

Fair Witness

By Tim Wees

This will probably always be a work in progress. It is an attempt to make some sense of our society and our place, as citizens, within our society. This will be an exploration into democracy. What is democracy? Are we living democracy? Is real democracy possible? What do we need to be and do as citizens and human beings to have democracy be real?

It was cold in the darkness of an early northern morning. My alarm clock jangled in my ear. I climbed from my nice warm bed to stir the coals in the wood stove and restart the fire for the day. Next a cuppa hot coffee was downed to light my own fire. Then with layers and layers of clothing topped off with an inner and then outer snowmobile suit, thermal gloves and thermal boots, I was out the door tramping through the raw new snow and on my way to the car. A quarter of a mile brisk walk through the minus forty degree weather brought me to a shovel and my snowed-in car. I started the car, unplugged all the lines to the heaters, dug a way through the snow-drift and was off to CKNL radio in Fort St. John.

When I arrived at the station, my first jobs were to start the coffee pot and rip the news wire, organize last night's world events, now all heaped in a pile, lay out my first news-cast, say hi to the morning on-air man and then flip the mike switch and tell the folks what happened last night.

In my own mind's eye, when I read the news, there were some half- dozen people in a kitchen getting ready for their own day. It was difficult for me to get a handle on talking to hundreds or thousands of people all at once. We covered an area from Fort Nelson to south of the Peace River and from the mountains to Alberta. This was north-eastern British Columbia and in that part of the world there were a lot of people all busy and living their day. So I just grouped half a dozen together in my mind and joined their friendly banter.

Years before, when I had first entertained the idea of being a broadcaster and a journalist, I had a conversation with a much respected lady, a broadcaster. Some would have called her a battle-axe, a term affectionately

applied to experienced no-nonsense women who had fought their way into the business and won and stayed. I asked her to give me something to give a working base to my philosophy, yet to be developed, something to remember when it all became tough and confusing.

"Always tell the truth," she said. "If you keep telling the truth sooner or later it will all work out, and you'll be okay."

"And how will I know what is the truth?" I asked.

She chuckled to herself when I asked that.

"You'll have to figure that one out for yourself," she said.

Her comments and the basic four W's, who, what, where and when, the newsman's checklist for accuracy, gave me a basic start, but a definitive answer to the fifth W, why, is often elusive, probably because the question goes beyond the obvious facts of the moment and points into that larger universal question, *What IS the truth?*"

Did those reams of paper coming off the news wire speak the truth? For the most part I considered the facts of the matter were accurate, although I was not always satisfied that such was the case. There were reports where authenticity *was* suspect. But what was most appalling was the overwhelming diet of news that was *bad* news, murder, mayhem, war, disease. Certainly in those times, the news-man psyche was infused with an idea that if news was not *bad* news then it was not news. Anything else went to a more general talk show, or the trash bin, down-graded to the inconsequential.

Why? Where did this idea come from? Who put it there? And what is the truth?

The truth about the truth is I do not think there is a definitive answer that will tell us what it is, and if what appears to be a definitive answer ever does show up, it should at best be given the status of a working definition, certainly not the end of the question. Some questions should be left open for all time, having more value in the asking than in the answers. There are only useful responses.

The response most useful to me thus far, as a working tool to offer direction in my own work, is that *the truth is what's so, spoken within a context of compassion*.

So what does that mean?

To say that the truth is *what's so* satisfies the first four W's, but all that we have if we thoroughly answer these is accuracy. There is not the substance nor depth present that it can be called *the truth*.

Facts standing alone are just naked pieces of information that mean nothing at all and are subject to a variety of interpretations. Background information turns a set of isolated facts into a situation, and when you start including the ebb and flow of human interaction, it all begins to come alive. The *why* of it begins to appear, and while what emerges is itself more interesting and useful than just the bare facts, being more complex and dynamic, it all still comes to nothing except that it is taken within a larger context of our culture and our collective vision about our future. If we do not have a healthy culture and a vision for our future then the notions of *compassion* or *the truth* are meaningless.

To observe with compassion is to come from an experience of absolute acceptance that what is happening is happening just exactly the way it is *without judgment* for either the situation as it is or for the situation which brought about the existent state of affairs, or, for that matter, for future situations that may consequently develop. I think Robert Heinlein had it right when he created the role of *Fair Witness* in *Stranger in a Strange Land*. A fair witness was making absolutely no attempt to construct, or reconstruct, a situation to satisfy commonly held beliefs about the nature of reality. Yet in the same moment the fair witness was, had to be, coming from a morality that can only really be called compassionate.

One does need to provide a context for the gathering and delivery of news, but one cannot offer context for a situation with an empty, formless mind. What substance fills the mind and what form and attitude the mind assumes is the responsibility of the owner of the mind. If one does not take responsibility for one's self and one's mind then someone else will, and the results of someone else's tinkering well might be inconsistent with serving the cause of honest and unbiased journalism.

For some, the sole purpose of the media is to make money. That's it, the consumer society speaking. Within that context, the job of a journalist is to fill in the spaces between the ads with material interesting enough to gather readers' attention, stage one before, hopefully, drawing that attention to the advertisements. The point here is not to offer a forum for communication and personal education but to have the readers buy and buy and buy again.

Not always, but more often than not, this is the way it happens. And all of this happens within a larger social context, one that values the accumulation of money before the quality of life and one which only encourages people to acquire for themselves rather than give of themselves.

The Consumer Society may be a simple and easy way to keep an economy predictably in motion, but this engineered culture is severely damaging our global and national societies and, indeed, our individual selves. With the consumer society being the game in play thus is provided a context where healthy vision and a real morality are all but non-existent.

The antithesis to *The Consumer Society*, like a parallel reality, is *Democracy*. I would argue that these two are separate realities and cannot operate in the same place, or the same mind, at the same time. One must make a choice which of these he will adopt as a context for his life and his interpretation of events.

Perhaps you might want to argue that the distinction is vacuous. 'We already have democracy,' you might say. Maybe, and maybe what we actually have is not democracy at all but a thinly disguised something else, disguised as democracy so that you and I will acquiesce to the existent state of affairs. There are some trappings of democracy still alive within the consumer society, but to my mind these are scarcely sufficient to allow the society we live within to be called *Democracy*.

There are regular elections being held to elect our governing officials and there is the ballot box with secret ballots. This *is* essential to democracy.

It would also appear that many, if not most, people approve of and support the system as it exists. This too is evidence of democracy, almost enough to move my hand to the off switch on the computer and stop writing this. If the people's will is being satisfied then who am I to object?

Well, I'll plow on anyway, because to my mind there is something seriously amiss here.

Democracy has several essential components that serve to keep it alive and dynamic.

The first, in Canada, we call Parliament. This is the place where our duly elected representatives have dialogue on our behalf and from that dialogue develop a body of law that serves to guide us all in our lives. The bureaucracy, the police, the military, all are extensions of parliament and manifest the will of parliament and beyond parliament, the will of the people.

Is this happening?

The second major component is the judiciary. Recognizing that the state and its various arms might not always operate with maturity and legal accuracy, the judiciary operates as an independent arbiter, offering citizens a fair and impartial hearing when there is any cause to believe or suspect that those citizens might not be receiving fair and appropriate treatment under the law.

Is this happening?

The third major component is the media. A responsible media speaking the truth dispassionately and compassionately is indispensable to a healthy democracy. An honest media keeps us all honest in our thinking and thus maximizes the opportunity for a dynamic and satisfying society.

Is this happening?

The fourth major component, and by far and away the most important of all, is the people. That's you and me. It all of it turns on us. We, people, are the hub of the wheel called our society be it our individual selves, our families, our close circles of friends, our countries or indeed the world. We are it. We are the ones who need to be responsible for how it is. As independently thinking people we set out in the day to determine the truth for ourselves and then act appropriately

Is this happening?

As we are free-thinking citizens who retain the responsibility for determining

the truth, there is the possibility for unlimited personal growth. There are truths and dimensions of being human that we have yet to encounter let alone explore and integrate into our consciousness. We do not know it all now, not by a long shot, but we might like to think we do, and therein is a tragedy.

As mere consumers, we let others take responsibility for everything, and we merely look for a niche to fill that will make us the most comfortable and secure. As consumers the highest level of development we can ever expect to attain is to learn how to whine and complain better than anyone else about how life isn't good enough. Oh yes, and we also become expert at assigning blame for what does not work, somewhere else and to someone else. What passes for social dialogue and communication is really just jockeying for position and attempting to line up agreement with the group of people we need for survival. That's easiest done when the problem is *over there* and not over here. In fact creating a threat *over there* is the most expedient method for creating agreement over here.

Is this not what war is all about?

These comments are certainly unfair to those people who do in fact exercise democracy as an integral part of their lives. There are people in government and its various agencies who do work to participate appropriately in the democratic process. There are those in the judicial bodies of the country who seriously understand their responsibilities and act accordingly, to the best of their abilities. There are many people in the media who appreciate their responsibilities and work diligently to discover and share the truth with their readership. And there are many thousands of people who walk through their lives as real citizens in a real democracy. For these, democracy *is*, and I would include myself therein, but I fear that for the culture as a whole it is not so.

We can have a body of law that defines us as a democracy, but that law is not worth a hoot in a stiff breeze if people do not live their lives in the spirit of democracy. And while there are many people who do just that, there are those who do not, and, which is worse, there are those who actively and deliberately seek to subvert democracy and all the goodness for which stands.

When I work with the equation which represents our society and keep

canceling out the superficial problems which beset us, looking even deeper for the truths which drive us, I ultimately have concluded that we are in the midst of a very real war between good and evil, although the lines might be drawn somewhat differently than some would have us believe.

The great sin of humanity which has brought us to an impasse is laziness. Each has to see how this is true or not for himself or herself, but the assertion I am making is that we are individually and collectively lazy in the matter of discerning the truth for ourselves and then discovering appropriate action and doing it and subsequently facing the consequences, the new truths of a new moment, and dealing with them. This could more accurately be called *creative laziness*, an idea which encompasses both the lack of willingness to discern the truth and the fashioning of a healthy vision and being and doing what it takes to make the vision happen.

I remember visiting a friend once. I had dropped by to discuss what I considered to be an important problem in our community. He listened to me for a while, and then he glared at me and said,

"You know, every time you come by here, you make me work!"

He was really upset with me. I mean really. I was startled by his anger. I was to be upbraided because I brought a community problem to his door and asked for discussion. I was asking for agreement for solutions certainly, but I was fully prepared for disagreement. I did not expect such complete annoyance that I had broached an uncomfortable subject that did indeed include us all and did need to be dealt with.

This was not an isolated incident. It has been repeated time and again and with people whom I honestly thought would have an interest in working together to develop and implement solutions.

This is laziness, an attitude that says, 'I want to bury my head in the sand and ignore all this. Let someone else handle it. That's what we pay the politicians for. Go away!' Seemingly we seek to find ways to avoid responsibility for discerning the truth and to then defer responsibility for appropriate action to someone else somewhere else. We do not create the day. We consume it.

We consume products from the corporation store. Products that come

directly from those who made them or grew them are exceedingly rare. We would still be consuming were we to buy directly from those whose heart, mind and labour went into their creation, but something vastly more personal and satisfying would go into such a transaction.

We consume the services provided by government. We rarely consider ourselves as part of the process that creates what government produces. We only consume, and then we complain like hell. How many times have I heard people complain about politicians? They are dishonest or incompetent and they do not set an example of which we should be proud. What goes unrecognized is that many people show as poorly as the politicians. How much dishonesty is there in the general citizenry? How well do each of us show up as leaders for our fellows?

Once I saw a bumper sticker that read, "*If the people will lead, the leaders will follow.*" I would suggest that the leaders are actually doing a fine job of following the people. Whatever we see in government, be it Parliament or the most distant and remote municipal government, it is but a mirror of the people who are being served.

From another perspective I am remembering many situations where I have watched well meaning grass-roots type people with great ideas and intentions be elected to government positions in their community and be swallowed whole, as it were, and come out in the same mould as those very same people with whom they were opposed only moments before. What happened? From my vantage point they got elected and were then taken off into a corner by the relevant bureaucracy, 'trained' in the finer points of their new job and then sent back to the public table where the decisions are made with the decisions already made; stamped, packaged, priced and neatly ready for public consumption.

It would be interesting to be a fly on the wall in those training sessions. It certainly looked to me that by the time these here-to-fore insightful people came back to work, they did not come as statesmen taking a stand for the people, they came back as an arm and the mouthpiece of the bureaucracy. There can be no argument against briefing new people who have been elected into government, but is the training simply briefing and offering supportive ideas for Canada's statesmen or is it about retraining these people away from their democratic ideals into becoming tools of those who consider themselves to be in power? It seemed to me that the real decisions

are made in the bureaucratic back rooms and the politicians, *our* representatives, are but front men for the back room boys.

At one point in my varied career, I operated a portable sawmill on an island off the west coast of Canada. I was a custom mill which is to say I would go onto other people's property and cut their logs for them into the lumber that they required. My dealings with my customers worked well. I had a computerized system of tracking my work and what showed up on my statements was always an accurate analysis of what happened, both as money charged and goods delivered. I counted the boards for size and species as they came off the mill, and, when I went home, I entered the data into my computer. The computer gave me the results back when so required.

Another set of data was required by the Ministry of Forests. This was required ostensibly so that the Ministry could track the use of wood in the province. In fact I thought this a good idea. However I found it objectionable that the data was required in a measurement system, metric, that was in fact alien to that which my customers required. This data was also required in a way and with forms that meant for a long and laborious session at the kitchen table. Matters were made worse by the fact that if there were any mistakes, it was all sent back to be redone, like this was grade four arithmetic class.

Others of my trade simply made up data and cooked the books, and nobody really cared whether or not the truth was told. That worked for them, but not for me. I have long held this idea that my word is important and that what comes out of my mouth or my pen should be the truth. It was a matter of personal integrity. Maybe my old broadcaster friend had made a deeper impression than she thought.

I had an idea for computerizing the whole project for the Ministry of Forests in a way that would produce the data they needed as a product of the data I was recording for my customers. My idea was rejected out-of-hand. They wanted to continue with their time-worn system.

One day I took the day off and took the ferry to Vancouver Island and drove to Port Albernie to talk directly with the person responsible for this decision. He still said no. He was adamant. He said that the decision was part of the regulations and that the regulations were passed to him to implement.

"But you write the regulations and recommend them in the first place!" I said.

He smiled an ingratiating smile that said it all.

The pressure intensified. The battle lines had been drawn, and ultimately the little demon in the back office won.

I was working one day cutting up some 5000 board feet of logs in a back corner of the island. I had been working for several days when my customer came out of the house with a letter from the Ministry of Forests saying that it was illegal for me to be cutting logs unless and until the Ministry received documentation from him that this was authorized. Can you believe it!?

We continued working, but I muttered something to myself to the effect that if someone came to me with \$10,000 I would sell the mill. It quite took me aback when I got home that night to find a person there who wanted to do just that .. and did.

This all leads into another issue, another lobbying group, one that lobbies both the duly elected representatives and their handlers in the bureaucracy. This group represents marketplace forces, some of these legal within the law of either the United States or Canada and some everything but. The line between the two lies somewhere between blurred to non-existent .. in my observation. These people are targeting Canada's resources be they material or human. These people are well trained in how to manipulate people. They hire psychologists and sociologists and others who know well the art of social engineering. Our poor elected representatives do not really stand a chance in the face of this activity.

One ought not to be surprised either, I suppose, that we the people have not survived this onslaught either.

This consumer society we live in is an intricately designed social engineering project. If who we are is but the psychological matrix of actions and reactions that our controllers would have us believe we are then we are truly powerless to deal with it. But is what we have been taught as the truth and subsequently had trained into the marrow of our bones as the truth really the truth?

If our vision for the future is that of a better and even more smoothly operating consumer society as we have defined it and operate it then what passes for the truth is the truth by definition. We know it all. There is nothing new to learn unless it be an improvement on that which we already know. The human race has reached its zenith and all we have left to do is play and enjoy the sunshine .. without regard for those who have been left out.

I do suspect that there are those who really do think, in good conscience, that what we have in place as a philosophy of society, if you will, is just fine. Let's just roll with the times and enjoy. Beyond these people though I see another group whose wealth and position as elitists depends upon the continued suppression through enforced ignorance of the general population. I am not speaking only of those who live at the top of the vertical money trail of the planet. I see them also in small communities, people who play the same insidious sleazy games as the all-powerful in the world. There is something about wanting to be in control of people that speaks to the worst in us. I have seen wonderful social causes, political movements, marriages, friendships, all of these and more, dissolve into anger and conflict and fear because someone needs control. I have seen this within myself. It only makes me feel ill.

It is this incestuous, close-minded, self-important need to control, and its partner in the crime, being resistant, that kills people, relationships, communities, nations and international relations. And those who resist control think that because they are resisting, they are safe. They are not the bad guys. This is a case of trying to draw a line between you and what you do not like by being the antithesis of that which you do not like. In fact being resistant only has the reverse effect. Being resistant gives power to that which you resist.

Am I saying that those who object or have dissent to offer should fade away into nothing and allow the evil that besets us to flourish? No. Someone must take a stand in the matter, but the stand must be FOR an idea if it is to be useful. Strategically this forces social controllers to themselves become the resistant element. A deeper strategy is to actually bring into being an idea that we can create a compassionate society, democracy, an idea that in these times is but a fantasy or, at best, a nice thought. One may well need to close the door to those who espouse *the new world order*, but democracy

will be created by living the idea, not by throwing rocks.

Come with me to an October afternoon in 1963. This is an experience on the front lines of the movement for social change. A large group of people is camping on the boulevard in front of the United States Consulate on University Avenue in Toronto.

These were the days when black people in the southern United States were making it known that the days of forced segregation were ended. Our group in Toronto called ourselves the *Friends of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee*. While people in the states were very much caught up in violence as outstanding issues were forced into resolution, we had it easy. We were a support group, collecting food and money and clothing and blankets and moral support and sending it all south.

I think we did a good job for our part. We collected some \$17,000. for the cause, and the moral support offered by the people of Toronto was wonderful.

Then in early October a blizzard hit the city. There was a parade of vans and cars carrying cold and wet people back to our headquarters on George St. We had done what we could. This event was over, and we all moved on to other things.

I was considering joining the anti-Vietnam war movement. I certainly was not happy with the United States' involvement in Vietnam and found U.S. motivation to be highly suspect. But I also felt that the Soviets and North Vietnamese were anything but guardians of democracy and freedom for people either. So I stayed out of it.

As I was mulling this situation over in my mind and trying to decide who I was with regard to all this, I passed a notice board somewhere in the University of Toronto and saw a sign ..

If you are a socially conscious person
Find something that you do not like
and resist it!
Resist!!

Something within me said that there was something very wrong here. I had

not felt I was resisting anything as we were camped in front of the American consulate. We were fighting *for* something, or at least we were supporting those who were fighting for something, an idea, freedom.

It would be another thirty years before I would be on the front lines again. It was the sign at the U of T that dampened my enthusiasm. Along the way I would look at all those who were involved in movements for social change, and I saw that they were all one flavour or another of resistance. They must have read the same sign I did, but *they* followed the instruction, those that did, and the rest of us stayed away.

Three decades later, in 1993, I had strong encouragement to go to Clayoquot Sound, on Vancouver Island, and lend my support to saving that forest.

I found to my dismay that being resistant was still a fundamental quality of those on the front lines looking for change. There were other qualities of this movement that were new and delightful, but this notion of being resistant had held firm through all these years.

Resistance just does not work. It never will. We need to give it a rest. We need to look for lasting solutions that will actually, practically, work.

Resistance is futile. This is not to say that we should give up, those of us who want to make some changes to how we do life on this planet, but we do need to get that resistance strategies are counter-productive.

Resistance only leads to more of the same. What you resist persists and ultimately you become it. Being resistant only gives power to that which we do not want. There are those who are leading us by the nose into the new world order, knowing this dynamic well, and we have been dancing to the tune. We have become like children mesmerized by a school-yard bully.

The controlling bully seeks to draw attention to himself, and whatever it takes to draw that attention, he will do that. That he is seen to be the only game in town is the prize. The forms the responses take are not important, so long as they are directed to him. If you love him then all is well. If you hate him then all is well. His goal is to erase the competition by having competing ideas cease to exist in the minds and imaginations of everyone within his range. If you and I can be drawn from manifesting a vision of a

world that works, and drawn into being at war with those who are building something else, then in that moment the bully's goals have been achieved. He has won.

It is difficult not to be resistant when bullies and terrorists of all shapes and descriptions are steam-rolling their way across the world. They exist at the international level, and they ply their trade at street level in communities everywhere. Good law and honest morality seem to count for nothing in these times. It would seem that the beast is indeed upon us.

Fear in all its forms and guises is the bully's weapon. Fear drives away consciousness and creative thinking and leaves individuals and whole communities malleable and open to manipulation and control. Cause people to be afraid and they will stop thinking imaginatively. Bodies may live but the spirit dies, automatons all.

The bullies of the world make it their business to create a culture of fear. It would appear, in my observation, that the method of attack of these social terrorists is to target the weak and vulnerable and carefully and deliberately mould their environment to cause them to be someone whom they are not and would not be if left to their own devices. Young girls who have grown up in disadvantaged homes can be lured into prostitution. Financially insecure boys who have not the social acumen to earn a living in the world can become thugs or thieves or pimps for their girl-friends. Sexually insecure people can be carefully manipulated into becoming sexually perverse to subsequently cause social havoc and terror in otherwise peaceful communities. These activities are the deliberate sabotage of personalities while the puppet-master sits back with his hands clean and his bank accounts filling. It has been estimated, and probably conservatively, that drugs and prostitution in the world fuel enterprises of \$500 billion.

The same social condition created by organized crime to further its ends serves the needs of those who espouse the consumer society paradigm. Advertising media thrive in a condition where people are devoid of free will, the ability to choose, and live in ignorance, ignorance being the state of mind for those who are mesmerized by fear. Thus, although the powers that be decry organized criminal enterprises, they thrive because of the work these low life people perform. Our society has evolved to require fear as a necessary component of daily life. We therefore give lip service to attempts to cleanse the world of thievery and its ilk.

In the early 1900's, I believe 1914 was the year, the United States made drugs such as marijuana, cocaine and heroin illegal and initiated a righteous war against their use. The net effect of that move has been to develop a massive industry, both primary and secondary, to combat drugs. The price of drugs took off astronomically and gave huge incentives for con artists and pushers to draw more and more users into the fold. It also had the effect of disenfranchising probably millions of people by making them criminals. Anyone who deliberately lives outside the rule of law loses interest in being part of creating the law. Democracy is based in the rule of law. Thus democracy wanes and consumerism thrives. The War on Drugs has served both the powers that be who consider themselves on the legal side of the fence and the criminal element who could care less.



All too often life is quite something other than what I want it to be.

I do want to be on this motorcycle, pattering along just the way I am, letting out a plume of dust on this delightful country road, with a warm sun and those beautiful rocky mountains stark against the blue sky, with the river meandering down the valley and through the cedar forests. This *is* comforting.

What I do not want is to be pointed to yet another blockade with angry people. They are civil, yes, and polite, yes, and non-violent, yes, but angry as hell and bent on hurting them, whoever, that did this, whatever, to us, and here I am pointed into all that. Yes I know it is me driving the bike and steering it up the hill into the war zone, and yes I know I could turn around

and point myself elsewhere, but I can't. I just can't turn away from this battle.

You see there is this huge ache in my heart, and I have this idea that it will not disappear until I have done everything I can to right the wrongs that are upon us. This is probably my own personal version of this gloriously self-righteous world we live in, but I *am* in this track and, just like my motorcycle, as though it were running in a deep rut in the road, I probably will not get out until I get to the other end, so I might just as well throttle up and go.

The motorcycle-friendly part of this journey ends halfway up the mountain. There is a road, but it is rough and for walking only. There are several policemen gathered at the beginning of the rocky trail. My bike is now parked in an opening in the bushes, and I am walking with the obvious intention of heading up and into the action. A uniformed policeman walks my way.

"Where are you going," he asked.

"Up the hill to take some pictures and see what's going on, " I replied.

"We have some people up there dealing with the situation," he said, "And we would rather you stayed here."

"Are you *telling* me I must stay here?" This is a public road.

"No. I am *advising* you to stay here."

"Well thank you for the advice, but I don't think I am in any danger, so if you don't mind, I'll just go up the hill," And I started again for the trail.

The uniformed policeman looked around for some help. A man in a suit came forward and opened his jacket and flipped up a leather covering on his belt and displayed his badge.

"Why do you want to go up there?"

Well, I didn't want to go up there, and that was the truth, but I was going to go up there regardless of how I or anyone else felt. One's body gets itself

organized to do things in a particular way and the rest of me just needs to bow to the stubbornness in my blood and sinew and follow along.

"I am going up there to take some pics and observe what's happening."

"I would advise you not to do that."

"You are *advising* me, not *telling*, me. Is that correct?"

"Yes."

"Is there an injunction in play?"

"No."

"Well as I understand the rules, this is a public road and unless there is an injunction in play, or some violence in the offing, you are not in a position to tell me what I can or cannot do. Correct?"

"Yes."

"Then unless you can give me good reason not to, your 'advice' notwithstanding, I think I'll just go up the hill and do what I came to do."

Well this was one quick-thinking policeman for sure, and he did not want me to go up the hill. After a short thoughtful moment he said,

"Maybe you would tell me what you think are the real issues here and why you feel so strongly about going up that hill."

Now this was a twist. He couldn't order me not to go up the hill, and advising me wasn't working. Maybe he figured I'd like to hear myself talk, and if I talked long enough the crunch would be over and he could go home. But on the other hand the whole point of a blockade, for me, was a demand to communicate, even though it be with people who seemingly had forgotten the meaning of the word. If someone, however intransigent they might appear to be, says he wants to have a conversation then I do have an obligation to make it work. Walk your talk, Tim. Hmmm.

This man and I looked eye to eye for a moment.

"Will you listen?" I asked.

"Sure."

"Okay."

The sun was higher in the sky now .. and hotter.

We immediately established common ground by agreeing that we both wanted a context called the 'rule of law' for our society. Rule of law makes sense, but it is only valid if it springs from the people and is designed to serve the people. My assertion is that the law of the land has ever so subtly and incrementally become something other than an expression of democracy. I would assert that the reins of power have left the hands of the people of Canada and have been taken up by a corporate structure, one that views the people themselves as yet another resource to be exploited. Independently thinking and self-generating human beings are no longer valued, and therein is a real tragedy.

"Those people camping high in those trees up the hill," I said to the policeman, "Are upset because the company is tramping through their watershed without any regard for the effects of their destructive activity on the streams or the rest of the environment that brings water to the homes of the folks in the valley. You can bet they tried to talk to the company and to the appropriate authorities, and they are there doing what they are doing as a last resort.

"But this issue represents only the tip of a large iceberg.

"In your mind's eye, look up and down this beautiful valley and into the lives of the thousands of people who live here. Virtually everything that goes on here, legally, is organized to serve the company, and the company is *not* organized to serve the people. The company serves the shareholders, people who have no relationship to this valley and probably not even to this country. Most of the corporate structure of this entire province is owned outside the country, and it is all of it designed to funnel the money earned and the products developed, south.

"The jobs that are provided by the company, these companies, are minuscule when compared to the need for gainful employment of the people and are insignificant when one assesses the resources growing on these mountains and buried in the soil. Imagine how these resources *could* be used to generate employment, but jobs for us do not count. Productivity and profit count. One machine, a feller-buncher I think it is called, that goes into the forest and cuts trees and trims them ready for skidding, displaces over eighteen men from work.

"One could take the attitude that the resources of our province are here to help us care for our needs. One could consider the development of secondary industry, boat-building, furniture manufacturing. There is a host of possibilities. But the company does not care about that, and, seemingly, neither does the government. How much real support is there for the development of secondary industry? Not much. Government and the bureaucracy are themselves only organized as arms of the corporate structure, and they organize the distribution of the resources to facilitate the needs of the corporations.

"Now to an issue which should be near and dear to your heart, being a policeman, drugs. When you are not up here on the mountain trying to chase environmentalists out of the trees, you are probably scouring the countryside for pot plantations hoping to bust some unfortunate pot farmer. Pot has become a multi-million dollar industry in BC. Did you ever stop to really wonder why?

"Imagine yourself to be a young man raising a family in this province. You are here because this is such an utterly beautiful place. It's wild and free. Only when you get past the star-gazing and are faced with the reality of making it work, you realize that maybe it's not so free. Getting a job with the company is a possibility, and if you can get such a job and can handle being somebody else's pawn for eight to twelve hours a day then your problem is solved. Failing that maybe you can get a job with a service industry, either as a government employee or in a store or a resort. Maybe you can find a secure niche for yourself. But the truth is that there are many people who just can't, and there are some who want to create something for themselves. These would be the enterprising group who truly want to be creative and organize a life style of their own making.

"On the job front, there are just simply not enough jobs to go around. There

are fewer jobs available than there are people to fill them, and those jobs that are available do not allow for the possibility for a human being to be creative and enterprising. But if you either can't get a job or you can't find an opportunity to be enterprising, all of that within the law, then you have no alternative but to operate outside the law.

"Welfare is not an option. I have been there, and I know. It was once billed as a social safety net, but in fact it is humiliating and personally debilitating beyond measure. Forget it.

"But growing marijuana. Now there is a real opportunity. There is a broad base of support amongst the large network of growers. There is artistry and creativity available in the work, and, most importantly, there is money to be made. Add to this that it is commonly known that marijuana, while being a delightful recreation drug, is less harmful to the individual than either cigarettes or liquor, and you have the makings of a real opportunity with no moral dilemma, if you don't mind stepping over the thin line that holds what's left of honest law.

"The truth is that given the size of the marijuana industry in BC, the province would fall flat on its economic ass if the industry were to die tomorrow. Given the economic conditions of the times, if you and your friends did manage to eradicate marijuana tomorrow, the day after you would have violence like you never dreamed possible. This would not be because the people had lost their drugs, it would be because the people had no food nor a place to live. The way things are set up there just is not enough to go around.

"However, there is a downside to BC Bud.

"When someone knowingly organizes his life outside the law of the land, he comes to live a life operating within a different rule of law, the law of organized crime. There are those who keep their operations small time and have managed to stay out of the clutches of organized crime, but there are many people who have had to sell out completely to the organized crime that besets us and who have forgotten caring for a cohesive healthy democracy. In fact to greater or lesser degree all of us who grow it or sell it or use it have compromised our integrity as Canadian citizens. It is not that this is bad, it just means that there are probably very few people who are fully living within the law of the land, such as it is, and who are thus

constrained from wanting to contribute to the country.

"The travesty that so many people have gone illegal to survive is exacerbated by the truth that *because it is illegal*, marijuana becomes tied to the harder drugs such as cocaine and heroine. A hard core pot grower who is truly out to make money can go to the border with a pound of first class BC Bud and exchange it for a pound of cocaine. He will sell that and then there is real trouble.

"Examine it all honestly, and you can see that the development of the drug trade in BC comes as a result of the wholesale sell-out of BC's natural resources to American corporations.

"I do not ever expect pot to go away. I expect that if government has any sense, government will legalize it. That move of itself would bring probably millions of people back within the scope of the law of the land. These would then be available as participants in rebuilding a healthy and viable democracy where the words 'Rule of Law' meant more than a self-righteous phrase being bandied about by politicians and lawyers.

"But beyond that we need to develop an attitude that the resources of BC are available to provide sustenance for people, not to provide fancy boats and fine hotels and cuisine for the rich. We need to organize government and industry to generate secondary industry, opportunity for people at ground level to be creative and provide useful lives for themselves.

"And we need to do all this with a deep and wholesome regard for the sanctity of life. If we treat the forest and the earth with love and respect then we will receive the same in kind. Then and only then will the environmentalists come down from the trees and you will be able to get back to patrolling your beat in a healthy society."

It has been several years now since this incident happened. The issues I discussed with the policeman are as they were spoken. Although I have taken some liberty in relating exactly what I said as a quotation, this is a truthful event. In the intervening years, I have left the province and the environmental movement. I do not know if the environmentalists are still camping high in the fir trees. I do know that what we then thought of as a multi-*million* dollar industry is now quoted as being a multi-*billion* dollar industry. I do know that economic conditions in BC are now harsher than

ever they were. I do have faith, though I know not how, that one day this conflict we call the culture of Canada will come to terms with itself and be at peace, and we will all be healthy and well and a viable thriving community. I also remember with fondness the conclusion to my chat with the policeman on the mountain.

As we concluded our conversation, with me doing most of the talking it seemed, other policemen and women could be seen coming down the mountain trail. Nobody was arrested and somehow whatever was happening up there was concluded satisfactorily. The police went and got in their cars to leave, and then the man with whom I had been talking came back from his car and stood and looked at me, eye to eye, once more.

"I just wanted you to know that I heard you," he said. "I have about three years left to serve on the force, and then I retire. Maybe one day you'll see me up on the line with you." He gave a brief smile and went to his car and drove away.

As I am pattering back down the road on my motorcycle, I feel a softening within me.

The battle to create real communication and negotiate a worthwhile reality is far from over, but this time someone new really listened. This is good news.

Speaking out on these matters, which do need to be spoken, is much like speaking out in the reality of Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* or George Orwell's *Nineteen Eight-Four*. The world of today is truly more of the same. In some countries the Orwellian society is patently obvious. But in almost every country on earth the pattern repeats itself to greater or lesser degree.

Since September 11, 2001, the United States government has made no bones, in the name of National Security, of claiming unto itself the right to know the nitty gritty details of every person in the country and, by extension, anyone else, anywhere else, whom it cares to investigate and document. When you surf the Internet, everywhere you go, every site you visit, who you communicate with, what you communicate, can be, and often is, recorded and analyzed and stored with computer/human generated profiles in computers .. somewhere. Then, as we become a cashless society, everything you buy, where you travel, how you travel, what you eat, all of this is added to your profile. And then there is your telephone. Do you think

you have privacy on your telephone? You do not. You think that authorities cannot and will not tap your phone without a court order. They will and they do. The court order is only a legal barrier they need to work through if they want to take you to court and provide evidence. But there is much that can be made to happen to you by the good folks who hold the reins of power that can cause you great harm, and it all will never see the light of day.

Your pets are being micro-chipped today so that you can easily find and identify them. And many pet owners willingly pay for this. Millions of dollars are already being generated in this business. When will someone move to expand this service to your children? When will someone offer *you* the service, complete with GPS and a financial profile. You will sweep your arm across the scanner at the IGA and buy your groceries. All this given that you are a good boy or girl and have not had the service withdrawn.

Osama bin Laden and Saddam et al have done the puppet-master yeoman service. He has every excuse he needs to draw the noose of fear ever tighter about our collective neck .. and he is doing just that, and you and I may well go unconscious and bury ourselves even more deeply into double-speak, just to survive.

Fear is evil and being conscious is good. That is a simplistic statement, I know, but it is the truth. Consciousness drives fear away. Being deliberately conscious and alive and awake sets those who propagate fear to packing the tools of their trade into their kit-bags and heading elsewhere.

To be resistant is to buy into fear. To be resistant is to be unconscious and become merely an action/reaction based machine, utterly predictable. It is as though one attaches strings to the controller and asks him to be the puppet-master. You cannot move except that he moves, and he moves to make you dance to his tune.

There IS a trap in the escape route from the fear/resistance paradigm. If one has had being resistant ground into the core of his being, and wishes to do things differently, then, unwittingly, he may find himself resisting being resistant. The net effect of this unhealthy piece of business is to find oneself drawn into an ever tightening spiral of incestuous self-defeating thinking and recrimination, one that can spawn an increasingly unhealthy mind. You become both the controller and the victim in an eternal self-defeating war with yourself. This can only result in varying degrees of insanity or, as a

matter of personal survival, in a return to the original war of us and them.

As a metaphor one could liken the desire to be free to being placed on the event horizon of a black hole. The hole itself represents the whole consumer society paradigm, that complex matrix of ideas which taken together are a system, a composite, our culture. As one wants to be free of the system, he can either discover a way to simply spring free of it or try to fight and resist it. Fighting and resisting means one needs to cast attention, in fact one's self, into the maelstrom that is spinning in its tightening, frightening orbit. Thus one is drawn further and further into the deeper centre even though the real objective is to escape. I am reminded of that delightful quotation, "When you are up to your ass in alligators it is easy to forget that the objective is to drain the swamp."

Perhaps being lazy is a simple mind response to what appears to be a lose/lose proposition.

I am of a mind that there is a way out of the dilemma, that my mentor of years ago was on target with her admonition to keep pursuing the truth. It is a deep and abiding conviction within me that being conscious and discerning of the truth is the real foundation for being creative and effective.

And, once again, *What is the truth?*

I am remembering that what I am seeking, as I ask that question, is not a definitive answer, but a new set of responses that can guide me onward in the quest. There will never be an end to the quest, and there will never be a day when I can sit back with a beer and say conclusively that the job is finished. I think that there are stages that one can target and attain, but each stage is but a platform from which to launch the next segment of the quest. The joy of it all is that there will always be something new to learn and unlimited universes of ideas to explore.

... **30** ...

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