



Chris Hedges speaks at Rage Against the War Machine

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Chris Hedges (CH): Idolatry is the primal sin from which all other sins derive. Idols tempt us to become God. They demand the sacrifice of others. In the mad quest for wealth, fame and power. But the idol always ends by requiring self-sacrifice, leaving us to perish on the blood soaked altars we erected for others. For empires are not murdered. They commit suicide at the feet of the idols that entranced them. We are here today to denounce the unelected, unaccountable high priests of empire who funnel the bodies of millions of victims, along with trillions of dollars of our national wealth, into the bowels of our own version of the Canaanite idol, Moloch. The political class, the media, the entertainment industry, the financiers and even religious institutions bay like wolves for the blood of Muslims or Russians or Chinese or whoever the Idol has demonised as unworthy of life. There were no rational objectives in the wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, Libya and Somalia, and there are none in Ukraine. Permanent war and industrial slaughter are their own justification. Lockheed Martin, Raytheon, General Dynamics, Boeing and Northrop Grumman earned billions of dollars in profits. The vast expenditures demanded by the Pentagon are sacrosanct, and the cabal of war mongering pundits, diplomats and technocrats who smugly dodge responsibility for the array of military disasters they orchestrate are protean, shifting adroitly with the political tides moving from the Republican Party to the Democratic Party, and then back again, mutating from cold warriors to new neocons to liberal interventionists. Julian Bender called these courtiers to power, the self-made barbarians of the intelligentsia. These pimps of war do not see the corpses of their victims. I did, including children. Every lifeless body I stood over as a reporter in Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Palestine, Iraq, Sudan, Yemen, Bosnia and Kosovo, month after month, year after year, exposed their moral bankruptcy, intellectual dishonesty, sick bloodlust and delusional fantasies. They are the puppets of the Pentagon, a state within a state, and the weapons manufacturers who lavishly fund their think tanks: Project for the New American Century, Foreign Policy Initiative, American Enterprise Institute, Centre for a New American Security Institute for the Study of War, Atlantic Council and Brookings Institute. Like some mutant strain of an antibiotic resistant bacteria they cannot be vanquished. It does not matter how wrong they are, how absurd their theories of global dominance (are) or how many times they lie or denigrate other cultures and societies as uncivilised, or how many they condemn to death. They are immovable props, parasites vomited up in the dying days of empire, ready to sell us the next virtuous war against whoever they have decided is the new Hitler. The map

changes, but the game is the same. Pity our prophets, those who wander the desolate landscape, crying out in the darkness. Pity Julian Assange undergoing a slow motion execution in a high security prison in London. He committed the empire's fatal sin. He exposed its crimes, its machinery of death, its moral depravity. A society that prohibits the capacity to speak in truth, extinguishes the capacity to live in justice. Some here today might like to think of themselves as radicals, maybe even revolutionaries. But what we are demanding on the political spectrum is, in fact, conservative. It is the restoration of the rule of law. It is simple and basic. It should not, in a functioning republic, be incendiary. But living in truth in a despotic system, one the political philosopher Sheldon Wolin called inverted totalitarianism, is an act of subversion. The architects of imperialism, the masters of war, the corporate controlled legislative, judicial and executive branches of government and their obsequious mouthpieces in the media and academia are illegitimate. Say this simple truth and you are banished, as many of us have been, to the margins. Prove this truth as Julian did and you are crucified. "Red Rosa has vanished, too", Bertolt Brecht wrote of the murdered socialist Rosa Luxemburg, "she told the poor what life is about, and so the rich have rubbed her out". We have undergone a corporate coup d'état where the poor and working men and women, 60% of whom lack \$400 to cover an emergency expense, are reduced to chronic instability. Joblessness and food insecurity are endemic. Our communities and cities are desolate. War, financial speculation, constant surveillance and militarised police that function as internal armies of occupation are the only real concerns of the state. Even habeas corpus no longer exists. We, as citizens, are commodities to corporate systems of power, used and discarded. And the endless wars we fight overseas have spawned the wars we fight at home, as the students I teach in the New Jersey prison system are acutely aware. All empires die in the same act of self-immolation. The tyranny that the Athenian empire imposed on others Thucydides noted in his history of the Peloponnesian War, it finally imposed on itself. To fight back, to reach out and help the weak, the oppressed and the suffering. To save the planet from ecocide. To decry the domestic and international crimes of the ruling class. To demand justice, to live in truth, to smash the graven images is to bear the mark of Cain. Those in power must feel our wrath, which means acts of sustained, non-violent civil disobedience, social and political disruption. Organised power from below is the only power that can save us. Politics is a game of fear, and it is our duty to make those in power very, very afraid. The ruling oligarchy has locked us in its death grip. It cannot be reformed. It obscures and falsifies the truth. It is on a maniacal quest to increase its obscene wealth and unchecked power. It forces us to kneel before its false gods. And so to quote the Queen of Hearts, metaphorically of course, I say, off with their heads.

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