

THE CHALLENGE OF TOTALITARIANISM

By William J. Ross

Editor: This article was published one year before the United States entered World War II.

The present challenge to democracy of the totalitarian powers must cause every Theosophist to examine his philosophy to see whether it works in the present condition of world affairs. The very resoluteness of the totalitarian philosophies has resulted in action, ruthless and brutal no doubt, but carried through with an efficiency which has often aroused the admiration of its most violent opponents.

It is this failure of the philosophies of democracies and freedom loving people to result in action that has given the totalitarian powers their apparent success. If these powers are to be overthrown, the challenge of their philosophy must be answered by a creed as resolute as totalitarianism itself.

As Lord Bacon said, "The roads to human power and human knowledge lie close together and are nearly the same!" Knowledge cannot be achieved by thought alone, but must be rooted in action. The pitiable condition so often observed in our modern society of action without thought is the legitimate and inevitable outcome of thought divorced from action.

It is this aspect of our philosophy which must be examined. Despite the constant emphasis, both in our literature and teachings, on living rather than ratiocination as the source of wisdom, this has not resulted in the dynamic quality which might be expected.

Why is this? The answer lies, I believe, not in the lack of good intentions, nor in the failure theoretically to understand and acknowledge the necessity for action, but in the peculiar adjustment which is taking place at the present period in evolution.

A change is taking place: a transfer in the level of conscious awareness from what in Theosophy we have been pleased to call the "lower mind" to the "higher mind," from analytical to synthetic levels of the mind.

In the analytical stage of consciousness, ideas are essentially self-centered and separative. The mind responds to authority and when "logically" convinced, as it often is by the appeal to bias and prejudice, is absolutely certain.

The synthetic stage presents a different picture. The mind is no longer self-centered and separative but looks to humanity rather than the individual, to syntheses which unite rather than separative analysis.

Prof. Tawney has said, "Clever men emphasize the differences which separate them from their fellows, and wise men emphasize what they have in common." This is an excellent statement of what is taking place in the present transition, a change from mere cleverness to wisdom, from separateness to the recognition of the interdependence of all humanity.

This change however brings its problems. No longer concerning ourselves with the certainties of the lower mind, we tend to become tentative and unsure. Believing that differences are not as important as a few verities that often defy definition, we lapse into vagueness and therefore no longer have a positive guide to action. Can this be avoided? Can we remain open minded, appreciative of the other person's point of view, undogmatic, not absolutely sure, and at the same time retain a philosophy which inspires to action, a philosophy which shall be a POSITIVE guide to conduct?

I think we can if we constantly bear in mind the essential unity between the world of ideals and the world of action. Those basic ideals upon which our philosophies are based are not abstract ideals to be achieved in some super-physical world. They are the very flint of reality, the very bedrock on which the whole superstructure of our conduct should be built.

The totalitarian powers have recognized this and their ideals—essentially ideals with a lower mind appeal, "Believe, Fight, Obey,"—are the bases for their life and action. Our ideals, the ideals of freedom loving peoples, are a little difficult of application, so much so that we often dismiss them as impractical.

A radio commentator recently quoted a French general as saying that the young people of France would have to forego their ideals of "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity," and bring themselves down to realities.

What can be more REAL than such ideals, what a more fitting basis upon which to erect a social structure? Yet the attitude of that general is the customary one. As Theosophists, I think our endeavor should be to change this customary attitude and demonstrate in our own lives that the ideals of our philosophy produce a dynamic code.

This will be the real answer to Totalitarianism, but it can only be given when people realize their own personal responsibility. HPB wrote in *The Secret Doctrine*: "The feeling of responsibility is the beginning of Wisdom, a proof that Ahankara is beginning to fade out, the beginning of losing the sense of separateness." (Ahankara—The conception of "I," the egotistical and *mayavic* principle in man.)

When we achieve this sense of responsibility then we will begin to strive for our ideals as the followers of the totalitarian philosophies strive for theirs; but with one

great difference—the difference which makes it certain that democracy shall succeed. We will not be followers; we will be cooperators in the building of a new world.

We will be the men and women to whom the foundations of our American democracy, the ideals of “Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness,” are not a pious hope, or a stirring phrase to quote in political speeches, but the underlying motivation of all our actions. A statement of something to be achieved as freedom loving people learn to live more effectively and find that happiness can be best pursued and found in learning to cooperate with our fellow men for the good of all.

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