

# power to the imagination!

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The Revolution continues not to happen, despite the presence of many revolutionary organizations in this country. Or is the presence of these groups actually inhibiting revolutionary activity here in the US? I don't want to examine this point too deeply now, but I do wish to address the first point above, and that is the failure of allegedly revolutionary organizations to gain any following amongst the masses they always discuss at their meetings and in their literature.

The main activity of most revolutionary groups is to educate people about the need to rise up and overthrow the capitalist system which oppresses them. No doubt, they are sincere in this desire to reach out and organize the masses.

Despite appearances to the contrary, most people are too cynical to blindly follow self-appointed leaders — unless they see there is something immediately rewarding to them, personally, in doing so. The difficult part for the revolutionaries is not the actual educational aspects of this form of organizing, but is to be found in the challenge of educating people while not awakening in them a sense of empowerment.

Sure, every revolutionary group would like to see people arise and set alight the Powers That Be — but only if the resulting revolution would result in the rise to power of their revolutionary organization. To this regard, they are not to be seen as enemies of the system, but as yet another faction in contention for State power. The revolutionaries don't want to smash the State; they want to **be** the State. This is why so few people — college students, mostly — fall for their schemes.

It's all but impossible for people to live in this era and not have an opinion about the legitimacy of authority. Almost everyone has run afoul of some code of conduct, law or regulation at some point in their lives, and almost every one of these instances very likely convinced the transgressors of the unfairness of the enforcing authority's power, or the idiocy of the rule/law/code transgressed. With few exceptions, authoritative power is seen as something rather arbitrary by most people.

This distrust of authority can become a knee-jerk reaction that is difficult to unlearn, as it tends to burn itself deeply into the psyche of the person who it has transgressed. Why do you think we have to attend school for so long? Definitely, it is because we must be trained in obedience. This is why so many kids detest school. They do not desire to submit to an authority that is pre-existent, which they were given no voice in establishing.

Sometime in a person's life, she must learn to handle the fact that she *must* recognize some entity's power over her, whether that power emanates from a religion, school, family, or workplace. This generally does not make the person happy. To most people, it is humiliating.

Looking for a job, for instance, is possibly the least favorite activity most people experience during their lifetimes. Since almost all of us are forced to work by the economic structure society imposes upon us, we manage to struggle through the pain and humiliation as best we can, often with some combination of booze, drugs, pharmaceuticals, religion and sex.

And when we hear someone speak about the need for revolution in our country, even when sympathetic to the message, folks generally tend to hope that someone else will take up the challenge, seeing as how they don't have the time or energy, or think they don't have the strength and courage needed to fight against the authorities. This is the weakness the revolutionary groups seek out in their intended victims. If there is a general feeling of something being very wrong in our society, but people feel helpless in the face of the overwhelming task of overthrowing the social order, the revolutionary group has at least a slight chance to convert some of the population into followers.

But, here lies the trick: how does one awaken another person's sense of indignation at the ills of society, while maintaining that person's willingness to submit to the group's purpose? It would be so much easier for the revolutionaries if they could hypnotize their intended followers into accepting the group's leadership. This is, of course, precisely what the revolutionaries attempt to do.

By ceaselessly bleating the same slogans, the group can entrap their intended victims into believing that their group is much different than the many other tiny revolutionary groups. Some gullible people will accept the group's message and begin to adopt that party's doctrine. If the hypnosis doesn't take effect, the revolutionaries can always try to use guilt, try to shame people into submission. This works particularly well on people who were raised as Catholics, by the way.

It's quite a difficult trick, trying to move people to action, while keeping them docile enough to be herded around by the leadership of the revolutionaries. No wonder revolutionaries find so little success in these endeavors. Most revolutionary literature is more boring than can be tolerated. And it is often written in some obscure idiom that is only decipherable to the initiated, much like the Bible. Indeed, the revolutionaries often offer the same thing as the bible-thumpers: salvation!

By joining their movement, people are told, together they can save the Nation, the Earth, the Blue Footed Booby – depending on the focus of the group. Still, there's that knee-jerk reaction to authority that most Americans never seem to fully outgrow.

Why awaken to one scam, just to be lulled to sleep again by a different one? Why choose Boss 13 over Boss A? This changing-of-the-guard has happened so often that its futility is glaringly obvious, even though this is not bluntly stated in textbooks. The combination of boring obscurity and the spectre of yet another authoritarian regime the wannabe revolutionary groups represent is not a winner in many people's hearts and souls. In a nation obsessed by the mythology of self-reliance, it's difficult to sell doctrines which require blind obedience. Not to the people most likely to arise with the rage needed to achieve any drastic changes in the systems that oppress us. In the marketplace of ideas, then – although the System gets much of the blame for what is going wrong – the revolutionary's attempt to take over State power, rather than overthrow the System and disperse power into the population, does not gain a wide following. The revolutionaries are

content to sit on the sidelines of history, and only make a fuss when some weakness in the System presents itself – like the current economic depression.

Inevitably, they will attract a number of people with their own ideas about what should be done about the situation at hand, and the revolutionaries will patiently explain that only *their* leadership can provide the proper solutions. Maybe not in this lifetime, though.

During the Bush II regime, Junta leaders demanded that leftists, environmentalists, and scientists never condemn the American Way of Life. That is to say, they were willing to go to war in order to secure oil and gas for Americans to use for whatever purpose they desired. As long as American citizens are willing to send their children to war in distant lands to ensure the flow of petrochemicals to the Fatherland, we can rest assured in knowing that there will be plenty of gas for our commutes to work, trips to the mall, and riding lawnmower races. Rather than criticizing consumers about the incredible amount of damage their lifestyles are inflicting upon the biosphere – as the revolutionaries often do – the Bush Junta insisted that it was inexcusable to suggest that the American Way of “Life” was in any way wrong. Which message do you think most people wanted to hear? That their over-consumption of the world’s resources must end before we destroy our planet’s ability to support life, or that everything’s just fine the way it is? Yes, Americans, like most people, are guided more by immediate self-interest than they are by wisdom gained by introspection and observation. This is what the revolutionary groups recognize as well. They do not call for a drastic change in the way we live our lives, they just want the ability to collect and spend the tax money we pay to the government in order to do so. It would be wonderful to think that the emergence of radical environmentalism would have produced some sort of alternative vision for our collective future at this point in the (end)game, but it hasn’t – and perhaps can’t.

Here we are, 30-odd years after the first Earth Day, and the most extreme change most people can envision in their lives is to drive hybrid cars to their wretched, demeaning jobs.

Youth are at least acknowledging the horrors they will have to face during their lifetimes, but even though they are questioning the consumerist lifestyle, what they generally come up with is more of the same – like riding bikes to their wretched, demeaning, collectively-owned-and-managed jobs, with some recycling thrown in along the way.

It’s clear to me that what we are suffering from is a failure of imagination. We cannot envision a world, or a way of life, that is vastly different (personally rewarding, nurturing, co-operative, gentle on our planet) because it is beyond the reach of our imagination.

At least part of the blame for this is the prevalence of Pragmatism in most educated people’s minds. Pragmatism is a way of thinking that is meant to defeat imaginative thinking and stifle creativity. We are told to be “practical” or “realistic.” This is a way of thinking that is inherently submissive. It is how a slave justifies her continued obsequience to her master, or a person trapped in an abusive relationship rationalizes her consent to remain in the relationship. Pragmatism discards the immense possibilities for the future in favor of those more immediately obtainable.

In this era of dwindling resources, Pragmatism is the logic of gradual, mass suicide, which rejects life and its infinite potential. Few of us find any meaning, comfort, or reward in our present lives, yet we cling to them. It’s all we know. Pragmatically thinking, there are powerful forces in place – economics, religion, police, and military, to name a few – which enforce consumerism, to ensure we do not wander astray of the Ruling Powers’ plans for our lives. This is a philosophy of fear. We are afraid of what will happen to us if we turn away from economics as our source of survival. We are afraid of how the police will treat us. We are afraid of the concentration camps

and prisons our government is busy building to contend with the future unrest which will arise as the economy continues to take more from the majority of the population and hands it over to those already massively wealthy. But, by abandoning the workers here in favor of cheaper labor overseas, the Ruling Powers have left us little choice but to look for answers elsewhere, often in black markets. Their economic models just do not work, and require government intervention every now and then in order to continue to exist.

While preaching to American voters that it is tragically inappropriate – even evil – to suggest the government provide healthcare to its people (the way almost every nation on Earth already does), the public mouthpieces of the monied elite demand taxpayer money to protect their investment swindles. When the current economic meltdown began to spiral out of control, the voting public expressed their disapproval for any sort of bailout for the embezzlers and con-men responsible for the mess. Most public officials acknowledged that their constituents were voicing their opposition to such subsidies by a margin of 10-1. Yet there was never even a hint of doubt that the swindlers would get the funds they demanded. The needs and opinions of the general public mean nothing to the people in power in this country. Money – huge, mountainous piles of money, inaccessible to the vast majority of the population – is what this economy is all about.

And where is the outrage over this debacle – the greatest single instance of theft in recorded history? The public has moved on to other issues, mostly because they have to work so much harder in order to maintain their standard of living. Also, many of them were suckered into believing that a changing of the guard in the White House could potentially lead to a re-assessment of priorities by the government. What most people desire is a fix to the economic ills the nation is experiencing. They want what they see on TV. They desire to purchase the good things in life – a home and everything that makes a home life comfortable and desirable. They want social change without having to sacrifice their privileged positions as first world consumers in order to achieve it. If we are not capable of envisioning a lifestyle vastly different from the one handed down to us, or the one depicted in advertisements and sitcoms, it's because any sort of alternative vision of how to organize our lives has not been presented to us.

The one model we have now (Work or Starve!) was originally forced on people through overwhelming military force. Where people did not acquiesce to such a lifestyle, campaigns of genocide were – and still are to this day – conducted until the resisters are unable to continue with their ways of providing for themselves outside of Western economies. Instead of radically transforming our lives so that we can meet our needs without over-taxing what our environment can provide for us, even the Visionaries among us can only seem to envision more of the same – only “New and Improved,” or “Sustainable!” This society is horribly sick and twisted.

Even now, as our elected (or self-appointed) leaders demand human sacrifice (the war in Iraq, the War on Drugs, etc.) to the god of the marketplace, many people refuse to question the values that shape our society. And how can we, when so many of us require pharmaceuticals, booze or other coping mechanisms in order to function in our day-to-day roles?

Our consumer-driven way of life is destroying us as human beings as well as our planet's ability to support life, yet we still reproduce our places within it, day after wretched day. What the fuck is wrong with us?

This may sound silly, but it's something that bothered me as a child and pisses me off to this day: Some of the iconic cartoons I grew up watching on Saturday morning served to re-enforce consumerism in the viewers by presenting it as both natural and never-changing. From the Flintstone's Stone-Age to the futuristic lifestyle of the Jetsons, the lives depicted were little different

from the lives being lived by the viewers. The level of technology may have changed from one show to the next, but the consumerist lifestyle was never any different: Work, buy, try to get ahead, buy some more! How can we break out of this cycle, when every element of society forces us to accept it as some sort of natural occurrence?

It's not enough that some of us attempt to think outside of the proverbial box. We have to think beyond the means used to produce boxes.

The imperative we face now – those of us who can see beyond the mechanisms of the Ruling Powers – is to enact our visions of very different ways of relating to the places where we dwell. In order to do so, we must band together with strong-willed and like-minded people in order to produce working models of how we think life could be, were there not coercive forces severely limiting our options. It's also important that more than one model of a different society be created. There should be as many as there are people committed to making their visions manifest in reality. There are, after all, many different ecosystems here on Earth, and each provides different challenges for the people who desire to live within them, based on their unique attributes, as well as the amount of damage industrialism has inflicted upon them.

It is not difficult to live on this planet. It has nurtured an astonishing variety of such ecosystems capable of providing for every imaginable need a human population requires in order to thrive. Everything we need is available almost everywhere, if we only know where (and how) to look for it. The greatest danger and difficulty will be found in the struggle to rid ourselves of the control the Ruling Powers possess in enforcing their lifestyle upon the rest of us.

They will use every method of coercion and violence available to them to either force us back into the vast herd of their docile servants, or kill us if we will not be enslaved. As it stands now, they seem to be poised to jettison the bulk of humanity, as tremendous numbers of us are no longer required to fulfill their needs. To use the U.S. as just the most glaring example: Our standard of living has (just in my lifetime) gone from being equal to or above that of any nation on Earth to being “better than Somalia.” The U.S. ceased being a First World nation when it was crushed under the heel of the Reagan regime. And the bottom of this downward trend is nowhere to be seen. Food prices continue to rise, while people's ability to purchase food continues to erode, even among those still legally employed.

What we truly require in these times are courage and resolve.

We must turn away from slavish obsequience to this dead-end society. Since we are all but blind to any other vision of a society, there is no blueprint or pathway prepared for us to follow in order to establish a radically different method of conducting our lives. But we must turn away from the one we are trapped in now. In doing so, we will suffer – and not a little. But not to do so is suicide.

We can create options for ourselves and our offspring— human beings are clever and adaptable creatures – and we need to do it *immediately!*

The one issue that continually comes to my mind is the abolition of economics. At the very least, the use of money as a means of exchange and accumulation should be abandoned. There is absolutely no sane argument for continuing along that path. It has only brought about severe limitations in the way most people conduct their lives, while rewarding thieves, thugs, warlords and swindlers. If that is not readily apparent to you, you should remind yourself every day that during this economic debacle, where over one-third of America's accumulated wealth has evaporated in less than one year, the oil corporations and their subsidiaries are recording unprecedented profits. Then, ask yourself a question: Is this something worth the sacrifice of our children?

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