

From the President: Preserving Our Freedom

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Almost everyone claims to be for freedom. Who would be against it?

Yet, how often does freedom merely mean license for oneself, and dictatorship for everyone else? History has the answer.

Six American authors who had previously favored Communism wrote the book *The God That Failed*.¹ Each thought his ideas of what was right would be imposed on society. Each was severely disillusioned.

The Communists claimed freedom was their goal. Guerrillas such as those under Fidel Castro were “armies of liberation,” traveling a “shining path.” Karl Marx wrote that freedom would come after eliminating competition and problematic opponents; a mystical withering away of the state would occur, and a utopia would result with freedom for all.

Hitler’s version of freedom was his “new order” disguised as “national socialism” that would rid the “Aryan race” of evil influences, and all “evil” people, especially Jews.

In France, the widely acclaimed *The Black Book of Communism*,² authored by six self-described Communist or pro-Communist intellectuals, reported research on Communist governments worldwide. The authors concluded that those governments were responsible for nearly 100,000,000 deaths, and that the Nazis and fascists caused the death of probably 25,000,000 people.

These kinds of governments came to be called “totalitarian.” They embody an impulse that continues today in North Korea and in radical Islam. Whether atheists or religious believers, totalitarians enforce behavioral conformity and try to impose “right” thinking and ideology on people.

Conversely, freedom requires that laws are justly approved by the governed, and that the laws apply to everyone. Without just and understandable laws, an individual does not know what he is free to do without incurring arbitrary punishment. In a totalitarian society without such a legal structure, might makes right.

Economic freedom is strongly correlated with prosperity. The ranking of 123 countries, prepared by more than 50 cooperating freedom think tanks, showed that countries with the most economic freedom tended to have the highest levels of productivity and wealth creation.³ Voluntary markets are a democratic mechanism, allowing people to vote with their money in every transaction.

Nonetheless, the ideas that lead to totalitarianism are seductive and often very popular at the outset. They promise utopia, with many “free” benefits and a sort of freedom, which is basically a release from traditional constraints. Freedom, on the other hand, requires responsibility, constant vigilance, and a foundation of ethics and a habit of moral behavior. It is constantly under threat, and freedom in medicine is at a critical juncture in the United States. Physicians cannot ignore their responsibility for preserving our freedom.

There are powerful forces to push medicine further into socialism, although the agenda may be disguised by calling it something else. Advocates of socialism do not admit that most European countries are experimenting with gradual privatization.

And single-payer advocates don’t like to admit that the only nations that forbid patients to use their own money to purchase medical care are North Korea, Cuba, and Canada.

During the Clinton administration, Americans showed that they didn’t want government medicine. They will reject socialized medicine as long as the reality is exposed by efforts like those of AAPS.

Decisions by patients and doctors, not those of politicians and bureaucrats, must direct the future of medicine. If this is to happen, you need to get involved. We need to show that so-called liberalism or progressivism, which extends government control and function, is actually illiberal, regressive, and antisocial.

There are many ways in which individual physicians can further the cause of freedom.

You can participate in the AAPS Action Alert Network by sending your e-mail address to jeremy@aapsonline.org or your fax number to (520) 325-4230.

Two active members could form a state chapter, or one active member can take the lead on state issues and be appointed state coordinator.

Financial contributions always help. Contributions to the AAPS Educational Foundation, which can be used to support meetings or to distribute materials to medical students, are tax deductible, as are contributions to the American Health Legal Foundation, which helps support litigation in defense of the constitutional rights of patients and physicians.

You can distribute AAPS material to your colleagues. Of particular interest are information about the “country doctor” exclusion from HIPAA; audio or video presentations by doctors who have opted out of third-party contracts; and material about threats such as sham peer review or arbitrary prosecution for prescribing pain medications or for alleged Medicare/Medicaid fraud and abuse charges.

AAPS physicians can contact members of their hospital staffs and county medical societies. Letters on your own stationery about pending issues can be very powerful. Retired members may want to spend some time meeting with prospective members to share views on medical problems and solutions.

Find out who your legislators are, and contact them regularly—directly, or through letters to the editor of your newspaper.

By joining AAPS, physicians show that they understand freedom and its importance. Many are very active in the battle to preserve our heritage. What could be a worthier challenge, or a more rewarding mission? We can all do more.

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REFERENCES

- ¹ Crossman RH, ed. *The God That Failed*. New York, N.Y.: Columbia University Press; 2001. [Originally published London: Hamilton; 1950.]
- ² Courtois S, Kramer M, Murphy J, et al. *The Black Book of Communism: Crimes, Terror, Repression*. Murphy J, Kramer M, trans. Kramer M, ed. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press; 1999.
- ³ Gwartney J, Lawson R. *Economic Freedom of the World: 2004 Annual Report*. Vancouver, B.C., Canada: Fraser Institute; July 2004.