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## **Must History Always Repeat Itself** **by Gary Barnett**

Some comparisons are just too tough to stomach, but the time has come to stomach one of them just the same. The United States has become the opposite of what was intended by our Founding Fathers. It is now not free, but rather sunk in dictatorial morass. What has become of us Americans? Why are we so weak as a people? Why do we not stand up for justice, right, and freedom, and against big, omnipotent government? And why do we allow our freedom and liberty to be systematically taken from us?

I recently read a spellbinding movie review written by Wendy McElroy of *Sophie Scholl: The Last Days*. It was in the May 2007 issue of the Future of Freedom Foundation's *Freedom Daily* and was titled "Sophie Scholl: A Life of Moral Courage." Moral courage is something sadly lacking in our own society these days. Sophie Scholl was a member of the White Rose, a nonviolent resistance group in Nazi Germany who actively opposed Hitler's regime, and because of this Scholl was put to death.

As I read that article, my body began to respond, just as it had when I watched the movie based on her life. I felt myself cringing and shaking, chills coming over me. What was happening to me was an awful awareness awakened by this powerful story. What courage she showed when faced with gargantuan risk! But her drive to change minds meant more to her than life itself.

Many today have lost faith in the power and force of ideas. Instead, like ostriches, they bury their heads in the sand, hoping someone else will take the lead. This sheeplike behavior has taken over this country, spreading like the plague and, if it continues, could be just as deadly. Americans are traveling on a very dangerous road, and the time for action is upon us if we want to salvage and preserve our freedom.

As I once again thought about Sophie Scholl, her brother Hans, and others involved with the White Rose, and the courage they showed, I began to compare things happening in Germany then with some of the things happening in the United States now. Although I hesitate to make this comparison, especially given the anti-Semitism that was inherent in the Nazi system, I nonetheless think it necessary. I'm sure there will be those who suggest that this comparison

stems from hatred of my country, but quite the opposite is true, especially since I believe that the policies of the federal government are extremely harmful to my country.

To make this comparison is to face realities that are painful and that go against everything Americans are taught or indoctrinated with throughout their lives. But nevertheless, those of us who believe in true freedom must speak out and muster the courage to change the minds of others, or the United States may well be doomed to a societal meltdown. It goes without saying, of course, that we're not at the level of Germany in 1943, but the country is definitely headed in a very bad and ominous direction. It is a journey that will become more difficult to slow down or reverse the longer we permit it to go on.

In Hitler's Germany, publicly supporting the troops was mandatory. Imprisonment or execution was the consequence of noncompliance. In America today, even though some politicians now say they don't support the war, supporting the troops has been and still is expected by those in positions of power. Although noncompliance does not now merit imprisonment, as it did during World War One, thanks to the passage of the Espionage Act, the consequences can be harsh. At the very minimum, those who oppose the war or the troops are publicly labeled as unpatriotic — as people whose hatred for their country is manifested by their opposition to governmental policy. What will be the next step to stifle criticism and dissent?

As noted by Wendy McElroy in her review, Germany's minister for public enlightenment during World War Two, Joseph Goebbels, said, "Total war is the demand of the hour.... The homeland must stay pure and intact in its entirety. Nothing may disturb the picture.... Everyone must learn to pay heed to war morale, and pay attention to the just demands of working and fighting people." Similarly, President Bush said on September 20, 2001, "Either you are with us or you are with the terrorists." From this ideology grew the "support the troops" mantra, a tone that has swept the country and, if not adhered to, brings guilt, shame and, in some cases, threats. Although Americans are not yet being thrown in prison for dissent, over the past few years the cry for false patriotism (i.e., nationalism) has been loud.

During Hitler's rise to prominence after becoming chancellor of Germany, he used a terrorist act to extend state power. It's also no secret that the German state had watchful eyes over its citizenry during Hitler's entire reign. Coercion, spying, torture, kangaroo courts, terrified criminal defense attorneys, and executions were the rule of the day. For a good example, watch the DVD of *Sophie Scholl: The Final Days*.

Let's take a look, however, at what has changed here in the United States just since September 11, 2001. Immediately following the 9/11 attacks, investigations of citizens and noncitizens began at all levels of government based on thousands of tips. Hundreds were detained, questioned, or arrested, and special registration procedures for certain male noncitizens were put into place.

On September 20, 2001, President Bush announced the creation of the Office of Homeland Security. Eventually, the name was changed to Department of Homeland Security, and it became the third-largest cabinet department in the federal government.

In October 2001, President Bush signed into law the USA PATRIOT Act. This all-encompassing act extended federal government powers to the executive branch and law enforcement beyond any in our history, infringing heavily on many civil liberties. Then in 2006, the worst provisions of this monstrous piece of legislation were extended, as fear continued to grip the country.

In early 2002, the Information Awareness Office was created as a means to survey the populace, and although it was defunded by Congress in 2003, many provisions were continued under different funding.

While many other attacks on our liberty have taken place over the past few years, including phone-tapping, warrantless searches, financial-record invasions, and extensive database collections on American citizens, far and away the worst and most dangerous assault on our freedom has been the passage of the Military Commissions Act. This effectively gave the president and the Pentagon the authority to arrest anyone they named an enemy combatant, American or foreigner, and then to imprison, torture, or execute them without a proper trial. There is little difference between Germany's kangaroo courts during World War Two, including the one that tried and sentenced Hans and Sophie Scholl to death, and the Pentagon's own military tribunals today.

So what does all this mean? The United States obviously hasn't sunk to the level of Nazi Germany, but how far are we going to allow this government to go, given that we have already lost many of our most precious rights? This essay is not meant to compare Bush to Hitler but it is meant to expose the dangers of the course that our nation is on — a course the government is taking — a course that, if not altered, will inexorably lead to more centralization of power, more subservience to the state, and more loss of liberty. Throughout history, early signs of tyranny have often been ignored until it was too late. We must pay specific attention to the signs this time, as we can hardly afford to be complacent much longer.

While I have become more optimistic lately, simply because so many are speaking out against the war in Iraq, I remain skeptical about the future. Although the numbers against the war have grown, very few are talking about eliminating the powers that have grown exponentially during Bush' administration. To pass these powers on would be a tragic mistake, and the longer they are in place, the more placid and acquiescent will become the citizenry. This is nothing less than a recipe for disaster.

The United States is currently fighting two occupations, one in Afghanistan and one in Iraq. The federal government is threatening to wage a third war, against Iran. If Americans allow that to take place, the abuses we have seen so far will pale in comparison with what we will see in

the future. The tools are in place, but they haven't yet been used to their full potential. The USA PATRIOT Act, along with the Military Commissions Act, grants massive power to the executive branch over the states and over the people. Should this president or any to follow him, choose to use these powers against us in response to an act of terrorism, natural disaster, or some other big "emergency" or "crisis," how will we respond?

Adolf Hitler once praised President Franklin Roosevelt for his approach to the economic emergency known as to the Great Depression. He said, "I have sympathy for Mr. Roosevelt because he marches straight toward his objectives over Congress, lobbies, and bureaucracy." If Hitler were alive today, what would he say about President Bush's march over Congress and the courts? If history is any judge, he would also smile favorably upon the actions of this administration. We had better take heed, or the next words we hear may be, *Show me your papers!*

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