

IT CAN HAPPEN HERE

"What can happen here?" you ask.

I answer "Liberty can be strangled or stifled here in the United States--vaunted fortress of freedom." Sinclair Lewis took a negative premise and unfolded its paradox. I take a positive premise and reveal its legitimacy.

How does it happen that talk of dictators can be countenanced in the United States? Or call a rose by any other name--

This nation came into being because men had become a law unto nations. This country was settled, wrested from a crown, and conceived in democracy because the men who came here preferred a nation that was subservient to the rights and wishes of men rather than a country composed of a group of serfs who were vassals of a king.

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How snort our memories grow! It has happened over and over again the world over. Italy still thrills to the name of Garibaldi thinking of him as the founder of a strong nation. They have forgotten that his heroic struggle had the single purpose of freedom. Had they remembered, the iron jaw would not be superimposed on the map of Italy. Russian peasants tiring of their centuries of starvation and cruelty, threw off the yoke of the Czars. They took hope and marched forward until Stalin again hitched them to a yoke of tyranny red with the blood of political opposition.

From the far corners of the earth, the musicians, writers and scientists of Germany hide wet eyes when they hear "Deutschland uber Alles." Those who loved liberty under von Hindenburg

are long since dead. An Austrian house painter painted a glowing picture for a discouraged and humiliated Germany. His landscape glows with concentration camps, bruised bodies, and tortured spirits. He has taught his people to love hate. The swastika is the flag; Heil Hitler is the national anthem; and the salute their attitude of worship. German women bear children as a command performance. Their cultural progress has been halted. Their children will make excellent cannon fodder in Hitler's attempt to prove that the culture and spirit of Germany is not dead,--just their sons!

Spain ...glamorous country of the Alhambra, engages in wholesale murder to prove that each contestant possesses superior qualifications to govern. That they both possess superior qualifications to extinguish a race and ravage the beauty and

antiquity of Spain admits of no doubt.

Greece, home of the world's oldest democracy, does a goose step under a monarchical baton.

At what time in the gradual disintegration that these countries have experienced, do you suppose the people organized themselves as vigilantes and questioned every act of the state.? Do you suppose they applied the test of freedom to every new power the government exercised, or did they, as so many of us, say, "It can't happen here!"

If one could see the army of the dictator or hear the clink of his armored heel, resistance would be everywhere evident, but dictators of the twentieth century vintage are commanding orators, makers of fine phrases, zealots for the rights of the citizens, descendants of Moses who have been sent to lead us from the

Wilderness.

Dictators are not heaven-sent but hell-born, and the burning is neither obvious nor immediate.

If I proved that it can happen here, and I think I have, your next question is "How can it happen here?"

My answer is, "Because we hold our heritage lightly; because we are akin to Esau. A birthright for our children or a mess of pottage for today?"

We forget, for the moment, that "the greatest glory of a free-born people is to transmit that freedom to their children." We neglect that which our forebears nourished and held in trust for us. "Our trusteeship is a guilty one if we pass not to our children that freedom which our fathers passed to us."

You say, "How are we remiss in our trusteeship?"

My answer is: "We are indifferent to our heritage. Familiarity has bred contempt. The liberty we have known so well has become a prophet without honor in his own country. We are indicted on the charge of indifference."

You wonder why our heritage is so valuable. I tell you the blood of the liberty-loving people over a period of 8 centuries has made it so. Do we forget that our forebears were burned at the stake, swung from the end of a rope, languished in the prison hells of Europe, died in massacres organized by the state in an attempt to eliminate political opposition? They bore all this and more in order to evolve and establish the liberties we so lightly cast aside for political exigencies.

Liberty is our heritage, and liberty is attained by slow and painful processes. That "the people never give up their

liberties but under some delusion," was true in the time of Burke and is no less true today.

It is necessary that we find a common denominator for liberty. As we Americans understand liberty, it means freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of religious worship, security in person and property, and the right to have independent courts pass on the questions involving both human rights and property rights.

Rights and privileges which we accept as a matter of course were handed us because our forebears refused to sacrifice liberty, whenever, whenever, however the demands were made. The road to freedom was <sup>not</sup> paved with the blood of braver man and women than we. We lack even the courage to explode a myth.

To the extent we are forgetful of the origin and growth of our liberties, we become indifferent to their maintenance and tragically blinded to the forces which threaten the extermination of our hard-won rights.

Indifference, the least thoughtful of us know, is the most potent tool of the despot. Indolence is the subsoil in which the seeds of dictatorship fall and germinate. Willing ignorance is the precursor of an enslaved people.

Through indifference, indolence, and willing ignorance in recognizing and coping with forces which threaten to undermine the foundation of our liberties, we allow our rights, one by one to be taken away, thinking the concessions we are making are insignificant and justified by emergency conditions. "None are more hopelessly enslaved than those who falsely believe they are

free."

When we count the rights we have surrendered and are now surrendering, we must know we are detouring backward on the long road our forefathers traveled from Runnymede. Let us, you and I, examine the origin of our liberty and renew our acquaintance with its growth.

The first great document of human liberty is the Magna Charta. It is the foundation rock upon which human rights have been builded. It is a towering landmark on humanity's long trek to freedom. It represents the efforts of a people goaded to desperation by the abuse of power.

With the signing of this instrument a new dawn of freedom broke upon a world black with tyranny. There on the tiny isle of Runnymede, in 1215, King John did promise that he would no more

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"send upon, imprison, nor disseize any man or deprive him of life and liberty except by the judgment of his peers and the law of the land." Thus a people who had thrown off indifference forced a ruler mad with power to sign the great document of human rights, the Magna Charta. Government by law attained legal status for the first time. Freedom began her long weary climb to constitutional government and a division of the powers of the government with the signing of this instrument. The King was no longer to be the sole executive, legislative, and judicial power of the country.

Government by laws made by the representatives of the people, protection from false imprisonment and undue punishment by an executive-controlled judiciary, were inaugurated with the signing of the Magna Charta.

The first guarantee of religious liberty is contained in the great charter.

Had the conditions of the Magna Charta been rigorously observed there might have been no need for further statement of the rights of men. However, as the years passed, the kings grew more autocratic and the people indifferent until abuse once more awoke them in the first quarter of the seventeenth century.

King Charles I had seriously transgressed the civil and political liberties of the people. He was forced to call the Parliament to obtain money and supplies for his armies. Thanks to the Magna Charta, Parliament held the purse strings. On this occasion Parliament was able to withhold money and supplies until the king had ratified the Petition of Right.

Thus the Petition of Right was signed in 1628. This

document restated and gave the force of written law to the prohibition of arbitrary imprisonment without due process of law, banned the lodging of soldiers in private homes and the use of martial law in time of peace. Until this document was ratified, arbitrary imprisonments were much used as a method of disposing of political and personal enemies and to terrorize the people into submission, despite the fact that it was forbidden in the Magna Charta. It ~~was~~ required a strong heart to criticize high authority in those days!

The third great document in the history of liberty ~~was~~<sup>is</sup> the Writ of Habeas Corpus. The principle of Habeas Corpus had developed much earlier, as we have just seen, but it needed further defining lest kings think their will to be "due process of law".

The Writ of Habeas Corpus was ratified in 1379. It was and still is one of the chief safeguards of our liberties and one of the best securities against tyranny ever devised. It commands the person having charge of a prisoner to produce him at a stated time and place to determine the justice of his detention. Before the Writ of Habeas Corpus was agreed to, only the sovereign could demand that a prisoner be given a trial. The sovereigns were noted for their short memories!

The fourth great document in the evolution of liberty is the Bill of Rights. It was written as a revolutionary measure after James was deposed. When William and Mary came to the throne, they accepted the provisions laid down in the Bill of Rights. It was afterward introduced and passed by the Parliament. It embodied the fundamental principles of human

and political liberties. As you know, the first ten amendments to the Federal Constitution form the American Bill of Rights. Many state constitutions have similar Bills of Rights.

The eighteenth century saw the fundamental fight for liberty removed from England to the Americas. The men and women who came to colonize America brought with them a passionate devotion to the principles of freedom which their forefathers had tried to establish in England. Englishmen had become indifferent and the liberties of Englishmen were again flouted.

Those who loved liberty came to America because conditions at home were intolerable. They hoped that here in America they might enjoy the freedom that obtains where there is no tyranny.

For a while the colonists enjoyed their much prized freedom. Soon however, tyranny began its encroachments. The American

Declaration of Independence was the answer. It is perhaps the most powerful indictment of tyranny ever voiced by free men.

In language that defies time and change, it is stated that the freedom of man is an inherent right. No words more significant to mankind were ever penned than these:

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; that to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed; that whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new government, laying its foundation on such principles and

organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness."

A long, bloody war established these principles. Upon this document, the American form of government was wrought. In the same atmosphere which produced the Declaration of Independence education was freed of its shackles and ~~won~~<sup>gained</sup> recognition as an essential of the maintenance and proper development of democracy.

In 1779, Thomas Jefferson presented to the Virginia Legislature a bill "for the more general diffusion of knowledge," a measure which recognized for the first time ~~that~~ in America, the principle that education is a function of the government.

Slowly his theories were accepted. The Texas Declaration of Independence, adopted March 2, 1836, a little more than a century ago declared, "It is an axiom of political science, that



unless a people are educated and enlightened, it is idle to expect the continuance of civil liberty, or the capacity for self-government."

Mirabeau B. Lamar, President of the Republic of Texas, in his message to the Texas Congress said of education:

"A cultivated mind is the guardian genius of democracy... It is the only dictator that freemen acknowledge and the only security that freemen desire."

A beacon light for American liberty now and forever is Washington's refusal to become King. After the revolution, there were many Americans who favored an elective monarchy based upon the British system. General Washington was strongly urged to make himself king of an American Empire.

Washington wrote, "Be assured, sir, no occurrence in the

course of the war has given me more painful sensations than your information of there being such ideas existing in the Army as you have expressed and I must view with abhorrence, and reprehend with severity.

"I am much at a loss to conceive what part of my conduct could have given encouragement to an address which to me seems big with the greatest mischiefs that can befall my country...

"Let me conjure you then, if you have any regard for your country....concern for yourself, or posterity, or respect ~~from~~ <sup>these thoughts</sup> me to banish <sup>from your mind</sup>, and never communicate as from yourself, or anyone else, a sentiment of like nature."

Thus, one great American statesman refused a concentration of power knowing full well as do all students of government what the inevitable outcome is.

Virginia made several important contributions to the establishment of liberty in America. Notable among these contributions was the "Virginia Act for Establishing Religious Freedom" promulgated in 1789.

The Supreme Court of the United States later defined the rights of religious freedom in these famous words:

"In this country the full and free right to entertain any religious belief, to practice any religious principle, and to teach any religious doctrine which does not violate the laws of morality and property, and which does not infringe personal rights, is conceded to all. The law knows no heresy, and is committed to the support of no dogma, the establishment of no sect."

All these principles which were established by our

forefathers, were incorporated in the American system of government when this government was founded. As we see, these liberties were not won soon or easily.

The constitution and its amendments embody these principles. Laws in accordance with the principles laid down in the original document or in the subsequent amendments are in line with this attitude of freedom. The founders of this constitution knew that they could not write a constitution which would serve for all time. Recognizing the element of time, and the necessity for change, they provided the method by which the constitution might be amended. It has been amended to meet the needs of the American people twenty-one times.

Whenever there is sufficient need to add further powers to the

central government, those powers will be added.

The constitution sets up a triple division of powers of the government. The executive is one branch, the legislative is another, and the judicial is another. Every great document I have recounted was promulgated in an effort to divide the powers of government. Our knowledge of human nature should tell us that power in the hands of one person ultimately means the abuse of that power. Our system of government is free from political tyranny and oppression today because up to now we have had an independent executive, an independent congress, and an independent court. When we diminish the power of one and increase the power of the other, we lose the balance that supports liberty. You may think that this is far-fetched; I refer you to every sign and red light that history hangs out.

I have mentioned these epochal developments in the fight for freedom to illustrate what a precious heritage we enjoy today.

When we review the long, hard road which has led to the American democracy of today, the endless struggle covering the span of 800 years, how inadequate seems the cry for executive power "to meet today's problems today." "Today's liberties are the results of yesterday's struggles. Tomorrow's liberties depend upon today's vigilance."

We, women of the United States have more as citizens to lose by the advance of tyranny than any other women in the world. We, women of the United States have more to lose as women than any women in the world. Consider our position as citizens, business women, professional women, artists,

scientists, and intelligent wives and mothers and determine for yourselves if you wish to be placed in the position that women of Germany, Italy, Russia, or Spain occupy today. Women have much to lose under a tyrannical government in that their long years of struggle to be citizens of their country in their own right will go for naught.

"This is strong medicine" you say, "Yes, I answer, but only strong medicine will serve the purpose now, for our indifference, indolence, and willing ignorance have gone far, and only strong medicine will touch the seat of infection."

If you are interested in how we may turn and go forward on the road of freedom again, I say:

"Examine each new proposal the state or federal government seeks to exercise. Ask, 'Will the projection of this measure,

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meritorious as it seems today, rob us of any liberty?' Spare no effort in finding the answer. Listen with open minds to both sides of a question. Let your rational judgment rather than your emotional judgment control. Once your mind is made up that a measure will endanger the wealth of liberty you hold in trusteeship, oppose it with all the strength and ingenuity at your command. From farmhouse to industrial center, tell the story of the inquisition. Tell the story of Magna Charta. Tell the story of the French Revolution. Tell the story of the decline and fall of the culture that was Germany's. Tell the story of the country that gave the renaissance to the world. Give your hearers the front page of any newspaper that carries reports of the murder in Spain. Ask no quarter and give no quarter."

In closing, I quote that distinguished public servant, the honorable Carter Glass, who quoted Hon. John Stuart Mill:

"A people may prefer a free government; but, if from indolence or carelessness or cowardice or want of public spirit, they are unequal to the exertions necessary for preserving it; if they will not fight for it when directly attacked; if they can be deluded by the artifices used to cheat them out of it; if by momentary discouragement or temporary panic, or a fit of enthusiasm for an individual, they can be induced to lay their liberties at the feet of even a great man, or trust him with powers which enable him to subvert their institutions--in all these cases they are more or less unfit for liberty."

During the next year, we shall know whether or not Americans are fit for liberty!