

## POLICE STATES

A visit to countries controlled by the “police” is quite valuable, for one can learn much about their past and present histories, and future dangers.

In 1958 when I visited the Portuguese Colony of Macau, I went to their border with China and saw many armed Chinese, each in the famous padded uniforms. At that time Mao’s revolution had reached southern China, and his army was in the process of collectivizing the farmers—and I was able to hear their gunfire used to get the job done. There were desperate refugees everywhere. Hong Kong itself overflowed with countless numbers of people living in the streets, many of them in boxes, but I did not see that many police. Hong Kong could not afford it.

The refugees in Hong Kong were fleeing a police state.

Shortly before the Soviets invaded Czechoslovakia with their military in 1968, I visited that country. The reason for the invasion “by Warsaw Pact Countries” was Czechoslovakia’s desire to “liberalize”, i.e. become less of a police state. Even so, police and military personnel were very prevalent, keeping watch on everything. Those of us who were obviously U.S. visitors were sought out by many people for questions, almost all of which were whispered. I jumped off a barely-moving streetcar in the center of a block, and was immediately accosted by a soldier who gave me a terrible dressing down. He was in the process of arresting me when he saw he had an alien in hand, and let me go. Was it a simple traffic violation? No, it was an intolerable action, for each and every rule and law had to be explicitly obeyed. “Freedom”, even freedom to think, was a dangerous activity.

My first visit to China proper was in the mid-eighties. What an education! I saw poverty beyond words, and darkness that helped to hide it. Soldiers with guns seemed to be everywhere. Of what was the government afraid? The answer is really quite simple in a police state. When Karl Marx said “The meaning of peace is the absence of opposition to socialism” he made clear that a communist nation’s goal of peace means opposition has to be suppressed.

Taiwan in 1958 was a police state. Two of us visited there at that time. We had to register at the police office in our block, and were quite aware that as visitors we were being watched not just by the curious, but by people whose job it was to do that. There were armed soldiers, but not as many as seen at the Chinese border with Macau.

Our visit with Wayne in South Korea was a surprise for me. Guess what? I learned that South Korea was also a police state. The airport was full of armed soldiers, as were major parts of Seoul. One of the oddities there was frequent air raid drills, and that required the streets to be completely empty of people in a very few minutes. Everyone had to comply and police were there to see that they did. Although I enjoyed running to play my part I learned that any old fear might be as good as any other if a state feels the need to control its people.

In Argentina in Peron's time, Addie Leah and I were photographed by the police as we were walking down the exit stairs of the airplane, and minutes later we were forced apart in customs until those in charge were able to decide to let us go. Now, what was that all about? It was probably due to the fact that I was from Los Alamos, but is a nice illustration of efforts spent by states worried about their political survival. We also crossed paths with Peron, and I was quite pleased to see a genuine dictator.

Israel was having a bombing war with Lebanon when I was there. Arafat was being driven out (he escaped to Libya) but I was truly impressed when I saw Israel's bombers headed north. Strangely enough, I did not have the sense that it was a police state similar to those that I have been detailing. Their enemies were apparently regarded as being external, and the local population seemed to be behaving in ways consistent with their own desires.

At one phase of its history, Bolivia was having a revolution that overthrew the government seemingly every few weeks. I was lucky enough to be there at the right time. In La Paz I crept outside in order to take pictures of military forays of several kinds. They were hunting revolutionaries, but I had the impression that it was one part of the military against another part, and that the populace was in such a state that no one had any fear of them.

On another occasion we were in Ecuador when a good many shooting and bombing events broke out between Ecuador and Peru. It happened on the anniversary of a previous war between the two countries, and enthusiasm to celebrate the occasion became much more than just firing into the air. We were on the Amazon River very near the Peruvian border and met a small group of American young men who had been bombed by the Peruvians. They were truly excited, and enervated. But even being present for a “mini-war” did not give me the feeling that Ecuador was a police state.

What conclusions do I have? Principally, it is this; for many states, peace is not the absence of fear. Rather, peace is believed to be achievable by using fear. When states behave in this way, they are police states to at least some degree.

Some police states face fears from beyond their borders. Even so, the way they monitor their own population bears watching.

Currently we are being told that we should be very fearful about our financial future. It is therefore necessary that we spend more than a trillion dollars, and permit the government to take over all kinds of businesses. So far opposition to the plan is being treated only with scorn, and I am concerned that the scorn evolves to something more menacing. But I have not yet said that I’m fearful. I should be sure to check in a few weeks.

The road we appear to be travelling justifies much thought, and perhaps memories of police states.

No matter our own situation; police states appear to be the norm. Everyone needs to keep watch.

