

It Can't Happen Here -- A Warning from Canada

The following was written by Susan Riggs, a Canadian citizen living in Ontario. She wrote this for the Detroit Free Press.

An open letter to my American neighbors: different. Then maybe I wouldn't be sitting here looking at a blank screen.

Like you, I woke up today, got dressed and settled down to a steaming brew and the morning newspaper before heading out to work. Unlike you, I read that dozens of my fellow citizens were arrested for carrying copies of the Buffalo News. The newspaper contained information about a trial here that the powers-that-be did not want us to read. It is that simple.

It is now 11:15 p.m. Minutes ago, I turned on the Buffalo television station, hoping to see on my TV what could not reach us through the newspapers. I am now looking at a blank screen. We received about 10 seconds of the trial controversy, and suddenly my screen went blank. A message appeared on

the screen explaining that because of the contravention of a ban, the station was prohibiting broadcast of the news. Along with the sign was a high-pitched whistle that sounded like the air-raid sirens the Britons used during World War II.

As I sit here alone, I realize that my blood is ruining cold at the sound of that whistle.

This could never happen here. Not in Canada.

You must wonder about a country that would deny its own citizens the freedom to read.

As a Canadian, I have done a lot of hard thinking about it. I guess the powers have their reasons for the ban. Censorship always has its reasons, but, believe me, when you are on the receiving end of government censorship, no reason amounts to a hill of beans - and that is why I am writing to you.

It is my hope that you will read the Canadian story and, as your famous columnist Ann Landers says, "wake up and smell the coffee" - while you still have a newspaper to read along with it.

I have always loved the United States of America, and I know that you are now making critical decisions about the role of government in your lives. Many years ago, we in Canada were at a crossroads in our decision-making that is similar to the one you are at now. I wish our decisions back then had been very

People learn to depend on government, and all governments, even those whose leaders warn against this dependency, learn to love the power that flows from it.

Some two decades ago, Canadians were concerned with how government could best help its citizens. We looked around at countries with a comprehensive social welfare system and envied them their cushions of comfort for everything from universal medical care to national day care.

We were a country that held individual freedom in high esteem. Surely, we thought, it was possible to take the best aspects of socialism and weave them into the fabric of a free society. After all, this was democratic Canada and not the Soviet Union.

Over the next 20 years, we developed an extensive social support network at both the federal and provincial levels of government. The government spent money on every conceivable program. We spent and spent. Still, no one was ever really satisfied. The spending even now continues unabated, and our national deficit today stands at more than \$45 billion.

When you adopt an extensive government agenda, you soon discover that all the entrenched programs and layers of bureaucracy become impossible to budge. Much of the population works for the government; about one of every four Canadians now draws a government paycheck. People learn to depend on government, and all governments, even those whose leaders warn against this dependency, learn to love the power that flows from it.

As for the threat to individual liberty, newspaper censorship is, frankly, the tip of the iceberg. Government intervenes in our lives constantly, and individual liberties are abrogated in new and ever more imaginative ways each day.

Recently, while on vacation, I rented a car in Seattle and tried to drive into British Columbia. My car was confiscated at the border. When I asked for an explanation, I was told that I had not paid taxes on it -- for Christ's sake, it was a *rental car!* Had I been an American, there would have been no problem, but as a Canadian, I had to pay \$200 more for a Canadian rental car in order to continue my

trip. Canadians who dare to get a haircut or a car tune-up across the border are being photographed and prosecuted upon their return to Canada. Why? Because they have secured these services without having to incur the 7 percent goods and services tax slapped onto our ever-burgeoning provincial taxes. Even insurance plans are now taxed.

A black market has sprung up, mainly in liquor and cigarettes, which carry the heaviest taxes. Don't think that the taxes will end there, though.

Once it takes hold, monopolization by government soon spreads to nearly every aspect of your life; in the Toronto area alone, we have six separate municipal governments and one super-municipal government (the "mother" of all local governments) called Metro, which exists to oversee the others.

You will find that after a time, your state and federal governments - even those of a different political stripe - will join forces to make their task of tax collection easier.

Our entire education system, up to university level, is governed by a centralized bureaucracy called the Ministry of Education, which dictates what can and cannot be taught in the schools and how it is to be taught. Universities are mainly government-funded. I realize that the issue of government-run programs is particularly important to you now because of the state of your health-care system. I sympathize with you completely. I cannot imagine a world where one could be left bankrupt because of illness. I also think that you are on the right track with your solutions. If anyone can devise a workable system for medical care, it is you.

I suggest that you look upon it as you do your police protection: a guard in place for the physical and mental well-being of your citizens. The real danger in socialized medicine is the attitude of entitlement it engenders.

The stories you have heard about us are largely true. It is not uncommon to pick up a newspaper and read about "The frightening wait for cancer therapy" here in Ontario, and the situation is no better in the other provinces. There is a shortage of the most advanced diagnostic technology. Thousands of the health cards that ensure access to medical care have been issued erroneously. We *do* wait two hours for an appointment booked weeks in advance. Despite our world-class doctors, many

patients can't get treatment in time because of overcrowding. When you are faced with a life or death medical situation, you don't mind paying whatever it costs. Under the government-dominated medical system, however, you can't even buy your way in - unless, of course, you go to the United States.

The sound of the air-raid siren on my TV has stopped, at least for now. As the politicians love to say, this is my "defining moment." As I sit here tonight, it is simply beyond my comprehension that such a well-intentioned and beloved country as my own could go so far astray so quickly. And it is all the more remarkable that it has taken place without grand conspiracies or intricate plots.

Indeed, most Canadians are as offended by the images of totalitarian government as you are. We shared your joy at the fall of the Berlin Wall and the crumbling of the Soviet bloc; we value freedom. And yet we have fallen into a trap where we are not free. As with that other well-known road, we traveled this one with the best of intentions.

To those who would dismiss me as an alarmist, I issue this invitation: Read our newspapers, watch our news broadcasts (what is left of them) and see for yourselves. Prove me wrong. I wish you could.

When you make critical decisions about the role of government in your life, please think about me, about this letter, and about Canada. Really think about what it could mean when you hear about a government initiative that sounds too good to be true. Thank God for a free press, even when you find yourself criticizing the media for broadcasting stories that you would rather not hear about. The recent publication ban is not the first one. There are others, and their number is growing.

Listen and learn, America. Cup your ear to the wind and hear the blood-chilling wail of the siren whistle as it drifts down across your border.

If just one of you reads this letter and pauses, even for a moment, to think about what unchecked government can do, then it has been worth the writing.

I have faith in you, America. Your road is tough and not perfect. Nothing is. Your road will keep leading you to freedom - the freedom to read and think and be exactly who and what you are - if you only let it. Treasure that freedom, love it and resolve never, ever to let it go.

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