

THE YEAR OF THE BICENTENNIAL

1976 ushers in the Bicentennial signing of the Declaration of Independence—a truly remarkable document in the annals of history.

It will probably never be satisfactorily resolved what impelled three million Englishmen to revolt against their mother country. While they were exploited, it was nothing compared to the exploitation which European governments had been practicing against their own people for years on end. The litany of reasons advanced such as taxation without representation, were questionable arguments for so momentous a step as a revolution. Even Thomas Paine's "Common Sense", published on January 10, 1776, which summarized the reasons for independence and was the spark which turned into the roaring flame of the Declaration, needed some tincture—whether of discontent, vexation, exasperation, or some unknown quantity—to nourish it, or it would have flickered into nothingness.

While no one can definitely say what were the exact combination of events, philosophies, or frustrations which led to the Declaration, the fact remains that the Revolution occurred.

Were the signers of the Declaration men of heroic stature as fourth of July orators would have us believe? Not really. For the most part they were plain ordinary human beings with all the strengths and weaknesses of those of us alive today. What is undeniable, however, is that they had reached a point where they were laying their lives and their property on the line. If the Revolution had failed almost certainly all of their property would have been confiscated, and if they had been captured, they probably would have suffered the fate of Nathan Hale.

As we look back across almost 200 years, has our government lived up to the tenets of the Declaration? One would have to wear the most delicately tinted beautiful pair of rose colored glasses to believe that it has. To the extent that the government has abided by the Declaration's principles, the government has been weak. As it has adopted the very same principles which we are told impelled the colonists to revolt against George III. Today, we have conscription—a modified form of slavery. Regulations bind us all up in a maze of red tape delightful to the bureaucrat's soul but which increasingly are becoming so onerous that people no doubt will soon be looking for another Thomas Paine to write a 20th Century "Common Sense".

But the 200 years of relative freedom has brought into existence accomplishments so unique as to have brought about a veritable revolution,

not only materially, but politically and socially. The telephone, the airplane, and the TV are but a few of the more significant examples of the material benefits which have flowed out of the freedom existing here. The overthrow of monarchies, as occurred in the French Revolution, had their impetus in the example of our revolution. The freedom we have had has led to changes in social mores, the most significant of which, has been the liberation of women from the age-old domination of the male in the western countries and increasing liberation in other nations.

The good effects are still continuing but at an exponentially decreasing rate as we drift away from the Declaration's principles. Will we return to them? It does not appear likely. But just as in spite of what the historians tell us, we are not certain at this late date of the real reasons for the Revolution of 1776, so we cannot tell what reasons may impell us to start a new Revolution from too much Big Government.

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Our government in Washington today resembles that of George III's to such a startling degree that if we are of the same temper as the colonists, we too might revolt if our pleas for more freedom go unheeded. But there's the rub. Are we of the same temper, wishing merely to be free to live our lives as we wish and beholden to no one? Or are we merely little better than mendicants with our heads outstretched to the Great Father in Washington for more and more for which we give less and less?

The year of the Bicentennial is an excellent one for us to assert our independence and to demand that Big government get off our backs. Will we try? Can we afford not to?

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