



Calum MacKenzie's View From The Shore:

Fear

When the Roman Empire was in its heyday, its armed forces would fabricate imaginary enemies and assign negative propaganda to them in order to spread the word that it really was a cruel and dangerous world out there. Not only that but the great unwashed masses envied the freedoms and institutions Romans enjoyed, and were plotting to attack. The Godless pagan hordes were different and had to be pre-emptively dealt with before they could muster their evil alien attacks. By keeping their citizenry in a constant state of fear the empire sold its military build up as an essential factor in protecting the homeland's values and vital Roman interests.

Those who were charged with the safety of the emperor, the senate and citizens, couldn't have the Roman legions lolly-gagging along the Tiber or elsewhere. There are only so many days one can spend training, route marching, and polishing armaments before boredom sets in. Besides armies have to be actively plundering the hinterland's far flung colonies and collecting taxes in order to keep the riches pouring into the Emperor's coffers. The emperor's offspring and those of the high ranking officials were far too busy with affairs of state and amassing huge fortunes to have any time left over for armed service.

In order to keep the very important military task front and centre in the minds of decision makers, an element of fear had to be ever present from abroad. Even when enemies were not close to the city gates, stories of imaginary enemies were circulated in the quarters that mattered. The continuous threat was fanned to flame by demonization of the outlanders and vilification of their life styles. Horrific tales of pagan rites and infidel non-believers added to the atmosphere of fear.

Although the Romans brought a certain competence to armed and violent aggression they strongly believed that their cause was just. They had to bring their civilized ruler-ship style to far flung outposts in order to spread their version of good order and the rule of law. At least that was the justification. It goes without saying, that they thought that they were doing their victims a great favour. After all they left thousands of miles of straight durable roads as well as water, sewer, and plumbing systems that survive to the present day. The Roman way was so superior everyone should buy into it. In addition, there are vestiges of Roman law, education, religion, architecture and infrastructure which leave us in awe and tending to forget that the Roman legions ruled by fear.

Down through the ages certain other groups have risen to power and used the same tactics as the Romans although they would be loathe to admit as much. Powerful armies were raised in France, Germany and Britain in order to free the so-called Holy Land from the devilish clutches of the followers of Mohammed. Under the cloak of religious fer-

your and blessing of the church, armies marched against Saracens and like non-believers. Their actions in the middle east at that time was no better than that of the people they tried to convert or conquer. The era of the crusades was one of aggression, violence, plundering, and killing all in the name of religion and favoured by the monarchies in power. Fear factors forced nations to raise armies for the cause and forced knights and soldiers to enlist, supposedly for the good of their souls. To refuse was to be damned.

In Spain and Portugal the influence of the church was so strong that church leaders lived and dressed like kings. In some cases they had power of the life and death over their charges as they had the right to hold Courts of Inquisition. It is difficult to equate the actions of the Spanish Inquisition with the tenets of Christianity. As the era of the Inquisition spread around the Mediterranean and north into the rest of Europe, so did the era of fear. The church which ruled at that time had so much influence that its leaders could direct nations to further its religious cause in unknown areas of the planet and yet when some brave souls such as Galileo explained the unknown and advanced knowledge, he was denounced as a heretic.

So fear led the Portuguese to South America, the Spanish and French to Central and North America and to this day churches rule individuals world wide through the medium of fear. For centuries wars have been fought because souls have to be saved from imaginary fires below the earth's mantle; or to enjoy forever the perishing cold of a heaven in outer space. Churches do much good work but their fear based activities are anathema.

As with the faith based initiatives of churches so too political systems rise and meet their fate due to fear. Germany has at least twice declared itself to be a superior race holding all other races in disdain as inferior life forms. Demonization and vilification propaganda became a function of state not just in Germany but in Japan and Italy as well. As the so-called superior people trumpeted their ethnic virtues over those who did not share their genealogy, a fear factor was imposed. Those who were physically, culturally, or mentally challenged were deemed to be so inferior that they could not be permitted to live. Mao's Chinese armies were said to deep fry and eat their enemies' babies. Senator McCarthy saw commies under every bed. Propaganda has no decency.

Apart from the example shown by the axis powers, fear has been used throughout African countries to the same ends. Genocide is too nice a word for what some members of the human race are willing to do to others and justify their actions as good. It is such a pall on humanity that the human mind can be so malleable as to allow some of those atrocities to be perpetrated. What is even more appalling is that we in the political West don't raise a finger in complaint or to rectify the situation unless there's a profit in it.

Does the Canadian government join with other western governments in using fear as a political tool? Well let me count the ways. In the 1920s social democrats in Canada campaigned for old age pensions, pensions for the military, labour law, worker protections, child labour laws, standard work weeks and other social programs. The right wing press immediately started a campaign of misinformation, demonization and vilification. It was said repeatedly that such programs would bankrupt the country, were absolutely unaffordable and would turn Canada into a pseudo-Russian republic. Hoary images of

Marx, Lenin and Stalin added to the fear factor. State imposed paranoia stalls the advance of civilization. All of the dire predictions and mendacious propaganda have been proven false. The enacting of those programs have actually benefited Canadians in many ways including diminishing fear.

The great debate in Canada of the 1950s centred around the introduction of universal health care insurance. It all started in one province where it was proved feasible and then was introduced federally. Again the bad news bears were stridently against the new proposal. Those with most to lose in the medical and pharmaceutical fields were especially loud in their condemnation. Again fear oozed from the editorial and opinion columns of the predominately right wing press, but cooler heads prevailed and eventually won the day. Fear has been used to combat the introduction of social programs in every western country and yet when introduced the programs have been shown to benefit rich and poor alike, cheaply and efficiently, and the fears have proven groundless.

Canada is now in a new round of fear conjured up by the military-industrial complex. Our right wing political masters are telling us that we are under threat by people in Afghanistan and therefore we must send armed forces personnel to that God forsaken country to pre-empt their devilish plans. Military pre-emption is a euphemism for violent aggression and no matter how you cut it and dress it up, it is illegal. Canada used to have a reputation as international peace keepers in East Timor; as peace makers in Bosnia-Herzegovina, but now we are supposed to bring democracy to a nation that has no such history or institutions, at the pointy end of a gun?

There is no profit in peace, whether its keeping it or making it, but there is profit to be made in violent aggression and that's where we are now folks. It's great to be known as the good guys and to have a stellar international reputation but that's not good enough for a political career path. The Career path has to show most favoured status to those who fund campaigns. There are at least ten armaments manufacturers in Canada on that gravy train, so why not jump aboard. The inordinate political power of oil companies continues to grease the wheels of government and that's nowhere more obvious than in Canada.

Part of the strategy is to ramp up the rhetoric. One would swear that G.W.Bush's script writers now send regular draft speeches to Ottawa. The same phrasing, terminology, and rationale come through time and again. The Afghanis have been variously called terrorists, murderers and scumbags by our top soldier General Hillier, our new PM Harper and our foreign minister McKay. I have yet to hear the words Godless heathens or pagans or crusade from a Canadian pulpit in this context, but any day now. We do not have a colour chart for anticipated terror alerts and we haven't been asked to lay in a stock of duct tape and 6 mil. polyethylene film but the way things are going, maybe tomorrow. We will aid Prime Minister Karzai to spread democracy throughout his country even if it takes ten years and causes death and destruction in every year. It has been explained that we are under threat and can expect a 9-11 type event at any time if we are not super vigilant. One can cry wolf too often methinks!

It took the western democracies centuries to bring their own democracies to their present imperfect state. Why not let developing countries take the time to do likewise?

Like the Romans of old, we want developing countries to do as we say, not as we did, because we know best what's good for them. Such utter hubris! We are already looking down on them, using fascist rhetoric to boost our case, and enlisting government friendly media to cheer on our troops and their efforts, however misguided.

What have we learned from the Romans and other Empires through the last twenty centuries? Some would say nothing and that we are in the process of repeating history's mistakes. Here's my Top 10:

- 1 - Fear, state sponsored and repetitious gives an electorate the erroneous impression that only the incumbents can provide good national security or whatever aspect of government. Opposition is denigrated as incompetent, ignorant, soft, appeasing, weak kneed, or worse. Only one view pervades information channels.
- 2 - Dissenters are dismissed as unpatriotic, mentally defective, treasonous, practiced in heresy and are completely out of touch with mainstream thinking. Due diligence of linking information to source has gone out the window.
- 3 - The military-industrial complex is reported as supremely competent, deserving of our respect and unquestioned support because it makes us safer. We kick ass because we can. Yet the much hyped Patriot missile hits only 10% of its targets and gives false identifiers resulting in friendly fire casualties.
- 4 - By keeping unemployment high we can enlist a steady stream of recruits to fill armed forces enrolment shortfalls.
- 5 - National debt does matter. Eventually the nation's bills have to be paid otherwise we become a laughing stock, lose all credibility, and become a failed state.
- 6 - A super strong military allows us to abrogate international laws, treaties, pacts and conventions, in effect making international crime our foreign policy. Might makes right. We often arm both sides in conflicts. Friends are allowed to develop nuclear weapons which leads to hypocrisy when "evil doers" do the same.
- 7 - Controlling inputs to news media and outputs from battle fields allows information to be slanted in favour of the ruling classes. Media is so appreciative of being invited along to the party at HQ or the battle field that they write glowing reports of support for the troops and the questionable good work that the military is engaged in.
- 8 - Truth and factual information of a negative bias need not be shared with the general population as long as the paranoia continues. So the gulag of Abu Ghraib and positive rendition becomes a fact of life.
- 9 - Eventually a party-going fiddler takes control and the wheels fall off the wagon. Empire ends, lawlessness becomes pervasive, and the mafia cycle begins.
- 10 - Churches and religions still have a powerful influence and can be a force for good but they have to stop taking sides with the obvious evils in our nations' capitals.

I've listed my Top 10. What are yours?

Suggested Readings

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For other readings contact calum@hungrypeasant.com.

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