

Democratic government - an endangered species?

Democracy is an ideal. In some ways, it is similar to Communism; the theory is wonderful. If either system truly worked as it is supposed to in theory, either would provide the best possible world for its citizens. And there is only one thing wrong with either Democracy or Communism. In practice, neither system really works because both depend upon controlling human elements of ambition, greed, apathy, and sloth. Until these characteristics are bred out of the human race, mankind shall never achieve the ideal of either a perfect Democratic state nor a perfect Communist state.

Examples of the problems Communists encounter in the U.S.S.R. are perceived by us as inefficiency, an inability to supply its population adequately with the necessities of life, let alone a standard of living equal to that most citizens of the U.S.A. enjoy. Stories like the one about the new apartment buildings in Moscow receiving a shipment of bathtubs too long for the space planned for their installation, so a hole is cut in the wall and one end of the tub protrudes into a hallway, delight us. Doubtless the Russians have been equally entertained during the past five years with reports of over-production of Detroit-built cars that Americans declined to purchase, or some similar "jokes" about the recent recession.

Behind problems of both systems lies the inescapable fact that people are imperfect. If people were only perfect, any system of government would work beautifully. Some Russians, no less than some of us, struggle to gain power. Some Russians, exactly like some of us, take advantage of position

to enhance their status, attain a more comfortable lifestyle at the expense of their countrymen, or increase their monetary positions. And some Russians, like some of us, allow others to benefit from making power plays because they, like us, don't really care much one way or the other. As long as they can continue in their own safe little ruts, undisturbed, they won't rock the boat, they won't make waves, and they will pretend the system is working.

Others are scared to blow whistles because they, too, might get caught doing something not quite on the up-and-up, so they close their eyes and turn away their heads. Or they are frightened of possible consequences. And then there are those, in both countries, who are just plain lazy. They take whatever they can get without making much effort, live on the slippage, and let somebody else work hard and pick up the tab.

As long as people dream dreams of Utopia, and as long as people remain fallible, governments will rise and fall, ever dependent upon the strengths and caliber of leaders (whether in Washington or Moscow), ever dependent upon ambitions of advisors to leaders, ever dependent upon powers of military forces, ever dependent upon the extent to which citizens permit their governments to rule without question.

Communist forms of government are imposed on the citizenry by force and control is maintained by force. Dissidents in Russia, in Czechoslovakia, or in Poland, we bear witness, are not tolerated.

Democratic forms of government are imposed on the

citizenry by choice of the majority; control is maintained through election by the majority. Dissidents are free to dissent, free to attempt to effect change in government by convincing a majority that change will be beneficial to everyone.

Both systems are constantly threatened from without and from within, but threats from within are more insidious and more likely to succeed than those from without. Communism may fail, eventually, through uprising of the masses. Democracy may fail, eventually, through changes in views of the majority.

But another possibility threatens Democracy, a possibility that does not threaten Russian Communism: a powerful and ambitious leader may build a strong military and either employ that force to seize dictatorial powers, or be overwhelmed by the force he has created. Were that to occur, the millions of apathetic and lazy people in this country would find themselves without recourse. Those who decline to serve in any public capacity, those who refrain from speaking out against preconceived wrongs, and those who do not even bother to vote may look back upon 1984 and ask, "How could I ever have let the good life slip from my grasp? Why did I not value it more when it was mine? Why did I not make superhuman efforts to protect it?"

If Democracy is to succeed, Americans must defend it on every front and from every threat, internal as well as external. We could as easily lose our freedom by default as through assault.