

This story was written in September 2019, less than a year before George Floyd was killed by American police in May 2020 and 8 minutes and 46 seconds became a symbol of police brutality in the United States. Although the similarity of that figure to the titular motif of this story is entirely coincidental, I don't think it's a coincidence that themes of peaceful resistance and suppression of dissent loomed large both in my mind and the world's mind in that moment in history. This is a story of a near future in which a police state enables different privileges for some than for many; the similarity it bears to our actual future depends on our actions now.

Black Lives Matter.

## Ingredients

several million people

several million smartphones

asphalt

1 medium-sized government

1 gallon assorted belief systems

1 pinch strongly-worded social media posts, or to taste

## Directions

1. Lay out people evenly spaced on a flat baking sheet. Sprinkle belief systems over them and allow to marinate. When they have developed complex and often conflicting conceptions of personal liberty, transparency, trust, privacy, altruism, and self-interest, they are ready for the next step.
2. Pour the concepts of money and credit into a large mixing bowl, add people and stir well. Pour this into a pan and leaven for five thousand years; modern economy should rise.
3. Peel asphalt into strips and lay in approximate grid pattern to form city streets. Arrange people so that they have pedestrian or automotive access to the streets.
4. Use government to build schools, enact monetary policy, ask for citizens' opinions with regular elections, ignore some of those opinions if vexatious to favorite industries, secretly enrich some holders of public office, subsidize healthcare, field a military, and decide on when to schedule bank holidays.
5. Install camera, communication, mobile banking, social media, and game applications on smartphones. Place one smartphone in the pocket of each person. The people should quickly become accustomed to the presence and use of the smartphones.
6. Use government to do something unsightly. Be creative! Double-check that the streets are accessible - if you've followed all steps correctly, they should fill with people.



# Eight Minutes

Conor Stuart Roe

Harmon is a shortish man with buzzed short, half grey hair. He fidgets as he waits, looking at his fingers and tapping his feet with a slightly uncomfortable expression. A man with a beard and stringy hair weighs an eighth of weed on a food scale and scoops it into a plastic sandwich bag.

"Alright, man, all good to go. So you said you got some beans and spaghetti for me today, yeah?"

"Yeah." Harmon says back. He slings the backpack off his shoulder and dumps the food out onto the table.

"And some smokes?"

Harmon pulls an unopened pack of cigarettes from his pocket and chucks it on the table as well.

"Alright brother, thanks a bunch." The stringy-haired man grins and hands over the bag. "Have a good one."

Harmon mumbles a reply and makes his way back out. He's glad his employer has never asked him to get a cryptochip, it would make these exchanges a lot harder to manage. His buddy is a programmer for a bank, and they made him get one a few years ago - something about security regulations. But Harmon's video game company is more laid back, and they probably don't want to scare off good workers. People aren't that used to cryptochips yet.

When he gets into the fresh spring morning he realizes how musty and sweaty that apartment had smelled. Back in college he could afford to be picky about dealers, but now he really needs someone close by to avoid arousing suspicion from "sitting still" for too long. His apartment is only a few minutes' walk away.

When he gets back he buzzes up to his roommate; he can't swipe in without his phone. A few seconds later, the door opens, but it's Adjoa bustling out in a pantsuit. Harmon cracks a grin and

tried to say something about "forgot my phone, oops!," but she isn't paying much attention. He slips through the open door as she passes with a slight shudder. An auditor is the worst type of person to run into at a moment like this.

Adjoa squints at the map on her phone as she steps out. The CityCar's supposed to be here. She rushes along the footpath and gets to the curb just in time to see it round the corner. Unusually, there are no other passengers; with a little gratification she takes a front seat. Looking out the windshield always helps ease her motion sickness.

As the car rolls itself onto the main road, she scrolls through her email with one hand and absentmindedly rolls a braid between her fingers with the other. She needs to remember her manager's exact wording to decide what she's in for today.

*"Computer system is filing suspicious AccountShare location activity warnings on all these protestors. Corporate is shitting itself over what to do - we can't review 400,000 warnings. Everybody needs to be in today so we can figure out a way to separate the protestors from run of the mill breaches and decide how to handle them."*

Adjoa sighs. She's probably gonna be making calls all day today.

After a few minutes on Harbor Avenue, the mass of people starts to come into sight. Adjoa had seen a few scattered protests leaving work last night, but this is something else. The car slows as it approaches and eventually refuses to continue; Adjoa taps the *Terminate Ride* button in the CityCar app and hops out. She's only 15 minutes' walk from the office anyway.

The din of chanting is deafening. She pops in headphones and puts on the news. She has to weave in between men and women, mostly younger, wearing bandannas and holding signs. Some of them glare at her as she passes, against the flow of marchers and wearing a corporate outfit. Almost a million people are on the streets, the news says. Once at her building, she swipes her wrist against the pad by the door. The pad beeps and flashes green as her cryptochip is recognized, and she steps in.



The capital city is shaped like a ginkgo leaf, fanning out along the sea and split down the middle by a river. Along the coast lie shipyards and warehouses, though some in the middle are giving way to cafes, fusion restaurants, galleries, and stretches of vinyl-sided houses with solar-paneled roofs and patios that look out on the ocean. Further inland, along the sloping course of the river, sit the huge neo-Gothic parliament building, city hall, and various red brick buildings affiliated with the university. Carrying traffic between the coast and the upland is a long, wide thoroughfare - Harbor Avenue. It's mostly parallel to the river, lit with string lights year-round, lined with shopping districts, beaming corporate offices, and high-rise condos. Further out, the city sprawls out into apartments, grocery stores, and shuttered gas stations. Most buildings there are old; some are no longer occupied.

On weekends, people are in their homes, listening to music, cooking breakfast, watching movies. Some of them take the dog for a walk. Some of them go to the shopping districts; they might even go out for a drink afterwards or dance late into the night. On Monday morning, many of the same faces can be seen wearing nice clothes taking cars to offices, typing on shiny computers, talking to each other in confident voices, going outside and getting food they can eat with one hand while they type with the other. Others stay home. Some of the kids take cars to school where they use computers and a kind-faced grownup says things to them all day. Some kids just stay home and watch videos about the alphabet, history, or math instead.

But today is a weekend, and yet many people aren't home. Harbor Avenue is filled with people. Some of them have homemade signs or wear dust masks. A stream of marching, shouting bodies flows in the opposite direction of the river, inland toward the parliament building. Police in helmets carry batons and hard plastic shields. Some of them carry guns. Some of them launch cans of tear gas at the people if they're shouting too loud or acting too angry. Many marchers converge around parliament, chanting and holding signs for TV cameras. Others converge around the prime minister's residence a few blocks away. Inside, he paces back and forth, talking on the phone.



Andreea, a white-haired woman, sits inside, sipping tea. The air hangs still and stuffy, but with the windows open the noise of the throng stories below poured in and she was unable to concentrate. She's staring intently at words on a laptop:

## *Consumer Financial Transparency in the Digital Age*

*by Saliha Abdulrashid*

*Every successful economy in history has been built on trust and credit. Innovations throughout history in systems of credit and accounting have allowed for the complexity of the modern system of global trade and consumer finance. The creation of the first credit bureaus around the turn of the 20th century are what allowed for banks to remain profitable while extending home and business loans to families and consumers around the world. And now in the 21st century, the institution of AccountShare and the automated monitoring of location and financial transaction data keeps all consumers accountable, prevents crime, and allows citizens to trust one another. Personal data transparency is a benefit to all those who have nothing to hide.*

*Let's begin by looking at the history of accounting...*

It's amazing how fervently her students support AccountShare. Twenty years ago, the idea that so much of your behavior would be a matter of public record would unsettle people. But then banks started wanting to make sure you weren't an irresponsible spender before they gave you a loan. And cryptochips were introduced as a foolproof way to verify identity, and before long employers wanted everyone to have them. And advertisers wanted to know everything they could get their hands on.

Somewhere along the way, people became comfortable with it. If companies were going to find a way to know everything about you, it might as well be in the open so you could know what they knew. The easiest way to meet up with your friends was just to leave location sharing on. You

could find out if the newest movie was any good by looking up how many people streamed it. Eventually, it was a point of social pride, a way to prove to everyone how well-behaved you were. Nobody feared others taking advantage of them, for the others were being tracked too.

Andreea blinks. Her eyes had wandered off the screen and onto Harbor Avenue below. Down there, on the sidewalk, she catches sight of Saliha standing with her friends.

Saliha holds a piece of cardboard with painted letters reading "*Citizens never lie! Why would you lie to us?*" A TV camera crew walks by on the sidewalk, behind the police line. "What does he have to hide? How can we trust our government now?" Saliha's friend shouts, hoping to be seen by the cameras. It feels good to be out here standing up for something. Everyone feels good.

The camera crew actually breaks through the crowd and approaches the leader of Saliha's group, a senior student she's talked to two or three times. Saliha can't hear the question they ask, but she can hear her impassioned reply: "For decades, governments around the world ignored the will of their citizens and hurt foreigners by acting in the shadows! Almost every country has been the perpetrator or the victim of violence waged for the sake of 'national security!' To hear such excuses come out of the prime minister's mouth on Thursday hurt my pride in our country!"

Saliha smiles to hear these words. The people around her are people she believes in, and people she can trust.



# **Prime Minister Admits Cabinet's Role in Falsified AccountShare Data**

THURSDAY - In a statement to the press at 9:30 this morning, the Prime Minister and Minister of Finance admitted that the cabinet has falsified the AccountShare location and financial data of the Prime Minister and several ranking cabinet officials and military officers. This follows the publication yesterday of leaked chats of cabinet officials discussing the use of aides to generate false location data and conduct secret financial transactions. In his statement, the Prime Minister said, "Our aim was not to fundamentally mislead the public about the official activities or personal behavior of myself or other officials. We began the program for the safety of military and civilian officers transiting high-risk areas, and protecting the classification of certain transactions key to national security."

According to the leaked chats, the cryptochips of selected officials were surgically removed and re-implanted in aides who accompany the officials on most travel and all public appearances. Officials leave the aides behind on travel they wish to keep a secret from the general public, giving the appearance in their location data that they have not left. In addition, the chats suggest that the personal financial accounts of aides are used to conduct secret financial transactions, as a way to keep them off of the widely monitored financial ledgers of state officials and the Cabinet Office. Some of the chat messages are cryptographically signed by the Prime Minister and other officials, corroborating their authenticity.

Last October, the Prime Minister received scrutiny when online commentators noticed that his publicly available location data appeared to be briefly out of sync with his actual location. On the 18th of that month, he was forced to return early from an overseas state visit, as a budget crisis unexpectedly came to a head. His AccountShare location data that day stated that he made it to Parliament from the airport approximately eight minutes before his vehicle was actually seen to arrive. At the time, the government attempted to explain the occurrence as a technical glitch, but



some commentators demanded an audit of government transparency. That incident is now being discussed once again in light of the new revelations.

As of 2:00 pm today, some protestors are already taking to the streets of the capital, demanding that the Prime Minister resign, and that third-party audits be made of the transparency of governmental data sharing.



Tobias stands in his helmet and grips his baton. His knuckles are white. The visor of his helmet is fogged with sweat; if he weren't wearing gloves he could wipe it off. Three hours ago he was a little anxious to be face-to-face with an angry mob, even if he wouldn't have admitted it out loud. Now he just feels hot and bored.

The protestors below him are visibly subdued by dehydration as well. Men and women are hanging their tongues out, and there's movement at the sides of the avenue as people split off to buy food or bottled water in neighborhood shops. A lot of businesses hadn't opened today, but at the corner stores business is booming.

Tobias had been stationed around 11:00 am to join the line holding around parliament and city hall. Into the early afternoon, the protestors were on the move, pouring in from all corners of the city and walking together up Harbor Avenue. But once the front of the pack started to reach parliament, they'd stalled and the whole street had become one big foot traffic jam. From what he'd been hearing over his earpiece, there'd been a standoff outside the prime minister's since mid-afternoon, as a large group of riot police ringed around the building and protestors seemed content to stay at bay. The protest had been losing energy since then.

But now Tobias notices that protestors have begun checking their phones more frequently, and discussing in more hushed tones. Apprehension again begins to well up in him. And then, all of a sudden, the street becomes eerily silent.



Up on the hill behind the city hall, Bishan adjusts the focus and white balance on his camera. In the last decade a lot of photographers had switched over to mobile phone cameras, which had admittedly gotten pretty high-quality by now, but there was still nothing quite like a real camera. Bishan is lucky he's good enough to get paid for doing something so fun. With some luck, he can sell his photos tonight and have one of them on the cover page of the news tomorrow.

He checks his phone - 5:34. Just two more minutes. He has the perfect spot up here - parliament and the prime minister's gaudy brown mansion are both in full view, and the rest of the city

stretches out to the hazy horizon. The collective murmur of a million people is audible below him.

One minute. It was kind of amazing, that the same digital communications that had thrown a society into this vicious disagreement also allowed people to come together and coordinate so perfectly. He checks his camera settings again - he wants to capture the moment a hush goes over the crowd.

5:36. The time of day last October when the prime minister's AccountShare had shown him arriving at parliament, even when the world could see him stuck in the middle of another traffic jam on this same artery through the city. Suddenly, all talking below ceases. Bishan puts his eye against the viewfinder, gazes at the crowd, and presses the shutter release.

He wants to take more pictures, but he allows himself a moment to admire the historic photo. In the crystal-clear image of his expensive digital camera, you can make out individual protestors. They stand facing the police and the prime minister holed up in his 21st century castle. Their left hands are placed over their mouths in disapproving silence.

For eight more minutes, as Bishan takes pictures, the protestors stand shoulder to shoulder, and the city is silent except for the murmur of the river.



# The Silent Protest

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From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

The so-called **Silent Protest** is the name given to both the period of demonstrations and civil unrest following the initial revelations in the [AccountShare scandal](#), and a particular event in those protests on Sunday, April 10 when protesters stood in silence for eight minutes to mark the [eight minutes](#) the previous year during which Prime Minister [Anton Prifti](#)'s AccountShare location data was visibly inaccurate. The organizers of the protest claim that over a million people nationally took part on that day, while official police accounts record about 600,000. The protests sought Prifti's resignation, and increased verifiability of the federal government's [freedom of information](#) pledges.

The protests eventually died down by the end of summer, without securing any major policy changes or the resignation of Prifti or any other high-level officials. Prifti's term as prime minister continued until the dissolution of parliament three years later over the [Sequestration funding crisis](#).

*This article is a **stub**. You can help Wikipedia by **expanding it**.*