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Chris Hedges

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Chris Hedges

## The Cost of Resistance

“No act of rebellion, however futile it appears in the moment, is wasted” — a talk by Hedges with an audio introduction by Just Stop Oil’s imprisoned Roger Hallam.

### The Chris Hedges Report

*This video is a recording of a talk given by Chris Hedges at the Kairos Club London on Sept. 11, 2024. Drawing on his intimate knowledge of resistance and repression, Hedges detailed the methods we need to adopt to defeat the powerful interests, including the fossil fuel industry and the animal agriculture industry, which have placed their profits above the protection of our species and all life on earth.*

*Hedges’ talk is preceded by an audio intro from Roger Hallam. Hallam is part of the “Whole Truth Five,” who are five members of Just Stop Oil who were sentenced last month to the longest ever prison sentences for non-violent protest.*

*Following their conviction, the U.N. special rapporteur on environmental defenders, Michel Forst said*

*“Today marks a dark day for peaceful environmental protest, the protection of environmental defenders and indeed anyone concerned with the exercise of their fundamental freedoms in the United Kingdom.”*

### **Transcript of Chris Hedges' Speech:**

Friedrich Nietzsche in *Beyond Good and Evil* holds that only a few people have the fortitude to look in times of distress into what he calls the molten pit of human reality.

Most studiously ignore the pit. Artists and philosophers, for Nietzsche, are consumed, however, by an insatiable curiosity, a quest for truth and desire for meaning. They venture down into the bowels of the molten pit.

They get as close as they can before the flames and heat drive them back. This intellectual and moral honesty, Nietzsche wrote, comes with a cost. Those singed by the fire of reality become “burnt children,” he wrote, eternal orphans in empires of illusion.

Dying civilizations make war on independent intellectual inquiry, art and culture for this reason. They do not want the masses to look into the pit. They condemn and vilify the “burnt people” — including my friend Roger Hallam. They feed the human addiction for illusion, happiness and the mania for hope.

They peddle the fantasy of eternal material progress and the cult of the self. They insist — and this is the argument of neoliberalism — that the ruling ideology, one posited on ceaseless exploitation and ever-expanding accumulation that funnels money upwards into the hand of a global billionaire class, is decreed by natural law.

We did not use the word optimist and pessimist in war. Those in war who could not coldly assess the world around them, who could not grasp the bleakness and mortal danger they faced, who had a childish belief in their own immortality or a mania for hope, did not live long.

There is, as Clive Hamilton in *Requiem for a Species: Why We Resist the Truth About Climate Change*, notes a dark relief that comes from accepting that “catastrophic climate change is virtually certain.”

This obliteration of “false hopes,” he says, requires an intellectual knowledge and an emotional knowledge. This intellectual knowledge is attainable. Emotional knowledge, because it means that those we love, including our children, are almost certainly doomed to insecurity, misery and suffering within a few decades, if not a few years, is much harder to acquire.

To emotionally accept impending disaster, to attain the gut-level understanding that the global power elite will not respond rationally to the devastation of the ecosystem, is as difficult to accept as our own mortality.

The most daunting existential struggle of our time is to ingest this awful truth — intellectually and emotionally — and rise up to resist the forces that are destroying us.

I covered uprisings and revolutions around the globe for two decades — the insurgencies in Central America, Algeria, Yemen, the Sudan and the Punjab, the two Palestinian uprisings, the revolutions in 1989 in East Germany, Czechoslovakia and Romania and the street demonstrations that brought down Slobodan Milosevic in Serbia.

**“The most daunting existential struggle of our time is to ingest this awful truth — intellectually and emotionally — and rise up to resist the forces that are destroying us.”**

Revolutions and uprisings are spontaneous combustions. No one, including the revolutionaries, the burnt children, are able to predict them. The February 1917 revolution was, like the French storming of the Bastille, an unexpected and unplanned popular eruption. As the hapless Alexander Kerensky pointed out, the Russian Revolution “came of its own accord, unengineered by anyone, born in the chaos of the collapse of Tsardom.” The tinder is recognizable. What sets it alight is a mystery.

A population rises up against a decayed system not because of revolutionary consciousness, but because, as Rosa Luxemburg pointed out, it has no other choice. It is the obtuseness of the old regime, not the work of revolutionaries, that triggers revolt.

And as she pointed out, all revolutions are in some sense failures, events that begin, rather than culminate, a process of social transformation.

“There was no predetermined plan, no organized action, because the appeals of the parties could scarcely keep in pace with the spontaneous rising of the masses,” she wrote of the 1905 uprising in Russia. “The leaders had scarcely time to formulate the watchwords of the on-rushing crowd.”

“Revolutions,” she continued,

“cannot be made at command. Nor is this at all the task of the party. Our duty is only at all times to speak out plainly without fear or trembling; that is, to hold clearly before the masses their tasks in the given historical moment, and to proclaim the political program of action and the slogans which result from the situation.

The concern with whether and when the revolutionary mass movement takes up with them must be left confidently to history itself. Even though socialism may at first appear as a voice crying in the wilderness, it yet provides for itself a moral and political position the fruits of which it later, when the hour of historical fulfillment strikes, garners with compound interest.”

No one could have predicted that the first intifada in 1987 would erupt in the Jabalia refugee camp after an Israeli truck driver collided with a car killing four Palestinian workers.

No one could have foreseen that the decision by a Tunisian fruit vender, whose scales had been confiscated by police because he was working without a license, to set himself on fire in protest in December 2010 would spark the Arab spring.

While the moment of eruption is mysterious, it's the visionaries and utopian reformers such as the abolitionists who make possible real social change, never the "practical" politicians. The abolitionists destroyed what the historian Eric Foner calls the "conspiracy of silence by which political parties, churches and other institutions sought to exclude slavery from public debate."

He writes:

"For much of the 1850s and the first two years of the Civil War, Lincoln — widely considered the model of a pragmatic politician — advocated a plan to end slavery that involved gradual emancipation, monetary compensation for slaver owners, and setting up colonies of freed blacks outside the United States. The harebrained scheme had no possibility of enactment.

It was the abolitionists, still viewed by some historians as irresponsible fanatics, who put forward the program — an immediate and uncompensated end to slavery, with black people becoming U.S. citizens — that came to pass (with Lincoln's eventual help, of course)."

As Foner points out, it is the "fanatics" who make history.

Vladimir Lenin argued that the most effective way to weaken the resolve of the ruling elite was to tell it exactly what to expect. This brazenness attracts the notice of state security, but it gives the movement an honesty and cachet.

The revolutionary, he wrote, must make unequivocal demands that, if met, would mean the obliteration of the current power structure.

The revolutions in Eastern Europe were led by a handful of dissidents who until the fall of 1989 were marginal and dismissed by the state as inconsequential until it was too late.

The state periodically sent state security to harass them. It often ignored them. I am not even sure you could call these dissidents an opposition. They were profoundly isolated within their own societies.

The state media denied them a voice. They had no legal status and were locked out of the political system. They were blacklisted. They struggled to make a living.

But when the breaking point in Eastern Europe came, when the ruling communist ideology lost all credibility, there was no question in the minds of the public about whom they could trust.



The demonstrators that poured into the streets of East Berlin and Prague were aware of who would sell them out and who would not. They trusted those, such as Václav Havel, who I and other reporters met each night at the Magic Lantern Theatre in Prague during the revolution, who had dedicated their lives to fighting for an open society, those who had been willing to be condemned as nonpersons and go to jail for their defiance.

Our only chance to overthrow corporate power and halt the looming ecocide comes from those who will not surrender to it, who will hold fast no matter the price, who are willing to be dismissed and reviled by a bankrupt liberalism.

They expose the bankruptcy of the ruling class. They force the state to respond – evidenced when parliament declared a climate emergency following mass protests organized by Extinction Rebellion and the decision by Dutch lawmakers to reduce fuel subsidies after the blockage of roadways.

Those who accept risks, including long prison terms, penetrate the consciousness of the wider society, including the security organs that protect it. That penetration, from the outside, is impossible to measure.

But it steadily erodes the foundations of power until what appears as a solid edifice, as I witnessed with the Stasi state in East Germany and Ceausescu’s Romania, seemingly crumbles overnight.

The ossified systems of governance — evidenced in the United States by our corporate-managed elections, our system of legalized bribery, our commercialized press and our captive judiciary, which has legalized gerrymandering, an updated version of Britain’s 19th-century “rotten borough” — exposes the political class as puppets of the ruling corporate cabal.

Reform through these structures is impossible. As the system calcifies, it carries out ever more draconian repression.

Abuses of power, unlawful government policies, whether the war crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan exposed by WikiLeaks, the Grenfell fire or the refusal to address a climate crisis

that will lead to mass death and societal collapse, are ignored that those that decry them persecuted.

**“As the system calcifies, it carries out ever more draconian repression.”**

Roger’s five-year prison sentence and the four-year prison terms of the other Just Stop Oil activists are justified by laws formulated by the fossil fuel industry such as “conspiracy to interfere with national infrastructure” or the new “Lock on” law that can see a protestor who attaches him or herself to an object, land or another person with some form of adhesive or handcuffs got to prison for four-and-a-half-years.

The hearings and trials for the Just Stop Oil activists, like those held for Julian Assange, deny the accused the right to submit objective evidence.

These show trials are a Dickensian farce. They mock the ideals of British jurisprudence and replicate the worst days of the Lubyanka.

These activists were not convicted for taking part in the protests, but for its planning. The evidence used in court to convict them came from an online Zoom meeting that was captured by Scarlet Howes, a reporter posing as a supporter from *The Sun*. No doubt some fossil fuel think tank is dreaming up a journalism prize for her now.

And, as Linda Lakhdhit, the legal director of Climate Rights International, points out, sentences for those engaging in climate protests have steadily gotten harsher and harsher, longer than many of the sentences imposed on those who engaged in acts of violence during the racist riots in Southport.

It is not accidental that the imprisonment of these climate activists coincides with the arrests of journalists and activists who seek to halt the genocide in Gaza – including Sarah Wilkinson, Richard Barnard, the co-founder of Palestine Action, which has disrupted the work of weapons factories linked to Israel’s genocide, including Elbit Systems, along with the arrest of British-Syrian journalist Richard Medhurst, whose plane was intercepted on the tarmac by police vehicles so he could be apprehended before he reached the gate, along with former British ambassador and journalist, Craig Murray, who was detained under Schedule 7 of the U.K. Terrorism Act.

Schedule 7 is the king of Orwellian tool that defines the corporate state. It permits the police, along with customs officials, to stop any person at any sea, land or airport port of entry and interrogate them for up to six hours.

There is no right to refuse to answer questions. There is no right to have a lawyer present. Any documents, PINS or passwords must be provided upon demand. Fingerprints and DNA

samples can be taken. Anyone convicted of “frustrating” a Schedule 7 request can receive a fine of up to 2,500 pounds and imprisonment for up to three months.

The U.K. government has used Schedule 7 powers to interrogate and obtain information from hundreds of thousands of people, perhaps more, since 2001; 419,000 people were subjected to Schedule 7 stops between 2009 and 2019.

An analysis published by Cambridge University in 2014 concluded that 88 percent of those stopped and interrogated – without any suspicion of a crime – were Muslim.

The government has refused to release data as to how many were stopped between 2001 and 2009. Community centers were raided, protestors were arrested and prosecuted, funds were seized, families were terrorized, intimidated and broken apart.

This is the heavy-handed state interference that is now being visited on the rest of us, including climate activists along with those who on social media posts support Palestinian resistance, condemn the apartheid and genocide of the Israeli state or even oppose NATO.

The Five Eyes intelligence services are building Venn diagrams to connect all who oppose Zionism, neoliberalism, militarism, press censorship, corporate rule and the fossil fuel industry.

It will only get worse. University administrations in the U.S. spent the summer working in tandem with security consultants, many with ties to Israel, to determine the best ways to stifle protests this fall.

They have imposed near universal bans on encampments, temporary structures, amplified sound, chalking, freestanding signs, flyering, outdoor displays and event tables. A whisper of dissent, in or out of the classroom, will see protesting students and faculty expelled or arrested.

There was a decade of popular uprisings from 2010 until the global pandemic in 2020. These uprisings shook the foundations of the global order. They denounced corporate domination, austerity cuts, the failure to address the climate crisis and demanded economic justice and civil rights.

**“A whisper of dissent, in or out of the classroom, will see protesting students and faculty expelled or arrested.”**

There were nationwide protests in the United States centered around the 59-day Occupy encampments. There were popular eruptions in Greece, Spain, Tunisia, Egypt, Bahrain, Yemen, Syria, Libya, Turkey, Brazil, Ukraine, Hong Kong, Chile and during South Korea’s Candlelight Light Revolution.

Discredited politicians were driven from office in Greece, Spain, Ukraine, South Korea, Egypt, Chile and Tunisia. Reform, or at least the promise of it, dominated public discourse. It seemed to herald a new era.

Then the backlash. The aspirations of the popular movements were crushed. State control and social inequality, rather than being curtailed, expanded. There was no significant change. In most cases, things got worse. The far-right emerged triumphant.

What happened? How did a decade of mass protests that seemed to herald democratic openness, an end to state repression, a weakening of the domination of global corporations and financial institutions and an era of freedom sputter to an ignominious failure? What went wrong? How did the hated bankers and politicians maintain or regain control?

As Vincent Bevins points out in his book *If We Burn: The Mass Protest Decade and the Missing Revolution* the “techno-optimists” who preached that new digital media was a revolutionary and democratizing force did not foresee that authoritarian governments, corporations and internal security services could harness these digital platforms and turn them into engines of wholesale surveillance, censorship and vehicles for propaganda and disinformation.

The social media platforms that made popular protests possible were turned against us.

Many mass movements, because they failed to implement hierarchical, disciplined, and coherent organizational structures, were unable to defend themselves. In the few cases when organized movements achieved power, as in Greece and Honduras, the international financiers and corporations conspired to ruthlessly wrest power back.

In most cases, the ruling class swiftly filled the power vacuums created by these protests. They offered new brands to repackage the old system.

This is the reason the 2008 Obama campaign was named *Advertising Age's* Marketer of the Year. It won the vote of hundreds of marketers, agency heads and marketing-services vendors gathered at the Association of National Advertisers' annual conference. It beat out runners-up Apple and Zappos.com. The professionals knew.

Brand Obama was a marketer's dream. They have reprised the same con with Kamala Harris. Too often the protests resembled flash mobs, with people pouring into public spaces and creating a media spectacle, rather than engaging in a sustained, organized and prolonged disruption of power.

**“Brand Obama was a marketer's dream. They have reprised the same con with Kamala Harris.”**



Guy Debord captures the futility of these spectacles/protests in his book Society of the Spectacle, noting that the age of the spectacle means those entranced by its images are “molded to its laws.”

Anarchists and antifascists, such as those in the black bloc, often smashed windows, threw rocks at police and overturned or burned cars. Random acts of violence, looting and vandalism were justified in the jargon of the movement, as components of “feral” or “spontaneous insurrection.”

This “riot porn” delighted the media, many of those who engaged in it and, not coincidentally, the police which used it to justify further repression and demonize protest movements. An absence of political theory led activists to use popular culture, such as the film *V for Vendetta*, as reference points.

The far more effective and crippling tools of grassroots educational campaigns, strikes and boycotts were ignored or sidelined, perhaps because they are much harder and less glamorous.

As Karl Marx understood, “Those who cannot represent themselves will be represented.”

Only highly organized movements that are structured around representation will save us.

“We thought representation was elitism, but actually it is the essence of democracy,” Hossam Bahgat, the Egyptian investigative journalist and human rights campaigner, tells Bevin in the book.

And all revolutionary movements need to be embedded in labor, otherwise any power vacuum that opens up will be filled by the corporate elites, who of course are very well organized.

The problem was that the institutions and structures of control during the decade protests remained intact. They may, as in Egypt, have turned on the figureheads of the old regime, but they also worked to undermine popular movements and populist leaders.

They sabotaged efforts to wrest power from global corporations and oligarchs. They prevented or removed populists from office.

The vicious campaign waged against Jeremy Corbyn and his supporters when he headed the Labour Party during the 2017 and 2019 U.K. general elections, for example, was orchestrated by members within his own party, corporations, Zionists, the conservative opposition, celebrity commentators, a mainstream press that amplified the smears and character assassination, members of the British military, and the nation’s security services.

Disciplined political organizations are not, in and of themselves, sufficient, as Greece’s left-wing Syriza government proved. If the leadership of an anti-establishment party is not willing

to break free from the existing power structures they will be co-opted or crushed when their demands are rejected by the reigning centers of power.

Syriza eventually became an appendage of the international banking system.

The Iranian American sociologist, Asef Bayat, who lived through both the Iranian Revolution in 1979 in Tehran and the 2011 uprising in Egypt, distinguishes between subjective and objective conditions for the Arab Spring uprisings that erupted in 2010. The protestors may have opposed neoliberal policies, but they also were shaped, he argues, by neoliberal “subjectivity.”

“The Arab revolutions lacked the kind of radicalism — in political and economic outlook — that marked most other twentieth-century revolutions,” Bayat writes in his book *Revolution without Revolutionaries: Making Sense of the Arab Spring*.

“Unlike the revolutions of the 1970s that espoused a powerful socialist, anti-imperialist, anti-capitalist, and social justice impulse, Arab revolutionaries were preoccupied more with the broad issues of human rights, political accountability, and legal reform. The prevailing voices, secular and Islamist alike, took free market, property relations, and neoliberal rationality for granted – an uncritical worldview that would pay only lip service to the genuine concerns of the masses for social justice and distribution.”

As Bevins writes, a “generation of individuals raised to view everything as if it were a business enterprise was de-radicalized, came to view this global order as ‘natural,’ and became unable to imagine what it takes to carry out a true revolution.”

The popular uprisings, Bevins writes, “did a very good job of blowing holes in social structures and creating political vacuums.”

But the power vacuums were swiftly filled in Egypt by the military. In Bahrain, by Saudi Arabia and the Gulf Cooperation Council and in Kyiv, by a “different set of oligarchs, and well-organized militant nationalists.” In Turkey it was eventually filled by Recep Tayyip Erdogan. In Hong Kong it was Beijing.

“The horizontally structured, digitally coordinated, leaderless mass protest is fundamentally illegible,” Bevins writes.

“You cannot gaze upon it or ask it questions and come up with a coherent interpretation based on evidence. You can assemble facts, absolutely — millions of them. You are just not going to be able to use them to construct an authoritative reading.

This means that the significance of these events will be imposed upon them from the outside. In order to understand what might happen after any given protest explosion, you must not

only pay attention to who is waiting in the wings to fill a power vacuum. You have to pay attention to who has the power to define the uprising itself.”

The lack of hierarchical structures in recent mass movements, done to prevent a leadership cult and make sure all voices are heard, while noble in its aspirations, make movements easy prey. By the time Zuccotti Park had hundreds of people attending General Assemblies, for example, the diffusion of voices and opinions meant paralysis, especially once the movement was heavily infiltrated by police, the F.B.I. and Homeland Security.

Peter Kropotkin makes this point, writing that consensus works in small groups – he caps the number at 150 – but cripples large organizations.

Revolutions require skilled organizers, self-discipline, an alternative ideological vision, revolutionary art and education. They require sustained disruptions of power, and most importantly leaders who represent the movement.

Revolutions are long, difficult projects that take years to make, slowly and often imperceptibly eating away at the foundations of power. The successful revolutions of the past, along with their theorists, should be our guide, not the ephemeral images that entrance us on mass media.

**“Revolutions are long, difficult projects that take years to make, slowly and often imperceptibly eating away at the foundations of power.”**

Revolution is not, ultimately, a political calculation. It is a moral one. It is grounded in a vision of another world, another way of being. It is driven, in the end, by a moral imperative, especially since many of those who begin a revolution do not survive to see its fulfillment.

Revolutionaries know that as Immanuel Kant wrote:

“If justice perishes, human life on earth has lost its meaning.”

And this means that, like Socrates, we must come to a place where it is better to suffer wrong than to do wrong. We must at once see and act, and given what it means to see, this will require the surmounting of despair, not by reason, but by faith.

I saw in the conflicts I covered the power of this faith, which lies outside any religious or philosophical creed. This faith is what Havel called in his essay “The Power of the Powerless” living in truth. Living in truth exposes the corruption, lies and deceit of the state. It is a refusal to be a part of the charade.

“You do not become a ‘dissident’ just because you decide one day to take up this most unusual career,” Havel wrote.

“You are thrown into it by your personal sense of responsibility, combined with a complex set of external circumstances. You are cast out of the existing structures and placed in a

position of conflict with them. It begins as an attempt to do your work well, and ends with being branded an enemy of society. ...

The dissident does not operate in the realm of genuine power at all. He is not seeking power. He has no desire for office and does not gather votes. He does not attempt to charm the public. He offers nothing and promises nothing. He can offer, if anything, only his own skin—and he offers it solely because he has no other way of affirming the truth he stands for. His actions simply articulate his dignity as a citizen, regardless of the cost.”

The long, long road of sacrifice and suffering that led to the collapse of the communist regimes stretched back decades. Those who made change possible were those who had discarded all notions of the practical.

They did not try to reform the Communist Party. They did not attempt to work within the system. They did not even know what, if anything, their tiny protests, ignored by the state-controlled media, would accomplish.

But through it all they held fast to moral imperatives. They did so because these values were right and just. They expected no reward for their virtue; indeed they got none. They were marginalized and persecuted.

And yet these dissidents, poets, playwrights, actors, singers and writers finally triumphed over state and military power. They drew the good to the good. They triumphed because, however cowed and broken the masses around them appeared, their message of defiance did not go unheard.

It did not go unseen. The steady drumbeat of rebellion constantly exposed the dead hand of authority and the rot of the state.

I stood with hundreds of thousands of rebellious Czechoslovakians in 1989 on a cold winter night in Prague’s Wenceslas Square as the singer Marta Kubisova approached the balcony of the Melantrich building. Kubisova had been banished from the airwaves in 1968 after the Soviet invasion for her anthem of defiance “Prayer for Marta.”

Her entire catalog, including more than 200 singles, had been confiscated and destroyed by the state. She had disappeared from public view.

**“Those who made change possible were those who had discarded all notions of the practical.”**

Her voice that night suddenly flooded the square. Pressing around me were throngs of students, most of whom had not been born when she vanished. They began to sing the words of the anthem. There were tears running down their faces.

It was then that I understood the power of rebellion. It was then that I knew that no act of rebellion, however futile it appears in the moment, is wasted. It was then that I knew that the communist regime was finished.

“The people will once again decide their own fate,” the crowd sang in unison with Kubisova. The walls of Prague were covered that chilly winter with posters depicting Jan Palach. Palach, a university student, set himself on fire in Wenceslas Square on Jan. 16, 1969, in the middle of the day to protest the crushing of the country’s democracy movement. He died of his burns three days later.

The state swiftly attempted to erase his act from national memory. There was no mention of it on state media. A funeral march by university students was broken up by police. Palach’s gravesite, which became a shrine, saw the communist authorities exhume his body, cremate his remains and ship them to his mother with the provision that his ashes could not be placed in a cemetery.

But it did not work. His defiance remained a rallying cry. His sacrifice spurred the students in the winter of 1989 to act. Prague’s Red Army Square, shortly after I left for Bucharest to cover the uprising in Romania, was renamed Palach Square. Ten thousand people went to the dedication.

We, like those who opposed the long night of communism, no longer have any mechanisms within the formal structures of power that will protect or advance our rights. We too have undergone a coup d’état carried out not by the stone-faced leaders of a monolithic Communist Party but by the corporate state.

We may feel, in the face of the ruthless corporate destruction of our nation, our culture and our ecosystem, powerless and weak. But we are not. We have a power that terrifies the corporate state. Any act of rebellion, no matter how few people show up or how heavily it is censored, chips away at corporate power.

Any act of rebellion keeps alive the embers for larger movements that follow us. It sustains another narrative. It will, as the state consumes itself, attract wider and wider numbers. Perhaps this will not happen in our lifetimes. But if we persist, we will keep this possibility alive. If we do not, it will die.

Reinhold Niebuhr labeled this capacity to defy the forces of repression “a sublime madness in the soul.” Niebuhr wrote that “nothing but madness will do battle with malignant power and ‘spiritual wickedness in high places.’”

This sublime madness, as Niebuhr understood, is dangerous, but it is vital. Without it, “truth is obscured.” And Niebuhr also knew that traditional liberalism was a useless force in moments of extremity. Liberalism, Niebuhr said,

“lacks the spirit of enthusiasm, not to say fanaticism, which is so necessary to move the world out of its beaten tracks. It is too intellectual and too little emotional to be an efficient force in history.”

The prophets in the Hebrew Bible had this sublime madness. The words of the Hebrew prophets, as Abraham Heschel wrote, were “a scream in the night. While the world is at ease and asleep, the prophet feels the blast from heaven.” The prophet, because he saw and faced an unpleasant reality, was, as Heschel wrote, “compelled to proclaim the very opposite of what his heart expected.”

This sublime madness is the essential. It is the acceptance that when you stand with the oppressed you get treated like the oppressed. It is the acceptance that, although empirically all that we struggled to achieve during our lifetime may be worse, our struggle validates itself.

As Hannah Arendt wrote in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, the only morally reliable people are not those who say “this is wrong” or “this should not be done,” but those who say “I can’t.”

Karl Popper in *The Open Society and Its Enemies* writes that the question is not how do you get good people to rule. Popper says this is the wrong question. Most people attracted to power, he writes, have “rarely been above average, either morally or intellectually, and often [have been] below it.”

The question is how do we build forces to restrict the despotism of the powerful. There is a moment in Henry Kissinger’s memoirs — do not buy the book — when Nixon and Kissinger are looking out at tens of thousands of anti-war protesters who have surrounded the White House. The Nixon administration had placed empty city buses in ring around the White House to keep the protesters back. “Henry,” he said, “they are going to break through the barricades and get us.”

And that is exactly where we want people in power to be. This is why, although he was not a liberal, Nixon was our last liberal president. He was scared of movements. And if we cannot make the elites scared of us, we will fail.

We must build organized structures of open defiance. It may take years. But without a potent counterweight, without an alternative vision and alternative structures of self-rule, we will be steadily disempowered. Every action we take, every word we utter must make it clear that we refuse to participate in our own enslavement and destruction.

Courage is contagious. Revolutions begin, as I saw in East Germany, with a few Lutheran clergy holding candles as they marched through the streets of Leipzig in East Germany. It ends with half a million people protesting in East Berlin, the defection of the police and the army to the side of the protesters and the collapse of the Stasi state.

But revolutions only happen when a few dissidents decide they will no longer cooperate.

We may not succeed. So be it. At least those who come after us, and I speak as a father, will say we tried. The corporate forces that have us in their death grip will destroy our lives. They will destroy the lives of my children. They will destroy the lives of your children.

They will destroy the ecosystem that makes life possible. We owe it to those who come after us not to be complicit in this evil. We owe it to them to refuse to be good Germans.

I do not, in the end, fight fascists because I will win. I fight fascists because they are fascists.

**Chris Hedges is a Pulitzer Prize–winning journalist who was a foreign correspondent for 15 years for *The New York Times*, where he served as the Middle East bureau chief and Balkan bureau chief for the paper. He previously worked overseas for *The Dallas Morning News*, *The Christian Science Monitor* and NPR. He is the host of show “The Chris Hedges Report.”**

*NOTE TO READERS: There is now no way left for me to continue to write a weekly column for ScheerPost and produce my weekly television show without your help. The walls are closing in, with startling rapidity, on independent journalism, with the elites, including the Democratic Party elites, clamoring for more and more censorship. Please, if you can, sign up at [chrishedges.substack.com](http://chrishedges.substack.com) so I can continue to post my Monday column on ScheerPost and produce my weekly television show, “The Chris Hedges Report.”*

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