

REWARD

Ever since the new regime swept into power on a wave of flattery and deceit and bloodshed, an ominous cloud hovers over the entire country. Never was it thought possible that in a land such as ours, so solid and so upright, a relative handful could sway so many into such an insane kind of submission. The masses of people had opened their arms to the very enemy of their souls. They had welcomed the changes and even helped to usher some of them in. They even sprinkled flower petals before the feet of the strong and powerful military arm that had efficiently snatched control of the government and the country.

Fine sounding words flowed from the mouths of the deliverers who took the ropes of social constraint off the people while holding chains behind their backs. They “spoke peace with their mouths while evil was in their hearts”, as the wise saying goes. Yet, so subtle and devious was their plan that few even recognized the chains when they were shown. “Of course,” they reasoned. “Order and security must be established. The land must be purified from certain negative elements or lawless ones (potential terrorists), even if the threat isn’t clearly defined. Nevertheless, all impurities must be purged.”

That was a few years ago. With the “enlightened liberation” complete and our people free to be really enslaved, a mass system of reeducation and rehabilitation was begun, turning the State into a kind of patriotic, religious frenzy with new icons. On the lips of everyone could be heard the latest wise saying of the national leaders. Especially moving were the songs sung by all of the students, especially the little ones and their memorized pledges. Periodically each town had rallies where mass chanting of slogans was practiced for the ideal of “personal motivation and inspiration”.

One main avenue of change, a dynamic of trust laid upon the good people by the good leaders was something called the Strength Principle. This dogma was elevated and quickly woven into the life of the entire populace. It was broadly hailed as the key to all true success, the force behind maintaining the “life of freedom” so graciously given by their conquest. It was exalted as the very breath of the whole new movement.

Consequently military power took on renewed importance as the central factor holding the culture securely together. Along with its potent civilian police counterparts, patriotic order was firmly established and sustained. Among the youth, those of strength and stature were groomed to move into roles in the State Forces. The young women were treated the same as the young men. Those of lesser caliber were directed to support roles. In fact anyone and everyone who could not grow into the State military ranks, both in and out of uniform, were by nature destined for lesser purposes in national life. It was the State way!

The educational systems of the people were gradually moved more and more to the policy of teaching the Principles of Dominant Strength. Ways of recognizing weaknesses were developed along with the system of cataloguing individuals, as it was called, for true State efficiency. A neighborhood program flourished with mandatory participation by all. Each student monitored his classmates. Each child monitored his family. Each employee his employer and on and on. Finally new courts of law were set up to process and to coordinate all the priority information, to legally direct the flow of up building and strengthening, the masses were taught and believed.

Eventually for the sake of the State unity, its optimum position of strength, the hopelessly weak were quietly dealt with. The terminally ill were encouraged to opt for a quicker, enhanced end. The sickly and the invalids were given the dignity of death - to end in the posture of a "strength decision". The elderly were brought to a more respectable demise. Any pregnancies among women in the weaker groups were simply aborted and the woman willingly sterilized so as to allow them to concentrate on their own "self-actualizing strengths". Men likewise were sterilized who held low composite scores in the common tests of stamina, endurance and the power of mind and body in harmony. At first base scores were kept lower but then were adjusted upwards from month to month as the program took effect.

The quality and usefulness of each woman's beauty, based on a tightly guarded national profile, as well as talents were also measured in great detail with obvious results. Their natural beauty was considered as an important "strength factor" relative to the needs of the State and family planning for the next generation. Family became an evolving hybrid format. Needless to say the handful who opposed this were quickly dealt with as examples to the rest.

Now, with this entrenched atmosphere and these circumstances existing, looming larger and larger upon the land and its people, something very peculiar took place. Something happened that defied any and every explanation. This paradoxical phenomenon shook the entire State from top to bottom, affecting every life under its authoritative shield. The tide of revolution was dramatically turned after being stopped dead in its tracks.

It all started quietly one Sunday afternoon at a special State celebration in honor of the newest wave of military leaders of the State, those recently promoted. The day was much like any of the others with the usual pompous displays of exulted arrogance frilled by endless speeches. The Sunday religious services from the old days were now replaced; all were required to attend these gatherings instead - and all dutifully did. At the capital city was the huge Victory Square. It was packed with various military and paramilitary formations, and these were surrounded by a tumultuous sea of common people. Slowly at first, then by the dozens, those in uniform started fainting! And, in a matter of about thirty minutes or so hundreds of the uniformed elite were down and sick with a type of flu causing plenty of vomiting. Finally the celebration was cut short and the crowds sent home before any deep panic set in among them. The State news briefs brushed the incident off efficiently.

Come the following Sunday's regular gathering a similar thing happened - mass fainting and vomiting among the military in formation. Only this time similar things happened across the nation. If it hadn't have been for the absolute public controls, the panic might have plunged the country into greater confusion. Without explanations, further public celebrations were now temporarily set aside. Arguments pinpointed outside agents as being the instigators of this plague filled the newspapers as if with one voice. Thousands of suspects were rounded up and accused of conspiracies using poisons or gas or something equally sinister. They were brutally dealt with and their bodies burned as so much refuse.

Needless to say, even with all of the new restrictions on everything thinkable, the malady continued to lay low vast numbers of the people. Especially hard hit were those elite State members of the Strength Factions in leadership at all levels. As it turned out, the viral infections with flu-like symptoms lingered on and on until the sick could do

little more than resign themselves to their beds. Many barely existed in conditions of helplessness and weakness. With the prior closings of so many hospitals and clinics, confusion reigned as acute care spaces had to be claimed at local schools and even factories. The State run strength programs themselves came to a grinding halt as most of the instructors were stricken.

In the midst of this, something even more remarkable and puzzling began to develop side by side with this plague - an irony utterly unthinkable! While the strongest were being struck down, those catalogued as at the lowest level, the weakest among the people were virtually untouched. It was as if they wore a "glove of protection". Literally none among the so-called weak and lowly, the seemingly foolish in the Society were afflicted. Only those classified as strong and wise, the mighty of the nation seemed touched. It was if the two strata of citizens were purposely singled out. The strong were placed in a reverse position of weakness, whereas the weak remained as the stronger of the two.

Vengeance burned in the hearts of the many who believed the weak were totally responsible for the ruin of the new State. *Many secret plans were mulled over on how to systematically rid the entire nation of these undesirables.* Many vows were made near death beds to some day avenge what was taking place. *Yet, quite amazingly, the humble common people quietly and steadfastly nursed the others back to eventual health.* While consuming anger was on one hand, compassion resolutely worked on the other.

This strange and peculiar circumstance lasted for nearly a year of suffering and slow painstaking recovery. Large numbers of the best and superior citizens were lost. The hearts of many of the elite even appeared to soften a bit. The hearts of the weaker class throbbed stronger and stronger, inwardly secure and confident. Finally one day, after power and health was fully restored, a general season of thanksgiving and gratitude was proclaimed throughout the land. The series of events was to be followed by the grandest assembly in the young history of the new regime. Every city from the least to the greatest would gladly participate.

Special allowances and privileges were to be given to all those good citizens who gave so much of themselves during the long national crisis. Much praise and many plaudits were heaped upon the weaker class acknowledging a deeper, keener strength, something the State confessed had been lacking in their general plans for transition. Maybe even a character quality was absent from the crafted Strength Principle Factors.

Come the final great day of thanks and public honoring, a festive atmosphere prevailed everywhere. Smiles and even some of the "old gladness" shone in the eyes of many. In the capital city, when all were properly assembled with clean uniforms ready for medals simultaneously in all cities, the Supreme Leader was to give his own personal thanks to those who had helped him and his family regain health, speaking as well for the many thousands of other survivors who were served in the same way. His elegant words would fill the ears of the numberless so-called weak class who jammed the city squares.

When the grand moment finally came, few knew about the trains that had quietly moved into the many local stations, each towing hundreds of empty boxcars. Few had questioned the positioning of unusually large numbers of well armed paramilitary police. And few in the capital's Victory Square saw the fiery look in the Leader's eyes as he moved like a stalking cat to the platform, salivating with teeth sharpened!