

■ On November 30, 1962, the Civil Liberties Union of the Philippines observed the 25th anniversary of its unflagging fight for civil liberties. This is a tribute from the Philippine press.

## MESSIAHNISM AND LIBERTY

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The Silver Jubilee of the Civil Liberties Union coincides with a patriotic occasion, which is the anniversary of Bonifacio's birth. This is most fitting and proper, for the foremost heroes of the Filipino race — Rizal, del Pilar, Bonifacio and Mabini — would easily grace the roster of the Civil Liberties Union, as once they did the roster of the *Liga Filipina*. This is a tribute not so much to the CLU as to the nation which has chosen, for its heroes and models, men whose lives were devoted to the cause of human liberty.

But this is not all. On this occasion the Civil Liberties Union rightly accords its Silver Jubilee tribute to that most distinguished body, the Supreme Court of the Philippines, of which it can be

said that never have so few done so much for the cause of liberty. How often have the gathering clouds of suspicion, mistrust and despondence over freedom immediately dissipated at a stroke of the pen of the Supreme Court! When we are gripped by fear and alarm, when we sense democracy itself trembling in the balance and the rule of the law dangling at the precipice, the thought that yonder lies the rock of justice, which no tyrant can move, — the rock of justice that is the Supreme Court, helps us collect our bearings and reassures us about the future.

The Press, exposed as it is from day to day to the threat of arbitrary power — to the infringement of its freedom — has a special reason to be

grateful to the Supreme Court. And the Press can only cheer this little band of crusaders for liberty, the Nemesis of every tyrant and of the new Torquemadas, this redoubtable band, the Civil Liberties Union of the Philippines.

We teach our youth that freedom is indivisible. This phrase is not only pleasant to hear; it is true, more true than people imagine. One may almost say, the extent to which this is understood — genuinely understood — can be a gauge of one's political or intellectual sophistication. It takes some sophistication to understand that the use of armed force to break a workers' picket line and the gagging of a newspaper amount to the same thing, an infraction of liberty, a blow against the Constitution and the rule of law.

One indeed has to be capable of a very broad view on human affairs to grasp the character of freedom as an extensive unity, almost an organic whole. When arbitrary power is used to attack our personal enemies, or perhaps business rivals, we tend to relish the spectacle, not know-

ing that the very weapon used against them can someday be turned against us. We see no cause for alarm when a crusading government applies legal short-cuts at the expense of due process to go after men we consider undesirable. But the same arbitrary methods can be used against good men, whom those in power happen to hate or dislike.

The objection to despotism lies in the character of despotism itself, not in its uses. To hold the contrary is to hold that a benevolent despotism is the ideal form of government, which is a contradiction in terms, for power not only corrupts and debases but also intoxicates. The world has now been told of what could happen when absolute power brings about intoxication — the paranoia of Stälin, who caused the butchery of an estimated eight million Russians.

I chose the example of Stälin, although I could have mentioned the massacres at Buchenwald and Dachau of Hitler's Germany, for a good reason: Communism professes to work for the liberation of mankind from every

form of exploitation and oppression, whereas Nazism had less scruples about ideals and principles. Never before has an ideal been so grossly perverted, as in Stalin's Russia, unless we set beside it the massacre of Christians in their religious wars and the burning of heretics by the Inquisition.

History shows that the cause of liberty becomes most insecure and precarious under self-righteous and crusading regimes. The messiah of politics is first of all the victim of a one-track mind, which, once he is in power, he seeks to impose upon all. To object is to run the risk of being branded a heretic and penalized for opposition, which now becomes disobedience. And in time, the messiah's notion of right and wrong passes over into the notion that whoever is not with him is against him.

Political messiahism is, moreover, inherently impatient: the messiah looks upon the laws as so many pieces of a Gordian knot, a puzzle and a harassment and he is tempted, like Alexander, to hack it all away with a stroke of his sword.

The messiah looks upon freedom as one for himself and his friends alone. Psychologically and intellectually, he is incapable of grasping what Justice Holmes has very aptly said, that freedom, to be meaningful, must mean freedom not only for the thought that we have but "freedom for the thought that we hate."

Messiahism was a religious phenomenon. In history, the Inquisition is its despicable symbol. But religious messiahism has tended to wane with the increasing secularization of the world. Inevitably it has acquired a political face. Stalin was a messiah in this sense; and so was Hitler.

In its religious form, messiahism upheld the right to flog the heretic for the good of his soul. In its political form, messiahism lashes out at every one who fails to conform as either a crook or a subversive, all this in the name of good government or the national security.

When messiahism is abroad, we have good cause to fear for our freedom. It warms the hearts of those who love liberty, therefore, to

find the Civil Liberties Union not only reactivated but revitalized, and rich as ever in courage and ideals. We of the press, who share with you the same zealous concern for the freedom of all, will stand beside you and lend you support in the pursuit of your noble cause, which is the cause of all free men.

We have stood together in the past against the invasion of the Bill of Rights and the usurpations of foreign and homegrown tyrants. No less than the Supreme Court, no

less than the Civil Liberties Union, the Philippine press shall rise, as in the past, to every challenge to freedom.

Freedom is so elusive it has to be conquered anew with every passing day, said Goethe. This remark of Goethe defines the terms of our struggle for liberty. The first is that the struggle has to be an unceasing one; the second is that we shall refuse to be cowed by any threats or calumnies, and that as the knights of old, we shall prefer death to dishonor of defaulting in the fight.

### THE ARTISTIC LIFE

It is actually only with the most genuine despair that I take up my art again. If this must happen, I must once more resign reality and plunge into that sea of fantasy, then at least my imagination must get help and support from somewhere. I cannot live like a dog, I cannot sleep on straw and drink bad brandy. I must be soothed and flattered in my soul if I am to succeed at this gruelling job of creating a world out of nothing. — Wagner in a letter to Liszt.