

A Letter to

JOSIE

by GIL GREEN

"Dear Daddy: We are well. The salamanders tail came off but he is still alive. When Danny was playing with it his tail came off. How are you? Love, Josie."

DEAR JOSIE: Knowing how you and Danny handle the poor salamander, I'm not surprised that its tail came off, rather that its head is still on.

You ask how I am. Well, Josie, that's quite a story.

As you know I am in New York on trial. Most of my day is spent in a courtroom. A courtroom, in case you don't know it, is a place where people go to get justice, in the same way that mother goes to a butcher shop to get meat.

Now, of course, a courtroom is not the same as a butcher shop. For one thing, meat is sold for a price, while justice, because it is priceless, is supposed to be free. Then there is another difference. Meat is something you can see with your eyes, feel with your fingers and taste with your mouth. Any person can recognize meat, regardless of whether he has the money to buy it, whether he be rich or poor.

But justice is not like that. Two people can look at it at one and the same time and yet violently disagree as to whether it be justice or injustice. The reason for this may at first be difficult to grasp. But when you think of it a little, it becomes clear. Many years ago, before either of us was born, a great American from our home state of Illinois understood this truth and expressed it in his own simple way. This man, Abraham Lincoln, said that "With some, the word liberty may mean for each man to do as he pleases with himself and the product of his labor; while with others the same word may mean for

some men to do as they please with other men and the product of other men's labor. Here are two, not only different, but incompatible things, called by the same name, liberty."

Then Old Abe illustrated his point with this story: "The shepherd," said he, "drives the wolf from the sheep's throat, for which the sheep thanks the shepherd as his liberator, while the wolf denounces him for the same act. . . . Plainly the sheep and the wolf are not agreed upon a definition of liberty." Nor of justice!

Abe Lincoln was referring to that period in American history when a few hundred thousand white plantation owners held millions of Negro men, women and children as their slaves, to do with as they pleased. And in defense of that brutal system, the white slave-holding class of the South plunged the nation into a civil war which lasted four long years, and did so in the very names of "justice" and "liberty." For justice to them meant the right to own slaves, while justice for the slaves meant the right to put an end to slavery—the right to be free.

But there is one thing about Lincoln's story that must not mislead you. Oppressed people are never sheep who wait for shepherds to save them. They struggle for their own liberation. And this was certainly true of the Negro people who valiantly fought to remove the cruel chains of slavery and who, under different conditions today, continue their struggle for freedom.

Yes, Josie, the sheep and the wolf are not agreed upon a definition of liberty or justice. You can learn this from your own experience. You remember last spring when Dickie's father's union went out on a long bitter strike for higher wages. You recall how the big packers attacked the workers by press and radio, said that they had no right to strike, called out the police to protect the scabs, got the courts to issue injunctions against picketing, and finally starved the strikers back to work. And at the same time that they refused to give the workers a living wage, they were charging scandalously high prices for meat and blaming this on what they called the "high wages" of the workers.

This was all done in the name of justice, for to the packers, justice means the right to rob the workers of their sweat and toil; the right for them to live in beautiful mansions and in idle luxury while the packing-house workers are compelled to live in over-crowded fire-traps and in poverty.

And that takes me to why I am in the courtroom, and not I alone. With me on trial are ten others, most of whom you know personally. You know Gene Dennis; you've heard him speak and you remember him as the guy who used to give you piggy-back rides when you were only a little snipper. You also know Johnny Williamson and Johnny Gates, both of whom you've seen at our house a number of times. And then there's Henry Winston, who stays at our home when he comes to Chicago and who has been Danny's hero all these years. And you could never forget big Ben Davis with whom we had such good times when we lived in New York and who once kidded you into believing that he owned Central Park. And even though you may not remember Jack Stachel, it was his son who visited Chicago last summer and took you and Danny to the Planetarium.

Well, all these friends of yours, and a few you do not know, are with me in the courtroom as fellow defendants—all of them, my comrades and friends.

Now, why are we here? Because we and the party we represent—the Communist Party—believe in and fight for liberty and justice for the many, for the great majority of Americans who work for a living, the men and women who by their labor make this country great. But the wolves-in-human-clothing that Lincoln spoke of don't like this. Through their control of the government and the courts they have brought us to trial. They want to send us to jail and to outlaw our party.

And they are trying to do this now because all over the world the system-of-the-wolves, the capitalist system, is on its way out. The people everywhere are waking up, fighting for their rights, for their freedom, and the wolves daily become more frantic and desperate. That is why they want to destroy completely whatever rights and liberties the people of this country were able to win by many years of struggle. They also think they can drown the great movement of the working people of the world in the blood of another world war.

The last time I was home, your mother told me of something you had said that gave us all a good laugh. You remember that your teacher had asked you and your classmates to write compositions on some out-of-the-ordinary occurrence in your lives. You came home that day and sadly complained that "nothing ever happens in our family." But now you know that something has happened. There are

all too many people in America who are blind to what is happening in their very midst; who believe that while great tragedies may befall other nations, nothing ever happens here or can happen here.

That is also what the German people once thought. There, too, it began by jailing Communists and outlawing the Communist Party. But it didn't end there. Soon after, all liberty was destroyed. That was fascism. And with it came war, not only for the German people, but for the whole world. Millions of young men lost their lives. Millions upon millions of children were made homeless orphans. Six million Jewish people were murdered in cold blood, only because they were Jews. And if your grandparents had not migrated to America in the early years of this century, our family, too, could have been among the victims.

You were born during that war. You were born at a time when the world was covered with grief and darkness. On the very day you opened your eyes—November 1, 1941—the armies of Hitler were boasting of having reached the outer defenses of Moscow, and many, many people thought it was all over—that the fascist barbarians would inherit the earth. But that did not happen. The people of the Soviet Union, who thirty-one years ago replaced the system-of-the-wolves with the system-of-the-working-people (socialism), broke the back of the fascist beast. Together with the people of the whole world, they won the war.

So you can see, what happens to one family or one party has meaning for others as well. What is happening to your father and his friends in this trial is happening to all Americans. When men can be brought to court because of their *beliefs*, the rights of all Americans are in danger—their right to think, speak, write, teach and organize. And that is why America itself is on trial with us.

Your dad,

GIL