

What to Expect When You're Expecting Totalitarianism

The political jargon and posturing one hears these days seems to suggest that we are in an era unlike any that has ever occurred before. Hope springs anew, there is light at the end of the tunnel, politicians gush, and for those of our elites who really want to impress with their knowledge of history, a reference to Abraham Lincoln fits the bill nicely: we're seeing "a new birth of freedom"!

I'd agree that something certainly is in the process of being birthed, but I'd be hard pressed to call that baby "freedom." Some would even say this baby better bears the opposing name of "totalitarianism."

But before we throw labels around, it's helpful to know what we mean by such terms. What does totalitarianism look like?

Robert Nisbet gives some answers to that question in his 1953 classic, [*The Quest for Community*](#):

1. Politics Is Everything

"In the totalitarian order the political tie becomes the all-in-all," Nisbet explains. Gone is the importance of the individual. Instead, individuals become cogs in the machine of a centralized government. This situation creates a "psychological setting that alone makes possible the massive remaking of the human consciousness."

2. Hiding Behind a Front of 'Democracy'

Totalitarian government, Nisbet infers, does not wish to

appear as the controlling, centralized power that it is. Instead, "the power of the government must seem to proceed from the basic will of the people." Thus, when authoritarian laws are passed, they will be framed as necessary for the preservation of democracy, even when it can be clearly seen that nothing could be further from the truth. Doing so enables the government "to bend, soften, and corrode the will to resistance in preference to forcible and brutal breaking of the will."

3. Diversity Is Abolished

Diversity is a pet issue for many in our government and culture today. Yet what people fail to realize is that under totalitarian rule, "The natural diversity of society is swept away." In its place comes militaristic conformity to the party line "in art and in politics, in science and economy." Totalitarian government, it seems, is cancel culture on steroids.

4. New Replaces Old

Perhaps one of the most prominent features of a totalitarian regime is its quest to replace the old with the new. The past becomes synonymous with the bad and everything is redefined. "History, art, science, and morality, all of these must be redesigned, placed in a new context, in order to make of a power a seamless web of certainty and conformity."

The replacement of the new with the old is necessary because, as Nisbet explains, "Totalitarianism is an ideology of nihilism. But nihilism is not enough." Thus while totalitarianism must remove the old in order for its new ideology to function, it also recognizes that something must fill the void left by the loss of faith and community. To this end, it attempts to implement a larger group effort which points back to the political and offers allegiance to the

state.

The question remains as to whether we have seen these traits play out in our own society of late. So let's go down the list.

Is politics everything these days? It certainly seems like it. One almost has to become a Luddite in order to get away from hearing political conversation. Even when one is not bombarded with politics on the news, political jargon somehow manages to creep into our private lives at work, in conversations, and even in our entertainment options.

How about [democracy](#) or diversity? The terms are certainly thrown around a lot these days, but whether or not we're really seeing democracy in action or experiencing true diversity of thought is up for debate in an era where genuine censorship is happening before our eyes.

Finally, where is the old being whitewashed by the new? We don't have to look far. Toppled statues abound, "The 1619 Project" exemplifies attempts to change and undermine the historical narrative, younger generations now accept sexual immorality as normal, and even science seems to drift along with the political winds.

If we are indeed now experiencing totalitarian government more than ever, how can we keep ourselves from being sucked into the vortex, simply becoming another mindless cog in the totalitarian machine?

The simple answer seems to be to swim upstream and foster those things which totalitarian government is against. If totalitarianism wants us to erase our memories of history, community, morality, and faith, then we must cling tightly to those very things.

This memory muscle can be strengthened by reading good books, studying history, and discussing the gleanings from these

sources with others. Regularly attending church, getting involved with the community there, and inviting that community into your home for fellowship will also increase that anti-totalitarian muscle. And last but not least, embracing family and expending energy to model good morals and behavior to your children will not only be helpful for the current fight against totalitarianism, but for future battles as well.

“Totalitarianism is an affair of mass attitudes,” Nisbet said.

Don't run with the crowd.

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