

Democracy's Road to Tyranny

by Erik von Kuehnelt-Leddihn

Plato, in his *Republic*, tells us that tyranny arises, as a rule, from democracy. Historically, this process has occurred in three quite different ways. Before describing these several patterns of social change, let us state precisely what we mean by "democracy."

Pondering the question of "Who should rule," the democrat gives his answer: "the majority of politically equal citizens, either in person or through their representatives." In other words, equality and majority rule are the two fundamental principles of democracy. A democracy may be either liberal or illiberal.

Genuine liberalism is the answer to an entirely different question: *How* should government be exercised? The answer it provides is: regardless of *who* rules, government must be carried out in such a way that each person enjoys the greatest amount of freedom, compatible with the common good. This means that an absolute monarchy could be liberal (but hardly democratic) and a democracy could be totalitarian, illiberal, and tyrannical, with a majority brutally persecuting minorities. (We are, of course, using the term "liberal" in the globally accepted version and not in the American sense, which since the New Deal has been totally perverted.)

How could a democracy, even an initially liberal one, develop into a totalitarian tyranny? As we said in the beginning, there are three avenues of approach, and in each case the evolution would be of an "organic" nature. The tyranny would evolve from the very character of even a liberal democracy because there is, from

the beginning on, a worm in the apple: freedom and equality do not mix, they practically exclude each other. Equality doesn't exist in nature and therefore can be established only by force. He who wants geographic equality has to dynamite mountains and fill up the valleys. To get a hedge of even height one has to apply pruning shears. To achieve equal scholastic levels in a school one would have to pressure certain students into extra hard work while holding back others.

The first road to totalitarian tyranny (though by no means the most frequently used) is the overthrow by force of a liberal democracy through a revolutionary movement, as a rule a party advocating tyranny but unable to win the necessary support in free elections. The stage for such violence is set if the parties represent philosophies so different as to make dialogue and compromise impossible. Clausewitz said that wars are the continuation of diplomacy by other means, and in ideologically divided nations revolutions are truly the continuation of parliamentarism with other means. The result is the absolute rule of one "party" which, having finally achieved complete control, might still call itself a party, referring to its parliamentary past, when it still was merely a *part* of the diet.

A typical case is the Red October of 1917. The Bolshevik wing of the Russian Social Democratic Workers' Party could not win the elections in Alexander Kerenski's democratic Russian Republic and therefore staged a coup with the help of a defeated, marauding army and navy, and in this way established a firm socialistic tyranny. Many liberal democracies are enfeebled by party strife to such an extent that revolutionary organizations can easily

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seize power, and sometimes the citizenry, for a time, seems happy that chaos has come to an end. In Italy the *Marcia su Roma* of the Fascists made them the rulers of the country. Mussolini, a socialist of old, had learned the technique of political conquest from his International Socialist friends and, not surprisingly, Fascist Italy was the second European power, after Laborite Britain (and long before the United States) to recognize the Soviet regime.

The second avenue toward totalitarian tyranny is “free elections.” It can happen that a totalitarian party with great popularity gains such momentum and so many votes that it becomes *legally* and democratically a country’s master. This happened in Germany in 1932 when no less than 60 per cent of the electorate voted for totalitarian despotism: for every two National Socialists there was one international socialist in the form of a Marxist Communist, and another one in the form of a somewhat less Marxist Social Democrat. Under these circumstances liberal democracy was doomed, since it had no longer a majority in the Reichstag. This development could have been halted only by a military dictatorship (as envisaged by General von Schleicher who was later murdered by the Nazis) or by a restoration of the Hohenzollerns (as planned by Brüning). Yet, within the democratic and constitutional framework, the National Socialists were bound to win.

How did the “Nazis” manage to win in this way? The answer is simple: being a mass movement striving for a parliamentary majority, they singled out unpopular minorities (the smaller, the better) and then rallied popular support against them. The National Socialist Workers’ Party was “a popular movement based on exact science” (Hitler’s words), militating against the hated few: the Jews, the nobility, the rich, the clergy, the modern artists, the “intellectuals,” categories frequently overlapping, and finally against the mentally handicapped and the Gypsies. National Socialism was the “legal revolt” of the common man against the uncommon, of the “people” (*Volk*) against privileged and therefore envied and hated groups. Remember that Lenin, Mussolini, and Hitler called their rule “democratic”—*demokratiya po novomu, democrazia organizzata, deutsche Demokratie*—but they

never dared to call it “liberal” in the worldwide (non-American) sense.

Carl Schmitt, in his 93rd year, analyzed this evolution in a famous essay entitled “The Legal World Revolution”: this sort of revolution—the German Revolution of 1933—simply comes about through the ballot and can happen in any country where a party pledged to totalitarian rule gains a relative or absolute majority and thus takes over the government “democratically.” Plato gave an account of such a procedure which fits, with the fidelity of a Xerox copy, the constitutional transition in Germany: there is the “popular leader” who takes to heart the interest of the “simple people,” of the “ordinary, decent fellow” against the crafty rich. He is widely acclaimed by the many and builds up a body guard only to protect himself and, of course, the interests of the “people.”

In the Name of the People

Think of Hitler’s SA and SS and also of the tendency to apply wherever possible the prefix *Volk* (people): *Volkswagen* (people’s car), *Volksempfänger* (people’s radio set), *das gesunde Volksempfinden* (the healthy sentiments of the people), *Volksgesetz* (people’s law court). Needless to say that this verbal policy continues in the “German Democratic Republic” where we see a “People’s Police,” a “People’s Army,” while Moscow’s satellite states are called “People’s Democracies.”

All this implies that in earlier times only the elites had a chance to govern and that now, at long last, the common man is the master of his destiny able to enjoy the good things in life! It matters little that the realities are quite different. A very high-ranking Soviet official recently said to a European prince: “Your ancestors exploited the people, claiming that they ruled by the Grace of God, but we are doing much better, we exploit the people in the name of the people.”

Then there is the third way in which a democracy changes into a totalitarian tyranny. The first political analyst who foresaw this hitherto-never-experienced kind of evolution was Alexis de Tocqueville. He drew an exact and frightening picture of our Provider State

(wrongly called Welfare State) in the second volume of his *Democracy in America*, published in 1835; he spoke at length about a form of tyranny which he could only describe, but not name, because it had no historic precedent. Admittedly, it took several generations until Tocqueville's vision became a reality.

He envisaged a democratic government in which nearly all human affairs would be regulated by a mild, "compassionate" but determined government under which the citizens would practice their pursuit of happiness as "timid animals," losing all initiative and freedom. The Roman Emperors, he said, could direct their wrath against individuals, but control of all forms of life was out of the question under their rule. We have to add that in Tocqueville's time the technology for such a surveillance and regulation was insufficiently developed. The computer had not been invented and thus his warnings found little echo in the past century.

Tocqueville, a *genuine* liberal and legitimist, had gone to America not only because he was concerned with trends in the United States, but also on account of the electoral victory of Andrew Jackson, the first Democrat in the White House and the man who introduced the highly democratic Spoils System, a genuine invitation to corruption. The Founding Fathers, as Charles Beard has pointed out, hated democracy more than Original Sin. But now a French ideology, only too familiar to Tocqueville, had started to conquer America.

This portentous development lured the French aristocrat to the New World where he wanted to observe the global advance of "democratism," in his opinion and to his dismay bound to penetrate everywhere and to end in either anarchy or the New Tyranny—which he referred to as "democratic despotism." The road to anarchy is more apt to be taken by South Europeans and South Americans (and it usually terminates in military dictatorships in order to prevent total dissolution), whereas the northern nations, while keeping all democratic appearances, tend to founder in totalitarian welfare bureaucracy. The lack of a common political philosophy is more conducive to the development of outright revolutions in the South where civil wars tend to be "the continu-

ation of parliamentarism with other (and more violent) means," while the North is rather given to evolutionary processes, to a creeping increase of slavery and a decrease of personal freedom and initiative. This process can be much more paralyzing than a mere personal dictatorship, military or otherwise, without an ideological and totalitarian character. The Franco and Salazar regimes and certain Latin American authoritarian governments, all mellowing with the years, are good examples.

Slouching Toward Servitude

Tocqueville did not tell us just how the gradual change toward totalitarian servitude can come about. But 150 years ago he could not exactly foresee that the parliamentary scene would produce two main types of parties: the Santa Claus parties, predominantly on the Left, and the Tighten-Your-Belt parties, more or less on the Right. The Santa Claus parties, with presents for the many, normally take from some people to give to others: they operate with largesses, to use the term of John Adams. Socialism, whether national or international, will act in the name of "distributive justice," as well as "social justice" and "progress," and thus gain popularity. You don't, after all, shoot Santa Claus. As a result, these parties *normally* win elections, and politicians who use their slogans are effective vote-getters.

The Tighten-Your-Belt parties, if they unexpectedly gain power, generally act more wisely, but they rarely have the courage to undo the policies of the Santa parties. The voting masses, who frequently favor the Santa parties, would retract their support if the Tighten-Your-Belt parties were to act radically and consistently. Profligates are usually more popular than misers. In fact, the Santa Claus parties are rarely utterly *defeated*, but they sometimes defeat themselves by featuring hopeless candidates or causing political turmoil or economic disaster.

A politicized Saint Nicholas is a grim taskmaster. Gifts cannot be distributed without bureaucratic regulation, registration, and regimentation of the entire country. Countless strings are attached to the gifts received from "above." The State interferes in all domains of human existence—education, health, transpor-

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tation, communication, entertainment, food, commerce, industry, farming, building, employment, inheritance, social life, birth, and death.

There are two aspects to this large-scale interference: statism *and* egalitarianism, yet they are intrinsically connected since to regiment society perfectly, you must reduce people to an identical level. Thus, a "classless society" becomes the real aim, and every kind of discrimination must come to an end. But, discrimination is intrinsic to a free life, because freedom of will and choice is a characteristic of man and his personality. If I marry Bess instead of Jean, I obviously discriminate against Jean; if I employ Dr. Nishiyama as a teacher of Japanese instead of Dr. O'Hanrahan, I discriminate

against the latter, and so forth. (One should not be surprised if an opera house that rejects a 4-foot tall Bambuti singer for the role of Siegfried in Wagner's "Ring" is accused of racism!)

There is, in fact, only either just or unjust discrimination. Yet, egalitarian democracy remains adamant in its totalitarian policy. The popular pastime of modern democracies of punishing the diligent and thrifty, while rewarding the lazy, improvident, and unthrifty, is cultivated via the State, fulfilling a demo-egalitarian program based on a demo-totalitarian ideology.

Democratic tyranny, evolving on the sly as a slow and subtle corruption leading to total State control, is thus the third and by no means rarest road to the most modern form of slavery. □

Mom's Monopoly, Part II

by Susan J. Osburn

One day, Sam came home from school in an anxious state of mind:

Sam: Mom, I'm in trouble now.

Mom: Why?

Sam: I did so well on my economics essay, with the help you gave me, that now Miss Snick wants me to present a project on the market system.

Mom: Can you do it as a practical project rather than as an essay?

Sam: Yeah, I guess so.

Mom: You can do it along with your fund-raising project for the band. Aren't you going to sell something?

Sam: Yeah! We're going to sell Booster Buttons, you know, badges that say "Hale High" and have the Hale Hyena printed on them, to the kids at school.

Mom: Okay, that can be your example of the market process. The band will be like a firm, offering a supply of a product to the market for purchase and consumption by your pool of potential buyers, the students. How much are you going to charge per badge?

Sam: About 50 cents, I guess.

Mom: Why that price?

Sam: Well, most kids can afford it, and we'll still make money.

Mom: So your decision on the price is based first of all on what you think your buyers will pay. How much does it cost you for each badge?



Sam: We checked with Wholesale Badges and it was 20 cents.

Mom: What would you have done if the wholesale company had wanted to charge you 75 cents a button?

Sam: We'd have looked for some other thing to sell. You can't sell stuff for over a dollar at school. The kids are too broke.

Mom: Right. Price was your first consideration in deciding how to enter this market. You worked back from your price to determine what costs you could allow. Doing that shows you already had some information about your market. Knowledge and the use of it are important for both the buyer and the seller. The kids at school have to have some idea whether 50 cents is a reasonable price for a Booster Button, or a rip-off; and you as a seller have to know how much your buyers are likely to spend for your type of product. How many kids are in the school?

Sam: Two thousand.

Mom: What makes you think they'll want Booster Buttons? How many will want them? How many will you get from the wholesaler?

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