

Signs of Despotism

Warning Signs of Despotism

Do we live in a democracy or in despotism? Today, democracy is synonymous with despotism.

Here is an old film clip from 1946 showing the signs of the signs of despotism. When you see this, it looks very similar to what we live in today.

Side Note: a short clip was shown of National Socialism instead of Communism.

Click here for the film

<https://archive.org/details/Despotis1946>

```
<iframe src="https://archive.org/embed/Despotis1946" width="640" height="480" frameborder="0" webkitallowfullscreen="true" mozallowfullscreen="true" allowfullscreen></iframe>
```

The transcript is here:

You can roughly locate any community in the world somewhere along a scale running all the way from democracy to despotism.

One at a democracy end, another somewhere in the middle, and a third...

Let's find out about despotism. This man makes it his job to study these things.

Well, for one thing, avoid the comfortable idea that the mere form of government can of itself safeguard a nation against despotism.

Germany under President Hindenburg was a republic, and yet in this republic an aggressive despotism took root and flourished under Adolf Hitler.

When a competent observer looks for signs of despotism in a community, he looks beyond fine words and noble phrases.

For which it stands, one nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

Many observers have found that two workable yardsticks help in discovering how near a community is to despotism.

The respect scale and the power scale.

A careful observer can use a respect scale to find how many citizens get an even break.

As a community moves towards despotism, respect is restricted to fewer people.

A community is low on a respect scale if common courtesy is withheld from large groups of people on account of their political attitudes.

If people are rude to others because they think their wealth and position gives them that right, or because they don't like a man's race or his religion.

Equal opportunity for all citizens to develop useful skills is one basis for rating a community on a respect scale.

The opportunity to develop useful skills is important, but not enough.

The equally important opportunity to put skills to use is a further test on a respect scale.

A power scale is another important yardstick of despotism.

It gauges the citizens' share in making the community's decisions.

Communities which concentrate decision making in a few hands rate low on a power scale and are moving towards despotism.

Like France under the Bourbon kings, one of whom said, the state, I am the state.

Today, democracy can ebb away in communities whose citizens allow power to become concentrated in the hands of bosses.

What I say goes, see, I'm the law around here.

The test of despotic power is that it can disregard the will of the people.

It rules without the consent of the governed.

Look beyond the legal formalities of an election in measuring a community on the power scale to see if the ballot is really free.

If the citizens can vote only the way they're told, a community approaches despotism.

When legislatures become ceremonial assemblies only and have no real control over lawmaking, their community rates low on a power scale.

T.I.A.! T.I.A.!

In a downright despotism, opposition is dangerous whether the despotism is official or whether it is unofficial.

The spread of respect and power in a community is influenced by certain conditions, which many observers measure by means of the economic distribution and information scales.

If a community's economic distribution becomes slanted, its middle income groups grow smaller and despotism stands a better chance to gain a foothold.

Where land is privately owned, one sign of a poorly balanced economy is the concentration of land ownership in the hands of a very small number of people.

When farmers lose their farms, they lose their independence.

This one can stay on, but not as his own boss anymore.

To the extent that this condition exists throughout a nation, the likelihood of despotism is increased.

In communities which depend almost entirely on a single industry, such as a factory or mine, maintaining economic balance is a challenging problem.

If this condition exists over the nation as a whole, so that the control of jobs and business opportunities is in a few hands, despotism stands a good chance.

Another sign of a poorly balanced economy is a taxation system that presses heaviest on those least able to pay.

A larger part of a small income is spent on necessities such as food.

Sales taxes on such necessities hit the small income harder.

In the days of the salt tax, feudal despotisms were partly sustained by this and other effects.

A community rates low on an information scale when the press, radio, and other channels of communication are controlled by only a few people, and when citizens have to accept what they're told.

In communities of this kind, despotism stands a good chance.

See how a community trains its teachers.

Bear this in mind. Young people cannot be trusted to form their own opinions.

This business about open-mindedness is nonsense. It's a waste of time trying to teach students to think for themselves.

It's our job to tell them.

And when teachers put such training into practice, despotism stands a good chance.

These children are being taught to accept uncritically whatever they're told. Questions are not encouraged.

How can you ask such a question? Have you got a textbook?

Yes, ma'am.

Does it say here that our law courts are always just?

Yes, ma'am.

Then how dare you question the fact. Sit down.

And so we aren't surprised when...

But it must be true. I saw it in this book right here.

And if books and newspapers and the radio are efficiently controlled, the people will read and accept exactly what the few in control want them to.

Government censorship is one form of control.

A newspaper which breaks a government censorship rule can be suspended.

It is also possible for newspapers and other forms of communication to be controlled by private interests.

I thought I told you to kill that story. It'll cost us a lot of advertising.

If that story goes out, I quit.

All right.

What sort of community do you live in?

Where would you place it on a democracy despotism scale? To find out, you can rate it on a respect scale and a power scale.

And to find out what way it is likely to go in the future, you can rate it on economic distribution and information scales.

The lower your community rates on economic distribution and information scales, the lower it is likely to rate on respect and power scales.

And thus, to approach despotism.

What happens in a single community is the problem of its own citizens.

But it is also the problem of us all.

Because as communities go, so goes the nation.