THE BOOK

IGNORANCE IS STRENGTH FREEDOM IS SLAVERY WAR IS PEACE

Emmanuel Goldstein THE BOOK

The Theory & Practice of Oligarchical Collectivism; or The Theory of Hierarchical Society

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Chapter 1: IGNORANCE IS STRENGTH

Throughout recorded time, and probably since the end of the Neolithic Age, there have been three kinds of people in the world, the High, the Middle, and the Low. They have been subdivided in many ways, they have borne countless different names, and their relative numbers, as well as their attitude toward one another, have varied from age to age; but the essential structure of society has never altered. Even after enormous upheavals and seemingly irrevocable changes, the same pattern has always reasserted itself, just as a gyroscope will always return to equilibrium, however far it is pushed one way or the other.

The aims of these three groups are entirely irreconcilable. The aim of the High is to remain where they are. The aim of the Middle is to change places with the High. The aim of the Low, when they have an aim – for it is an abiding characteristic of the Low that they are too much crushed by drudgery to be more than intermittently conscious of anything outside their daily lives – is to abolish all distinctions and create a society in which all men shall be equal. Thus throughout history a struggle which is the same in its main outlines recurs over and over again. For long periods the High seem to be securely in power, but sooner or later there always comes a moment when they lose either their belief in themselves, or their capacity to govern efficiently or both. They are then overthrown by the Middle, who enlist the Low on their side by pretending to them that they are fighting for liberty and justice. As soon as they have reached their objective, the Middle thrust the Low back into their old position of servitude, and themselves become the High. Presently a new Middle group splits off from one of

the other groups, or from both of them, and the struggle begins over again. Of the three groups, only the Low are never even temporarily successful in achieving their aims. It would be an exaggeration to say that throughout history there has been no progress of a material kind. Even today, in a period of decline, the average human being is physically better off than he was a few centuries ago. But no advance in wealth, no softening of manners, no reform or revolution has ever brought human equality a millimeter nearer. From the point of view of the Low, no historic change has ever meant much more than a change in the name of their masters.

By the late nineteenth century the recurrences of this pattern had become obvious to many observers. There then arose schools of thinkers who interpreted history as a cyclical process and claimed to show that inequality was the unalterable law of human life. This doctrine, of course, had always had its adherents, but in the manner in which it was now put forward there was a significant change. In the past the need for a hierarchical form of society had been the doctrine specifically of the High. It had been preached by kings and aristocrats and by the priests, lawyers, and the like who were parasitical upon them, and it had generally been softened by promises of compensation in an imaginary world beyond the grave. The Middle, so long as it was struggling for power, had always made use of such terms as freedom, justice and fraternity. Now, however, the concept of human brotherhood began to be assailed by people who were not yet in positions of command, but merely hoped to be so before long. In the past the Middle had made revolutions under the banner of equality, and then had established a fresh tyranny as soon as the old ones were overthrown. The new Middle groups in effect proclaimed their tyranny beforehand. The new movements, of course, grew out of the old ones

and tended to keep their names and pay lip-service to their ideology. But the purpose of all of them was to arrest progress and freeze history at a chosen moment. The familiar pendulum swing was to happen once more, and then stop. As usual, the High were to be turned out by the Middle, who would then become the High; but this time, by conscious strategy, the High would be able to maintain their position permanently.

The new spectacular doctrines arose partly because of the accumulation of historical knowledge, and the growth of the historical sense, which had hardly existed before the nineteenth century. The cyclical movement of history was now intelligible, or appeared to be so; and if it was intelligible, then it was alterable. But the principal, underlying cause was that, as early as the beginning of the twentieth century, human equality had become technically possible. It was still true that people were not equal in their native talents and that functions had to be specialized in ways that favored some individuals against others; but there was no longer any real need for class distinctions or for large differences of wealth. In earlier ages, class distinctions had been not only inevitable but desirable. Inequality was the price of civilization. With the development of machine production, however, the case was altered. Even if it were still necessary for human beings to do different kinds of work, it was no longer necessary for them to live at different social or economic levels. Therefore, from the point of view of the new groups that were on the point of seizing power, human equality was no longer an ideal to be striven after, but a danger to be averted. And so the idea of earthly paradise – which had haunted the human imagination for thousands of years – came into discredit at exactly the moment

when it became realizable. Every new political theory, by whatever name it called itself, led back to hierarchy and regimentation.

As compared with their opposite numbers in past ages, the new aristocracy was less avaricious, less tempted by luxury, hungrier for pure power, and, above all, more conscious of what they were doing and more intent on crushing opposition. This last difference was cardinal. By comparison with that existing today, all the tyrannies of the past were half-hearted and inefficient. The ruling groups were always infected to some extent by liberal ideas, and were content to leave loose ends everywhere, to regard only the overt act, and to be uninterested in what their subjects were thinking. Even the Catholic Church of the Middle Ages was tolerant by modern standards. Part of the reason for this was that in the past no government had the power to keep its citizens under constant surveillance. The invention of print, however, made it easier to manipulate public opinion, and the film and the radio carried the process further. With the development of television and the personal computer, and the technical advances which made it possible to receive and transmit simultaneously on the same instrument, private life came to an end. Every citizen, or at least every citizen important enough to be worth watching, could be kept for twenty-four-hours a day under the eyes of the police and in the sound of official propaganda, with all other channels of information closed. The possibility of enforcing not only complete obedience to the will of the State, but complete uniformity of opinion on all subjects, now existed for the first time.

Nothing the citizen does is indifferent or neutral. His or her friendships, hobbies, behavior towards his or her spouse or lover, facial expressions, gestures, characteristic movements, tones of

voice, words muttered while asleep – all are jealously scrutinized. Not only any actual misdemeanor, but any eccentricity, however small, any change of habits, any nervous mannerism that could possibly be the symptom of an inner struggle, is certain to be detected. Endless purges, arrests, tortures, imprisonments, and disappearances are inflicted both as punishments for crimes which have been actually committed and as the systematic wiping-out of any persons who might perhaps commit a crime at some time in the future.

And so today the determining factor in perpetuating a totally obsolete hierarchical society is the mental attitude of the ruling class itself. The problem, that is to say, is educational. It is a problem of continuously molding the consciousness both of the directing group and of the larger executive group that lies immediately below it. Skepticism and hesitancy among the ranks of the rulers must be prevented.

[As will be seen in Chapter 3, the best method of molding consciousness is continuous warfare.]

The consciousness of the masses [the proles], by contrast, needs only be influenced in a negative way. The masses could only become dangerous if the advance of industrial technique made it necessary to educate them more highly: but, since military and commercial rivalries are no longer of primary importance, the level of popular education is actually declining. What opinions the masses hold, or do not hold, is looked upon as a matter of indifference. They can be granted intellectual liberty because it is thought that they have no intellect. In a member of the ruling elite, on the other hand, not even the smallest deviation of opinion on the most unimportant subject can be tolerated.

All the beliefs, habits, tastes, emotions, mental attitudes that characterize our time are really designed to sustain the mystique of the rulers and prevent the true nature of present-day society from

being perceived. A member of the elite is required to have not only the right opinions, but the right instincts. Many of the beliefs and attitudes demanded of him or her are never plainly stated, and could not be stated without laying bare the contradiction at the heart of modern-day hierarchical society. To maintain this regime, a continuous alteration of the past is necessary. Both the elites and the masses will tolerate present-day conditions because they have no standards of comparison. Everyone must be cut off from the past, as well as from other countries, because it is necessary for one and all to believe that everyone is better off than his or her ancestors and that the average level of material comfort is rising. But by far the most important reason for the constant readjustment of the past is to safeguard the validity of the system itself. It is not merely that speeches, statistics, and records of every kind can and must be constantly brought up to date in order to show that the fundamental principles of society are sound. No change in these basic principles — work, commodity production, private property, the State — can ever be admitted. For to change one's mind is a confession of weakness, and weakness cannot be tolerated in a perfect system.

If human equality is to be forever averted — if the High, as we have called them, are to keep their places permanently — then the prevailing mental condition must be controlled insanity. And so, in our society, those who have the best knowledge of what is actually happening are also those who are furthest from seeing the world as it is. In general, the greater the understanding, the greater the delusion: the more intelligent, the less sane.

This is the inner meaning of the slogan IGNORANCE IS STRENGTH.

Chapter 2: Freedom is Slavery

Given this background, one could infer, if one did not know it already, the general structure of modern capitalist society. At the apex of the pyramid comes Big Brother. Big Brother – in whose person the functions of military commander-in-chief, political leader and religious figure are combined and integrated – is infallible and all-powerful. Compared to him, the average person [the human individual] is absolutely powerless, even nonexistent. Every success, every achievement, every victory, every scientific discovery, all knowledge, all wisdom, all happiness, all virtue, are held to issue directly from Big Brother's leadership and inspiration. Despite the fact that Big Brother is always watching everyone, nobody has ever seen him. Strictly speaking, Big Brother does not exist and thus can be replaced at any time. The personality and image of Big Brother is merely a composite of several unusually ambitious and charismatic people. He is a silent pair of eyes, an inscrutable face on billboards, televisions, and computer screens. We may reasonably be sure he will never die, and there is already considerable uncertainty among his many biographers as to when he was born. Big Brother is the spectacular guise in which the ruling class chooses to exhibit itself to the world. His function is to act as a literal focusing point for love, fear, and reverence - emotions which are more easily felt toward an individual than toward an organization.

It is important to note that Big Brother is not Big Father: The parallel with the Christian myth of Jesus Christ [the Son of God] is striking and intentional. Big Brother is not God the Patriarchal Creator; he was created by God the Father, as were we all. Fraternal and earthy, Big Brother fought the revolution

against the oppressive Father with us. If Big Brother rules with an iron fist and a boot upon the back of the neck, this is because he knows what is good for us, for all of us, because he is one of us. The immense global oligarchy at whose apex he stands is a collectivist one. Big Brother was democratically and unanimously elected, and is democratically and unanimously re-elected every time he runs for office. As long as there is a hierarchical society to be ruled, Big Brother will always be in office.

And yet capitalism – let us not forget that Big Brother presides over an integrated, global capitalist system – must be democratic, because it cannot be anything else. Capitalism could only grow hand-in-hand with democratic society. To deploy itself fully over the face of the whole planet, capitalism must even now permanently assure everyone of a choice, the outcome of which it has determined in advance. One must be able to choose between two indistinguishable politicians or two indistinguishable political ideologies because one chooses between two indistinguishable commodities. If there is no appearance of political democracy, there can be no sustainable capitalist system. This has been proven to be true by the permanent atrophy of the merchants in oriental despotism, by the ultimate defeat of Hitlerian and Mussolinian fascism, and by how poorly bureaucratic capitalism was managed by Stalinism.

Every commodity – whether it is a brand of shampoo or a brand of political ideology – fights for itself, cannot acknowledge the validity of the others, and attempts to impose itself everywhere as if it were the only one. What can be called the spectacle is the epic poem of this machinic struggle, an epic which cannot be concluded by the fall of any Troy. The spectacle does not sing the praises of men and their weapons, but of commodities and their passions. In this blind struggle, every com-

modity – pursuing its totalitarian passion – unconsciously realizes something higher, which is the becoming-world of the commodity, which is also the becoming-commodity of the world. Thus, by means of a rise of commodity logic, what's specific in the commodity [use-value] wears itself out in the fight, while the commodity-form [exchange-value] moves toward its absolute realization.

What hides under the spectacular oppositions between commodities and political ideologies is a unity of misery – the misery experienced by wage slaves, by people who have always worked and must continue to work for a living, no matter what product they buy or who wins the election. Behind the masks of total choice and total freedom, different forms of the same alienation and oppression confront each other – all of them built on real contradictions which are repressed. The fraud of satisfaction exposes itself by being replaced, by following changes of products and changes in the general conditions of production.

That which asserted its definitive excellence with perfect impudence nevertheless changes; it is the system alone which must continue. Stalin as well as the outmoded commodity are denounced precisely by those who imposed them. Every new lie of advertising is also an avowal of the previous lie. The fall of every figure or object with totalitarian power reveals the illusory community which had approved of it unanimously, and which had been nothing more than an agglomeration of fragments.

And so the satisfaction which no longer comes from the use of abundant commodities is now sought in the recognition of their value as commodities: the on-going use of totally unsatisfactory commodities becomes sufficient unto itself; the consumer is filled with religious fervor for the commodities' sovereign freedom. Waves of enthusiasm for a given product, supported and spread by all the

media of communication, are thus propagated with lightning speed. Just when the mass of commodities slides toward puerility, the puerile itself becomes a special commodity; this is epitomized by the gadget.

We can recognize a mystical abandon to the transcendence of the commodity in free gifts, such as I love Big Brother watches which are not bought but are included by advertisers with prestigious purchases. The fanatic who collects these watches, which have been manufactured precisely for collectors, produces a glorious sign of his or her presence among the faithful. The reified person advertises the proof of his or her intimacy with the commodity as such, and not merely with certain commodities. This fetishism — and Big Brother himself is nothing if not one big fetish-object — reaches moments of fervent exaltation similar to the ecstasies of the convulsions and miracles of the old religious fetishism. The only use which remains here is the fundamental use of submission to a higher, external power.

The unreal unity proclaimed by the society of the spectacle [the modern war-machine] masks the class divisions — Low, Middle and High — on which the real unity of the capitalist mode of production rests. What obliges workers to participate in the construction of the hierarchical world is also what separates them from it. What brings together people freed from the constraints of local and national boundaries is also what pulls them apart. What requires a more profound rationality is also what nourishes the irrationality of hierarchic exploitation and repression. What creates the abstract power of society creates its concrete unfreedom.

This is the inner meaning of the slogan Freedom is Slavery.

Chapter 3: WAR IS PEACE

War is no longer the desperate, annihilating struggle that it was in the early decades of the twentieth century. It is a warfare of limited aims between combatants who are unable to destroy one another, have no material cause for fighting, and are not divided any genuine ideological difference. This is not to say that either the conduct of war, or the prevailing attitude toward it, has become less bloodthirsty or more chivalrous. On the contrary, war hysteria is continuous and universal in all countries, and such acts as raping, looting, the slaughter of children, the reduction of whole populations to slavery, and reprisals against prisoners which extend even to boiling and burying alive, are looked upon as normal, and, when they are committed by one's own side and not by the enemy, meritorious. But in a physical sense war involves very small numbers of people, mostly highly trained specialists, and causes comparatively few casualties. The fighting, when there is any, takes place on the vague frontiers whose whereabouts the average person can only guess at, or around the military bases which guard strategic spots on the sea lanes. In the centers of civilization war means no more than a continuous shortage of consumer goods, and the occasional crash of a rocket bomb which may cause a few scores of deaths. War has in fact changed its character. More exactly, the reasons for which war is waged have changed in their order of importance. Motives which were already present to some small extent in the great wars of the early twentieth century have now become dominant and are consciously recognized and acted upon.

The primary aim of modern warfare is to use up the products of the spectacular machine without raising the general standard of living. Ever since the end of the nineteenth century, the problem of what to do with the surplus of consumer goods has been latent in industrial society. At present, when few human beings even have enough to eat, this problem is obviously not urgent, and it might not have become so, even if no artificial processes of destruction had been at work. The world of today is a bare, hungry, dilapidated place compared with the world that existed before 1945, and still more so if compared with the imaginary future to which the people of that period looked forward. In the early twentieth century, the vision of a future society unbelievably rich, leisured, orderly and efficient – a glittering antiseptic world of glass and steel and snow-white concrete – was part of the consciousness of nearly every literate person. Science and technology were developing at a prodigious speed, and it seemed natural to assume that they would go on developing. This failed to happen, partly because of the impoverishment caused by a long series of wars and revolutions, partly because scientific and technical progress depended on the empirical habit of thought, which could not survive in a strictly regimented society. As a whole the world is more primitive today than it was fifty years ago. Certain backward areas have advanced, and various devices, always in some way connected with wurfare and police espionage, have been developed, but experiment and invention have largely stopped.

From the moment when the machine first made its appearance it was clear to all thinking people that the need for human drudgery, and therefore to a great extent for human inequality, had disappeared. If the machine were used deliberately for that end, hunger, overwork, dirt, illiteracy,

and disease could be eliminated within a few generations. And in fact, without being used for any such purpose, but by a sort of automatic process – by producing wealth which it was sometimes impossible not to distribute – the machine did raise the living standards of the average human being greatly over a period of about 50 years at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries. But it was also clear that an all-round increase in wealth threatened the destruction indeed, in some sense was the destruction – of a hierarchical society. In a world in which everyone worked short hours, had enough to eat, lived in a house with a bathroom and a refrigerator, and possessed an automobile or even an airplane, the most obvious and perhaps the most important form of inequality would already have disappeared. If it once became general, wealth would confer no distinction. It was possible, no doubt, to imagine a society in which wealth, in the sense of personal possessions and luxuries, should be evenly distributed, while power remained in the hands of a small privileged elite. But in practice such a society could not long remain stable. For if leisure and security were enjoyed by all alike, the great mass of human beings who are normally stupefied by poverty would become literate and would learn to think for themselves; and when once they had done this, they would sooner or later realize that the privileged minority had no function, and they would sweep it away. In the long run, hierarchical society was only possible on a basis of poverty and ignorance. The problem was thus how to keep the wheels of industry turning without increasing the real wealth of the world. Goods must be produced, but they need not be distributed. And in practice the only way of achieving this was by continuous warfare.

War, it will be seen, not only accomplishes the necessary destruction, but accomplishes it in a psychologically acceptable way. In principle it would be quite simple to waste the surplus labor of the world by building temples and pyramids, by digging holes and filling them up again, or even by producing vast quantities of goods and then setting fire to them. But this would provide only the economic and not the emotional basis for a hierarchical society. What is concerned here is not the morale of the masses, whose attitude is unimportant as long as they are kept steadily at work, but the morale of the elite itself. Even the humblest bureaucrat is expected to be competent, industrious, and even intelligent within narrow limits, but it is also necessary that he or she should be a credulous and ignorant fanatic whose prevailing moods are fear, hatred, adulation, and orgiastic triumph. In other words it is necessary that he or she should have the mentality appropriate to a state of war. It does not matter whether the war is actually happening, and, since no decisive victory is possible, it does not matter whether the war is going well or badly. All that is needed is that a state of war should exist — and so we have been confronted with the war on poverty, the war on crime, the war against drugs, the war against international terrorism, etc. etc.

Modern war, therefore, if we judge it by the standards of previous wars, is merely an imposture and a purely internal affair. In the past, the ruling groups of all countries, although they might recognize their common interest and therefore limit the destructiveness of war, did fight against one another, and the victor always plundered the vanquished. In our own day they are not fighting against one another at all. The war is waged by each ruling group against its own subjects, and the object of war is not to make or prevent conquests of territory, but to keep the structure of global

society intact. The effect would be much the same if the world's ruling classes, instead of [pretending to be] fighting one another, should agree to live in perpetual peace, each inviolate within its own boundaries. For in that case each would still be a self-contained universe, freed forever from the sobering influence of external danger. A peace that was truly permanent would be the same as a permanent war.

This is the inner meaning of the slogan WAR IS PEACE.

Chapter 4: GOD IS POWER

The heavenly masters – the gods – were cast in the mold of the ruling class [the High of Chapter 1] and require similar sacrifices. Because the rulers were themselves the product of alienated thought, the heavenly masters – even God himself – could not hope to be anything other than alienated. What were honest, self-respecting people to think of these gods, who are supposedly robed in omnipotence and yet are beholden to human beings and their stupid prayers as if the gods were not fundamentally different from the earthly masters, who are answerable to their human slaves? Are these Gods – is God – then merely the sum of absent life? No, not even that. God is merely the gaping void that swallows up the impotence that we call the power of the strong and the rich, and all the despair that we call the hope of the weak and poor. God is merely the totalitarian projection of the economics of exchange and survival. He is nothing more than the false illusion of life.

And yet many people blithely proclaim that God is dead, and therefore powerless. It is quite true that the death of God created the chaos out of which both the person of and the need for Big Brother came. But even the self-avowed atheists continue to genuflect. God is dead as a sovereign entity, as master of the world, but he lives on in the very power structures that originally gave birth to him by submitting humanity to economic alienation, to thought separated from life, and to human bodies weakened, mutilated or broken in the name of labor. There is no God whose power is not based on the negation of life and on the inversion of pleasures; there is no power that is not based on God and the oppressive and hierarchical natural order of things he both created and was created by.

And so it remains true that the first critique is the critique of religion; the first revolt is against the supreme tyrannies of theology and the phantom of God. Ever since the fantasy of a Divine Being took shape in humanity's imagination, God - all gods, and among them above all the God of the Christians – has always taken the side of the strong and the rich against the ignorant and impoverished masses. Through his presence, he has blessed the most revolting privileges, the basest oppressions, and the vilest of exploitations.

As long as we have a master in heaven, we will be slaves on earth, and our reason and ability to create our own lives will be annulled. As long as we believe that we must unconditionally obey — and, vis-a-vis God, no other obedience is possible — we must of necessity passively and totally submit, without the least reservation, to the holy authority of all his agents, messiahs, prophets, divinely-inspired lawmakers, emperors, kings, and all their functionaries and ministers, representatives and consecrated servants of the two greatest institutions which impose themselves upon us, and which are established by God himself to rule over men and women — namely, the Church and the State. All temporal or human authority stems directly from spiritual and/or divine authority.

Authority is the negation of freedom, of human self-determination and self-management. God, or rather the fiction of God, is the consecration and the intellectual and moral source of all slavery on earth, and the freedom of humanity will never be complete until the disastrous and insidious fiction of a heavenly master is annihilated. To annihilate totally hierarchical power and thereby bring about human equality, it is necessary to annihilate God; to kill God, it is necessary to annihilate totally hierarchical earthly power.

This is the inner secret of the slogan GOD IS POWER.

Chapter 5: THE PROLES

Very little is known about the proles. As far as Big Brother is concerned, it is not necessary to know much. So long as they continue to work and do not riot in the streets, their other activities are without importance. To keep them under control is not difficult. A few police spies always move among them, spreading false rumors, and marking down and eliminating the few individuals who are judged capable of becoming dangerous; but no attempt is made to indoctrinate them with political ideas. It is not desirable that the proles have strong political feelings of any kind. All that is required of them on occasion – on the occasion of continuous warfare, that is – is an alienated patriotism which can be appealed to whenever it is necessary to make them accept longer working hours or less pay.

And yet, if there is hope, it lies – it must lie – in the proles, because only there, in those swarming disregarded masses – eighty-five percent of the population – can the force to destroy hierarchical society be generated. The society watched over by Big Brother can not be overthrown from within, or by partial revolutions: the revolution against it must come from without and must be total. Unlike those we have called the High and the Middle, the proles – if only they can somehow become fully conscious of their own strength – have no need to conspire, no need to become members of secret revolutionary brotherhoods. The proles need only to rise up and shake themselves like a horse shaking off flies. For the proles are loyal to each other. They have stayed human; they have not become hardened or dead inside; they have held on to the basic instincts and emotions which the power elites and their bureaucratic priests have to re-learn by conscious effort.

The uprisings in Russia in 1905 and then again in 1917 – the uprisings in Germany in 1918, in Kronstadt in 1921, in Spain in 1936 – all these historical events show that the proles are quite capable of revolting against both the Middle and the High, of organizing on their own to fight for their own interests, and of attacking hierarchical society at its root. In all these uprisings, workers refused to work, but their refusal was made outside of the traditional, hierarchical structures of the trade union and the alternative political parties. The workers spontaneously organized themselves into autonomous and deliberately anti-hierarchical councils and committees, and began to plan and execute the re-organization of all of society in accordance with the principle of total human equality. It was precisely as a result of these uprisings – and their ultimate likelihood of success – that Big Brother fought and won the revolution in the first place. Given the fact that the material bases for a non-hierarchical society have now existed for decades, it is inevitable that Big Brother will continue to be challenged by the proles and their spontaneous uprisings for some time to come.

Publisher's note added 1998: It would seem that history has indeed continued to prove that Dr. GOLDSTEIN's analysis is correct. Since the publication of this book in 1949, there have been proletarian uprisings in East Germany in 1953; in Hungary & Poland in 1956; in Belgium in 1961; in the United States in 1965; in France, Czechoslovakia & Mexico in 1968; in Italy in 1969; in Poland in 1970; in Portugal in 1974; in Italy again in 1977; in Romania in 1989; in Russia in 1991; in Mexico again in 1994; in France again in 1995, in Albania in 1997, etc. etc. And yet — Big Brother is still watching us.

GOD IS POWER THE PROLS

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