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A Free Society and a Free Press

Is a free press a guarantor of freedom? When Russian Czar Nicholas II was forced to abdicate in February, 1917, Alexander Kerensky, a dynamic leader of liberative process took over the helm. The following eight months, Russia experienced unprecedented freedom with incomparable turmoil. The explosion of unruly mobs, intoxicated by the sudden dissolution of czarist rule, took freedom heedlessly, disregarding the warning of history that the price of freedom is a disciplined vigilance.

Kerensky, in his American exile 30 years ago, once spoke on our University of Chattanooga campus. He was a man of good intentions, yet his ephemeral administration, even as prime minister of the Russian provisional government through the summer of 1917, included unheard freedom of the press, resulting in a great delusion. What became a political vacuum only invited the ruthless Lenin Bolshevik revolution that overwhelmed Russia during the following October.

Today we unquestionably assume that no society is truly free without a free press; yet the Kerensky period indicates that the existence of a free press is no assurance of a free society. Terrorist Lenin, with his Bolshevik cohorts, profitably deployed that freedom for themselves, toppling Kerensky and substituting a dictatorial hegemony that wiped out freedom of the press and freedom of nearly everything else. Is there a lesson here for us in what is still left of the free world?

As we today become aware of the reckless freedom of the communication media, printed or electronic, we realize the possibility that this can approach irresponsible anarchy. With our advanced technology, these have become more penetrating in the Western World than in the predominating illiteracy of Kerensky's Russia with neither radio nor TV. What does really guarantee the freedom of society so much cherished in the Jeffersonian republic and so impressively recorded on the sumptuous monument near the Potomac River? Do we not

observe a remarkable similarity to the Kerensky dilemma not only in the U.S. press but directly in Cuba prior to the Castro take-over?

It was the striking case of Migueo Agel-Quevedo, former editor of the influential Cuban magazine, *Bohemia*, that actually assisted Castro in gaining power. When Castro consolidated his dictatorial grip on Cuba, Quevedo sought refuge in Mexico. Eventually the disillusioned and embittered editor committed suicide, and before he died wrote a portentous message in which he laid the blame for the extinction of Cuban freedom on the press. What he said is the symptomatic voice in the wilderness of our carefree Western World and a warning of history:

"We were all guilty. Newsmen who filled my desk with damning articles against all administrations. They were applause-seekers who, in order to satisfy the futile and brutal morbidity of the masses, and to feel flattered by the approval of the common people, would clothe themselves with hateful uniform of 'systematic oppositionists.' It did not matter who the president was, nor the good things he may be accomplishing for Cuba. He had to be attacked. He had to be destroyed."

This perfectly illustrates Lenin's strategy through the summer of 1917. "Destroy everything" was the repetitious gospel which he had learned from his admired tutor Nechaev and his "Revolutionary Catechism." As was Nechaev, so was Lenin more concerned with destruction than with the creation of a new world. The spirit of the dedicated terrorist of the previous century has entered our arena at the doorstep of happiness-pursuing Florida.

Why was Nechaev, special Czar's prisoner in the Petro-Pavlovsk fortress in St. Petersburg, able to mesmerize the sentry and organize the assassination of Czar Alexander II on March 13, 1881, and only then was placed in solitary confinement in the same fortress, where he was never left to starve as are the innocent victims today in Soviet prison camps? Lenin-Nechaev's daring strategy operates today throughout the entire free world

as an enticing seduction. Few are aware that our freedom of press and media are used by clever propagandists to undermine confidence of the people in the institutions of our free society. While the Western World has accepted bona fide the Helsinki agreement behind the Iron Curtain it is considered marxistically a joke, never intended to be taken seriously. Solzhenitsyn never tires of reminding us that "two or three decades of so-called 'co-existence' as glorious as the last and the very concept of the West will vanish from the face of the earth."

We cannot destroy freedom in order to save it. Yet our freedom of press and media are used not only by the wise and responsible. Their voice may be lost in the shrillness and glamor of those who promote decadence and depravity in our society. They accelerate the trend in which we may end up losing both the will and means to defend our heritage of freedom. This present grand strategy of Communist imperialism represents a fantastic Trojan horse right in our midst. Our citadels of freedom are falling, one after another.

Is there a solution to the present precarious trend of the free world? There is much more to safeguard our freedom than luxuriating in it. Millions have fallen under the Communist heel it is because many have lost faith in higher, spiritual values of life. Freedom for them has become a license to gain privileges without responsibility and obligation. Spiritual values have been superseded by material values. Basking in freedom and materialism robs our souls of the security, hope and enduring forms of spiritual enjoyment, such as sustaining the simple living of the Founding Fathers of this land of liberty. The virtue of simple life is in knowing how to resist the advertised glory of an ever expanding economy on borrowed time and money. The first condition is a culture, philosophy or religion which unifies material and spiritual values in a true living.

When Aldous Huxley, before he passed away, revisited his *Brave New World*, he found it ever more alarming. Now Orwell's "1984" is creeping up on us through unsuspected doors. The only hope is a new man and a new redeemed civilization. At this period of springtime, resurrected life in nature and Holy Days, it is an appropriate time to ponder over this question.

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