

at the fringes of that system, underneath it, through its cracks as it seizes up and falls apart.

This transition may be painful or frightening, but it will not be difficult. We fear a high-tech police state because we have been taught to romanticize technology. But the airline hijackers used an early stone age invention called the "knife" to turn the 20th century's proudest jetliners and office towers against themselves. We don't have to agree with them to learn from them that people beat machines. Cameras and microchips are easier to fool than skilled people, and people who rely on cameras and microchips are no longer skilled. As radiation guns disperse protesters, the police behind the guns get weaker while the protesters get more resourceful.

It may not even come to that. If free counter-cultures have to survive as far-flung underground networks, risking death and prison to get necessities outside official channels, we will. But the center may not hold so strongly. When Rome fell, urban people moved to self-sufficient rural communities that the remaining Empire just left alone. We could do that well or even better, with whole cities or Indian reservations declaring and sustaining independence, or even with huge regions reshaping themselves into something like the vision the framers of the Constitution got from the Iroquois Confederacy: A totally bottom-up society, with no permanent military and no police above the local level, where "leaders" have no coercive power and "governments" only mediate disagreements, where full power, trust, and responsibility are given to all people by all people.

As long as it takes, we're going to do it, as sure as the grass cracks the pavement. As Leonard Cohen said: Democracy is coming to the USA.

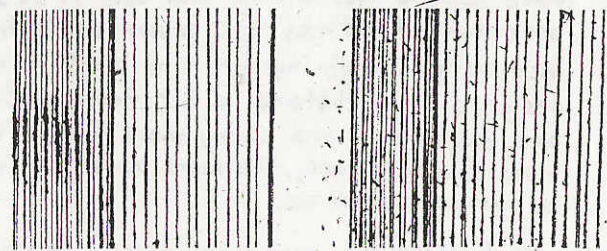


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The War Is For Your Freedom

15



Ancient Rome did not suddenly fall when the Visigoths sacked it. It declined for centuries before and decades after, so slowly that if you were living at the time it was hard to notice. The Visigoth army was not even especially violent. They came, they went, and life went on seemingly the same. But in hindsight this event marks the end of the Roman Empire because of its symbolic value: warlike enemies could come into the main city of a supposedly untouchable nation and do as they pleased.

The American Empire is over. Its machinery keeps mindlessly running, but whatever was holding it up is gone. Remain at your desk or run down the stairwell.

We're in a new game now, but what? For fifty years it has been possible to hijack a giant plane and crash it into a giant building, but no one has even tried and failed. Suddenly someone has succeeded three times in an hour. If now, why not before? If not before, why now?

If we tell the story that the attack was planned by America-hating foreigners, then the answer is too easy: it's the natural result of a nation declining on the inside while abusing other nations on the outside. For decades the American military and CIA have been invading other countries, toppling democratic governments, installing right wing dictators, training and funding death squads and torturers, and supplying weapons to violent and aggressive nations, and the impulse to "punish" the USA has been growing.

Meanwhile, Americans have been made stupider and more apathetic by schools and news media carefully designed to make us easily ruled by corporations and the elite. And with the increasing concentration of wealth, the airline laborers who might have prevented these attacks are now

making far less in real dollars than they used to. And where these people used to work for humans, they now work for corporations, which do not inspire or motivate people no matter how many rights they buy.

And as the people in positions to stop these attacks have become less willing and able to do so, the destructive potential of attacks has grown as technologies have grown increasingly high-impact. The World Trade Center was designed to withstand a hit from a Boeing 707, but jets are bigger now and carry more fuel. The more powerful we make our machines, the more powerfully our machines can be turned against us.

For decades, occupants of the USA have been unwitting participants in and beneficiaries of murder and exploitation all over the world. Now it's our turn to be the bewildered objects of violence. This is not "justice," just more stupidity. All humans are doing the best we know how and nobody deserves to be bombed. Violence never helps the attackers, only sucks them deeper into a violent reality. But it may help us, by making us aware of the violence built into the system we've been living in, and leading us to abandon that system.

This is not about avoiding "guilt." It's about paying attention and adapting. Those of us who go to work in financial districts can now ask: "They pay me enough to do meaningless labor in a lifeless space, but do they pay me enough to risk death?" If attacks in the USA continue, more of us will adapt by quitting our jobs, by moving out of cities, by dropping out now that dropping out has obvious survival value.

This is not "giving in to terrorism." We gave in to terrorism in kindergarten when we learned to do whatever the teacher said under fear of punishment. By backing out of the dominant American economy, we are finally standing up to terrorism by refusing to stick our necks out for one violent system in its battle with another.

There may be a third violent system. Or there may not even be a second. At this time it is not clear whether factions within the US government merely ignored warnings of the attacks, or also suppressed warnings or even collaborated. If they did, it suggests an evil power so much deeper than big business and the military that it was willing to sacrifice the World Trade Center and some of the Pentagon for goals that boggle the imagination.

Still, these goals are not hard to guess, and they are the same whether the planner was Bin Laden or the New World Order or anyone we credit with intelligence: The attacks were calculated to spark World War III between the Western powers and the Islamic nations, possibly allied with China.

If the people of the world don't stop this war then tens of millions of us will die in a big distraction. The important war is the war over our freedom.

In the hours and days after the attacks, when the alphas on TV were not screeching monkeys flinging shit at the enemy tribe, they were reasonable-sounding "experts" suggesting that American society, one of the most centralized and alienating systems in history, where a greater proportion of the people are in prison than in any society ever, where most people not in prison are in highly structured school and wage labor worlds, where surveillance cameras and walk-through detectors are everywhere, where you can't get a job or a place to live without an invasive examination of your life history, where everyone has memorized a nine-digit federal identity number, where workplace stairwells are locked and doors require card keys, where school kids are arrested for squirt guns and suspended for critical expression — that this insanely restrictive and fear-worshipping society is actually unreasonably free and trusting, and that we need tighter security, stronger police and secret agents, more machines scrutinizing us and men with guns telling us what to do.

These people are subtle fanatics, like the fanatics who hijacked the airliners in that they dream of a perfectly controlled world enforced by the threat of violence. And these fanatics are all effectively collaborating: Now, with secret military units inside the USA spectacularly killing people, it will be politically difficult to oppose frequent searches or face-recognition cameras or microchip implants, or to dissent from the dominant system. Once people give up their freedom it will be hard to get it back, and still the killing will continue.

Whether or not the USA gets broken from the outside by a vain ground war in Asia, it will continue to die and decay from the inside. But from this decay will come new life. People who believe in "America" can ask themselves what America was supposed to mean to them and whether something else can now better hold that meaning. People who believe in freedom will stop fighting for freedom within the dominant system and begin working to sustain freedom