant and animal species as rapidly shrinking wilderness is made barren of life, and so on.

Innumerable problems crying out for solutions are ignored by the news media, or are given a brief, sensationalist glance, and are then dismissed with the unspoken assumption that there's nothing to be done, that change is impossible or impractical, and that corporations and government must be allowed to have their way regardless of the consequences.

The crises the news media are willing to examine in detail are ones that don't have any relevance or impact on the status quo. Plane crashes, train wrecks, auto accidents, murders, celebrity scandals, anything that doesn't question the system, or at worst suggests that bits and pieces need fixing but that the whole is solid. Attention is rigidly concentrated on immediate dangers and problems, deliberately excluding any analysis of long-term effects.

A celebrity dying of cancer will receive attention; the cluster of cancers in the celebrity's neighborhood due to a nearby toxic waste site will not. A politician caught taking bribes will receive attention; the corrupt process of lobbying and the trade-off between politicians and corporate campaign donors will not. The mass firing of teachers due to cuts in education budgets will receive attention; the governments starving of educational budgets so as to expand the military, the cops, courts and prisons will not. Examples of this kind of selective vision could be multiplied endlessly, the common denominator is the media's refusal to examine causes, and its insistence on viewing effects as isolated cases unrelated to a larger picture.

There are many other types of subterfuge the media uses to keep the masses in their place, but all these are the ruses of the news media, a narrow specialty designed to confuse and fool people able to think independently. The rest of the media – the majority of it, is one in nor must sales tool, dedicated to celebrating consumerism and the worship of youth and beauty. Its purpose is to distract the general

public from “serious” issues, keep them amused and fascinated by spectacles and bizarre ephemera. Sports, celebrities, and sexual titillation, these are the mainstays of the media's campaign of diversion serving corporate interests by promoting materialism, and an obsession with self-image.

By such stratagems the population is pacified and tamed. For most, trapped by debt and lifestyle into wage slavery, struggling to pay for the plethora of things they've been convinced they “need”, co-opted by the system of rewards and punishments imposed on them by corporations and government, there is no visible means of escape. The masses may dream of liberation, may even dally with it, as do the poor through drugs and the middle class through cyberspace, but in their hearts they know that they are at the mercy of the machine. Worse, most understand that political solutions are no solution at all against the system that offers only false choices, forever yielding more of the same. The fascist status quo wins by inertia and overwhelming force, and by relentlessly destroying any alternative to its plans for power.

Those who seek a different way of life, anticorporate activists, dissenters and dreamers of all kinds are harassed, marginalized, and ostracized by the powers that be, or are co-opted and used as symbols of the states ability to change and embrace new ideas. Dissenters are hunted and persecuted, with the hope they will give up and assimilate into the totalitarian mainstream.

So what is to be done? How can one live with integrity, and overcome the fascist nightmare into which the US has dissented as ethics and morality demand?

These questions will be addressed in part two fascist America the path to freedom.