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Gretzky
in

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Soviet Nationals vs. Philadelphia Flyers

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Disoriented?

Students' Orientation Services (SORSE) is a service provided by your students' union. If you have any questions that experienced students might be able to answer, come and see Deb or Jim in rm. 278, SUB. Free information kits available.

Also, those who are **mature students** might visit Student Affairs at 225 Athabasca Hall and counselling of a more personal nature is available at Student Counselling, 102 Athabasca, Student Help, 248 SUB. Information about writing and study skills available from Student Affairs.

Make the most of your educational opportunity and make it easier on yourself by taking advantage of these services.

Orwell's Armageddon - Beware of Big Brother!

Whatever happened to the Free World? No matter how much we point our accusatory fingers at the abuses of civil rights in the USSR and Latin America, there is one fact that should trouble all of us as Canadians (and Albertans): we have considerably less freedom than we used to have. Gradually, but fundamentally, our rights are being taken away from us, without much more than a whimper of protest — with the notable exception of the anti-nuclear campaign.

Such a statement, you might say, is outrageous. In fact, the process carries an aura of inevitability because of the arms build-up. The latter has led to an increasing erosion of democratic rights. Take, for example, the installation of a cruise missile at Cold Lake. Now, you may agree or disagree about this particular venture; but, were you, as Albertans, consulted about it? Did any national or federal leaders approach provincial constituents, much less residents of the Cold Lake region, and ask them what they thought about such a move; a move, it should be added, which affects dramatically the lifestyles and security of everyone in this province.

Of course you were not consulted and the reason provided for this is that the defence needs of this country must necessarily be kept secret: that there are certain areas of government policy that cannot be disclosed to the public. This is acceptable up to a point. But it is clear now that the public has a right to know what the government or military establishment is doing when it so closely affects its welfare. Similarly, it has a right to a voice in many of the military decisions that are currently being made in its name. The nuclear proliferation can be dealt with first. There is no point in pretending that this cannot concern us — to do otherwise would be to commit political suicide. In the past, whenever one of the so-called democratic governments has acceded to the will of the military, huge casualties have resulted. Now, with the new phenomenon of the military — to be more accurate, the American military led by the Pentagon — dictating policy to the governments of Canada and the U.S.A., the chances of destruction are much greater than they have ever been in the past.

The most obvious question is what exactly are we fighting for. If the answer, as it might be, is the freedom to live in a democratic society, there are two immediate responses: first, any nuclear confrontation would result in the total destruction of society as we know it, i.e. it would destroy irrevocably everything we are supposedly working toward. But the second response presents the paradox. If we do live in a democratic society, then why are the people unable to stop the nuclear proliferation. Because, undoubtedly there are many who are terrified about the future. The demonstrations in favour of disarmament rank among the largest demonstrations ever held, anywhere. Anyone who imagines that the Russians are immune to this same fear is living in a dreamworld.

I am obliged, reluctantly, to admit that whatever agreement has been made between the U.S. government and the Pentagon, it included one proviso: that the people were not to be allowed to assert an opinion on this matter. Instead, the president appears on television to announce that the Russians have taken the lead in the arms build-up, in order to justify an almost-criminal defence budget. (At the same time, of course, this same president authorizes huge grain sales to the USSR, that enable that country to maintain its investments in defence at the expense of consumer goods; so much for straight talking.) In connection with the renewed cold war between the superpowers, the tremendous advance in technology made over the past decade — the implications of which will be discussed in a moment — allow a more accurate impression of Soviet manoeuvres. The invasion of Afghanistan, for example, was predicted a full two months before it occurred. Yet the people who make the political-military decisions manage to create a veritable "bogyman" out of the Russian bear, a foe who moves slyly, secretly to an unknown goal. What nonsense. It is unlikely that a bus moves on a Kharkiv street without being carefully monitored by U.S. satellites. The people, kept in ignorance, are also being carefully duped through the information that is revealed to them.

Yes, you might say, but if this were so we would find out about it through the newspapers and television. Not so. In fact, newspapers and television are the main instruments of the propaganda that is being fed to us. Ronald Reagan, carefully groomed, appears regularly on most of our screens and although there may be the odd programme that presents an alternative viewpoint, one can say, in general, the TV stations perpetuate the prevailing line, i.e. that it's us against them. The radio is now a lesser medium, but no doubt many Edmonton listeners heard our venerable mayor announce that not a single Edmonton citizen was opposed to nuclear power. Our concern should be manifested not because he made such a statement — the mayor has never been known for intelligent remarks — but

because he made it as a matter of course, almost certain that the statement would not be refuted. As for the press, the two Edmonton newspapers are both owned by chains: one, by Southam, which would not allow its subsidiaries to advocate any policy that was likely to affect its continuing journalistic hegemony; and the other, the Sun syndicate, which is well known for its conservatism and regressive attitudes in general. Both newspapers faithfully maintain the Pentagon line, as do the vast majority of their columnists.

Some readers might object here that although some democracy has been curtailed by the lack of a free press and the military build-up that ignores the wishes of the people, that people are still free to believe whatever they want. Perhaps. But they are not permitted to freely display such beliefs. Take, for example, the Communist Party of Canada (not my favourite institution, I hasten to add). Every member of that party has been filed on computers right down to his shoe size. If the argument is made that these people represents a threat to the nation's security, we have to recall that with the increase in technology, the chances are that already the vast majority of Canadian residents are filed in the same way, whether they know it or not and regardless of whether they would agree to such surveillance. The difference is only that in the USSR, you know you are being watched, here it probably would come as a surprise to most of us.

We should ask ourselves one question in this regard. If we were members of the police or security forces, and had such equipment at our disposal, how would we choose the people to be monitored. We might begin with the communists, known criminals, even citizens with minor police records, but within a few months, the process would undoubtedly mushroom to include anyone who displayed the slightest tendency toward deviation. Such methods inevitably lead to excess, and now, truly, Big Brother is watching us.

The improved technology leads to the general question of science. Since science is the province of specialists, should it be left solely to those specialists or should it be a part of the democratic system? We have heard a lot of nonsense recently about the relative merits of arts and sciences on campus, but the question here is whether a layman elected democratically could make decisions in the scientific world. My view is that this has to be attempted. Like most fields, science can get out of control, and scientists should at least be made to explain the benefits of some of their inventions. One wonders, for example, how the inventor of the neutron bomb would have justified his invention. The truth is that he didn't have to. Most of us only found out about it several months after it was ready.

There is another aspect to this erosion of our freedoms, namely the country's power structure. Perhaps there never was a time when one's electoral vote was of major significance. It is arguable that, once elected, a government would not necessarily adhere to campaign promises. What is clear, however, is that, today, the authority of the elected government — whether federal or provincial — has dwindled alarmingly. This is the era of the multinational company, a mysterious body that operates under the dubious title of "free enterprise." I say "dubious" because such corporations, which own at least 75 per cent of the natural resources of this province are answerable to nothing and no one, save their own boardrooms in Washington and New York. This is capitalism gone mad. I am aware, of course, that Albertans voted overwhelmingly for a government that declared its support for such enterprises. But my view is that the people really know little about what is happening to their natural resources.

Let me explain this further. Many people now are unemployed. Even the most fervent advocates of capitalism admit that the system is in a state of crisis. Canadians feel powerless to do anything about this, with justice. The fact is that the crisis is something external, and it is an integral part of this loss of control over their destinies that is plaguing the Canadian people. In order to be competitive, capitalism must cut its losses, including its excess labor force. Given the advance of technology, the chances of the unemployed finding work again are very slim if this process is allowed to continue. Nevertheless, it is useful to find a suitable scapegoat for our economic troubles: some, especially in this province, blame the Trudeau government, or socialism — sometimes the two are made synonymous. Alas, this has little or nothing to do with it, and Trudeau's plea for the working force to work harder is pathetic proof that he also is a victim of forces beyond his control. The simple truth is that the multinationals now run this country and the democratically elected government plays only a secondary role in the face of vast forces it cannot control.

Beware friends; you and other Canadians are losing your civil rights. These are hard won rights, which will be difficult to retrieve. Perhaps, though, you do not wish to retrieve them. Perhaps you are content to be a part of the American-Canadian establishment, the conservative press, your actions closely followed whenever you come close to breaching the official line. Well that is fair enough. Your mecca, the nuclear cataclysm is just around the corner. Others, however, would like to believe that we can still have an influence over our destinies through the democratic process; that if the government, federal or provincial wishes to install a cruise missile at Cold Lake, let alone fire it, it should ask us first; that if we are to be documented by computers, we should likewise be asked first; that if a huge multinational company starts operations in this province, then the people of this province should have some say in this.

These, after all, are not revolutionary demands. I once thought they were our birthright, as fundamental rights now enshrined in our new constitution. It is high time to get democracy working again.

Brian Cohen, Grad Studies