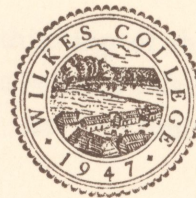


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Why Make Up Your Mind?

A Wilkes College Brief . . .

Fall, 1961



WILKES COLLEGE
Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania

Why Make Up Your Mind?

"Why make a decision today?"

"Perhaps if I wait, everything will right itself."

Was this the thinking of the French and English leaders in power when Hitler entered the Ruhr? Was this the thinking of the German people when the concentration camps and crematories were public knowledge?

"It can't be true!"

"It is too shocking to be true!"

Was this the thinking of those who should have made firm decisions when Hitler was rising to power through the "big lie," intimidation, and ruthless daring.

But it was true, and 40,000,000 people died because no decision was made.

Indecision determines the future as surely as does decision. There is no such thing as a prolonged drift of events, for indecision always leads to a forced

decision. When events are allowed to drift because of indecision, some would-be dictator - - petty or great - - seizes the opportunity to direct events to his own advantage. Indecision inevitably creates a vacuum. In human affairs, as in nature, there is always pressure to fill a vacuum.

We can recognize the results of a decision. We seldom recognize the results of indecision. Yet it is likely that indecision has done more to deter the progress of man and to weaken civilizations than great decisions have done to advance the welfare of mankind. Throughout history, indecision has created periods of drift and these periods have written all too much of the history of mankind.

Churchill once called World War II the world's most unnecessary War. Did he mean that a firm decision in 1936 could have checked Hitler's rise to power and so have saved the world from the tragedies of war? As we look back, we see that from 1934 to 1939 the great nations were paralyzed by the failure of their leaders to act decisively in the interests of peace.

We are living now in a period in which the free peoples of the world have counted upon the drift of events to resolve their problems. It should be apparent by this time that lack of decision leads only to

decline and to disaster. If freedom is to survive the successive attacks of dictators, the free peoples of the world must make many hard decisions. They must support leaders who are able and willing to make firm decisions that are designed to preserve our lives, our institutions, and our ideals. Failure to make sure decisions invites dictators of both the right and the left to fill the vacuum created by indecision.

We should beware of placing our faith in leaders who have failed to make decisions in their own daily affairs. We must recognize that the ability to make a great decision grows from the habit of making little decisions. Failure to make little decisions creates the need for great decisions. Failure to make little decisions renders the individual incapable of making any decision.

There is as much need for decision in the daily life of the individual as in the life of a nation and a civilization. The decisions that an individual makes or fails to make irrevocably shape the character of the individual and of society. When a student cheats a little bit in an examination, he weakens the fibre of his character. When he fails to accept a responsibility, he becomes less dependable. When he is less than honorable, he establishes a pattern of dishonor. Decisions are the building blocks of sound character in individuals and in society.

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Freedom and Private Property

A Wilkes College Brief...

Reprinted, Winter 1962



WILKES COLLEGE
Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania

Freedom and Private Property

Because the place of property in our social and economic systems divides the world into ideological camps, it becomes imperative that men come to some conclusion regarding the place of property in a free society. Can men be free who are totally dependent upon the state for employment, security, and welfare? Can they retain freedom of conscience and thought and action when there is only one employer and the only bulwark of the individual is the state? Is private property essential to the maintenance of freedom?

We must recognize that some people in some places look upon private property as an evil. Because under a system of private enterprise men sometimes have been exploited, that society has, in the minds of some, become associated with slavery, exploitation, and greed. One hundred years ago, when Marx wrote the Communist Manifesto, he looked upon private ownership as the blight of mankind. He believed that by abolishing private property we could eliminate those human forces which have retarded the development of our civilization. In 1950, it seems to many that he recognized a fault in our economic society, but that he did not accurately diagnose the cause.

Marx grasped an idea through which he sought to enrich the lives of men, and to free them so that they might enjoy greater privileges than were open to the people of Central Europe in 1850. He did not recognize that the existence of private property was not the cause of the evils of his time, but that the cause lay in the relative values placed upon property and life. In that day life was still cheap, and property was by many valued beyond life - - - particularly when it was the other fellow's life. Exploitation was rampant not because private property was an evil, but because men's values were out of balance.

"The world is made and remade perpetually by the force of ideas, and by beliefs in the minds of men. The Western world must either believe in its own principles - - in its own destiny, or succumb to a greater faith."

—BARBARA WARD

When Marx wrote, there were no advanced societies based upon communal ownership of property. In consequence, there was no opportunity to compare two systems. The only possible comparison was between a nebulous and untested ideal and a growing but imperfect capitalism.

In the past hundred years private property has been eliminated in many sections of the world, and yet we find that life and existence are no better in these areas than they have been in the past. In fact, there is a possibility that the rigid controls imposed by Totalitarians in the name of human welfare may have created such a rigid society, that social and economic improvement will become impossible. Although in some places and in some times private property has been associated with slavery and exploitation, it is now equally apparent that slavery and exploitation exist in countries where private property has been practically eliminated. We must be aware that it is the value placed upon the life of the individual that determines the status of man. No society will automatically bring him to Utopia. If the value of life is to be enhanced, the significance of the individual must be recognized. There can be no Utopia for men in a society where the individual is insignificant.

Perhaps private property is not essential to human betterment and freedom. Perhaps in some areas social and economic progress may take place where there is no private property. In the history of the world, however, it is significant that men have gained freedom and improved their status only where private property has existed, and where men have, at the same time, esteemed the individual. It is possible that there is some relationship between private ownership and respect for individual integrity, conscience, and worth.

Although every man needs to feel that he is a part of a group, he must also feel that he can exist as an individual. This is essential to the fullest development of his personality. It is questionable, therefore, whether a man can attain his

fullest significance in a society which denies to him complete freedom within at least a limited area. It is questionable if there can be any area of complete freedom where there is no private property.

There is also a question whether a balance of power and influence can be maintained in a society that eliminates private property. If the state owns all industry there is only a single employer. Failure to get along with that employer results in disaster. Where there are many employers, failure to get along with one may lead to new opportunities within another. Where all productive agencies are controlled by government, there cannot be the wholesome and lively competition that keeps men alert and prevents a society from becoming static. Men must work under some compulsion. It is likely that the most wholesome compulsions come where property and power are divided among many. Although men have dreamed that government ownership would eliminate the social and economic evils of the past, there is a great possibility that the concentration of vast powers in government will destroy the checks and balances that exist in a society that is decentralized, and in which economic controls are scattered. If the system of checks and balances is important in American government, is not a system of checks and balances equally important in the American economy?

In this time of grave crisis we are challenged to strengthen our own society that we may survive. One of the great historians of our time has suggested that those civilizations that have placed their faith in military power have become so rigid, that decline became inevitable. On the other hand, those societies which have survived their moment of crisis have placed their faith in ideas and ideals. These ideals have provided the dynamic forces essential to continued progress.

Today our civilization is challenged by an ideology that denies importance of the individual. This ideology also insists that private property is the root of evil. They have so

convinced themselves and others that they have succeeded in destroying private property in a large portion of the world, and have simultaneously consolidated vast power in the hands of a small group. Can we not accept the challenge with which they confront us by maintaining our respect for the individual, and by envisioning the welfare of the individual in its proper relationship to property? There appears to be some definite relationship between human welfare and property. In the past, we have not succeeded in properly equating human welfare and property. We have, however, made great progress in the last half century. If we continue to harmonize human and property values, we place ourselves in a position to meet the challenge of today. By gaining a true perspective we strengthen those institutions that recognize the significance of the individual, and guarantee freedom within which men may resolve their lives.

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