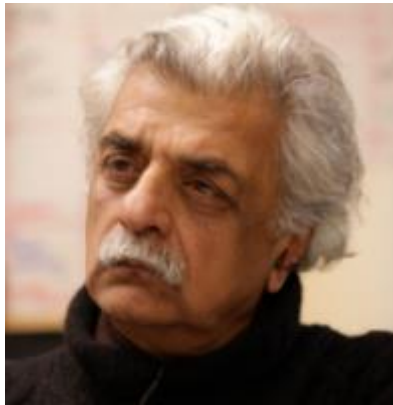


## The Time Is Ripe for Revolution

by Chris Hedges via stan - ICH Saturday, Mar 7 2015, 6:08am

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Tariq Ali is part of the royalty of the left. His more than 20 books on politics and history, his seven novels, his screenplays and plays and his journalism in the Black Dwarf newspaper, the New Left Review and other publications have made him one of the most trenchant critics of corporate capitalism. He hurls rhetorical thunderbolts and searing critiques at the oily speculators and corporate oligarchs who manipulate global finance and the useful idiots in the press, the political system and the academy who support them. The history of the late part of the 20th century and the early part of the 21st century has proved Ali, an Oxford-educated intellectual and longtime gadfly who once stood as a Trotskyist candidate for Parliament in Britain, to be stunningly prophetic.



**Tariq Ali**

The Pakistani-born Ali, who holds Pakistani and British citizenships, was already an icon of the left during the convulsions of the 1960s. Mick Jagger is said to have written "[Street Fighting Man](#)" after he attended an anti-war rally in Grosvenor Square on March 17, 1968, led by Ali, Vanessa Redgrave and others outside the U.S. Embassy in London. Some 8,000 protesters hurled mud, stones and smoke bombs at riot police. Mounted police charged the crowd. Over 200 people were arrested.

Ali, when we met last week shortly before he delivered the Edward W. Said Memorial Lecture at Princeton University, praised the street clashes and open, sustained protests against the state that erupted during the Vietnam War. He lamented the loss of the radicalism that was nurtured by the 1960s counterculture, saying it was "unprecedented in imperial history" and produced the "most hopeful period" in the United States, "intellectually, culturally and politically."

"I cannot think of an example of any other imperial war in history, and not just in the history of the American empire but in the history of the British and French empires, where you had tens of thousands of former GIs and sometimes serving GIs marching outside the Pentagon and saying they wanted the Vietnamese to win," he said. "That is a unique event in the annals of empire. That is what frightened and scared the living daylights out of them [those in power]. If the heart of our apparatus is becoming infected, [they asked] what the hell are we going to do?"

This defiance found expression even within the halls of the Establishment. Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearings about the Vietnam War openly challenged and defied those who were

orchestrating the bloodshed. "The way that questioning was conducted educated a large segment of the population," Ali said of the hearings, led by liberals such as J. William Fulbright. Ali then added sadly that "such hearings could never happen again."

"That [spirit is what the ruling elite] had to roll back, and that they did quite successfully," he said. "That rollback was completed by the implosion of the Soviet Union. They sat down and said, 'Great, now we can do whatever we want. There is nothing abroad, and what we have at home—kids protesting about South America and Nicaragua and the contras—is peanuts. Gradually the dissent decreased.'" By the start of the Iraq War, demonstrations, although large, were usually "one-day affairs."

"It was an attempt to stop a war. Once they couldn't stop it, that was the end," he said about the marches opposing the Iraq War. "It was a spasm. They [authorities] made people feel there was nothing they could do; that whatever people did, those in power would do what they wanted. It was the first realization that democracy itself had been weakened and was under threat."

The devolution of the political system through the infusion of corporate money, the rewriting of laws and regulations to remove checks on corporate power, the seizure of the press, especially the electronic press, by a handful of corporations to silence dissent, and the rise of the wholesale security and surveillance state have led to "the death of the party system" and the emergence of what Ali called "an extreme center." Working people are being ruthlessly sacrificed on the altar of corporate profit—a scenario dramatically on display in Greece. And there is no mechanism or institution left within the structures of the capitalist system to halt or mitigate the reconfiguration of the global economy into merciless neofeudalism, a world of masters and serfs.

"This extreme center, it does not matter which party it is, effectively acts in collusion with the giant corporations, sorts out their interests and makes wars all over the world," Ali said. "This extreme center extends throughout the Western world. This is why more and more young people are washing their hands of the democratic system as it exists. All this is a direct result of saying to people after the collapse of the Soviet Union, 'There is no alternative.' "

The battle between popular will and the demands of corporate oligarchs, as they plunge greater and greater numbers of people around the globe into poverty and despair, is becoming increasingly volatile. Ali noted that even those leaders with an understanding of the destructive force of unfettered capitalism—such as the new, left-wing prime minister of Greece, Alexis Tsipras—remain intimidated by the economic and military power at the disposal of the corporate elites. This is largely why Tsipras and his finance minister, Yanis Varoufakis, bowed to the demands of European banks for a four-month extension of the current \$272 billion bailout for Greece. The Greek leaders were forced to promise to commit to more punishing economic reforms and to walk back from the pre-election promise of Tsipras' ruling Syriza party to write off a large part of Greece's sovereign debt. Greece's debt is 175 percent of its GDP. This four-month deal, as Ali pointed out, is a delaying tactic, one that threatens to weaken widespread Greek support for Syriza. Greece cannot sustain its debt obligations. Greece and European authorities will have to collide. And this collision could trigger a financial meltdown in Greece, see it break free from the eurozone, and spawn popular upheavals in Spain, Portugal and Italy.

The cost of open defiance, which, Ali pointed out, is our only escape route from corporate tyranny, will at least at first be painful. Our corporate masters do not intend to release their death grip without a brutal fight.

Ali recalled that even his late friend Hugo Chavez, the firebrand socialist president of Venezuela,

was not untouched by intimidation from Establishment forces. "I remember talking to Chavez many times and saying, 'Comandante, why do you stop there?' " Ali said. "He said it is not realistic to do it at the present time. We can regulate them, make life difficult for capitalism, use oil money for the poor, but we can't topple the system."

Ali added, "The Greeks and the Spanish are saying the same."

"I don't know what Syriza thought," he said. "If it thought we can divide the European elite, we can make a big propaganda campaign in Europe and they will be forced to make concessions, that was foolish. This European elite, led by the Germans, doesn't crack easily. They have walked all over the Greeks. The Greek leaders should have said to their own people, 'We are going to try and get the best possible conditions—if not we will report to you what has happened and what we need to do.' Instead, they fell into the European trap. The Europeans made virtually no concessions that mattered."

The clash between the Greeks and the corporate elites that dominate Europe, Ali said, is "not economic."

The European Union is "prepared to pour billions into fighting Russians in the Ukraine," he said. "It's not a question of the money. They can throw away the bloody money, as they are preparing to do and are doing in the Ukraine. With the Greeks they pretend it is economic, but it's political. They are fearful that if the Greeks pull it off, the disease will spread. There are elections in December in Spain. If Podemos [Spain's left-wing party] wins with Greece already having won and proceeding, however modestly, on a different path, the Spanish will say the Greeks have done it. And then there is the Irish waiting patiently with their progressive parties, saying, 'Why can't we do what Syriza has done? Why can't we unite and take on our extreme center?' "

Ali said he was "shocked and angry about all the hopes that were invested in Obama by the left." He lambasted what he called the American "obsession with identity." Barack Obama, he said, "is an imperial president and behaves like one, regardless of the color of his skin." Ali despaired of the gender politics that are fueling a possible run for the White House by Hillary Clinton, who would be the first woman president.

"My reply is, 'So bloody what?' " he said. "If she is going to bomb countries and put drones over whole continents, what difference does her gender make if her politics are the same? That is the key. The political has been devalued and debased under neoliberalism. People retreat into religion or identity. It's disastrous. I wonder if it is even possible to create something on a national scale in the United States. I wonder if it would be better to concentrate on big cities and states to develop some movements where they can have an influence in Los Angeles, New York or in states such as Vermont. It may be wiser to concentrate on three or four things to show that it can be done. I can't see the old way of reproducing a political party of the left, modeled on the Republican and Democratic structures, as working. These people only work with money. They do not even speak with very many ordinary people. It is credit-card democracy. The left cannot and should not emulate this. America is the hardest nut to crack, but unless it is cracked we are doomed."

Ali said he fears that should Americans become politically conscious and resist, the corporate state will impose naked forms of militarized repression. Government's reaction to the 2013 bombings at the Boston Marathon stunned him. Authorities "closed down an entire city with the support of the population." He said that the virtual declaration of martial law in Boston was "a dress rehearsal."

"If they can do it in Boston they can do it in other cities," he said. "They needed to try it on in Boston

to see if it would work. That frightened me.”

“The manufacturing of threats manufactures fear,” he said. “It creates sleepwalking citizens. They [officials] never tried to do this on this scale when they were fighting the Soviet Union and the communist enemy, which was supposed to be the worst, most dangerous threat ever. Now they do it over a handful of bloody terrorists.”

Groups such as [Black Lives Matter](#), he said, offer some hope.

“Just as the traditional left parties have been wiped out all over the world, so has the radical segment of the African-American population and their organizations,” he said. “They were physically wiped out. Martin Luther King and Malcolm X, some of the most gifted leaders, were assassinated. The Black Panthers were destroyed. Areas where blacks lived on the West Coast were flooded with drugs. It was a well-planned assault. But the young people who came out in Black Lives Matter have this older spirit. When Jesse Jackson went to Ferguson and engaged in demagoguery he was heckled. They did the same on the East Coast with [Al] Sharpton. These black leaders, bought off, are being seen for what they are.”

Ali’s deep concern is that organizations such as Black Lives Matter too often react to events and “don’t totally grasp that dealing with this problem of continuous state violence against the citizenry requires political movements.” He worries that Americans lack an understanding of their own history and that very few are literate in basic revolutionary theory, from Karl Marx to Rosa Luxemburg. This illiteracy, he said, means that opposition movements are often unable to effectively analyze the structures and mechanisms of capitalist power and cannot formulate a sophisticated political response.

“Why didn’t the American working class produce a Labour Party or a proper Communist Party?” he asked. “Repression. If you look at ... what happened in America in the early decades of the 20th century and the last decade of the 19th century you see that private mercenaries were hired to stop it [political organizing]. This is a history that is not emphasized. This wretched neoliberalism has downgraded the teaching of history. It is the one subject they really hate. Politics they can take up because they use anti-communism. But history is a huge problem. You can’t understand the emergence of Syriza without understanding the Second World War, the role of the partisans, the role of the Communist Party that organized the partisans and how at one point 75 percent of the country was controlled by these partisans. Then the West came and fought a new war, Churchill did it with Truman’s backing, to defeat these people.”

“I was sympathetic to the Occupy movement, but not to the business of not having any demands,” he said. “They should have had a charter demanding a free health service, an end to the pharmaceuticals and insurance companies’ control of the health service, a free education at every level for all Americans. The notion, promoted by anarchists such as [John Holloway](#), that you can change the world without taking power is useless. I have a lot of respect for the anarchists that mobilize and fight for immigrant rights. But I am critical of those who theorize a politics that is not political. You have to have a political program. The anarchists of yore, in Spain, for example, had a real political program. This new type of anarchism achieves nothing. And probably half of these groups are infiltrated. We have the figures of how many FBI people were in the Communist Party and their Trotskyist offspring. There were huge numbers. FBI people were making key decisions.”

Ali said that the failure on the part of citizens to build mass movements to dismantle wholesale surveillance in the wake of the revelations by Edward Snowden was an example of our collective self-delusion and our complicity in our own oppression. The cult of the self, a product of neoliberal

corporate propaganda, infects every aspect of society and culture and leads to paralysis.

"Hollywood gave an Oscar to "[Citizenfour](#)" and that is as far as it goes," he said. "As if that matters. That is what is frightening. No civil rights movement has sprung up uniting the citizens against mass surveillance. Neoliberalism has effectively destroyed solidarity and empathy, helped by new technology. It is a culture of narcissism."

Ali predicted that the current global speculation would result in another catastrophic financial crash. This new crash will give birth to "movements and people who will say, 'Enough.' " If these movements build radical political programs with an alternative socialist vision for society, our "authoritarian capitalimericism" can be battled, but if this vision is absent, if revolt is simply reactive, things will get worse. The epicenter of this struggle, he said, will be in the United States.

"If nothing happens in the United States, if nothing new is created to challenge systemic excesses and empire, it will be a bad situation for all of us," he said. The people are doomed if nothing happens in the U.S.

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*[The American people are already lost (Boston) - sheep fit for the slaughter. Look to ASIA, Africa and Latin America for REAL REVOLUTION.]*

<http://www.informationclearinghouse.info/article41146.htm>

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Jungle Drum Prose/Poetry. <http://jungledrum.lingama.net/news/story-1498.html>