The Pavement of Good Intentions

By Donald L. Gilmore
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Currently, while I was writing on contract a book for a New York publisher tentatively titled "Eyewitness March Against Hitler," the subject of the German civilians who were ordered to bury the Jews who died in German concentration camps during World War II came up. When Eisenhower ordered the German people to perform this task in 1945, many thought it the right and proper thing to do, a sort of poetic justice for the Germans. From my perspective, in an attempt to analyze the events from both an American and German perspective, I came to an entirely different conclusion.

In the spirit of fair play, I thought that while Germans were known for the anti-Semitism prevalent in their country for many decades, if not for a century or more preceding World War II, surely most people must realize that if the creation of the death camps had been decided by a public, democratic vote of Germans, no death camps would have ever existed. The animosity for such heinous treatment of an ethnic minority did not exist in Germany or Germans in the nineteenth century. That is one of the reasons why the Nazis kept the mass exterminations publicly secret. Clearly, the German populace knew of the exterminations, however, if not their scope. Those who lived near the camps could smell what was going on, the stench of death. And ordinary Germans worked in the camps, and that sort of secret could not have been kept from the German people. That is true.

What is not considered, however, is that the German people could not have publicly protested the death camps without becoming condemned with the Jews, the Gypsies, the sufferers of psychological and physical disabilities, and the thousands of dissident Catholic priests who inhabited the camps and suffered the same vile fate as the Jews. Germany was a totalitarian state, one where dissent was impossible short of incarceration or death. A similar totalitarian, socialist state existed under Stalin for the Russians. In such environments, few people are willing to risk their lives, only a handful at most, a few Schindlers, who are willing to place their lives at stake for a greater cause. But the multitude of people in any country, and that includes you and me to be quite frank, are not made of this moral fiber and are not going to rise up against a tyranny backed up with a second-to-none secret police like the Gestapo or KGB or an army of fanatics like the SS, i.e., the *Schutzstaffel*, the elite military and police units of the Nazi party, who were carefully indoctrinated and fanatically devoted to the policies of the Nazis (i.e., the National Socialist German Workers' Party).

Rather than casting the first stone at the German people, as we did after the end of World War II, it would have been more profitable and enlightening for us to understand their situation. Today, we need to contemplate how a country might fall under the sway of a dictator and how a dictator or dominant government can gain control of an entire population of a country and maintain it.

Clearly, the first step is to control the armed forces of a nation and its police. That is what Hitler did. Then, just as important, a dictator or dominant government must gain control of the mass media of a nation, which in modern times has the power to indoctrinate a nation, to influence the people of a country to think as it wishes it to. With an army and police powers at its disposal and with the control of public thought, a dictatorship can perpetuate itself. Does any of this sound so foreign to us, for example, the control of the public communications media? Do we have an apparatus, a media infrastructure in modern Western nations capable of obtaining this sort of engineered mind control, Nazi-like in its efficiency and thoroughness?

I think we do. It is manifested in what we call the "Political Correctness" movement, which is largely sustained by the communications media in Western nations. It seems harmless enough, I admit, and when someone brings up the term, it generally generates an uneasy smile among many of us, even those controlled by it. It seems so harmless to many. And yet, if you violate one of its implicit strictures, the media-either newspapers, magazines, TV, or voices on the internet-will besiege you with pervasive attacks on your credibility, honesty, integrity-and, oddly enough, your righteousness.

Political correctness hardly existed among Americans, English, Germans, or the French thirty years ago, but it exists today as a powerful social force. Simply put, political correctness tells us how to act, think, believe, and feel, and it does so automatically. We no longer have to think; someone is out there thinking for us. And they are thinking right, folks! You may be thinking wrong, folks! And you had better be listening up!

Nick the Greek was one of the first public commentators to feel the sting of political correctness. He proposed, almost off the top of his head, one time, that black athletes were so superior because they had been chosen and bred by their Southern masters to have formidable strength and physiques. The "Greek" immediately was assaulted from all corners of the media and lost his job almost instantly. He had violated one of the tenets of the new and growing movement called political correctness. It was as if he had hollered "Nigger" at a black person on live TV, which would also be politically incorrect, if you happened to be a white perpetrator. Was any scientific investigation conducted to discover whether there was anything to the Greek's spur of the moment opinion? None whatever, that I know of. There didn't need to be. Nick was merely removed from his position in disgrace, almost as if by a deus ex machina. From then on, we have seen the growing vigor and power of the political correctness movement throughout American society. No one can call a spade a spade any longer. I mean no pun, incidentally. I must protect myself, even as I write.

What I am saying is that the long tradition of freedom of speech in the United States has been placed in jeopardy—has been in jeopardy for some time. We cannot say what we think any longer. We cannot attack our enemies, unless they are the prescribed enemies, those sanctioned by the implicit tenets of the new political correctness movement.

I started this discussion by talking about Adolph Hitler and the socialist government of Nazi Germany. This was a government, too, that had its own twisted brand of political correctness, with a socialist bent, as perhaps ours does, also. Books that did not conform to the Nazi political correctness ideology were burned; paintings that did not comply with Nazi notions of political correctness, even in relation to art, were burned or destroyed. Men and women who did not conform to Nazi notions of

political correctness were gassed, shot, and executed without trial.

So in ending this little discussion, I think we should all be a little hesitant to get on the bandwagon of this new social phenomenon, "Political Correctness," because you can never be sure just where that wagon is headed.

You know, there is that old saying that the "Road to hell is paved with good intentions." Perhaps we ought to think for ourselves for a moment and contemplate where the proponents of political correctness are headed and where they are taking us.

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About the Author

Donald L. Gilmore earned bachelor's and master's degrees in English from the University of Missouri at Kansas City. He taught English at the college level then worked as an editor for seventeen years at the U.S. Army's Combat Studies Institute, retiring in 2001. In addition to serving as technical consultant for the Civil War movie Ride With the Devil, Mr. Gilmore has also written articles about the Border War for Journal of the West, History Today, and Wild West.He is the author of Civil War on the Missouri-Kansas Border, which you can order from Amazon or direct from Pelican Publishers.

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