

There Once Was...

by J.R. Nyquist

There once was a great republic, born out of a revolt against a king. Liberty was its first battle cry. Its founding fathers created a constitution based on a system of checks and balances. As time advanced, the republic prospered and became the world's greatest military power.

A famous historian once wrote of this republic in the following terms:

"There really was, it seemed, a nation on this earth prepared to fight for the freedom of other men, and to fight at her own expense, and at the cost of hardship and peril to herself; a nation prepared to do this service not just for her near neighbors ... but even prepared to cross the sea in order to prevent the establishment of unjust dominion in any quarter of the globe, and to ensure that right and justice, and the rule of law, should everywhere be supreme."

The great republic met with success, becoming fabulously rich. But wealth and success have a dark side. The republic's leaders eventually showed signs of corruption. Its people grew complacent and decadent. The old values were no longer fashionable. Atheism was openly advocated, belief in divine authority was questioned.

At this time there appeared a new politician. He had a wife and a daughter. His wife was connected to various subversive groups. This politician was sexually promiscuous and had many mistresses. In his path to power he made an alliance with the thugs and mobsters of his day. He also aligned himself with powerful banking and financial interests.

At long last this politician reached the highest office of the land. He corrupted the entire state administration. He rewarded his allies; he thwarted his critics. He was not beyond using violence, even murder to extend his control. He committed many crimes while in office. Because of these crimes he could not lay down his office without being exposed to legal prosecution. Only the power of his position protected him from the law. He therefore resolved to change the constitution so that he could extend his term of office indefinitely and avoid prosecution.

His political enemies were unable to stop him. They were always ineffectual, inept—incapable of resolute action. One senator characterized his colleagues as "each waiting for someone else to act." Nobody did anything to stop the destroyer of the republic. Nobody seemed willing to oppose the world's most powerful politician. Some were bought off, others were intimidated, still others retreated into private life.

Perhaps this story seems strangely familiar. I could be describing the United States at the end of the 20th century. History has an odd quality in that events tend to repeat themselves, and characters long since dead tend to reappear. The republic I am writing about was Rome, and the politician I am describing was Julius Caesar.

The Roman Senate finally got up the courage to confront Caesar, ordering him to lay down his office and return to Rome where he would face trial and conviction. Instead of obeying the Senate, Caesar took the army under his command and marched against Rome. This was the famous "crossing of the Rubicon," from which there could be no turning back.

The Senate organized armies to oppose Caesar in Italy, Greece, Asia, Africa, and Spain. But Caesar's political machine in Italy was so effective, his propaganda so overwhelming, that the senators opposing him had to flee Italy. He followed them to Greece and fought two pitched battles against Pompey the Great, the Senate's leading general. In the first battle Caesar suffered a minor defeat, but in the second battle he smashed the senatorial army. He chased Pompey to Egypt, which he conquered, then he went to Africa, conquering the Senate's army there. He moved on, at last, to Spain and won another victory. Caesar pardoned his enemies and made himself a "perpetual dictator." The Roman constitution was finally broken. The great Roman senator and orator, Marcus Cicero, wrote of Caesar's victory with these words:

"There came a man [Caesar] whose cause was not right but evil; and his success was ... horrible. Mere confiscations of the property of individual citizens were far from enough to satisfy him. Whole provinces and countries succumbed to his onslaught, in one comprehensive universal catastrophe. Entire foreign nations were given over to ruin and destruction."

Who did Cicero blame for this "universal catastrophe"?

"Surely," wrote Cicero, "our present sufferings are all too well deserved. For had we not allowed outrages to go unpunished on all sides, it would never have been possible for a single individual to seize tyrannical power."

Downcast and defeated, Cicero wrote, "Here in the city nothing is left—only the lifeless walls of the houses. And even they look afraid that some further terrifying attack may be imminent. The real Rome has gone forever."

Those words were probably written in 44 B.C., the year that Caesar was assassinated by a group of senators. After stabbing him to death, the senators ran through the streets waving their bloody daggers, proclaiming liberty. But it was only the beginning of another civil war.

Caesar's political machine outlived him. It hunted down Caesar's assassins and rubbed them out. A permanent dictatorship then entrenched itself in Rome. Freedom was vanquished, tyranny was triumphant. After that some of the blackest names in history appeared as Caesar's heirs—tyrants like Caligula and Nero.

Freedom is a rare and delicate thing. Once destroyed, it is not easily recovered. The death of the Roman republic is a story we should all keep in mind. Our republic has been compared to that of Rome. We need to make sure that it doesn't share a similar fate.

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About the Right To Health Care :

"The American concept of [morality] is officially stated in the Declaration of Independence. It upholds man's unalienable, individual rights. The term "rights", note, is a moral (not just a political) term; it tells us that a certain course of behavior is right, sanctioned, proper, a prerogative to be respected by others, not interfered with-and that anyone who violates a man's rights is: wrong, morally wrong, unsanctioned, evil.

"Now, our only rights, the American viewpoint continues, are the rights to life, liberty, property, and the pursuit of happiness. That's all. According to the Founding Fathers, we are not born with the right to a trip to Disneyland, or a meal at McDonalds's or a kidney dialysis (nor with the 18th-century equivalent of these things). We have certain specific rights-and only these.

"Why only these? Observe that all legitimate rights have one thing in common: they are rights to action, not to rewards from other people. The American rights impose no obligations on other people, merely the negative obligation to leave you alone. The system guarantees you the chance to work for what you want-not to be given it without effort by somebody else.

"The right to life, e.g., does not mean that your neighbors have to feed and clothe you; it means you have the right to earn your food and clothes yourself, if necessary by a hard struggle, and that no one can forcibly stop your struggle for these things or steal them from you if and when you have achieved them. In other words: you have the right to act, and to keep the results of your actions, the products you make, to keep them or trade them with others, if you wish. But you have no right to the actions or products of others, except on terms to which they voluntarily agree.

" To take one more example: the right to the pursuit of happiness is precisely that: the right to the pursuit-to a certain type of action on your part and its result-not to any guarantee that other people will make you happy-or even try to do so. Otherwise, there would be no liberty in the country: if your mere desire for something, anything, imposes a duty on other people to satisfy you, then they have no choice in their lives, no say in what they do, they have no liberty, they cannot pursue their happiness. Your "right" to happiness at their expense means that they become rightless serfs, i.e., your slaves. Your right to anything at others' expense means that they become rightless.

...Under the American system you have a right to health care if you can pay for it, i.e., if you can earn it by our own action and effort. But nobody has the right to the services of any professional individuals or group simply because he wants them and desperately needs them. The very fact that he needs these services so desperately is the proof that he had better respect the freedom, the integrity, and the rights of the people who provide them.

"You have a right to work, not to rob others of the

fruits of their work, not to turn others into sacrificial, rightless animals laboring to fulfill your needs.

"Some of you may ask here: But can people afford health care on their own? Even leaving aside the present government-inflated medical prices, the answer is: Certainly people can afford it. Where do you think the money is coming from right now to pay for it all-where does the government get its fabled unlimited money? Government is not a productive organization; it has no source of wealth other than confiscation of the citizens' wealth, through taxation, deficit financing or the like.

...Some people can't afford medical care in the U.S. But they are necessarily a small minority in a free or even semi-free country. If they were the majority, the country would be utterly bankrupt and could not even think of a national medical program. As to this small minority, in a free country they have to rely solely on private, voluntary charity. Yes, charity, the kindness of the doctors or of the better off—charity, not a right, i.e., not their right to the lives or work of others. And such charity, I may say was always forthcoming in the past in America. The advocates of Medicaid and Medicare under LBJ did not claim that the poor or the old in the '60's got bad care; they claimed that it was an affront for anyone to have to depend on charity.

But the fact is: You don't abolish charity by calling it something else. If a person is getting health care for nothing, simply because he is breathing, he is still getting charity...To call it a right when the recipient did not earn it is merely to compound the evil. It is charity still..."

I hope these thoughts are helpful.

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