It Can't Happen Here

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF SINCLAIR LEWIS

Sinclair Lewis was born and raised in a small town in Minnesota. He attended Yale University, where he began writing for the university literary magazine, and then spent several years working as an editor and journalist around the U.S. in order to fund his dream of writing novels. While his first five novels did not sell widely, his sixth, *Main Street* (1920), was an instant bestseller. This novel, which satirizes the life of Lewis's native small town, turned Lewis into a national celebrity. His next two novels, *Babbitt* (1922) and *Arrowsmith* (1925), were also spectacularly successful satires about American middle-class life. Lewis would continue publishing novels for two more decades and his work was still very popular, but none of his fifteen later novels approached the wild popularity of these three early novels. Still, the early novels were influential enough to win Lewis the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1930, making him the first American to do so. Lewis divorced his first wife, the editor Grace Livingston Hegger, in 1925 and married his second, the reporter Dorothy Thompson, three years later. Thompson became one of the first prominent women in American journalism, and she was the first American journalist forced out of Nazi Germany by Hitler's regime. In fact, her research in Germany was the basis for *It Can't Happen Here*, and the farm where she and Lewis lived in Barnard, Vermont starting in 1928 was the model for Doremus Jessup's farm in the town of Fort Beulah. In the 1930s and 1940s, Lewis descended into serious alcoholism, divorced Thompson, and continued to write, including briefly in Hollywood. He died of alcohol-related illness in 1951. While Lewis was undoubtedly among the most popular novelists of his generation, his work is read less and less frequently today—although his social criticism is still relevant, and there was a significant resurgence of interest in *It Can't Happen Here* after the 2016 presidential election.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

It Can't Happen Here is set in the turbulent 1930s, a time of serious economic desperation and political turmoil in the United States and Europe. The Great Depression was in full swing, while fascist governments were taking over Europe—starting in Italy and Germany—and authoritarianism was quickly becoming the norm there. In fact, Sinclair Lewis viewed these two phenomena as connected: he thought that economic crisis gives dishonest politicians an incentive to make impossible promises by guaranteeing that desperate voters will flock to them, seeking a solution to their woes. In 1936, while President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal work and relief programs made him relatively popular, his reelection was by no means a guarantee. In fact, Louisiana's corrupt, populist governor Huey Long—the model for Buzz Windrip—was planning to challenge Roosevelt that year. He went on a national speaking tour and won a mass following, until an opposing politician's son-in-law assassinated him in September. Sinclair Lewis had just finished *It Can't Happen Here* the month before, and he made a few last-minute changes to account for Long's death. With Long out of the picture, Roosevelt easily won reelection. However, many historians have argued that even Roosevelt turned towards authoritarianism in the late 1930s (for instance, by trying to pack the Supreme Court with loyalists). Still, authoritarianism was far more widespread in Europe, most noticeably in Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, and Communist Russia. Italian dictator Benito Mussolini first coined the term fascism to describe his far-right political movement, which built a nationalist dictatorship in the hopes of eventually creating a new Italian empire. Mussolini's political tactics—like paramilitary organizing, propaganda, and severe repression—became the basis for Hitler's government in Germany. After being appointed as Chancellor in 1933, Hitler quickly dismantled Germany's democracy by arresting members of the Reichstag (parliament) and then forcing through a law that gave him the power to set all laws. (Buzz Windrip does the same in *It Can't Happen Here*.) In other words, Hitler took fascism to terrifying new levels—and Sinclair Lewis knew this firsthand because his wife, Dorothy Thompson, was the first American journalist to be kicked out of Nazi Germany for criticizing the government. While many Americans assumed that fascism couldn't spread the same way in the U.S., Lewis thought that a figure like Huey Long could easily set up an American dictatorship the same way that Hitler set up a German one: by charismatically responding to the common people's hopes and fears, winning power legitimately, and then creating a state of emergency to justify eliminating their opposition and the democratic checks and balances on their power.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Sinclair Lewis is still best remembered for his early novels *Main Street* (1920), *Babbitt* (1922), and *Arrowsmith* (1925), which satirize different aspects of early 20th century American life. The most significant biographies of Sinclair Lewis are Mark Schorer's *Sinclair Lewis: An American Life* (1961) and Richard R. Lingeman's *Sinclair Lewis: Rebel from Main Street* (2005). *It Can't Happen Here* is commonly read alongside Philip Roth's *The Plot Against America* (2004), which is set just a few years later (in 1940) and also depicts the United States electing a fascist

tyrant. Similarly, Jack London's *The Iron Heel* (1908) describes a right-wing dictatorship taking over the U.S. in the early 20th century and ruling for several centuries, and Philip K. Dick's *The Man in the High Castle* (1962) tells an alternate history in which the Axis Powers win World War II and rule over the United States. Many classic dystopian novels share Lewis's concern about the dangers of tyranny—they include George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* (1953), and Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985). However, Lewis's depiction of American tyranny in *It Can't Happen Here* is primarily based on historical facts, including controversial Louisiana governor Huey Long (the model for Buzz Windrip) and the Nazi regime in Germany (the model for many of Windrip's policies). The most significant works about Huey Long's life and legacy include his autobiography *Every Man a King* (1933), his political platform *My First Days in the White House* (1935), and T. Harry Williams's biography *Huey Long* (1969). Robert Penn Warren's famous novel *All the King's Men* (1946) is also based on Long's political career. Meanwhile, Lewis primarily learned about the Nazi regime from his wife, Dorothy Thompson, who worked as a foreign journalist in Nazi Germany. She summarized her concerns in the book *I Saw Hitler* (1932) and explained the broader context of Nazism in *Dorothy Thompson's Political Guide: A Study of American Liberalism and its Relationship to Modern Totalitarian States* (1938). Similarly, Steven Michels analyzes the political themes in Sinclair Lewis's work in *Sinclair Lewis and American Democracy* (2016). Finally, in *It Can't Happen Here*, Doremus Jessup carries around a copy of Oswald Spengler's *The Decline of the West* (two volumes in 1918 and 1922). This book serves as a powerful metaphor for the way that Windrip's authoritarian style of politics was overtaking democracy across the western world in the early 1900s.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *It Can't Happen Here*
- **When Written:** May-August 1935
- **Where Written:** Barnard, Vermont and Stockbridge, Massachusetts
- **When Published:** October 1935
- **Literary Period:** 20th century, interwar
- **Genre:** Political Satire, Dystopian Fiction, Alternate History
- **Setting:** 1936-9 in the United States—primarily in the fictional small town of Fort Beulah, Vermont
- **Climax:** Doremus Jessup escapes to Canada, the Windrip administration is overthrown, and the United States descends into civil war.
- **Antagonist:** Berzelius ("Buzz") Windrip, the Windrip administration, the Corpos and Minute Men, Oscar ("Shad") Ledue, Effingham Swan, fascism, propaganda
- **Point of View:** Third person

EXTRA CREDIT

Stage Adaptation. When *It Can't Happen Here* first came out in 1935, the idea of a fascist dictator taking over the U.S. was not outlandish—populist authoritarians like Huey Long, Charles Coughlin, and Charles Lindbergh were all viable presidential candidates. Thus, Lewis's novel spoke to very real fears about the future of U.S. democracy at the time. This helps explain why, after Hollywood refused to adapt the novel for the screen, it was almost immediately adapted for the stage instead. In 1936, 28 theater companies began performing the play in more than a dozen different cities across the U.S.

Did It Happen Here? With the election of Donald Trump in 2016, *It Can't Happen Here* quickly became a national bestseller again. Theaters across the country re-adapted the novel for the stage, both to commemorate the 80th anniversary of the original performance and to show the connections between threats to American democracy in the 1930s and today.

PLOT SUMMARY

In Sinclair Lewis's dystopian political novel *It Can't Happen Here*, the populist senator and "Professional Common Man" Buzz Windrip wins the 1936 presidential election and turns the United States into a fascist dictatorship. Before the election, most Americans complacently assume that fascism "can't happen here"—but after the election, it's already too late to stop it. The novel follows Doremus Jessup, a small-time Vermont newspaper editor, as he watches Windrip completely transform the U.S. in a matter of months. Everyone who speaks, writes, or protests against the government starts to disappear, leaving Jessup to decide how he and his newspaper, the **Daily Informer**, can contribute to the fight for democracy.

The novel begins at a Rotary Club meeting in Jessup's hometown of Fort Beulah, Vermont. The portly retired general Herbert Y. Edgeways and the zealous anti-women's rights activist Adelaide Tarr Gimmitch give passionate speeches calling for the U.S. to start a major war, "purify" the media, and crack down on its opponents (like communists, Jews, women, Black people, and labor unions). After the dinner, Jessup discusses the nation's fragile political situation with his friends, including wealthy businessman Francis Tasbrough and brutish school superintendent Emil Staubmeyer. Like Edgeways and Gimmitch, most of Jessup's friends think that the popular senator Buzz Windrip will save the nation from communism and the Great Depression. They think the U.S. is too free and democratic to become a dictatorship—but Jessup disagrees.

The novel explains that Doremus Jessup grew up in Fort Beulah, where his father Loren Jessup ran the Universalist

church. Jessup has spent more than half of his 60 years running the *Daily Informer*. He and his wife Emma live in an elegant old farmhouse and have three children: Philip (a lawyer who lives in Massachusetts), Mary (who is married to the local doctor Fowler Greenhill), and Sissy (who is still in high school).

The whole family attends a picnic at Jessup's cousin Henry Veeder's farm. Jessup listens to the radio in horror as the country's most popular radio host, the Bishop Paul Peter Prang, enthusiastically endorses Buzz Windrip. The Great Depression is in full swing, and Prang's millions of followers—economically distressed white people who call themselves the "League of Forgotten Men"—are a powerful voting bloc. Jessup is "a mild, rather indolent and somewhat sentimental Liberal," so Windrip's theatrical style and extreme, contradictory promises fill him with fear and worry.

Surely enough, Windrip defeats President Franklin D. Roosevelt to win the Democratic nomination. His official platform includes nationalizing any industry and banning any labor union he pleases, guaranteeing a minimum income and capping the maximum income, expanding the military while shutting down the legislative and judicial branches, and taking away the civil and economic rights of Jewish people, Black people, women, communists, and pacifists. Doremus Jessup sees that this is a recipe for totalitarianism: Windrip wants to seize absolute power, then dismantle the democratic freedoms that Americans have cherished for generations.

Windrip campaigns tirelessly around the country and builds a mass following. His campaign team is crucial to this effort—including the militaristic colonel Dewey Haik and especially the conniving political strategist Lee Sarason. Doremus Jessup points out Windrip's lies in impassioned *Daily Informer* editorials, but the people around him—like his brutish handyman, Shad Ledue—believe everything that Windrip says. When Jessup attends a Windrip rally in New York, he learns how charismatic Windrip really is: even though Windrip doesn't make any coherent point, he's so passionate and relatable that people genuinely start to believe that he will solve all of their problems. Unsurprisingly, Windrip defeats Republican nominee Walt Trowbridge in the election. The same night, Windrip's supporters and his massive private militia, the Minute Men, march through the streets around the country, and Doremus Jessup receives a death threat on his porch.

Until after the inauguration, only a few people in Fort Beulah really understood the threat that Windrip posed to democracy. Besides Jessup, these people included the communist union organizer Karl Pascal, Jessup's daughter Sissy, her boyfriend Julian Falck, Jessup's scrappy best friend Buck Titus, and Lorinda Pike, a widowed local tavern owner with whom Jessup is carrying on an affair. When Windrip takes office, he immediately arms the Minute Men, sends them to arrest Congress, and orders them to kill anyone who protests his administration. He overthrows the Supreme Court, bans every political party besides his own, and starts heavily censoring the media. He even dissolves the "League of Forgotten Men" and makes Bishop Prang mysteriously disappear. Next, he reorganizes the U.S. into eight large provinces and appoints the Corpos, a board of loyal industry and worker representatives, to run the U.S. economy. By printing too much money, Windrip seriously worsens the Great Depression. He quickly abandons his promise to pay every American family a minimum of $5,000 a year—instead, he forces all unemployed people into labor camps, where they work for $1 a day (and pay 70 to 90 cents per day for room and board).

However, Windrip's opponent in the election, Walt Trowbridge, manages to escape to Montreal. He sets up a resistance organization called the "New Underground," which starts publishing uncensored news, helping refugees escape north, and planning to overthrow Windrip.

Windrip's purges quickly reach Vermont—which is now part of the Northeastern Province, District Three. When the loyal, foolish brute Shad Ledue becomes the county commissioner in Fort Beulah, Doremus Jessup realizes that he can no longer publish what he wants in the *Daily Informer*. But he strongly believes that the public must learn about the government's crimes—like how it covers up Secretary of Education Hector Macgoblin murdering his old biology professor Willy Schmidt and the respected Rabbi Vincent de Verez in a fit of drunken rage. When Jessup publishes a bold editorial criticizing the administration, an angry mob tries to lynch him. Shad Ledue arrests him instead, and the effete "gentleman-Fascist" military judge Effingham Swan forces him to publish pro-government news and train Ledue's incompetent new assistant, Emil Staubmeyer, to replace him as editor. When Jessup's son-in-law Fowler Greenhill barges into the courtroom to defend his character, Judge Swan gets annoyed and sentences Greenhill to death. A firing squad immediately murders him. Grief-stricken Mary Greenhill moves back to Jessup's house with her son David.

Rebellions break out around the U.S., so Windrip makes criticizing the government a crime punishable by death. The government starts building concentration camps around the country, including near Fort Beulah at Trianon. Shad Ledue starts going through Jessup's papers, and Buck Titus tells the Jessups that they must escape to Canada immediately. One winter night, he drives the family down icy backwoods trails to the Canadian border—but the Minute Men stop them and make them return home.

Jessup's son Philip, now a loyal Corpo, visits and warns him about the consequences of opposing the government. In fact, Jessup knows that he'll inevitably end up in the camps, so he decides to finally fight for his principles. He quits the *Informer* and tries to join the Communist Party's resistance movement—but they reject him, so he joins the New Underground instead. He starts a local chapter with a group of

people, including Buck Titus, Lorinda Pike, the *Informer* typesetter Dan Wilgus, and the farmer Truman Webb. They start writing, printing, and distributing pamphlets with real news about the Windrip administration and fiery editorials defending democracy. But the movement requires sacrifices. Lorinda Pike worries that her affair with Doremus is interfering with their activism, so she moves away. Julian Falck and Sissy Jessup sacrifice their relationship to become spies for the New Underground: Julian joins the Minute Men and Sissy Jessup starts dating Shad Ledue to get information out of him.

Eventually, a Corpo spy tracks down Jessup's group, and the Minute Men arrest him, Buck Titus, Truman Webb, and Dan Wilgus. They go to the concentration camp, where Effingham Swan sentences Jessup to torture and 17 years of imprisonment. The camps are horrible: all of the prisoners have to do hard labor, and many die at the guards' hands—including Wilgus, Henry Veeder, and the professor Victor Loveland. Jessup befriends the communist activist Karl Pascal, then realizes that Pascal also wants to create a dictatorship. Later, the Minute Men catch Julian Falck spying on them, so they send him to the camps and brutally torture him. Finally, to everyone's surprise, Shad Ledue loses his job in the Minute Men and comes to the Trianon camp as a prisoner. The other prisoners don't know why he's there, but they hate him and burn him alive in his cell.

Meanwhile, in the free world, Mary Greenhill executes a plot to avenge her husband's death. She joins the military, becomes a fighter pilot, and then flies her plane straight into Effingham Swan's. They both die in the collision. The Jessup household breaks up. Emma takes David to live with Philip, while Sissy goes to live with Lorinda Pike and work in the New Underground full-time. Then, the novel explains how Shad Ledue ended up at Trianon: on one of his dates with Sissy, he proudly told her about a scheme he was running to extort the Minute Men. Sissy reported this to Francis Tasbrough, who is now the District Commissioner. Tasbrough imprisoned Ledue—probably to take over the extortion scheme for himself.

After Shad Ledue's death, the novel quickly reaches a hair-raising climax. First, the Windrip administration collapses: Lee Sarason overthrows Windrip and starts a war with Mexico, and then Dewey Haik murders Sarason and takes over the presidency for himself. Back in Vermont, Lorinda Pike bribes a Minute Man named Aras Dilley to help Doremus Jessup escape from the Trianon camp. It works. Lorinda and Sissy bring Jessup to Montreal, where he joins the New Underground's leadership. Around the same time, the Chief of Staff of the Army, General Emmanuel Coon, starts an organized military revolt against the government. The novel ends with Doremus Jessup traveling through Minnesota as an undercover agent, organizing a network of New Underground spies who are persuading the public to join the rebellion.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Doremus Jessup/William Barton Dobbs – Doremus Jessup, a 60-year-old newspaper editor, is the protagonist of *It Can't Happen Here*. Jessup lives and works in the small town of Fort Beulah, Vermont. The novel centers on his family and social circle, including his wife Emma, his children Philip, Mary, and Sissy, his lover Lorinda Pike, his best friend Buck Titus, and his acquaintances around town. Jessup is middle-class, well-educated, skeptical of people with power, and empathetic for people without it. As a result, he is firmly committed to nonviolence, democracy, and the liberal values that have traditionally served as the foundation of political life in the United States (and New England in particular). Jessup finds Buzz Windrip's political style deeply troubling from the start, and he predicts many of the Windrip government's tyrannical policies before the election, even as most of his acquaintances insist that fascism "can't happen here" in the United States. However, Jessup is just as opposed to other sorts of political idealism, like communism; he distrusts anyone who commits their life to an ideology, particularly any ideology that wants to concentrate power in the hands of a small elite. Instead, he believes that genuine political progress requires an inclusive, representative, deliberative, and informed democracy. After Windrip gets elected and turns the U.S. into a dictatorship overnight, Jessup feels a growing moral obligation to speak out in his paper, the **Daily Informer**. The government jails Jessup and seizes control over the *Informer*, so instead, he puts his publishing skills to use creating pamphlets for a secret resistance movement called the New Underground. His activities land him in the Trianon concentration camp, where the government's Minute Men torture him, but he manages to escape to Canada. He ends the novel working as a New Underground spy under a new identity (William Barton Dobbs), trying to advance General Coon's rebellion in Minnesota. Sinclair Lewis uses Jessup's political beliefs as a proxy to argue for the importance of liberal democracy and the free press. And by showing Jessup transform from an idle critic into a committed activist, Lewis argues that there *are* some values worth dying for.

Berzelius "Buzz" Windrip – Buzz Windrip is the populist senator who wins the 1936 presidential election and sets up a fascist dictatorship in *It Can't Happen Here*. At the beginning of the novel, Windrip builds mass support by promising iron-fisted rule and riches for all. In reality, however, Windrip is a "Professional Common Man" with no principles at all: he convincingly tells everyone what they want to hear, even though he doesn't intend to keep any of his promises. His public personality is largely an invention, and behind the scenes, his ruthless secretary Lee Sarason is really running the campaign. What Sarason and Windrip truly want is power—and when they

get it, they immediately turn against anyone who threatens to take it away. Windrip all but shuts down Congress and the Supreme Court, empowers his personal militia (the Minute Men), and hands control over the whole U.S. economy to a handful of well-connected businessmen. He replaces the states with provinces and appoints loyal followers to run them. Then, he starts censoring, imprisoning, and executing everyone who opposes him. Even though he crashes the national economy and faces countless rebellions, Windrip manages to stay in power through corruption, propaganda, and widespread repression—until Lee Sarason overthrows him. Windrip's rise to power, which Sinclair Lewis based on a combination of Adolf Hitler and the populist Louisiana governor Huey Long, is a cautionary tale about the dangers of authoritarianism and the importance of defending democracy. Lewis uses Windrip's populist platform and relatable, folksy style to emphasize that fascism is always grounded in unique national traits and demonstrate what an American version of it would look like. While a Windrip-like tyrant never took power in the 1930s, Lewis warns his readers against ever complacently believing that fascism can't take root in the United States.

Mrs. Candy – Mrs. Candy is the Jessup family's sharp, sarcastic housekeeper. Hardworking, reliable, and socially aware, she contrasts strongly with both the bitter Shad Ledue and the uninformed Emma Jessup. She eventually joins the New Underground, and after the Jessup family breaks up, she starts working for (and spying on) Francis Tasbrough instead.

Father Charles Coughlin – Father Coughlin was a real-life priest and radio host who amassed a massive nationwide audience during the Great Depression. He publicly advocated fascist policies, spread extreme anti-Semitism, and built an enormous political movement called the National Union for Social Justice. He inspired the character of Bishop Prang and his "League of Forgotten Men" in *It Can't Happen Here*.

Captain Cowlick – Captain Cowlick is the superintendent of Trianon concentration camp for most of the time that Jessup is there. Cowlick is shy and peaceful—so much so that he lets Ensign Stoyt abuse the inmates however he wants. After Shad Ledue dies in the camp, the administration replaces Cowlick with Snake Tizra.

Roscoe Conkling "R.C." Crowley – R.C. Crowley is a wealthy Fort Beulah banker who supports Buzz Windrip because he thinks that Windrip will give the banks more power. Ironically, most of Windrip's supporters think the exact opposite, but Crowley turns out to be right: Windrip rules primarily for the benefit of wealthy elites like him. Later, he and Shad Ledue hatch a scheme to profit by selling rundown Fort Beulah buildings to the government.

Aras Dilley – Aras Dilley is a poor dairy farmer who later becomes a Squad Leader in the Minute Men. Like many down-and-out Americans, Dilley initially supports Buzz Windrip because he thinks that Windrip will personally make him rich. He ends up being right: his buddy Shad Ledue gets him a lucrative job. Dilley helps execute Fowler Greenhill, spies on the New Underground, and finally becomes a guard at Trianon—where he takes a bribe from Lorinda Pike and helps Doremus Jessup escape. Dilley's actions show how many people support fascist governments like Windrip's out of pure self-interest—like Windrip himself, Dilley has no real principles, besides his thirst for power and money.

Herbert Y. Edgeways – Herbert Y. Edgeways is the belligerent retired general who speaks to the Fort Beulah Rotary Club in the novel's opening scene. He boldly calls for the U.S. to expand its power and conquer the whole world. His speech reflects Sinclair Lewis's belief that the American public was already leaning towards populism and fascism during the Great Depression.

Joe Elphrey – Joe Elphrey is a Communist Party activist who, ironically enough, is also a millionaire economist and the son of a prominent banker. He goes by the pseudonym "Mr. Cailey," and he eventually gets kicked out of the Party for collaborating with non-Communists to fight the Windrip dictatorship. Sinclair Lewis uses Elphrey to mock the Communist Party's elitism and extreme orthodoxy.

The Rev. Mr. Falck – The Reverend Mr. Falck is an Episcopal minister in Fort Beulah. He is elderly, highly educated, and well-respected as a community leader. Along with Doremus Jessup, Buck Titus, and Father Perefixe, he is one of the only prominent men in Fort Beulah to oppose the Windrip regime from the start. Shad Ledue arrests him and sends him to the Trianon concentration camp because his grandson Julian works for the New Underground. At Trianon, Ensign Stoyt brutally beats and tortures him. His fate demonstrates the Windrip regime's cruelty.

Julian Falck – Julian Falck, Sissy Jessup's boyfriend, is a handsome, intellectual college student who grew up in the care of his grandfather, the Rev. Mr. Falck, in Fort Beulah. He is reliable, affectionate, and sincere, and Doremus Jessup squarely approves of his relationship with Sissy. After the Windrip government shuts down Amherst, where Julian Falck goes to school, he becomes Dr. Olmsted's driver and joins the New Underground. Sissy convinces him to become a spy within the Minute Men, and while he collects valuable information, he eventually gets caught and ends up in Trianon, where the guards brutally torture him.

Adelaide Tarr Gimmitch – Mrs. Adelaide Tarr Gimmitch is a conservative activist and extreme nationalist who believes that traditional American values are under threat and ought to be imposed on the country by any means necessary—including a Windrip dictatorship. In particular, she wants to ensure that women remain at home and have as many children as possible, rather than participating in public life. In fact, her strong opposition to women's suffrage is her signature issue. She is

one of Buzz Windrip's most prominent supporters during his campaign: she gives a speech in the novel's opening scene, and she writes many of Windrip's absurd, patriotic campaign songs. After the election, Windrip follows Gimmitch's own advice about women's rights by refusing to give her a job in the government. She ends up working in Hollywood instead. Sinclair Lewis primarily uses the character of Gimmitch to parody the thoughtless nationalism and hypocritical self-righteousness of many middle-class Americans.

David Greenhill – David is Fowler and Mary Greenhill's son, who is eight years old at the beginning of the novel. Even thought the Windrip administration murders his father, David falls victim to its propaganda: he starts dreaming about joining the Minute Men. Eventually, after his mother's death, he moves in with his uncle Philip.

Dr. Fowler Greenhill – Fowler Greenhill is a doctor who runs the main clinic in Fort Beulah along with Dr. Olmsted. He is married to Doremus Jessup's daughter Mary, and he is the father of Jessup's grandson David. He is loyal, hot-tempered, and generally respected in town for his medical genius. After Doremus Jessup publishes an anti-government editorial in the **Daily Informer**, Greenhill appears at court to defend Jessup's character. Annoyed at the interruption, Judge Effingham Swan orders Greenhill executed on the spot—and Shad Ledue and Aras Dilley gladly carry out the order. Greenhill's death devastates his family, which shows how fascist atrocities inflict profound suffering on ordinary people. In fact, the Jessup family's grief over Greenhill's death eventually pushes them to join the New Underground and fight the Windrip dictatorship. Mary later assassinates Effingham Swan to avenge Greenhill's death.

Mary Greenhill/Jessup – Mary is the second of Doremus and Emma Jessup's three children. Athletic, savvy, and stylish, she is married to the prominent doctor Fowler Greenhill. They have one son, David. But she is only a minor character in the novel until Effingham Swan, Shad Ledue, and Aras Dilley murder her husband. Then, grief-stricken and vengeful, she becomes the Fort Beulah New Underground's most fearless activist and pamphleteer. She eventually sacrifices her life in order to assassinate Swan and avenge Greenhill's death.

Dewey Haik – Colonel Dewey Haik is a cold-blooded, homicidal congressman and soldier who belongs to Buzz Windrip's inner circle. He nominates Windrip at the Democratic Convention, campaigns for him in unusual places around the U.S., and founds the Minute Men. After the inauguration, Windrip makes Haik the Provincial Commissioner of the Northeastern Province, although he eventually becomes Secretary of War, helps Lee Sarason overthrow Windrip's government, and then murders Sarason to take power for himself. By the end of the novel, Haik is the president of the United States. He is even more brutal than Windrip or Sarason, and he is busy fighting two wars: his futile invasion of Mexico and the new civil war against General Coon's rebel forces. Haik's rise to power suggests that authoritarian systems like fascism generally fall deeper and deeper into crisis over time because, without checks and balances on power, they allow the most callous and selfish officials to end up with the most power.

Otis "Doc" Itchitt – "Doc" Itchitt is an earnest, wily young reporter who works for Doremus Jessup at the **Daily Informer**. He secretly opposes Windrip and the Corpo government, but he chooses to distance himself from Jessup, obey the government censors, and befriend Shad Ledue and Emil Staubmeyer in order to advance his career. Eventually, after Jessup quits the *Informer*, Itchitt essentially starts running the paper (even though Staubmeyer is officially the editor).

Emma Jessup – Emma Jessup is Doremus Jessup's wife. They met in high school, and after three children and several decades of stable marriage, they love one another but often fail to see eye-to-eye. In many ways, Emma is a stereotypical housewife: she enjoys knitting, baking, and romance novels. She is unfailingly loyal and honest, but also very conventional and naïve, especially when it comes to politics. This frustrates Doremus, who prides himself on his moral and political awareness. While Doremus worries about the future of the United States under Buzz Windrip, Emma cares far more about her family's safety, reputation, and financial situation. She disagrees with Doremus's decision to join the New Underground (but tolerates it anyway), and she never notices his relatively overt affair with Lorinda Pike. But most of all, she worries endlessly about his safety, especially after he ends up at Trianon. After Doremus's imprisonment and Mary's death, Emma takes her grandson David to live with her Corpo son Philip. The character of Emma represents the way that ordinary middle-class people fail to understand the true consequences of fascist regimes like Windrip's—and end up supporting them out of ignorance or convenience.

Philip Jessup – Philip Jessup, Doremus and Emma Jessup's eldest son, is a successful lawyer who lives in Worcester, Massachusetts. Unlike his father and his siblings Mary and Sissy, Philip staunchly supports Buzz Windrip, whom he sees as the U.S.'s best defense against evil Jews and Communists. After his parents try and fail to escape to Canada, Philip visits them, reveals that the Corpos are appointing him to a judgeship, and attempts to convince his father to support the regime. He even defends the Corpos' concentration camps and Judge Swan's arbitrary decision to execute his brother-in-law Fowler Greenhill. Doremus dismisses Philip, recognizing that they will never see eye-to-eye. Philip's political leanings show how fascist propaganda can easily brainwash even educated professionals, especially by appealing to their self-interest. Meanwhile, Philip and Doremus's falling-out shows how totalitarian states take over people's lives by convincing them that their identity depends on politics and that their connections to others only matter if they further the

government's goals.

Cecilia "Sissy" Jessup – Sissy Jessup is Doremus and Emma Jessup's youngest daughter. She is in high school at the beginning of the book, as she is just 18 years old—far younger than her siblings Mary (who is 30) and Philip (who is 32). She is incredibly witty, capable, and fearless, but most of the people around her underestimate her. In particular, she merges her father's moral compass with her younger generation's progressive values. This is doubly true when it comes to gender and romance. Intellectual Julian Falck and popular Malcolm Tasbrough compete for her heart, but she definitively chooses Falck after Tasbrough becomes a Windrip supporter. After they join the New Underground together, Sissy boldly seduces Shad Ledue in order to obtain inside information about the administration and pass it to the New Underground's publishers. She ends up exposing the atrocities he commits against the population and his corrupt business dealings (which land him in Trianon concentration camp). After her sister Mary dies, Sissy moves north to work and organize New Underground activities with Lorinda Pike. She and Pike are dear friends, and she even approves of Pike's affair with her father. Later, she helps her father escape to Canada.

Loren Jessup – Loren Jessup was Doremus Jessup's father. A Universalist pastor, he lived an austere life so that Doremus could afford to go to college. Loren's only luxury was the complete illustrated set of Dickens's novels that he bought himself. (The Minute Men destroy it while arresting Doremus.) Three years after Doremus's graduation, Loren Jessup died, leaving the inheritance of about $3,000 that Doremus used to buy part of the **Daily Informer**. Loren Jessup's belief in education, financial prudence, and hard work suggests that he taught Doremus the liberal values that he fights for during the Windrip dictatorship.

Harry Kindermann – Harry Kindermann is a Jewish maple, dairy, and machinery trader in Fort Beulah. Kindermann makes a comfortable living until Windrip's election—but then, he loses all his contracts and the government takes away all his property. After giving up his bungalow and business, he ends up moving into a rundown shack and selling sausages on the street. His wife even dies of pneumonia. He joins the New Underground, but later quits out of fear. His fate demonstrates how Windrip's fascist dictatorship inflicts needless suffering on minority groups, like Jewish people.

Oscar "Shad" Ledue – Shad Ledue is Doremus Jessup's lazy, incompetent, and bitter handyman, who becomes a devoted Windrip supporter and Minute Man during the campaign. The Windrip administration rewards him with a job as County Commissioner for the Fort Beulah area, even though he has no relevant education or skills. He takes charge of implementing the government's agenda in town, including by extorting shopkeepers, funneling money to the Minute Men, and persecuting everyone who opposes the government. He spends much of his time pursuing a personal vendetta against Jessup, including by spying on him and looking for forbidden books and papers in his library. He also tries to seduce Sissy Jessup, who goes along with his plans in order to get information out of him. Ledue tells Sissy plenty of state secrets—which she then passes to the New Underground, who publicly reveal the information in damning pamphlets. After he admits to swindling the Minute Men and Sissy reports his actions to District Commissioner Francis Tasbrough, Ledue ends up in Trianon—the concentration camp he originally built. Most of the other inmates are in the camps thanks to him, so they kill him as soon as they get the chance. More than any other character in the novel besides Buzz Windrip himself, Shad Ledue represents the way that fascism builds a state around blind loyalty and obedience. In contrast, Sinclair Lewis suggests, a true democracy would promote freedom and assign power based on merit. Thus, Ledue's extreme stupidity, serious abuses of power, and ironic death all embody the senseless brutality and violence that Lewis worries that fascism could inflict on the Untied States.

Clarence/Clifford Little – Little is a successful jeweler in Fort Beulah. He never went to college but always dreamed of it, so for a time, he pays Victor Loveland for private Greek lessons. But after a Minute Man overhears Little and Loveland complaining about the government, both end up in the Trianon camp. At Trianon, Little wins his freedom by reporting on Henry Veeder's escape plans. He is variously called Clarence and Clifford in different passages.

Victor Loveland – Victor Loveland is a Classics professor at Isaiah College, near Fort Beulah, who gets fired from his job for criticizing the government. He eventually ends up as a teacher in a labor camp, a clerk in a quarry, and finally a prisoner in Trianon. After a mob of prisoners kills Shad Ledue, Effingham Swan randomly decides to execute Loveland (and several other prisoners) as punishment. But ironically enough, like Doremus Jessup, Loveland is a committed liberal who doesn't believe in violence. In fact, he's one of the only people in Fort Beulah besides Jessup to recognize early on that Buzz Windrip poses a severe threat to fundamental liberal values, like freedom and equality.

Osceola Luthorne – "Colonel" Osceola Luthorne is a Kansas magazine editor and real estate agent who joins Buzz Windrip's campaign team from the very beginning and eventually becomes Windrip's Secretary of War. He is not a real colonel, but his friend, the Governor of Tennessee, gives him the title anyway. He eventually gets fired and replaced by Dewey Haik because he didn't give the Corpos enough power. He retires to his Kansas farm, until Lee Sarason orders him to be murdered without Buzz Windrip's knowledge. His career trajectory shows how fascist administrations allocate power based on arbitrary loyalties, not ability or qualifications.

Dr. Hector Macgoblin – Hector Macgoblin is a prominent

surgeon who campaigns for Buzz Windrip and later becomes his Secretary of Education, Culture, and Public Relations. He sets out to reform the nation's education system by firing disloyal teachers and building a new "entirely practical and modern" curriculum that he deems completely free of pesky dogmas like "intellectualism" and "tradition." In the process, he drunkenly murders his old professor Willy Schmidt and the Rabbi Vincent de Verez—but he gets away with it, which shows how cruel and corrupt fascist dictatorships tend to become. He also helps lead the government's propaganda effort by censoring unfavorable journalists and lying to the international press and community. (For instance, he insists that the government's concentration camps are really voluntary education programs for citizens' own benefit.) Macgoblin also enthusiastically supports Lee Sarason's war against Mexico—but when Dewey Haik seizes power from Sarason, Macgoblin is forced to flee the U.S.

Mr. Nipper – Mr. Nipper is Lorinda Pike's smug business partner at the Beulah Valley Tavern. Nipper and Pike invest equal amounts of money in the Tavern, but unlike Pike, Nipper does no work to maintain the property or serve the guests. After Windrip takes office, Nipper opportunistically sues Pike and convinces Judge Effingham Swan to grant him full ownership of the Tavern. He tries to make Pike keep working in the kitchen, but she eventually quits.

Dr. Marcus Olmsted – Dr. Olmsted is an elderly but capable doctor who runs Fort Beulah's main medical practice with Fowler Greenhill. After Judge Swan orders Greenhill's execution, Olmsted joins the New Underground and hires Julian Falck as his personal driver. He passes secret information to and from the patients he visits in Trianon, including Doremus Jessup.

Karl Pascal – Karl Pascal is a communist mechanic and labor union organizer who works at John Pollikop's garage. Pollikop and Pascal constantly debate whether socialism or communism will solve the world's woes. Pascal also frequently tries to convince Doremus Jessup to join the Communist Party. However, Jessup generally refuses—he believes that Pascal's faith in the Communists is just as irrational and dangerous as the American public's faith in Windrip. (The one time Jessup *does* meet with the Party, they realize that he's a liberal and reject him.) At the beginning of the novel, Pascal already knows Jessup from his time organizing a strike at Francis Tasbrough's quarry, but they truly become close friends as cellmates in the Trianon camp. By collecting compromising information about the guards, Pascal ensures that they treat him well rather than torture and abuse him. Nevertheless, he still grows more and more radical during his time in the camps, to the point of advocating for a Communist dictatorship. Sinclair Lewis uses Pascal to argue that anyone can end up supporting tyranny if they let loyalty and blind faith guide their political decisions. Pascal is still in the camps when Jessup escapes at the end of the novel.

Father Stephen Perefixe – Father Perefixe is a young Roman Catholic priest from Canada who lives and preaches in Fort Beulah. Like his close friends Doremus Jessup, Buck Titus, and Mr. Falck, Perefixe opposes Windrip from the start for moral reasons. After the election, he becomes an active New Underground member and decides to return home to Canada. Ironically enough, even though he constantly tells everyone else about these plans, he never goes. By the end of the novel, he is the Fort Beulah New Underground's leader (and one of its last remaining members).

Lorinda Pike – Lorinda Pike is a spirited young widow who runs the Beulah Valley Tavern near town. While she has a poor reputation in town because of her marital status, she is one of Doremus Jessup and Buck Titus's best friends. In fact, she's Jessup's primary love interest during the entire novel—they carry on a long affair, and they have much more in common than Jessup does with his wife Emma. A staunch liberal and opponent of the Windrip administration, Pike becomes one of the New Underground's main leaders in Fort Beulah, especially after her business partner, Mr. Nipper, convinces Judge Effingham Swan to sign over total control of the Tavern to him. She moves in with Buck Titus instead, posing as his housekeeper but really spending all of her time leading refugees to Canada and helping Doremus Jessup publish his anti-government pamphlets. However, when she realizes that her affair with Jessup is interfering with her commitment to fighting fascism, she leaves Fort Beulah and moves north to Beecher Falls, where she starts another chapter of the New Underground. She and Sissy eventually help Doremus Jessup escape from the Trianon concentration camp and make it to Canada. Practical, industrious, and firmly committed to saving democracy from tyranny, Lorinda Pike is a model activist.

John Pollikop – John Pollikop is a good-humored, outspoken Polish socialist who runs an auto repair shop in Fort Beulah. He is almost always engaged in a friendly debate with his employee, the communist Karl Pascal. Later, he joins the New Underground, and his experience smuggling liquor into the U.S. from Canada during Prohibition becomes a great asset to the cause. He eventually ends up in Trianon concentration camp, where he shares a cell with Pascal, Doremus Jessup, and Truman Webb.

Bishop Paul Peter Prang – Bishop Prang is a popular Methodist Episcopal minister and radio host, modeled on the real-life fascist personality Father Charles Coughlin, whose weekly broadcast commands an enormous nationwide audience. Fickle and belligerent, Prang uses his platform to attack minority groups, call for wealth redistribution, and run a profitable fan club called the "League of Forgotten Men." Yet he's the most influential political commentator in the United States by far. In fact, he helps Buzz Windrip gain recognition and legitimacy in the nation's eyes by publicly campaigning for him. However, as

soon as Windrip takes office, Prang starts to question the administration's authoritarian policies. When he visits Windrip in Washington to voice his concerns, Windrip jails him, then shuts him in an insane asylum. He disappears forever. Prang's wild popularity shows how mass media increasingly shapes politics in the 1930s and how dishonest public figures can push Americans towards a uniquely American style of fascism, particularly by promising a solution to economic crisis through a combination of religion and racism. Meanwhile, his downfall shows how dishonest fascists are dangerous because they are generally willing to turn on their supporters (or anyone else) in order to increase their own power.

John Sullivan Reek – John Sullivan Reek is the stodgy career politician, yes-man, and ex-governor who becomes the Commissioner of District Three in the Northeastern Province. He implements Windrip and Dewey Haik's agenda by censoring journalists, opening the Trianon concentration camp, and running corrupt schemes with Shad Ledue. Eventually, Reek becomes anxious and afraid because he realizes that his colleagues will throw him under the bus for their own professional advancement. Sure enough, when Effingham Swan becomes the Provincial Commissioner, he immediately fires, arrests, and imprisons Reek.

Louis Rotenstern – Louis Rotenstern is a jingoistic Fort Beulah tailor who tries to distance himself from his Polish Jewish ancestry by passionately supporting Windrip and attacking minority groups (including his fellow Jewish people). He suffers from the Windrip administration's anti-Semitism anyway: an angry mob destroys his shop sign on election night, and later, Shad Ledue sends him to Trianon and gives one of his friends control over the tailor shop.

Lee Sarason – Lee Sarason is Buzz Windrip's campaign manager, Secretary of State, and closest friend. He writes Windrip's campaign songs and autobiography, **Zero Hour**, and then essentially runs the government from behind the scenes, since he is the leader of both the Minute Men and the Corpos. At the end of Windrip's first year in office, in December 1937, Sarason works with Dewey Haik to overthrow Windrip and install himself as president. He immediately starts a war with Mexico—but then Dewey Haik murders him and takes over the presidency for himself. Sarason's scheming during the campaign shows how the charismatic outward-facing persona of fascists like Buzz Windrip is really just a cover for brutal, selfish schemes to gain as much power as possible. Importantly, Sarason is a former journalist and news editor, which reflects Sinclair Lewis's belief that the mass media's power to manipulate public opinion is part of what makes fascism possible in the first place. Meanwhile, Sarason's time in the government shows that, as a political system, fascism is ultimately based on nothing more than power and loyalty—in it, a small club of elites tries to amass total political power by convincing the public that it's for their own benefit. Finally, Sarason's coup against Windrip shows how systems built on this basis tend to collapse because they encourage leaders to undermine each other and destabilize the whole government.

Upton Sinclair – Upton Sinclair was a real-life writer and activist who became famous for depicting poverty and exposing corruption in the early 20th century U.S. He ran for Governor of California on an anti-poverty platform in 1934. Based on these campaign promises, Sinclair Lewis portrays him as a Buzz Windrip supporter in *It Can't Happen Here*. After the election, Windrip appoints Upton Sinclair as ambassador to the U.K.

"Professor" Emil Staubmeyer – Emil Staubmeyer, who falsely claims to be a professor, is the superintendent of schools in Fort Beulah (at the beginning of the novel) and Shad Ledue's assistant (during the Windrip administration). Later, Judge Swan assigns him to take control of the **Daily Informer** from Doremus Jessup. Despite his powerful government jobs, Staubmeyer is really just an ignorant conformist, willing to flatter anyone who offers him power and recognition. At the *Informer*, he praises everything that Jessup does, fails to even notice Jessup's anti-government editorials, and eventually passes control of the paper to Doc Itchitt rather than actually running it himself, like Swan wanted. Emil Staubmeyer's career, like Shad Ledue's, shows how fascist governments reward the most corrupt and incapable men with power.

Effingham Swan – Effingham Swan is a rich, arrogant banker and Corpo military judge who sentences countless people to deaths and incarceration at Trianon, usually for completely arbitrary reasons. Most importantly, he orders Dr. Fowler Greenhill's execution (for appearing in court, unannounced, to defend Doremus Jessup). Later, when he becomes the Provincial Commissioner, he arrests all of his political opponents and sends numerous New Underground members to Trianon, including Doremus Jessup. After Shad Ledue's death, he decides to randomly execute several Trianon prisoners as punishment. Mary Greenhill eventually assassinates him to avenge her husband's death. Swan's callous disregard for other people shows how dangerous it is to concentrate extreme, unchecked power over human life in the hands of a few elites. While Swan's overly formal, flamboyant style couldn't be more different from folksy Shad Ledue's, his underlying sadism and thirst for power are exactly the same. Sinclair Lewis plays up this contrast in order to show how fascist governments often use emotion and flair to cover up their true motives and destructive policies.

Francis Tasbrough – Francis Tasbrough, owner of the local quarry, is the wealthiest man in Fort Beulah. Even though he repeatedly claims that "it [fascism] can't happen here in America," he enthusiastically supports Buzz Windrip and then takes a prominent job in the administration, as District Commissioner. He uses his position to steal as much money as he possibly can from the government, Minute Men, and local businesses. He turns against his old friend Doremus Jessup for

his own political benefit and sends Shad Ledue to the Trianon camp when he finds out that Ledue has been extorting even *more* money from the Minute Men, without sharing the spoils. Tasbrough's political career reveals how corruption, profit, and self-interest are the real driving forces behind authoritarian governments like the Windrip administration.

Buck Titus – James Buck Titus, Doremus Jessup's closest friend, is a tough, worldly 50-year-old farmer from Fort Beulah who spent several years as a cattle-rancher, prospector, and horse-breeder in Montana. During the Windrip administration, Titus runs the Fort Beulah New Underground out of his farmhouse. Titus's deep knowledge of history and philosophy, wide network of acquaintances, and fearless frontier spirit make him a particularly effective organizer. For instance, Titus is the one who warns Jessup about the government's plans to arrest him and helps his family make an escape attempt to Canada. Later, Titus ends up in the Trianon camp, but he never loses his optimism or sense of humor, even when the Minute Men brutally torture him. He embodies what Sinclair Lewis sees as the best dimensions of American identity and culture, and his steady commitment to the New Underground shows how organized political resistance should give people hope even in the darkest political situations.

Walt Trowbridge – Walt Trowbridge is the Republican politician who loses to Buzz Windrip in the 1936 election, then escapes to Canada and starts the New Underground. While Windrip's campaign is exciting and emotional, Trowbridge's is tame and policy-focused. He promises to gradually create a more equal economy, and he believes in "integrity and reason," important democratic values that the public doesn't seem to value anymore—except for liberals like Doremus Jessup. But this is Sinclair Lewis's point: nations are more likely to achieve true political progress through gradual, democratic solutions than sudden, authoritarian revolutions. At the end of the novel, Trowbridge and General Coon *do* lead a revolution—an armed rebellion against Dewey Haik's government—but only in order to reestablish a stable liberal democracy in the U.S.

Henry Veeder – Henry Veeder, Doremus Jessup's cousin, is an ordinary country farmer. Even though he doesn't care about politics, he lands in trouble when the government decides to move several families into his house, and he complains about it. He ends up as Jessup's cellmate in Trianon concentration camp. He tries to escape, but fails because Clarence Little gives away his plans. The Minute Men execute him as punishment. Veeder's fate represents the way that fascism oppresses the ordinary people it claims to benefit.

Dan Wilgus – Dan Wilgus is the compositor (head typesetter) at the **Daily Informer.** After joining the New Underground, he steals an old printing press and movable type from the *Informer* offices, then uses them to print thousands of pamphlets in Buck Titus's basement. The Minute Men send him to Trianon concentration camp at the same time as Doremus Jessup, and he ends up tragically dying there. The guards tell Jessup that Wilgus's death was a suicide, but the novel implies that the guards actually might have tortured him to death.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Perley Beecroft – Perley Beecroft is the Southern planter and ex-governor whom Buzz Windrip chooses as his vice president because he is posh and unthreatening. When Windrip starts to feud with Lee Sarason, Beecroft quits the vice presidency, joins Walt Trowbridge's resistance in Montreal, and befriends Doremus Jessup.

Medary Cole – Medary Cole is a Fort Beulah miller and the president of the local Rotary Club. A pitiful conformist, he enthusiastically supports Buzz Windrip because everyone around him does, too.

Emmanuel Coon – Emmanuel Coon is the major general who Buzz Windrip appoints as Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army. Coon is a true believer in Windrip, so after Lee Sarason overthrows the government, he turns against the government and leads an organized military rebellion from Minnesota.

Mr. Dimick – "Mr. Dimick" is the alter ego of the spy who recruits Doremus Jessup into the New Underground and helps coordinate the Fort Beulah cell's activities with the leadership in Montreal.

The Ensign – The Ensign is a cruel Minute Man who arrests Doremus Jessup and takes him to the Trianon concentration camp.

Foolish – Foolish is the Jessup family's loyal mutt.

Mungo Kitterick – Mungo Kitterick is Doremus Jessup's lawyer. When recommending his services to Lorinda Pike, Jessup describes him as meticulous but unintelligent. He eventually joins the New Underground.

Owen J. Peaseley – Owen J. Peaseley is the cowardly president of Isaiah College, and later the Director of Education and head of the book-burning committee for John Sullivan Reek's district government.

Senator Porkwood – Senator Porkwood is a loyal member of Buzz Windrip's inner circle, and later his Attorney General. Porkwood is a boring, respected liberal, and his participation gives Windrip's campaign an air of legitimacy.

Raymond Pridewell – Raymond Pridewell is a grouchy, prudent Fort Beulah hardware dealer who loses his shop and gets imprisoned at Trianon after personally insulting Shad Ledue.

Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR) – The actual U.S. president in 1936, Franklin D. Roosevelt, loses the Democratic nomination to Buzz Windrip in *It Can't Happen Here* and runs for reelection as an independent instead. He loses, and after the inauguration, Windrip offers him the ambassadorship to Liberia as a practical joke.

Willy Schmidt – Willy Schmidt is a respected biologist who Hector Macgoblin decides to visit one evening—and then murders in a drunken rage, along with the Rabbi Vincent de Verez.

Webster R. Skittle – Webster R. Skittle is the corrupt banker who Buzz Windrip appoints as Secretary of the Treasury.

Ensign Stoyt – Stoyt is a young, sadistic Minute Men squad leader at the Trianon concentration camp. He embodies the Windrip administration's cruel spirit because he enjoys treating the prisoners as violently as possible—for instance, he takes delight in executing Henry Veeder and attacking the elderly Rev. Mr. Flack.

Malcolm Tasbrough – Francis Tasbrough's arrogant son Malcolm is one of Sissy Jessup's two love interests, along with Julian Falck. However, Sissy stops seeing Malcolm after he becomes a fervent Windrip supporter and joins the Minute Men.

Alfred "Snake" Tizra – "Snake" Tizra is a vicious gangster, truck driver, and friend of Shad Ledue who joins the Minute Men and eventually becomes the Trianon concentration camp's superintendent. He is far crueler than his predecessor, Captain Cowlick.

Rabbi Vincent de Verez – Vincent de Verez is the respected scholar, Rabbi, and Jewish community leader who Hector Macgoblin murders in New York, along with Willy Schmidt.

Pete Vutong – Pete Vutong is a poor French Canadian farmer who joins the New Underground in Fort Beulah.

Truman Webb – Truman Webb is a farmer who helps run the Fort Beulah New Underground out of his old farmhouse. His abolitionist grandfather helped people escape slavery in the same house, as part of the original Underground Railroad. He ends up in the Trianon camp with Doremus Jessup.

TERMS

Corpos – The "Corpos" are **Windrip**'s supporters and government officials. Their nickname comes from the name of Windrip's American Corporate State and Patriotic Party, which advocates for Corporatism—an economic system in which worker representatives and business owners form associations and run their industries together.

Fascism – Fascism is a far-right, authoritarian political philosophy that advocates for the government to organize everything in society for the sake of economic and military expansion. Usually, fascists believe that the people of their nation are a superior "master race" with an inherent right to rule over all other peoples. Fascist governments generally spread propaganda, attack dissidents and minority groups, and start imperial wars in order to expand their power. Italian dictator Benito Mussolini was the first to conceive of fascism, but the best-known fascist government is still Nazi Germany under Adolf Hitler. *It Can't Happen Here* shows **Buzz Windrip** setting up a uniquely American kind of fascist regime in the U.S. during the Great Depression.

Great War – "The Great War" is another common term for World War I.

Liberalism – Liberalism is a political philosophy that supports democracy, equality before the law, and universal civil rights and freedoms. Whereas authoritarians (including fascists and most communists) generally believe that a minority ought to impose the best way of life on everyone else, liberals tend to think that society functions best when everyone can live according to their own values and make collective decisions through representative democracy. In *It Can't Happen Here*, **Doremus Jessup**'s commitment to liberalism leads him to join the New Underground and fight the **Windrip** administration.

Minute Men – The Minute Men are **Buzz Windrip**'s private militia, which he eventually turns into the U.S.'s primary law enforcement and military force. They are similar to the SA and SS in Nazi Germany, or the Blackshirts in Fascist Italy.

New Underground – The New Underground is the clandestine resistance movement, led by **Walt Trowbridge**, that tries to fight **Buzz Windrip**'s fascist dictatorship by spying on the Corpos and Minute Men, helping political dissidents escape to Canada, and publishing clandestine newspapers. **Doremus Jessup** joins the New Underground about two-thirds of the way through the novel.

Rotary Club – Rotary Clubs are the local chapters of the service organization Rotary International. Sinclair Lewis viewed Rotarians as naïve, middle-class conformists who tried to earn social status by talking like humanitarians, without actually doing anything.

Trianon – Trianon is a concentration camp that the **Windrip** government builds on the site of a former girls' school near Fort Beulah. It is named for the Grand Trianon, an extravagant palace built for Louis XIV in 17th-century France.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

AMERICAN FASCISM

In Sinclair Lewis's *It Can't Happen Here*, the charismatic, folksy U.S. Senator Buzz Windrip builds a massive popular following during the Great Depression, wins the 1936 presidential election, and then

transforms the U.S. into a totalitarian, fascist dictatorship. The novel's protagonist, the small-town newspaper editor Doremus Jessup, watches his nation and community collapse as Windrip dismantles Congress and the Supreme Court; hands virtually unlimited power to his own private militia; passes ruthless labor policies that crash the economy but enrich his millionaire friends; and violently cracks down on women, minority groups, and everyone who opposes him. These policies are clearly extreme, but in the 1930s, they were far from hypothetical—in fact, Windrip's style of politics was popular and gaining momentum in Europe. Sinclair Lewis wrote this book a decade into Benito Mussolini's rule in Italy, shortly after Adolf Hitler's rise to power in Germany, and immediately before the assassination of Louisiana's corrupt, authoritarian populist governor Huey Long, who was running in the 1936 election on a platform similar to Windrip's.

Thus, the title *It Can't Happen Here* is really an ironic warning to the American people. Sinclair Lewis completely rejects the common belief that the U.S. is too vast, wealthy, or egalitarian to fall into fascism. Instead, he shows how these unique aspects of American culture lend themselves to a uniquely American sort of tyranny. He suggests that, in times of crisis, Americans' excessive pride, hope, individualism, and disdain for authority could lead them to democratically elect a dictator who promises to represent their interests against the establishment—but then *becomes* the establishment and dismantles democracy from the inside. Over the course of the novel, Lewis vividly shows how totalitarian atrocities are possible in the U.S., from censorship and warmongering to the rise of government-sponsored concentration camps and mass murder. Through his sinister satire, Lewis encourages his readers to defend their nation's democracy and reject any political movement that claims it must take away people's rights and freedoms in order to save them from threats—lest they fail to recognize the true threat until it's already too late.

LIBERALISM AND TOLERANCE

In *It Can't Happen Here*, Sinclair Lewis thoroughly rejects Buzz Windrip's style of populist fascism, but he also recognizes that many of the underlying problems that could have driven people to it in the 1930s—like economic desperation and social isolation—required real political solutions. Thus, beyond merely telling his readers which political values to *reject*, Lewis also offers an alternative vision of a healthier, more egalitarian system. Through the eyes of the "mild, rather indolent and somewhat sentimental Liberal" Doremus Jessup, Lewis argues that the U.S. should revitalize itself not through violence and repression, but by actually fulfilling the liberal values on which it was founded. These values include tolerance for political rivals, respect for individual freedom, and equality before the law.

Lewis defends liberalism by showing that institutions tend to undermine themselves when they concentrate power in too few hands, with too few checks and balances. For instance, Windrip's administration rewards officials who one-up their rivals by giving them unchecked power. Therefore, instead of working together on policies to benefit the country, Windrip's aides compete over power and actively destabilize the government in the process. It's little wonder that the novel ends with two coups d'état (seizures of power) and a civil war: nobody in Windrip's administration can agree on who should hold power or what they should do with it. And Lewis suggests that authoritarianism can take hold in virtually any political group: the novel's communists (like Karl Pascal) are so sure they have the secret to utopia that they refuse to work with anyone who disagrees with them. But Doremus Jessup suspects that they would be just as dictatorial and violent as Windrip if they took power. Instead of declaring that a certain group of people knows what's right for everyone and then imposing that solution on the entire nation, Lewis concludes, governments should embrace "the free, inquiring, critical spirit" that all humans share. Specifically, this means that governments should spread power more broadly by following a parliamentary system, in which laws are true compromises among all the different groups in society.

MORALITY AND RESISTANCE

In *It Can't Happen Here*, after Buzz Windrip takes over the U.S. presidency, dissenters like Doremus Jessup feel defeated and powerless. Jessup knows that the new administration will be catastrophic for the nation, but he also knows that anyone who speaks out will be spied on, arrested, or far worse. Eventually, Jessup finds an outlet for his political frustrations: he joins the New Underground, a resistance movement that meets in secret, publishes accurate news about the administration, and helps people targeted by the government escape to Canada. While this lands him in the Trianon concentration camp, he doesn't regret a thing—he feels like he's dedicating his life to freeing his country, and he's willing to die in the process. But this selflessness makes Jessup very different from the vast majority of the people he meets, who either try to ignore the new regime (like his wife Emma), or else wholeheartedly embrace it as soon as doing so personally benefits them (like his son Philip and his former farmhand Shad Ledue). Thus, while Lewis suggests that the majority of people will merely ignore their values and go along with tyranny when it's in their self-interest, he also argues that there will *always* be a sizable minority that puts morality and the common good first. This is why, after Jessup becomes a spy and organizer for the New Underground, Lewis ends the novel with the line, "a Doremus Jessup can never die." He means that wherever there is tyranny, there will always be dedicated pockets of resistance.

POLITICAL COMMUNICATION AND MASS MEDIA

It's no coincidence that in *It Can't Happen Here*, the protagonist Doremus Jessup is a newspaper editor, and the demagogue Buzz Windrip builds his following primarily through the popular Bishop Prang's weekly radio show. Later, Windrip rules the U.S. with an iron fist by censoring all the news, while Jessup tries to fight back by publishing opposition pamphlets with the New Underground. Clearly, then, Sinclair Lewis sees how the media—and especially the global systems of mass media that formed in the first half of the 20th century—can shape people's political consciousness on a monumental scale. By the 1930s, beyond just giving people useful information, the radio also became many Americans' primary source of entertainment. As these two functions mixed, the mass media's power as a propaganda tool only grew. In *It Can't Happen Here*, by showing most of the U.S. population merely repeat the lies on the government-censored news, Lewis suggests that audiences start to consume—and believe—whatever is available to them and makes them feel good, regardless of the quality of that information.

In fact, throughout the novel, Lewis repeatedly shows how media (including novels themselves, like Buzz Windrip's **Zero Hour**) can distort people's thinking and make them more vulnerable to authoritarianism by playing with their emotions. And yet Lewis also clearly believes in the media's power to fight lies and misinformation, when placed in the right hands (like Jessup's). After all, Jessup's pamphlets help him expose the administration's crimes on an unprecedented scale. Thus, although it predated most of the 20th century's major totalitarian states, *It Can't Happen Here* accurately depicts how the media became a key political battleground in nearly all of them. Lewis suggests that mass media is a powerful but dangerous tool in modern politics: because most people are not capable of evaluating the quality of the information they receive, mass media can both expand and narrow people's horizons, depending on what reaches them. Put differently, more than ever before, controlling mass media is the fastest route to controlling public opinion.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

ZERO HOUR

Zero Hour, Buzz Windrip's purported autobiography (which was actually written by Lee Sarason), demonstrates how propaganda works: it uses the power of storytelling to manipulate its audience's emotions and distract them from political realities. Sinclair Lewis underlines this point by starting chapters five through twenty of *It Can't Happen Here* with increasingly absurd excerpts from Windrip's fictional book.

Zero Hour is a nauseating slew of nonsense: it covers an impossibly wide range of topics, which it links through anecdotes, jokes, and appeals to emotion, rather than logic and evidence. For instance, in one passage, the book argues that Marxism is wrong by comparing it to a pair of suspenders and invoking the names of several American founding fathers. The book offers the clearest demonstration of Windrip's rhetorical strategy: he tries to *sound* persuasive, without actually persuading anyone of any real point. That way, everyone can like him, but nobody has to hold him accountable for any particular beliefs. In a nutshell, he is an entertainer masquerading as a politician and asking for power. This is what makes him so dangerous.

But Sinclair Lewis also uses *Zero Hour* to make a metafictional point about his own work and influence. He wrote *It Can't Happen Here* in part to dissuade the American public from electing a demagogue like Huey Long in 1936. But crucially, he approached a deadly serious topic—genocidal fascist tyranny—through *satire*. He did this because he knew that stories are more effective persuasive tools than facts. In this sense, Lewis's novels were also propaganda tools—and he chose to write pro-democracy propaganda precisely because he knew how powerful anti-democracy propaganda could be. Thus, Windrip's absurd but influential autobiography demonstrates Lewis's deep faith in his own writing's power to transform public opinion and shape his nation's future.

THE FORT BEULAH DAILY INFORMER

Doremus Jessup's newspaper, the *Daily Informer*, represents the free press's role in a democracy, effective journalism's power to improve society, and the dangers of censorship. The paper is Jessup's life's work: when the novel begins, he has dedicated more than 35 of his 60 years to running it. Thousands of people read everything he writes, and while his editorials are often controversial, they consistently shape the political conversation in his corner of Vermont.

Then, Buzz Windrip becomes a national phenomenon. His primary communications strategy is mass media—and specifically the radio, which allows him and his followers (like Bishop Prang) to instantly spread propaganda around the whole country. Local newspapers like Jessup's start to seem irrelevant and powerless, because their facts and rationality are no match for Windrip's grandiose rhetoric and empty promises. In other words, the U.S. falls into tyranny in part because the free press is not powerful, organized, or committed enough to show the public the dangers that Windrip poses to them.

After Windrip takes power, he starts censoring the press. Suddenly, Jessup can no longer write freely, and nobody can find out about Windrip's increasingly horrific abuses of power. Jessup takes one final stand by publishing an honest editorial criticizing the government—and then the administration takes over his paper and forces him to publish exclusively favorable news. The *Daily Informer* turns from a defense against government propaganda into a tool for it. With no access to independent information, Americans start to blindly trust the administration. Thus, the *Daily Informer*'s relatively bland name actually represents the humble but absolutely essential role that journalists play in a democracy: they must simply inform people of the truth, day after day, so that the public can make better decisions and protect themselves against tyrants.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Signet edition of *It Can't Happen Here* published in 2014.

Chapter 1 Quotes

"For the first time in all history, a great nation must go on arming itself more and more, not for conquest—not for jealousy—not for war—but for peace! Pray God it may never be necessary, but if foreign nations don't sharply heed our warning, there will, as when the proverbial dragon's teeth were sowed, spring up an armed and fearless warrior upon every square foot of these United States, so arduously cultivated and defended by our pioneer fathers, whose sword-girded images we must be ... or we shall perish!"

Related Characters: Herbert Y. Edgeways (speaker), Adelaide Tarr Gimmitch , Berzelius "Buzz" Windrip

Related Themes:

Page Number: 2-3

Explanation and Analysis

It Can't Happen Here opens in the small town of Fort Beulah, Vermont, where the traditionalist activist Adelaide Tarr Gimmitch and the retired general Herbert Y. Edgeways give impassioned political speeches at a local Rotary Club meeting. In his speech, General Edgeways declares that the U.S. must build up its military and invest in weapons "for peace!" He argues that aggressive foreign countries pose a profound threat to American national security, so the U.S. must dramatically increase its military spending—and preferably start invading its enemies—in order to maintain a stable world order. Readers will easily notice the hypocrisy in Edgeways's speech: he's promoting aggressive American militarism as a solution to imaginary aggressive militarism from other countries.

It's significant that Lewis chooses to start his novel not with Buzz Windrip, the charismatic fascist at its center, but rather with a pair of insignificant characters who give speeches, then quickly fade into the background. By doing so, Lewis suggests that there was already a strong fascist undercurrent to American life in the 1930s. Even without a crazed strongman to set up a dictatorship, he insists, many Americans (like Edgeways's audience) were already seeking fascist solutions to their problems. They were already celebrating unbridled power, turning against minorities and foreigners, and calling for an American empire. And they were already failing to see the profound danger in abandoning democracy and handing power to a dictator.

Thus, Lewis suggests that it's misleading to blame fascism entirely on the leaders who create fascist governments—instead, he thinks that fascist leaders also respond to important antidemocratic tendencies in their countries. By fighting these tendencies, people who value democratic principles (freedom of speech, equal rights for all, consent of the governed, etc.) can stop fascists before they ever become powerful enough to take over the country.

"Well, all the birdies in their nest agree. My friend, Mrs. Pike, ought to know that freedom of speech becomes mere license when it goes so far as to criticize the Army, differ with the D.A.R., and advocate the rights of the Mob. So, Lorinda, I think you ought to apologize to the General, to whom we should be grateful for explaining to us what the ruling classes of the country really want. Come on now, my friend—jump up and make your excuses."

Related Characters: Doremus Jessup/William Barton Dobbs (speaker), Lorinda Pike, Herbert Y. Edgeways, Adelaide Tarr Gimmitch

Related Themes:

Page Number: 9-10

Explanation and Analysis

After Adelaide Tarr Gimmitch and General Herbert Y. Edgeways give absurd speeches calling for fascism in the United States, Lorinda Pike stands and publicly denounces their views. But the crowd shouts her down. Next, Doremus Jessup stands and gives this brief speech. Even though

many people in the audience think he's being serious, in reality, everything he says here is ironic. He points out how Gimmitch, Edgeways, and their allies try to shut down free speech, rather than listen to Lorinda Pike's valid criticisms. He points out that the U.S. is dangerously close to launching the global imperial war that Edgeways wants. And, more subtly, he points out how the misogynistic audience treats his ideas as far more important than Lorinda Pike's (even though he doesn't mean a word he says).

Jessup's speech reflects how close the U.S. is already inching to fascism—in fact, in Fort Beulah (the small town where this part of the book is set), fascism seems to have already become the majority opinion. Only a marginalized few, like Jessup and Pike, are willing to defend the principles behind democracy. But Lewis also uses Jessup's speech to show how satire can serve as a powerful tool in politics. In his speech, Jessup shows that Gimmitch's ideas violate the fundamental democratic value of free speech, while Edgeways is calling for a destructive war merely so that powerful people can enrich themselves. In other words, Jessup soberly explains the antidemocratic principles behind Edgeways and Gimmitch's arguments so that his audience can see how absurd and dangerous they are. Of course, this is also Sinclair Lewis's precise reason for writing *It Can't Happen Here*: through satire, he wants show what fascism would really look like in the U.S. and expose the serious dangers that it poses to Americans and their way of life.

Chapter 2 Quotes

❝ "People will think they're electing [Windrip] to create more economic security. Then watch the Terror! God knows there's been enough indication that we can have tyranny in America—the fix of the Southern share-croppers, the working conditions of the miners and garment-makers, and our keeping Mooney in prison so many years. But wait till Windrip shows us how to say it with machine guns! [...] On the whole, with scandalous exceptions, Democracy's given the ordinary worker more dignity than he ever had. That may be menaced now by Windrip—all the Windrips. All right! Maybe we'll have to fight paternal dictatorship with a little sound patricide—fight machine guns with machine guns. Wait till Buzz takes charge of us. A real Fascist dictatorship!"

"Nonsense! Nonsense!" snorted Tasbrough. "That couldn't happen here in America, not possibly! We're a country of freemen."

Related Characters: Doremus Jessup/William Barton Dobbs, Francis Tasbrough (speaker), Berzelius "Buzz" Windrip

Related Themes:

Page Number: 16-17

Explanation and Analysis

After the Rotary Club dinner from the novel's first chapter, Doremus Jessup meets with a group of friends to discuss the upcoming election. Jessup worries that the popular senator Buzz Windrip will win and set up a fascist dictatorship, but his friends—most of all the wealthy quarry-owner Francis Tasbrough—insist that this could never happen. They argue that the U.S. has always been a democracy, that its people will never give up their freedoms, and that Windrip has no intention of destabilizing its government. But Jessup disagrees. He knows that Windrip's proposals are impossible to fulfill, and he thinks that Windrip's real intention is to win the presidency, then dismantle American democracy from the inside out.

Of course, many people believed the exact same thing as Francis Tasbrough in the 1930s, and Sinclair Lewis wrote this book to prove them wrong. He argues that many of fascism's characteristic traits were also present in the U.S. (not just Europe), and that an American fascist could easily take power by exploiting the same cultural attitudes that people like Tasbrough wrongly view as inherently democratic. Rather than an all-knowing paternal figure, for instance, an American fascist would likely present himself as a relatable everyman. Just like local politicians, slaveholders, and business leaders have done for centuries, an American fascist could talk about ideas like freedom and equality while proposing changes that actually make society far *less* free an equal. For instance, Windrip could insist that armed insurrections and forced labor are actually supposed to stop invasions and keep the economy free. The U.S. is not immune from fascism, Lewis concludes—on the contrary, it's dangerously close to it.

Chapter 4 Quotes

Senator Windrip's father was a small-town Western druggist, equally ambitious and unsuccessful, and had named him Berzelius after the Swedish chemist. Usually he was known as "Buzz." He had worked his way through a Southern Baptist college, of approximately the same academic standing as a Jersey City business college, and through a Chicago law school, and settled down to practice in his native state and to enliven local politics. He was a tireless traveler, a boisterous and humorous speaker, an inspired guesser at what political doctrines the people would like, a warm handshaker, and willing to lend money. He drank Coca-Cola with the Methodists, beer with the Lutherans, California white wine with the Jewish village merchants—and, when they were safe from observation, white-mule corn whisky with all of them.

Within twenty years he was as absolute a ruler of his state as ever a sultan was of Turkey.

Related Characters: Berzelius "Buzz" Windrip

Related Themes:

Page Number: 26-27

Explanation and Analysis

This chapter presents Buzz Windrip's life story and explains how he came to pose such a profound threat to American democracy. Windrip is neither a common man nor a member of the social elite, but he manages to get along with both—in fact, he manages to get along with *everybody* by simply imitating whatever they do. This is the essence of his political genius: he wins everyone's support by convincing them that he's just like them and will obviously fight for them. With diverse groups of voters behind him, he claims to have the country's best interests at heart.

But in reality, all of Windrip's promises are empty and contradictory. He's nothing like most of his constituents. In reality, he's little more than a charismatic entertainer—he just demands power and votes instead of laughs and applause. His candidacy seems too good to be true, which is why it's so dangerous. Fascism replaces honest democracy with misleading entertainment, so that the public is too distracted to notice when its cherished democracy disappears.

No one, even among the Washington correspondents, seemed to know precisely how much of a part in Senator Windrip's career was taken by his secretary, Lee Sarason. When Windrip had first seized power in his state, Sarason had been managing editor of the most widely circulated paper in all that part of the country. Sarason's genesis was and remained a mystery.

[...]

He had been variously a Socialist and an anarchist. Even in 1936 there were rich people who asserted that Sarason was "too radical," but actually he had lost his trust (if any) in the masses during the hoggish nationalism after the war; and he believed now only in resolute control by a small oligarchy. In this he was a Hitler, a Mussolini.

Related Characters: Lee Sarason, Berzelius "Buzz" Windrip, Doremus Jessup/William Barton Dobbs

Related Themes:

Page Number: 28-29

Explanation and Analysis

The most powerful member of Buzz Windrip's campaign team is his trusted secretary, Lee Sarason. The public knows little about Sarason, but Lewis takes the opportunity to explain his political leanings for the reader. Like Windrip, Sarason believes in using any means necessary to secure "resolute control [over the government] by a small oligarchy." While most Americans aren't privy to this information (so will likely overlook the dangers that Sarason poses to democracy), this information can help Lewis's readers understand Windrip's campaign tactics. Specifically, Sarason and Windrip's strategy is to appeal to as many voters as possible, win power, and then use that power to destroy democracy and take full control of the country for themselves.

In fact, Sarason's past is almost as significant to the novel as his present—he used to be a journalist, just like the novel's protagonist, Doremus Jessup. But while Jessup believes in using honest journalism to inform the public and enrich democracy, Sarason evidently believes in using it to mislead the public and dismantle democracy. In other words, Jessup and Sarason use the same journalistic tools in opposite ways, which shows why the media plays such a crucial role in the success or failure of a democracy.

Chapter 6 Quotes

❝ When Doremus, back in the 1920's, had advocated the recognition of Russia, Fort Beulah had fretted that he was turning out-and-out Communist.
He, who understood himself abnormally well, knew that far from being a left-wing radical, he was at most a mild, rather indolent and somewhat sentimental Liberal, who disliked pomposity, the heavy humor of public men, and the itch for notoriety which made popular preachers and eloquent educators and amateur play-producers and rich lady reformers and rich lady sportswomen and almost every brand of rich lady come preeningly in to see newspaper editors, with photographs under their arms, and on their faces the simper of fake humility. But for all cruelty and intolerance, and for the contempt of the fortunate for the unfortunate, he had not mere dislike but testy hatred.

Related Characters: Doremus Jessup/William Barton Dobbs, Berzelius "Buzz" Windrip

Related Themes:

Page Number: 46

Explanation and Analysis

After describing Buzz Windrip's campaign and noting that Doremus Jessup is one of the few people in Fort Beulah who doesn't support him, the novel explores the origins of this disagreement. Jessup is serious but not humorless, freethinking but not radical, and honest but not naïve. In particular, Jessup's political leanings are inextricably tied to his profession. As a well-educated, well-off newspaperman who fully understands his work's high stakes, Jessup views national politics with a skepticism that many of his fellow townspeople lack. Since his job is largely about persuasion, he pays close attention to the stories that politicians tell about themselves—and whether or not they truly match up to reality.

In fact, his journalistic sensibilities explain why he's suspicious about Buzz Windrip from the outset. Jessup views every politician with the same critical eyes—including, to everyone's horror, the Russian communists. But he clearly sees that Windrip's promises don't match up with his actions. And the only thing that Jessup hates more than selfish elites are the dishonest politicians who claim that they'll put an end to elite selfishness forever. This is why he's a "mild, rather indolent and somewhat sentimental Liberal"—he thinks that anyone who claims to have the solution to all political problems is probably lying in the hopes of gaining more power for themselves. Instead, Jessup believes in good old-fashioned democracy: he thinks everyone in society should be able to speak freely and try to persuade everyone else. Rather than one ruler claiming to speak for all the people, the people's voices, in aggregate, should rule.

Chapter 7 Quotes

❝ *Buzz and buzz and keep it up,*
Our cares and needs he's toting,
You are a most ungrateful pup,
Unless for Buzz you're voting!

[...]

See, youth with desire hot glowing,
See, maiden, with fearless eye,
Leading our ranks
Thunder the tanks,
Aeroplanes cloud the sky.

Bring out the old-time musket,
Rouse up the old-time fire!
See, all the world is crumbling,
Dreadful and dark and dire.
America! Rise and conquer
The world to our heart's desire!

Related Characters: Adelaide Tarr Gimmitch (speaker), Berzelius "Buzz" Windrip, Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 53-54

Explanation and Analysis

At the 1936 Democratic National Convention in Cleveland, incumbent President Franklin D. Roosevelt is seeking re-nomination, but Buzz Windrip is the clear favorite. After Windrip's supporters march in an extravagant procession to celebrate him, Mrs. Adelaide Tarr Gimmitch sings two cute but poorly written songs about Windrip's candidacy. (The above passages are the verses to both.)

Gimmitch's songs exemplify how fascism poses a serious threat to democracy by confusing substance with style, or politics with entertainment. To most listeners, these verses are just catchy tunes intended to celebrate their candidate's victory. But the songs' lyrics tell a different, more frightening story. The first rejects a basic tenet of democracy: the notion that citizens can respectfully disagree about politics, without questioning one another's

rights to participate in the political system. Instead, it suggests that anyone who votes against Windrip has not a legitimate difference of political opinion, but rather an ungrateful contempt for the nation itself. While the song stops short of calling for political violence, it does encourage Windrip voters to view non-Windrip voters as enemies.

Meanwhile, the second song *does* call for political violence: it declares that the U.S. ought to "Rise and conquer / The world." In other words, the song celebrates and calls for another world war. Yet people singing it could easily fail to recognize the gravity of its lyrics. While these songs are Sinclair Lewis's satirical inventions, they show how dangerous it can be to conflate emotion with policy and party with identity.

Chapter 8 Quotes

❝ (15) Congress shall, immediately upon our inauguration, initiate amendments to the Constitution providing (a), that the President shall have the authority to institute and execute all necessary measures for the conduct of the government during this critical epoch; (b), that Congress shall serve only in an advisory capacity, calling to the attention of the President and his aides and Cabinet any needed legislation, but not acting upon same until authorized by the President so to act; and (c), that the Supreme Court shall immediately have removed from its jurisdiction the power to negate, by ruling them to be unconstitutional or by any other judicial action, any or all acts of the President, his duly appointed aides, or Congress.

Related Characters: Berzelius "Buzz" Windrip, Doremus Jessup/William Barton Dobbs

Related Themes:

Page Number: 64

Explanation and Analysis

In Buzz Windrip's long, bold, contradiction-riddled political platform, everything is optional—except this 15th and final plank. In fact, this paragraph is nothing more than a convoluted, legalistic declaration of Windrip's plans to destroy American democracy. Windrip wants to make Congress hand him all of its legislative powers and the Supreme Court's judicial powers. Rather than elected senators and representatives working together to write laws, Windrip will be able to write them alone. And if he decides to write any unconstitutional laws, the Supreme Court will no longer have the power to stop him.

In other words, this plank in Windrip's platform is designed to prevent the three branches of government from checking and balancing one another's power. With these checks and balances gone, Windrip can rule by decree, as a dictator. He may or may not follow through with the rest of his agenda, but he will certainly never have to give up his power, for any reason. To liberals like Doremus Jessup, this paragraph leaves no doubt about Windrip's true intentions—and the profound danger he poses to the nation.

Chapter 9 Quotes

❝ Doremus had never heard Windrip during one of his orgasms of oratory, but he had been told by political reporters that under the spell you thought Windrip was Plato, but that on the way home you could not remember anything he had said.

There were two things, they told Doremus, that distinguished this prairie Demosthenes. He was an actor of genius. There was no more overwhelming actor on the stage, in the motion pictures, nor even in the pulpit.

[...]

But below this surface stagecraft was his uncommon natural ability to be authentically excited by and with his audience, and they by and with him. He could [...] make you see him veritably defending the Capitol against barbarian hordes, the while he innocently presented as his own warm-hearted Democratic inventions, every anti-libertarian, anti-Semitic madness of Europe.

Aside from his dramatic glory, Buzz Windrip was a Professional Common Man.

Related Characters: Doremus Jessup/William Barton Dobbs, Berzelius "Buzz" Windrip

Related Themes:

Page Number: 71-72

Explanation and Analysis

Doremus Jessup hasn't yet seen Windrip in person, but he has heard rumors about how Windrip manages to build such a broad, dedicated following. Specifically, he has heard that Windrip combines a prowess for acting with the "uncommon natural ability" to relate to people on their own terms. In other words, Windrip is an expert at figuring out what people want to hear and then saying it convincingly. As a result, he's popular not because of his political platform, but because of how he connects to people. He's primarily an entertainer, not a traditional politician.

This is why his audiences often can't remember Windrip's

speeches: they relate so deeply to his style, emotions, and outlandish promises that they never bother to determine if he's really serious about them. In this sense, Windrip takes advantage of the precise traits that Americans think protect them *against* fascism—like their diversity, individualism, and entrepreneurial spirit—in order to convince each and every group of Americans that he wants to create a dictatorship *just for them*. But needless to say, when he actually builds this dictatorship, it will primarily be for his own benefit.

> There came to him stockbrokers, labor leaders, distillers, anti-vivisectionists, vegetarians, disbarred shyster lawyers, missionaries to China, lobbyists for oil and electricity, advocates of war and of war against war. [...] He promised to further their causes. [...] He promised fellow politicians to support their bills if they would support his. He gave interviews upon subsistence farming, backless bathing suits, and the secret strategy of the Ethiopian army. He grinned and knee-patted and back-slapped; and few of his visitors, once they had talked with him, failed [...] to support him forever... The few who did fail, most of them newspapermen, disliked the smell of him more than before they had met him [...] By the time he had been a Senator for one year, his machine was as complete and smooth-running—and as hidden away from ordinary passengers—as the engines of a liner.

Related Characters: Berzelius "Buzz" Windrip

Related Themes:

Page Number: 74

Explanation and Analysis

During his term as a U.S. senator, Buzz Windrip meets with an endless variety of representatives from an endless variety of places, professions, and interest groups. And he manages to please everyone—besides the journalists, who actually listen to his words, note the contradictions in them, and thus see right through his persona. But these journalists aren't powerful enough to stop him. Instead, Windrip builds a wide network of supporters by genuinely convincing everyone that he will give them what they want, even though he seldom follows through. He has no integrity, principles, or overarching worldview, besides his desire for power and attention.

But fortunately for Windrip, this doesn't matter: the more he lies, the more power and attention he receives. By connecting with people, he wins votes at rallies and secures support from political and business elites (even though voters hate the elites, and vice versa). Even though recognizing his con is as easy as comparing his words to his actions, nobody seems to do it. In other words, Windrip's rise shows how dangerous even a democracy can become when people stop making decisions based on critical thinking and start making them based on blind emotion and misplaced trust instead.

Chapter 11 Quotes

> The conspicuous fault of the Jeffersonian Party, like the personal fault of Senator Trowbridge, was that it represented integrity and reason, in a year when the electorate hungered for frisky emotions, for the peppery sensations associated, usually, not with monetary systems and taxation rates but with baptism by immersion in the creek, young love under the elms, straight whisky, angelic orchestras heard soaring down from the full moon, fear of death when an automobile teeters above a canyon, thirst in a desert and quenching it with spring water—all the primitive sensations which they thought they found in the screaming of Buzz Windrip.

Related Characters: Berzelius "Buzz" Windrip, Walt Trowbridge, Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 85-86

Explanation and Analysis

The 1936 election is ultimately a showdown between the "integrity and reason" candidates, Walt Trowbridge and the incumbent President Franklin D. Roosevelt, and the candidate of "frisky emotions" and "primitive sensations," Berzelius Windrip. Unfortunately, emotions tend to capture people's attention more firmly and sustainably than reason. This was especially true in the 1930s (when the book is set), as the Great Depression had driven most Americans to desperation, and mass media made it possible for all of them to indirectly meet the personalities behind national politics. Even more unfortunately, emotions can persuade people to do things that they would never do rationally—like sacrifice their own safety, freedom, and civil rights. Thus, even though the vast majority of established politicians support Trowbridge and Roosevelt, Windrip is the clear favorite to win the election. This is why Lewis sees this preference for emotion over reason as the foundation of fascism.

Yet Lewis also recognizes that it can be difficult to overcome the bias toward emotion once it has already taken root. Often, a better strategy is to reach rational conclusions, then attach strong emotions to them. In fact, one of Lewis's

primary reasons for writing this book was to give people "frisky emotions" and "primitive sensations" in favor of democracy. The violent atrocities that come after Windrip's election, he hopes, will shock his readers into realizing that liberal democracy is a far better option than fascism for the United States.

❝ [Doremus Jessup] had expected that traditionally Republican Vermont would give him too drearily easy a task in preaching Trowbridge. What he found was a dismaying preference for the theoretically Democratic Buzz Windrip. And that preference, Doremus perceived, wasn't even a pathetic trust in Windrip's promises of Utopian bliss for everyone in general. It was a trust in increased cash for the voter himself, and for his family, very much in particular.

Related Characters: Doremus Jessup/William Barton Dobbs, Berzelius "Buzz" Windrip, Walt Trowbridge

Related Themes:

Page Number: 86-87

Explanation and Analysis

When he starts to interview local people in Fort Beulah, Doremus Jessup is surprised to learn that the vast majority of them support Windrip, even despite his area's historically Republican political leanings. (In fact, Vermont and Maine were the only two states to vote Republican in the *real* 1936 election.) Soon, Jessup realizes that voters' primary reason for supporting Windrip is not that they believe in his vision for the country, but rather because they think that life will get better for *themselves* under his leadership. In other words, their motives are fundamentally selfish—and, in Jessup's eyes, Windrip manages to dupe them by appealing to their self-interest.

This aspect of Windrip's popularity is also significant because it separates him from European fascists, like Hitler and Mussolini, whose appeal depended on promising a perfect future society to their followers. Windrip doesn't even need to aim so high, largely because of the U.S.'s individualistic, capitalist spirit—the same spirit that so many Americans thinks will protect them against fascism. Instead, Windrip just promises everyone that he will personally enrich *them*, usually at someone else's expense. Lewis suggests that Americans are more concerned with their own individual success than the well-being of society at large, which means that Windrip never even has to propose a coherent worldview.

Chapter 12 Quotes

❝ Manhattan peasants. Kind people, industrious people, generous to their aged, eager to find any desperate cure for the sickness of worry over losing the job.
Most facile material for any rabble-rouser.

Related Characters: Berzelius "Buzz" Windrip, Doremus Jessup/William Barton Dobbs

Related Themes:

Page Number: 97

Explanation and Analysis

Two days before the presidential election, Doremus Jessup travels to New York to attend Buzz Windrip's last rally. It will be the first and only time that Jessup sees Windrip in person. As he walks into Madison Square Garden, where the rally will be held, Jessup notices that most of the other attendees belong to a very specific social class: they are responsible, working-class people who have suffered unduly from the Great Depression. Most of them support Windrip because they expect to personally gain from his administration—but they are preoccupied with their personal finances not out of greed, but for the sake of their and their families' survival. They are perfectly capable of careful, critical thinking—they just choose not to use it with Windrip because he gives them the sense of hope and security that they need. In other words, Windrip preys on desperate people because he knows that they are vulnerable. During the Depression, nearly the whole country is vulnerable, and Windrip offers everyone a ready-made solution to their troubles.

❝ He slid into a rhapsody of general ideas—a mishmash of polite regards to Justice, Freedom, Equality, Order, Prosperity, Patriotism, and any number of other noble but slippery abstractions.

Doremus thought he was being bored, until he discovered that, at some moment which he had not noticed, he had become absorbed and excited.
Something in the intensity with which Windrip looked at his audience, looked at all of them, his glance slowly taking them in from the highest-perched seat to the nearest, convinced them that he was talking to each individual, directly and solely; that he wanted to take each of them into his heart; that he was telling them the truths, the imperious and dangerous facts, that had been hidden from them.

Related Characters: Berzelius "Buzz" Windrip, Doremus Jessup/William Barton Dobbs

Related Themes:

Page Number: 99

Explanation and Analysis

When Doremus Jessup goes to New York for Buzz Windrip's final pre-election rally, he's already convinced that Windrip poses a fundamental threat to American democracy. As a result, he's completely astonished when he finds Windrip's speech captivating and persuasive. Others have described this effect to him over and over, but now, he experiences it firsthand. He has no idea what Windrip is talking about, but he doesn't care, because Windrip's speech is simply so enjoyable. Put differently, Jessup's *emotional* reaction to the speech is so strong that he doesn't have a *rational* reaction to it at all until much later.

Of course, many of Windrip's supporters never get around to rationally evaluating his ideas at all. As the narration points out here, they decide whether Windrip is telling the truth based on how they *feel*, and not on whether there is actual *evidence* behind Windrip's claims. This explains how so many people can enthusiastically support Windrip without bothering to figure out how he actually plans to govern. Indeed, if Windrip can win over a shrewd journalist like Doremus Jessup, even for a few minutes, then it's unlikely that ordinary people will manage to resist his charms.

Chapter 13 Quotes

❝ All through the "Depression," ever since 1929, Doremus had felt the insecurity, the confusion, the sense of futility in trying to do anything more permanent than shaving or eating breakfast, that was general to the country. He could no longer plan, for himself or for his dependants, as the citizens of this once unsettled country had planned since 1620.

Why, their whole lives had been predicated on the privilege of planning. Depressions had been only cyclic storms, certain to end in sunshine; Capitalism and parliamentary government were eternal, and eternally being improved by the honest votes of Good Citizens.

Related Characters: Doremus Jessup/William Barton Dobbs, Berzelius "Buzz" Windrip

Related Themes:

Page Number: 104-105

Explanation and Analysis

After Windrip wins the election, Doremus Jessup retreats to his study and tries to forget about politics. It doesn't work—he can't stop thinking about Buzz Windrip, and everything else seems to have lost its meaning. Soon enough, Jessup realizes why: because Windrip's election leaves the U.S.'s political future so uncertain, Jessup can't be sure about anything else in his life, either. But actually, this started much earlier, with the beginning of the Great Depression. Unsure when the Depression will end, Jessup doesn't know whether his savings and investments will be secure, his newspaper will survive, or his children will be able to pursue their dreams. And now, he doesn't know if Windrip will follow through with his lofty campaign promises or immediately seize power for life and destroy democracy.

Worst of all, Jessup can't do anything about any of this: the nation's political and economic future seems entirely outside his control. And because the nation's political and economic systems are the foundation for Jessup's life and work as a newspaperman, the coming political crisis makes everything else in his future look even more hazy and irrelevant than it already did. Indeed, it's a great privilege to not care about politics and the economy, because one can assume those realms are stable enough to never interfere with one's plans. Jessup no longer has this privilege. In fact, since the beginning of the Depression, neither have the majority of Americans, which helps explain their turn to fascism.

❝ "Is it just possible," he sighed, "that the most vigorous and boldest idealists have been the worst enemies of human progress instead of its greatest creators? Possible that plain men with the humble trait of minding their own business will rank higher in the heavenly hierarchy than all the plumed souls who have shoved their way in among the masses and insisted on saving them?"

Related Characters: Doremus Jessup/William Barton Dobbs (speaker), Berzelius "Buzz" Windrip

Related Themes:

Page Number: 117

Explanation and Analysis

After Windrip is elected president, Doremus Jessup

contemplates human folly and starts writing an editorial in defense of liberalism. He thinks about how many "vigorous and bold[] idealists" have arrogantly claimed to know the solution to humanity's problems. From revolutionaries like the Bolsheviks to religious leaders like Brigham Young (the second president of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints), most have fallen far short of their goals—or failed altogether. (In fact, Jessup thinks that Young was the most successful of all.) Some "rabble-rousers" underestimate the challenges they will face, while others get corrupted by power and start exploiting their followers. But none ever reach the promised utopia, Jessup concludes, and all do more harm than good. So why, Jessup asks himself, do people continue following arrogant, charismatic leaders who take advantage of them? Will humanity ever stop repeating its mistakes?

Jessup isn't sure whether people ever *will* stop falling for idealistic tyrants, but he's pretty sure that he knows *how* they can: by firmly committing to liberal democracy. Instead of handing control over society to a charismatic leader, Jessup believes, humans should design inclusive governments based on compromise. Rather than imposing one way of life on everyone, such governments give each person the freedom to live how they want and enable all of society to make important collective decisions. This is exactly what the U.S. has sought to do—even if it has often fallen far short of total inclusivity. In fact, this vision of liberal democracy is the only ideal that Jessup is willing to fight for.

Explanation and Analysis

The day he takes office, Buzz Windrip immediately starts to realize all of Doremus Jessup's worst fears. He announces a state of emergency, gives official powers to his personal militia, the Minute Men, and then orders them to imprison all of the congressmen who oppose his plan to strip Congress and the Supreme Court of all of their powers. In a matter of hours, Windrip destroys the checks and balances in the U.S. federal government, ensuring that he can run it as a dictator for as long as he likes. He also carefully manages his public image so that he appears to be protecting the officials he's really disempowering. In other words, he outwardly pretends that the U.S. government is still a functional representative democracy while he frantically dismantles it. Numerous Americans *do* realize what he's doing, but the vast majority don't.

This shocking scene clearly underscores Sinclair Lewis's central message: fascism poses a serious threat to the U.S., and once a dictator takes power, there's no saying whether the public will ever get it back. Even if the U.S.'s democracy seems particularly strong, *all* democracies are inherently fragile, because dictators can easily destroy them right under the public's noses. People can resist this process, but often, they don't do anything until it's far too late. Indeed, the best way to empower fascism is by ignoring it under the pretense that "it can't happen here" (hence the book's title). Thus, if Americans truly care about democracy, they should be extremely vigilant about protecting it.

Chapter 15 Quotes

❝ Before six, the President had proclaimed that a state of martial law existed during the "present crisis," and more than a hundred Congressmen had been arrested by Minute Men, on direct orders from the President. The Congressmen who were hotheaded enough to resist were cynically charged with "inciting to riot"; they who went quietly were not charged at all. It was blandly explained to the agitated press by Lee Sarason that these latter quiet lads had been so threatened by "irresponsible and seditious elements" that they were merely being safeguarded. Sarason did not use the phrase "protective arrest," which might have suggested things.

Related Characters: Berzelius "Buzz" Windrip, Lee Sarason, Doremus Jessup/William Barton Dobbs

Related Themes:

Page Number: 135-136

❝ "I am addressing my own boys, the Minute Men, everywhere in America! To you and you only I look for help to make America a proud, rich land again. You have been scorned. They thought you were the 'lower classes.' They wouldn't give you jobs. They told you to sneak off like bums and get relief. They ordered you into lousy C.C.C. camps. They said you were no good, because you were poor. I tell you that you are, ever since yesterday noon, the highest lords of the land—the aristocracy—the makers of the new America of freedom and justice. Boys! I need you! Help me—help me to help you! Stand fast! Anybody tries to block you—give the swine the point of your bayonet!"

Related Characters: Berzelius "Buzz" Windrip (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 136-137

Explanation and Analysis

After Windrip strips all power from Congress and the Supreme Court, protests break out across the United States. In one of these protests, activists appear to shoot two members of Windrip's private militia, the Minute Men. So, Windrip responds with this fiery speech to the whole militia: he tells the Minute Men that his presidency is their opportunity to retake the power that belongs to them, and he gives them explicit permission to murder anyone they please. It's significant that he specifically links empowerment to violence—he doesn't complain about his followers being the "lower classes" because he believes in social equality, but rather because he thinks that his followers ought to *rule over* other groups of people. In other words, his vision of greatness is being *greater than* others. So, he tells his supporters (who are mostly armed white men) that they *deserve* this supremacy and can therefore do anything they want to regain it. After all, Windrip has taken control of the courts, so he can ensure that his cronies will never face legal consequences.

The U.S.'s rapid, terrifying fall from democracy in this book is a warning. Lewis wants his readers to know that they could conceivably lose all of their civil and political rights overnight and be forced to live under tyranny for the rest of the lives. By showing them this, he hopes that they will realize that democracy truly is worth fighting for.

Chapter 16 Quotes

❝ The hysteria can't last; be patient, and wait and see, he counseled his readers.
It was not that he was afraid of the authorities. He simply did not believe that this comic tyranny could endure. *It can't happen here*, said even Doremus—even now.

The one thing that most perplexed him was that there could be a dictator seemingly so different from the fervent Hitlers and gesticulating Fascists and the Cæsars with laurels round bald domes; a dictator with something of the earthy American sense of humor of a Mark Twain, a George Ade, a Will Rogers, an Artemus Ward. Windrip could be ever so funny about solemn jaw-drooping opponents, and about the best method of training what he called "a Siamese flea hound." Did that, puzzled Doremus, make him less or more dangerous?

Related Characters: Doremus Jessup/William Barton Dobbs, Berzelius "Buzz" Windrip

Related Themes:

Page Number: 143

Explanation and Analysis

In Doremus Jessup's mind, Windrip's first actions in office are so absurdly, egregiously tyrannical that the rest of the country's political establishment simply *must* act to stop him. Unfortunately, this belief is just a convenient fantasy, a way for Jessup to deny the terrifying events that are unfolding before him. In reality, there is no establishment left to overthrow Windrip: he has already jailed most of his political opposition and destroyed all of the democratic systems that other officials could use to limit his power. So, Windrip clearly isn't going anywhere—and Doremus Jessup only thinks otherwise because of his mistaken assumption that democracy is inevitable in the United States.

In reality, Sinclair Lewis suggests, Americans might be particularly ill-suited to defend their democracy precisely because they are so used to taking it for granted. Americans view their culture as totally unique, Jessup realizes in the second paragraph, and so they don't know what kind of dictator to expect. Perhaps a Nazi-style disciplinarian would never win office in the U.S., but a folksy conman absolutely can, and Lewis uses Jessup's internal monologue to suggest that most Americans don't even take this frightening possibility seriously. Lewis wants them to—he hopes to show them that American democracy is much more fragile than they think, because a vicious dictator could destroy it in a matter of hours. And the nation is so ill-prepared that even some of its best-educated journalists, like Doremus Jessup, could fail to believe their eyes.

Chapter 18 Quotes

❝ "All this trouble and the Corpos—They're going to do something to you and me. We'll become so roused up that—either we'll be desperate and really cling to each other and everybody else in the world can go to the devil or, what I'm afraid is more likely, we'll get so deep into rebellion against Windrip, we'll feel so terribly that we're standing for something, that we'll want to give up everything else for it, even give up you and me. So that no one can ever find out and criticize. We'll have to be beyond criticism."

"No! I won't listen. We will fight, but how can we ever get so involved—detached people like us—"

"You *are* going to publish that editorial tomorrow?"

"Yes."

Related Characters: Doremus Jessup/William Barton Dobbs, Lorinda Pike (speaker), Berzelius "Buzz" Windrip, Dr. Hector Macgoblin, Willy Schmidt, Rabbi Vincent de Verez

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 179-180

Explanation and Analysis

After learning about Hector Macgoblin murdering his old professor Willy Schmidt and the Rabbi Vincent de Verez in cold blood, Doremus Jessup decides that he absolutely must use his position at the *Daily Informer* to do something about the Windrip administration's unspeakable abuses of power. So, Jessup writes up an angry anti-government editorial and sends it in for publication, even though he knows that it could land him in serious trouble. In this passage, he and Lorinda Pike discuss his decision and the future of their relationship.

Specifically, Doremus Jessup and Lorinda Pike ask themselves whether they have a moral obligation to dedicate their lives to the fight against Windrip. There seems to be no more important goal than restoring democracy in the United States—but Jessup has already voiced his skepticism about political idealism and martyrdom. As Lorinda Pike puts it, she and Jessup can either bury their heads in the sand and treat their affair as a refuge from the government's atrocities, or they can choose to confront the government head-on, which may require them to give up the affair altogether. (This prediction comes true—Pike and Jessup eventually do break up to focus on activism.)

But, while Jessup insists on publishing the editorial, he and Pike don't yet reach a final decision about their relationship. Of course, it's still early in the Windrip administration, and Jessup and Pike have a long ways to go. Still, their conversation shows that defending democracy can require profound sacrifices, of a sort that most Americans probably wouldn't be willing to make. Through this scene, Lewis indirectly asks his readers to consider how much they value democracy, and whether they would be willing to make the same sacrifice to save it.

Chapter 19 Quotes

"The tyranny of this dictatorship isn't primarily the fault of Big Business, nor of the demagogues who do their dirty work. It's the fault of Doremus Jessup! Of all the conscientious, respectable, lazy-minded Doremus Jessups who have let the demagogues wriggle in, without fierce enough protest.

[...]

"It's my sort, the Responsible Citizens who've felt ourselves superior because we've been well-to-do and what we thought was 'educated,' who brought on the Civil War, the French Revolution, and now the Fascist Dictatorship. It's I who murdered Rabbi de Verez. It's I who persecuted the Jews and the Negroes. I can blame no Aras Dilley, no Shad Ledue, no Buzz Windrip, but only my own timid soul and drowsy mind. Forgive, O Lord!

"Is it too late?"

Related Characters: Doremus Jessup/William Barton Dobbs (speaker), Rabbi Vincent de Verez, Aras Dilley, Oscar "Shad" Ledue, Berzelius "Buzz" Windrip

Related Themes:

Page Number: 186

Explanation and Analysis

After Doremus Jessup publishes his polemic anti-government editorial, Shad Ledue throws him in jail. In the cell, Jessup contemplates his actions and the future of American democracy. In this part of his internal monologue, he blames *himself* for Windrip's victory. This may sound like empty melodrama, but what Jessup really means is that he and his pro-democracy allies should have acted sooner. Rather than waiting for Windrip to destroy democracy and then feebly trying to reinstate it, Jessup realizes, they should have protected democracy while it still existed. Lewis's message is clear: citizens of democratic countries should not take democracy for granted. Instead, democracy's defenders must constantly stop would-be tyrants—and, in order to do so, they must admit that democracy is always inherently fragile.

Curiously, when he realizes that he should have acted earlier, Doremus Jessup also starts to question one of the conclusions he reached immediately after the election. At that time, he thought that idealists and "rabble-rousers" were responsible for most political failures. But now, he sees that he needed to raise awareness and act decisively in order to save democracy before the election. He wonders if this makes him an idealistic "rabble-rouser," just like Windrip.

In fact, this doubt points to an enduring paradox in the book: how can democracy overthrow tyranny? Is forcing democracy on a nation any different from forcing communism or fascism on it? If not, then how can a nation create a democracy in the first place? Sinclair Lewis resolves this paradox in the novel's closing scenes, when he shows the New Underground seeking to restore American democracy by organizing and persuading ordinary citizens. In other words, they launch a dynamic, truly democratic revolutionary movement that seeks to include as many Americans as possible and win back power through the force of numbers, rather than merely representing a small group of elites.

"Cut the cackle, will you, M. J. [Military Judge]? I've just come here to tell you that I've had enough—everybody's had enough—of your kidnaping Mr. Jessup—the most honest and useful man in the whole Beulah Valley! Typical low-down sneaking kidnapers! If you think your phony Rhodes-Scholar accent keeps you from being just another cowardly, murdering Public Enemy, in your toy-soldier uniform—"

Swan held up his hand in his most genteel Back Bay manner. "A moment, Doctor, if you will be so good?" And to Shad: "I should think we'd heard enough from the Comrade, wouldn't you, Commissioner? Just take the bastard out and shoot him."

Related Characters: Dr. Fowler Greenhill, Effingham Swan (speaker), Doremus Jessup/William Barton Dobbs, Oscar "Shad" Ledue, Aras Dilley

Related Themes:

Page Number: 195

Explanation and Analysis

After publishing his anti-government editorial, Doremus Jessup goes on trial before the vicious new "gentleman-Fascist" judge, Effingham Swan. In this passage, Jessup's son-in-law, the respected physician Fowler Greenhill, barges into the courtroom. He tries to defend Jessup's character and argue that the entire trial is an absurd miscarriage of justice—but it doesn't go over well. Judge Swan finds the interruption so annoying that he orders Greenhill executed on the spot. And because Windrip has suspended all normal judicial procedures, Shad Ledue and Aras Dilley carry out the order immediately. Within seconds, Greenhill is dead, and Jessup's family changes forever.

More than any other scene in the novel so far, Greenhill's death shows how fascism fosters unspeakable violence and cruelty. By giving unchecked power over people's lives (and deaths) to callous, egocentric people like Effingham Swan, Windrip turns the legal system on its head, so that it brings about injustice rather than justice. Needless to say, Lewis uses this shocking scene to remind his readers about the value of an independent, fair judiciary and warn them against ever letting authoritarians take it over and run it for their own personal benefit.

Chapter 24 Quotes

"I can do nothing of the kind! I can never forgive evil and lying and cruel means, and still less can I forgive fanatics that use that for an excuse! If I may imitate Romain Rolland, a country that tolerates evil means—evil manners, standards of ethics—for a generation, will be so poisoned that it never will have any good end. I'm just curious, but do you know how perfectly you're quoting every Bolshevik apologist that sneers at decency and kindness and truthfulness in daily dealings as 'bourgeois morality'? I hadn't understood that you'd gone quite so Marxo-materialistic!"

Related Characters: Doremus Jessup/William Barton Dobbs (speaker), Philip Jessup

Related Themes:

Page Number: 238

Explanation and Analysis

After the Jessup family's failed escape attempt to Canada, Doremus Jessup's son Philip visits Fort Beulah to try and convince him to support the government. Philip is a prominent lawyer, and the Corpo administration has offered him a position as a military judge (although Doremus doesn't yet know that at this point in their conversation). When Philip declares that the administration's noble goals justify its extreme, violent tactics, Doremus responds with this irate speech. He insists that Philip's claim is just a hollow excuse for atrocities: the regime is not using violence to achieve important goals, but rather talking about important goals in order to justify its decision to use violence. Even if the regime's goals truly were noble, Jessup continues, it would undermine those goals by using violence. Finally, Jessup points out that communists use exactly the same argument (that the ends justify the means) to promote violence for the sake of their imaginary revolution.

Ultimately, Jessup soundly rejects all violent tactics and chooses to stick with his liberal values instead. That makes

this conversation a significant milestone in his evolving views on violence and political idealism. For some time, after the dictatorship began, Jessup started to wonder whether he should have used more extreme tactics to try and keep Windrip out of office. Here, he makes his decision clear: *no*. He believes that it's impossible to create a free, equal society by trampling on freedom and equality.

Chapter 26 Quotes

Doremus discovered that neither he nor any other small citizen had been hearing one hundredth of what was going on in America. Windrip & Co. had, like Hitler and Mussolini, discovered that a modern state can, by the triple process of controlling every item in the press, breaking up at the start any association which might become dangerous, and keeping all the machine guns, artillery, armored automobiles, and aeroplanes in the hands of the government, dominate the complex contemporary population better than had ever been done in medieval days, when rebellious peasantry were armed only with pitchforks and good-will, but the State was not armed much better.

Dreadful, incredible information came in to Doremus, until he saw that his own life, and Sissy's and Lorinda's and Buck's, were unimportant accidents.

Related Characters: Doremus Jessup/William Barton Dobbs, Berzelius "Buzz" Windrip, Cecilia "Sissy" Jessup, Lorinda Pike, Buck Titus

Related Themes:

Page Number: 260

Explanation and Analysis

After he joins the New Underground to write anti-government protest pamphlets, Doremus Jessup finally gets access to uncensored news reports from around the country and the world. When he does, he realizes how brutally repressive the regime has become. Perhaps most importantly, he learns how it has used censorship to cut millions of people entirely off from reality and extreme violence to terrorize the population into accepting tyranny.

Beyond reminding the reader about the value of a free press and civil rights, in this passage, Lewis also explains why fascism poses an unprecedented, uniquely modern kind of threat to civilized society. Specifically, fascists seek power by controlling *technology*, which makes it far easier for a small minority of the population to rule by force over a large, unwilling majority. Indeed, in Lewis's lifetime, it was conceivable for the first time that an authoritarian state could hoard technology so advanced that no democratic movement of any size could ever overthrow it.

Chapter 29 Quotes

The universal apprehension, the timorous denials of faith, the same methods of arrest—sudden pounding on the door late at night, the squad of police pushing in, the blows, the search, the obscene oaths at the frightened women, the third degree by young snipe of officials, the accompanying blows and then the formal beatings, [...] the waiting in solitude to know what will happen, till men go mad and hang themselves—

Thus had things gone in Germany, exactly thus in Soviet Russia, in Italy and Hungary and Poland, Spain and Cuba and Japan and China. Not very different had it been under the blessings of liberty and fraternity in the French Revolution. All dictators followed the same routine of torture, as if they had all read the same manual of sadistic etiquette.

Related Characters: Doremus Jessup/William Barton Dobbs, Berzelius "Buzz" Windrip, Dr. Hector Macgoblin

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 284-285

Explanation and Analysis

After he retires from the *Daily Informer* and begins working for the New Underground full-time, Doremus Jessup starts to contemplate the numerous connections between Windrip's regime and other authoritarian governments around the world. He calls this the "biology of dictatorships." He concludes that regardless of their leaders' political ideology, dictatorships tend to follow similar patterns because of certain inherent features in their power structures. First, because dictators tend to be unstable, unpopular, and terrified of losing power, they tend to persecute dissidents as zealously and cruelly as they possibly can. Second, because authoritarian leaders turn the government from a tool for public service into a tool for their own personal benefit, they tend to create a pattern of greed, corruption, and rule-breaking throughout the bureaucracies they run.

Jessup's "biology of dictatorships" matters because it offers a far more detailed explanation of why authoritarianism is so dangerous in itself, regardless of what goals it is designed to serve. In other words, Jessup clearly shows why power

corrupts and why undemocratic systems of government tend to become more and more dysfunctional over time. But perhaps most importantly, this "biology" once again shows that the U.S. is not so different from the rest of the world: even if Windrip's specific personal style is unprecedented in the world, his tactics are tried-and-true. And identifying these tactics is the best way to counter them.

❝ Their feeble pamphlets, their smearily printed newspaper, seemed futile against the enormous blare of Corpo propaganda. It seemed worse than futile, it seemed insane, to risk martyrdom in a world where Fascists persecuted Communists, Communists persecuted Social-Democrats, Social-Democrats persecuted everybody who would stand for it; where "Aryans" who looked like Jews persecuted Jews who looked like Aryans and Jews persecuted their debtors; where every statesman and clergyman praised Peace and brightly asserted that the only way to get Peace was to get ready for War.

What conceivable reason could one have for seeking after righteousness in a world which so hated righteousness? Why do anything except eat and read and make love and provide for sleep that should be secure against disturbance by armed policemen?

He never did find any particularly good reason. He simply went on.

Related Characters: Doremus Jessup/William Barton Dobbs, Berzelius "Buzz" Windrip

Related Themes:

Page Number: 288

Explanation and Analysis

Several months after he joins the New Underground, Doremus Jessup starts to wonder if his new job will ever really achieve anything. Overwhelmed by the Windrip government's vast power and corruption, he realizes that his pamphlets will always be a step behind the regime's propaganda (and much more difficult to access). In fact, Jessup admits that, past a certain point, the government can drown out the truth simply by telling enough lies. Without a free press, he concludes, he will never know if his work makes a dent at all.

Next, Jessup recognizes that even if fascism comes to an end, dozens of other popular ideologies share its fundamental fault: concentrating too much power in too few hands. Thus, he wonders if fighting against fascism really means fighting for democracy—or if, instead, it just means fighting to open space for a new kind of tyranny.

Between these two serious doubts, Jessup starts to question his very decision to fight for democracy. He never questions democracy's superiority to fascism—only whether it's still worth fighting for. As he admits here, he continues on with the fight not because he's rationally convinced that he can win, but only because he feels that he has to—that, on some level, he's obligated to do what's right. To Lewis, this kind of moral sense is the foundation of democracy, as well as humanity's best tool against tyranny. While many people simply ignore their moral compass, Lewis suggests that a select few do not, and that these few will always lead the fight for justice and equality, no matter how dire the conditions.

Chapter 32 Quotes

❝ At exercise hour, the discipline of the men marching out to the quadrangle was broken when one prisoner stumbled, with a cry, knocked over another man, and loudly apologized—just at the barred entrance of Shad Ledue's cell. The accident made a knot collect before the cell. Doremus, on the edge of it, saw Shad looking out, his wide face blank with fear.

Someone, somehow, had lighted and thrown into Shad's cell a large wad of waste, soaked with gasoline. It caught the thin wallboard which divided Shad's cell from the next. The whole room looked presently like the fire box of a furnace. Shad was screaming, as he beat at his sleeves, his shoulders. Doremus remembered the scream of a horse clawed by wolves in the Far North.

When they got Shad out, he was dead. He had no face at all.

Related Characters: Doremus Jessup/William Barton Dobbs, Oscar "Shad" Ledue, Francis Tasbrough

Related Themes:

Page Number: 324-325

Explanation and Analysis

The Minute Men arrest Doremus Jessup and several of his New Underground comrades on the Fourth of July, and then imprison them in the Trianon concentration camp. In November, Jessup's nemesis Shad Ledue arrives at the camp, too. None of the other inmates know why he's there—but most of them don't care. After all, Ledue was responsible for locking most of them up in the first place. So, the other prisoners decide to seek revenge by murdering

Ledue, burning his private cell to the ground while he's inside.

Unlike the rest of the prisoners, Doremus Jessup disagrees with murdering Ledue because he believes in nonviolence. (After Ledue's death, the camp leadership brutally cracks down on the inmates, and Jessup views this as proof that he was right.) But this scene is actually more significant because of what its extraordinary violence reveals about how tyranny and power work: what goes around comes around. It turns out that Shad Ledue was extorting the Minute Men in Fort Beulah, and when Francis Tasbrough found out, he took over Ledue's graft scheme and had Ledue sent to the Trianon concentration camp. Thus, while Ledue initially enjoys his seemingly unlimited power and benefits handsomely from his corruption scheme, both ultimately cause him greater problems in the future.

Chapter 33 Quotes

"Wouldn't it be awful if somebody took a shot at Mr. Swan and the Chief? Might change all history," Mary shouted down.

"No chance of that! See those guards of his? Say, they could stand off a whole regiment—they could lick Walt Trowbridge and all the other Communists put together!"

"I guess that's so. Nothing but God shooting down from heaven could reach Mr. Swan."

"Ha, ha! That's good! But couple days ago I heard where a fellow was saying he figured out God had gone to sleep."

"Maybe it's time for Him to wake up!" said Mary, and raised her hand.

Related Characters: Mary Greenhill/Jessup (speaker), Effingham Swan, Doremus Jessup/William Barton Dobbs, Oscar "Shad" Ledue

Related Themes:

Page Number: 331

Explanation and Analysis

Just as the Trianon prisoners get their revenge against Shad Ledue, Doremus Jessup's daughter Mary decides to seek revenge against Effingham Swan, the judge who ordered her husband's execution. So, she joins the military, becomes a star pilot, and then kills Swan in a suicide attack. Swan's death, like Ledue's, shows how a government built around arbitrary, unchecked power inevitably backfires. When the government lets officials abuse their power however they like, with no legal constraints whatsoever, this actually creates a built-in mechanism for accountability: others can *also* use their power arbitrarily against the corrupt officials. In this case, Mary Greenhill obtains and misuse her power to punish Judge Swan for misusing his power against her husband.

Thus, even if a violent death isn't Doremus Jessup or Sinclair Lewis's preferred version of justice, Swan's assassination still shows that fascists and tyrants absolutely can and do face consequences for their actions. The key difference is that those consequences usually come from the same informal networks of power they exploit, rather than a formal legal process like a trial or hearing.

Chapter 34 Quotes

She was very sick about his being killed. She was very sick about all killing. She found no heroism but only barbaric bestiality in having to kill so that one might so far live as to be halfway honest and kind and secure. But she knew that she would be willing to do it again.

Related Characters: Cecilia "Sissy" Jessup, Oscar "Shad" Ledue, Doremus Jessup/William Barton Dobbs

Related Themes:

Page Number: 337

Explanation and Analysis

Two chapters after describing how a group of vengeful inmates murders Shad Ledue in the Trianon concentration camp, the novel reveals how Ledue ended up there in the first place. Sissy Jessup had been dating him as part of a New Underground espionage plot: she got close to him, discovered important secrets about his activities in the Minute Men, and then used those secrets against him. Namely, she discovered that he was defrauding the Minute Men to line his own pockets, and she reported this to Francis Tasbrough (who had Ledue sent to the camps).

But when she learns about Ledue's death, Sissy feels terrible. She holds herself responsible and wonders if spying on him was truly worth it. But she concludes that it was. Like her father Doremus, Sissy is opposed to all killing on principle—but unlike him, she thinks that killing is sometimes necessary in order to create a free society. It still goes against her principles, but when forced to choose, Sissy would rather save innocent lives than let a vile man live. Thus, even if she wouldn't have personally killed Ledue in the camps, she has no regrets: his fate was nothing if not a fair retribution for his crimes. Of course, readers may have

their own opinions as to whether Doremus or Sissy is right about the ethical implications of political violence. Nonetheless, unlike the administration, both recognize the value and dignity in every human life—including the lives of fascist criminals, like Shad Ledue.

Chapter 35 Quotes

In his two years of dictatorship, Berzelius Windrip daily became more a miser of power. He continued to tell himself that his main ambition was to make all citizens healthy, in purse and mind, and that if he was brutal it was only toward fools and reactionaries who wanted the old clumsy systems. But after eighteen months of Presidency he was angry that Mexico and Canada and South America (obviously his own property, by manifest destiny) should curtly answer his curt diplomatic notes and show no helpfulness about becoming part of his inevitable empire.

And daily he wanted louder, more convincing Yeses from everybody about him. How could he carry on his heartbreaking labor if nobody ever encouraged him? he demanded.

Related Characters: Berzelius "Buzz" Windrip, Lee Sarason, Oscar "Shad" Ledue, Effingham Swan

Related Themes:

Page Number: 340

Explanation and Analysis

Lee Sarason overthrows Buzz Windrip at the end of his second year in office, and this chapter explains why. It begins with this description of Windrip's mental state. Like Shad Ledue and Effingham Swan's deaths, Windrip's personal turmoil shows that the fascist government doesn't even benefit its own leaders in the long term. Instead, it backfires. Windrip craves power and attention—but the more he receives, the more he wants and the less satisfied he becomes. Windrip's hunger for power borders on addiction, so instead of satisfying his desires, his dictatorship just makes him miserable—much like it does to practically everyone else in the U.S.

In particular, Windrip hates that his agenda never gets implemented. This is deeply ironic: almost everyone in the Windrip administration recognizes that the government only cares about enriching officials and their friends, and not about fulfilling its promises to the people. But the one glaring exception is Windrip himself, who seems to genuinely believe in his nonsensical, contradictory campaign platform. In short, Lewis depicts Windrip as a delusional man who desperately tries to impose his own fantasies on the nation. In this sense, he embodies fascism itself, which Lewis sees as self-destructive because incessantly pushes the nation to embody an impossible ideal.

Secretary of the Treasury Skittle and Attorney General Porkwood shook their heads, but Secretary of War Haik and Secretary of Education Macgoblin agreed with Sarason high-mindedly. Once, pointed out the learned Macgoblin, governments had merely let themselves slide into a war, thanking Providence for having provided a conflict as a febrifuge against internal discontent, but of course, in this age of deliberate, planned propaganda, a really modern government like theirs must figure out what brand of war they had to sell and plan the selling-campaign consciously. Now, as for him, he would be willing to leave the whole set-up to the advertising genius of Brother Sarason.

"No, no, no!" cried Windrip. "We're not ready for a war! Of course, we'll take Mexico some day. It's our destiny to control it and Christianize it. But I'm scared that your darn scheme might work just opposite to what you say."

Related Characters: Berzelius "Buzz" Windrip (speaker), Lee Sarason, Webster R. Skittle, Senator Porkwood, Dewey Haik, Dr. Hector Macgoblin

Related Themes:

Page Number: 347

Explanation and Analysis

In the Midwest, organized rebellions break out against the Windrip regime. Many of Windrip's advisors worry that they will quickly lose control of the country, unless they can rally it around a shared, patriotic goal. So, they propose the classic fascist solution: an imperial war. Sarason, Haik, and Macgoblin believe that the best way to unite Americans around Windrip is by invading Mexico and then developing a persuasive excuse for doing so. In other words, the propaganda wouldn't serve the war effort—rather, the war would merely be an excuse to develop new propaganda, which could be used to control the population.

Windrip disagrees with the plan, which he views as too hasty. Indeed, Lewis shows that Windrip has good cause for concern—he highlights the administration's total ineptitude by showing Windrip declare his intention to "Christianize" Mexico, a predominantly Catholic country. But rather than

take Windrip's concerns seriously, Sarason, Haik, and Macgoblin decide to overthrow him. In fact, the war effort turns out to be a catastrophic failure, just as Windrip predicts—it only turns more Americans against the regime. Thus, Lewis again shows how fascism tends to destabilize itself through infighting and incompetence. And the mass rebellion against the government shows how activists can take advantage of these weaknesses in fascism to push for a democratic alternative.

They planned, these idealists, to correct, as quickly as might be, the errors of brutality and crookedness among officials. They saw arising a Corpo art, a Corpo learning, profound and real, divested of the traditional snobbishness of the old-time universities, valiant with youth, and only the more beautiful in that it was "useful." They were convinced that Corpoism was Communism cleansed of foreign domination and the violence and indignity of mob dictatorship; Monarchism with the chosen hero of the people for monarch; Fascism without grasping and selfish leaders; freedom with order and discipline; Traditional America without its waste and provincial cockiness.

Related Characters: Berzelius "Buzz" Windrip, Lee Sarason, Doremus Jessup/William Barton Dobbs

Related Themes:

Page Number: 351

Explanation and Analysis

When Lee Sarason overthrows Buzz Windrip, the fascist U.S. government loses support from a key constituency: the loyal "Corpo Idealists." As the narrator explains here, these idealists genuinely believe in Windrip's (impossible) policy proposals and aspiration to save American identity and build a perfect society through art, industry, and war. Whereas most of Windrip's voters and bureaucrats care only about profit and power, these idealists genuinely believe in fascism—although probably just because they consume an extraordinary amount of government propaganda.

In fact, this propaganda is so successful that the idealists identify the government's agenda with Windrip as an individual—and stop supporting it as soon as Sarason takes over. The idealists show how effectively propaganda can brainwash people, especially when non-government media is censored. Their actions also support Doremus Jessup's theory that the most dangerous political and social leaders are the illiberal "rabble-rousers" who believe that they alone can save the world.

Chapter 36 Quotes

[Doremus Jessup] saw now that he must remain alone, a "Liberal," scorned by all the noisier prophets for refusing to be a willing cat for the busy monkeys of either side. But at worst, the Liberals, the Tolerant, might in the long run preserve some of the arts of civilization, no matter which brand of tyranny should finally dominate the world.

"More and more, as I think about history," he pondered, "I am convinced that everything that is worth while in the world has been accomplished by the free, inquiring, critical spirit, and that the preservation of this spirit is more important than any social system whatsoever. But the men of ritual and the men of barbarism are capable of shutting up the men of science and of silencing them forever."

Related Characters: Doremus Jessup/William Barton Dobbs (speaker), Karl Pascal, Berzelius "Buzz" Windrip

Related Themes:

Page Number: 359

Explanation and Analysis

Just before he escapes from the Trianon concentration camp, Doremus Jessup thinks one last time about his friendship with the grumpy communist Karl Pascal. Jessup still believes that communists, fascists, and other authoritarians are all equally dangerous, because they try to seize power through revolution and rule by decree. In contrast, Jessup still thinks that liberal democracy is the best kind of government—even if it's far less glamorous than electing a dictator to "shut[] up" free discussion and build a utopia based on their own vision.

In fact, the more Jessup learns about Windrip's tyrannical regime, the more strongly he believes that freedom, equality, and tolerance should serve as the basic political values behind a functional system of government. Such a system embraces "the free, inquiring, critical spirit" by taking all ideas seriously and settling on the best ones. This is the opposite of propaganda, in which only one idea is seen as legitimate. Finally and perhaps more importantly, Lewis concludes that democracy affirms every human being's value by declaring that everyone has a right to publicly voice their opinions and participate in political decisions.

Chapter 37 Quotes

❝ But as for Doremus, he leaned back not vastly caring what nonsense the others might talk so long as it was permitted them to talk at all without finding that the waiters were M.M. spies; and content to know that, whatever happened, Trowbridge and the other authentic leaders would never go back to satisfaction in government of the profits, by the profits, for the profits. He thought comfortably of the fact that just yesterday (he had this from the chairman's secretary), Walt Trowbridge had dismissed Wilson J. Shale, the ducal oil man, who had come, apparently with sincerity, to offer his fortune and his executive experience to Trowbridge and the cause.

Related Characters: Doremus Jessup/William Barton Dobbs, Walt Trowbridge, Perley Beecroft, Joe Elphrey

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 365-366

Explanation and Analysis

When he first escapes to Canada, Doremus Jessup feels an overwhelming sense of peace and freedom. After living without democracy for two years, he is relieved to finally speak his mind without fearing imprisonment, and to help plan a better democratic future for the U.S. By showing Jessup's journey from democracy into the depths of tyranny and back again, of course, Lewis hopes to show his readers what they're taking for granted—and convince them that democracy is absolutely worth fighting for.

In fact, something similar happens in the novel, as the U.S.'s experiment with fascism reinforces Walt Trowbridge's commitment to democracy: he decides that the New Underground won't let a few wealthy businesspeople distort its priorities, like the U.S. government. Instead, it will be a genuine democratic movement, led by and for the majority of its members. Regardless of whether it succeeds, it clearly shows how activists can fight for freedom and keep the spirit of democracy alive even under the direst circumstances.

Chapter 38 Quotes

❝ His host was slapping Doremus's shoulder, muttering, "Just had a phone call. Corpo posse out after you."

So Doremus rode out, saluted by the meadow larks, and onward all day, to a hidden cabin in the Northern Woods where quiet men awaited news of freedom.

And still Doremus goes on in the red sunrise, for a Doremus Jessup can never die.

Related Characters: Doremus Jessup/William Barton Dobbs

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 381

Explanation and Analysis

The novel ends with this brief scene. Doremus Jessup is working as a spy for the New Underground in Minnesota, where he is sleeping in a remote rural cabin. But his hosts wake him to report that the Corpos are after him, so he evades them by riding out into the sunrise (which is a metaphor for the U.S.'s bright, democratic future).

The novel's final words—"a Doremus Jessup can never die"—are particularly significant. They suggest that the fight for democracy and against tyranny will always live on, because there will always be moral-minded people willing to make sacrifices for the common good. And these words also suggest that such democracy defenders' work stands the test of time: even if they don't succeed in their own lifetimes, they live on to shape future democracies through their policies, stories, and institutions.

Ultimately, Lewis never reveals the fate of the U.S.'s fascist regime—he neither explains whether the New Underground convinces the majority of the people to support democracy nor whether the Midwestern rebels win their war against the government. Of course, this is intentional. Instead of ending by tying up the plot, Lewis ends by returning to the book's central principle: fight tyranny and defend democracy, at any cost. In 1936, when the U.S. was dangerously close to electing a Windrip-like fascist as president, Lewis wanted to ensure that his novel did as much as possible to contribute to American democracy's survival.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CHAPTER 1

At the elegant Hotel Wessex in the fictional town of Fort Beulah, Vermont, the local Rotary Club hosts a Ladies' Night Dinner. The event is mostly serious in tone—like everything else in the nation in 1936. One of the speakers is Herbert Y. Edgeways, a retired brigadier general. Another is Mrs. Adelaide Tarr Gimmitch, a famous anti-women's suffrage activist who now wants to "maintain the purity of the American Home" by making everyone who works in Hollywood take a patriotic oath.

The novel's opening scene firmly anchors it in the specific political context of 1936, which modern readers must understand in order to grasp Sinclair Lewis's motivation and message. It was an election year, and the U.S. was deep in the Great Depression. President Roosevelt's New Deal program was popular, but still not fully implemented, and the populist governor Huey Long was planning to challenge him for the Democratic Nomination. Meanwhile, fascism was growing in Europe, with leaders like Hitler taking power in the hopes of "maintain[ing] the purity" of their nations. While the U.S. never went down the same fascist route, Sinclair Lewis saw that it clearly could, and he wanted to warn his readers against it. He created exaggerated characters, like Edgeways and Gimmitch, to show the underlying authoritarian, nationalist groupthink that lurked behind the politics of his time. Modern readers may find the novel an entertaining escape or a dire warning, depending on their own political context.

In his "manly yet mystical rhapsody" of a speech, General Edgeways declares that the U.S. needs to defend itself from foreign influence and maintain peace by spending as much as possible on weaponry. Everyone loves the speech, except the local newspaper editor Doremus Jessup and a few "crank pacifist women."

Edgeways's speech and the audience's response show how easily selfish, destructive proposals—like investing in war with the excuse of preserving peace—can become popular, common-sense ideas in a democracy. Specifically, Edgeways's speech echoes a common idea in fascist politics: that all nations are always competing to project their power through military might and conquest, so our nation has to do more than any other. In fact, modern readers may feel that this attitude really is a political consensus in the U.S. today.

Mrs. Gimmitch is next. Back during the Great War, the narrator notes, she fought to send canaries to American soldiers. Today, she spends her time "purifying the films," organizing the Republican Party, and writing children's books (although she has no kids). She's also a lifelong member of the Daughters of the American Revolution—which Doremus Jessup considers a ridiculous and hypocritical organization. Gimmitch wears a giant floppy hat over her gray hair and a flower pinned to her silk dress.

If Edgeways represents the militaristic side of fascism, then Gimmitch represents its cultural, propagandistic side. She wants to censor any media that doesn't repeat her narrow ideas about what the U.S. is and should be. Her naïve proposals may seem less harmful than Edgeways's call for war, but over the course of the novel, Lewis hopes to show that they're extremely dangerous nonetheless.

Instead of voting, Mrs. Gimmitch announces, women should stay home and have six children each. The cranky young widow Lorinda Pike calls out to ask what women should do if they "can't hook a man," but Gimmitch replies that any truly charming woman *can*. Gimmitch complains about selfish labor unions extorting noble businessmen by seeking better wages for themselves and higher taxes on the rich. She announces that Americans need to learn discipline, then turns to General Edgeways and declares that they ought to learn it by fighting another war. The crowd cheers.

Lewis's political satire rests on the irony in Gimmitch's speech: she demands policies to strengthen a social hierarchy that doesn't even benefit her. Suffragists won women like Gimmitch the power to participate in politics, and she is using this power to undermine her own interests. Moreover, while many Americans certainly agreed with Gimmitch that women should *be nothing but mothers and homemakers, few would have* forced *them to do so through official policies. Thus, Lewis uses Gimmitch's exaggerated proposals to point out the undercurrent of anti-democratic, intolerant, and authoritarian thinking in American culture.*

The red-faced, portly General stands and announces that war would be far better than the current "so-called peace"—in which unions, writers, and newspapermen are attacking the Constitution and trying to turn the U.S. into the Soviet Union. He declares that even though his speech was about peace, he really wants the U.S. to dominate the world, because "power is its own excuse!" He wants the U.S. to be more like Hitler's Germany or Mussolini's Italy. He celebrates how Nazi-style military training has become normal in U.S. schools, and how nationalists are infiltrating and beating up pacifist student groups.

General Edgeways gives away the real motivation behind all of his and Gimmitch's empty talk about discipline, values, and cultural purity. They want power. *They believe that a great nation is one that dominates and subjugates other nations, and they think that every American should work tirelessly to fulfill this vision of greatness (whether they agree with it or not). Thus, even though Edgeways originally proposed investing in the military to preserve* peace, *now he admits that he really wants constant* war. *This pattern repeats itself throughout the book, and in real life: some politicians act entirely out of narrow self-interest but cover up their real motivations by talking about values like security and justice. Lewis's satire aims to make this duplicity as obvious as possible.*

Lorinda Pike stands up to complain about the General's "sadistic nonsense," but the wealthy local quarry owner Francis Tasbrough interrupts and silences her. Then, the slim, graying Doremus Jessup stands up to speak. He's successful and well-connected in town, but he's considered eccentric and snobbish for his political beliefs. He declares that freedom of speech doesn't apply to criticizing the Army or Daughters of the American Revolution, and he thanks the General for revealing "what the ruling classes of the country really want." (Rotary Club president Medary Cole can't tell whether or not Jessup is joking.) Lorinda Pike stands and melodramatically apologizes to the General, who humbly bows and accepts her compliments.

Lewis introduces the novel's protagonist, Doremus Jessup. However, the reader meets Jessup through the fanatical audience's unsympathetic eyes, and not through the same sympathetic narrator that will go on to follow Jessup for the rest of the novel. Like Lorinda Pike's apology, Jessup's speech is *completely satirical—he presents an exaggerated version of Gimmitch and Edgeways's beliefs in order to show how dangerous their style of politics can become. In this way, Jessup is a mouthpiece for Sinclair Lewis himself, who wrote this novel for precisely the same reasons. He depicts a crazed, fascist United States to help ordinary Americans better understand and identify the anti-democratic tendencies in their politics.*

The dinner ends with a series of nationalistic songs. The singer, Louis Rotenstern, is a beloved local patriot who proudly denies his Polish, Jewish roots and campaigns to keep "the Kikes [and] the Wops and Hunkies and Chinks" out of the country. The whole crowd sings along. Doremus Jessup's wife, Emma, sarcastically praises him for shutting up Lorinda Pike. The Jessups agree not to invite "the Siamese elephant, the Gimmitch," over to their home for a drink.

Louis Rotenstern's songs use ethnic slurs to refer to Jewish, Italian, Central European, and Asian immigrants. The juxtaposition between Rotenstern's songs and his self-destructive political ideology is significant. It shows how, by treating politics as mere entertainment, people can easily lose sight of its true consequences. By appealing to people's emotions and sense of identity, Rotenstern helps build a consensus around Edgeways and Gimmitch's dangerous policies—without forcing his audience to ever actually consider them as policies. *Thus, this is Sinclair Lewis's first warning (of many) that politics should be about reason, not emotion, and seek compromise, not domination.*

CHAPTER 2

After the Rotary Club dinner, Doremus Jessup will go to Francis Tasbrough's house for an afterparty. But first, he drives Emma home. They pass through the sleepy, picturesque New England granite-mining town of Fort Beulah, where Jessup has lived almost all of his life. Looking out at the moonlit woods and meadows, he wonders whether Vermont—and the U.S.—can create more great men like the senator Stephen Douglas or the religious leader Brigham Young. Today, Jessup thinks, most young people are too lazy and sheltered to do anything great. Maybe General Edgeways and Mrs. Gimmitch are right, he thinks—maybe the U.S. needs a war to whip its young people into shape. Emma Jessup interrupts Doremus's train of thought by reminding him not to drive in the middle of the road.

In his first chapter, Sinclair Lewis used the Rotary Club dinner to introduce the social and political context where his protagonist, Doremus Jessup, lives and works. (It's an exaggerated but recognizable version of Lewis's reality.) Now, Lewis introduces Jessup himself in greater detail. Despite his discomfort with Edgeways and Gimmitch, Jessup still sees the appeal in their call for a visionary strongman to lead the U.S. to greatness through war. Specifically, this idea appeals to Americans' need for a sense of unity, purpose, and hope—all of which they lacked during the Great Depression (when the book is set). Of course, Jessup's swerving on the road is a metaphor for how this kind of thinking can lead people awry.

The wealthy, imposing Francis Tasbrough lives in a large house on Pleasant Hill, near the Jessups. As a young boy, Tasbrough enjoyed hitting other children in the head, and Doremus Jessup—who is six years older—used to protect him. Tasbrough's guests assemble in his barroom: Doremus Jessup, Medary Cole, the local school superintendent Emil Staubmeyer, the banker Roscoe Conkling Crowley, and the elderly Rev. Mr. Falck, who grew up in a wealthy New York family and then spent his career seeking solitude in Fort Beulah. Most of them find the elegant leather-and-metal decorations distasteful, but they all appreciate the whiskey and snacks.

Like most other characters in this novel, Francis Tasbrough functions as a stand-in for a specific segment of American society—and his attitudes and actions represent how Lewis thinks that segment will respond to fascism. After all, Tasbrough's early abuse of other children shows that he has sadistic and selfish tendencies, and readers will soon learn how these same values guide his business practices and his actions under the fascist regime. Similarly, Jessup's willingness to protect Tasbrough during their childhood is consistent with his commitment to tolerance and democracy today. All of the other characters who assemble in Tasbrough's barroom also represent different segments of American society: small business owners (Cole), low-level bureaucrats (Staubmeyer), financiers (Cole), and religious leaders (Falck).

Tasbrough criticizes Jessup for being a liberal and invites him to "join the family." He declares that the Jews, communists, and union leaders are plotting together to undermine business leaders. But Jessup has supported unions striking against Tasbrough's company—he even befriended the "alien murderer Karl Pascal." Jessup agrees with Tasbrough that the country's political situation is serious: Senator Buzz Windrip might win the presidency next year, especially if the popular radio personality Bishop Prang endorses him. Jessup thinks that Windrip will launch a war, dismantle democracy, and set up "a real Fascist dictatorship." Tasbrough doesn't think the U.S. could ever descend into tyranny, but Jessup disagrees.

Tasbrough and Jessup's conversation sets up the central political conflict in the book: fascism versus liberal democracy. Crucially, Tasbrough isn't directly calling *for a fascist dictatorship—but he does share the core fascist worldview. Specifically, he thinks that the country must band together to destroy its enemies—whom he portrays as shrewd, treacherous outsiders—at any cost. In contrast, Jessup believes that these invisible enemies don't really pose a threat, and that Windrip is just fearmongering in order to justify antidemocratic measures that would give him more power. Of course, Tasbrough essentially admits that* his *business interests would also benefit if Windrip annihilated the country's enemies. Thus, Lewis shows how fascism can win over elites by promising them even more power and wealth at the expense of the majority of the population, all while appealing to that majority through empty promises and emotionally charged rhetoric.*

Jessup gives several examples of fascist tendencies in American life, including the dictatorial Louisiana governor Huey Long, hysterical nationalism during the Great War, and lynching and the KKK. But R.C. Crowley declares that Windrip would give bankers like him the power they deserve, while punishing "lazy bums" who live off government assistance and making the country more efficient. Staubmeyer even credits Hitler with saving Germany from Communism. Tasbrough admits that he'd love to have a strongman for president, but he claims that "it just can't happen here in America." Rev. Mr. Falck appears to mouth the words, "the hell it can't!"

Through Jessup's speech, Lewis argues that the U.S. is just as prone to the kind of irrational, antidemocratic mass politics as Italy or Germany, even if the country's people believe that it has special democratic values. The U.S. might not share other countries' culture or political history, but fascists always try to glorify their own nation's particular virtues, so American fascism will inevitably look different. Specifically, Lewis uses this conversation to warn that American fascists will justify setting up a dictatorship by talking about common American values like hard work, capitalism, and (most ironically of all) anti-authoritarianism.

CHAPTER 3

Doremus Jessup, whose father, Loren Jessup, was a pastor, grew up surrounded by literature in Fort Beulah. He attended the nearby Isaiah College, then became a reporter for newspapers around Massachusetts. He even worked in Boston, which he found thrilling but exhausting. When Jessup's father died, he left behind a small estate, which Jessup used to move home and buy a stake in the *Weekly Informer* newspaper. In the 35 years since, he has bought the paper outright and turned it into the **Daily Informer**.

Jessup's upbringing shows that he belongs to New England's long tradition of liberal intellectuals and religious leaders. He has deep roots in Fort Beulah and plays an important role in the community's collective life. He is educated and relatively wealthy, but money is by no means his primary motivator in life. Thus, in the broader political scheme of the novel, Jessup represents the high-status professionals and public intellectuals who want to serve the common good and have the means to do so, but who often stand to lose wealth, status, or power if they do—particularly under a dictatorship.

Jessup is a fair, competent, and politically independent editor. He and his wife, Emma, first met in high school, and they now have three children. The oldest is 32-year-old Philip, a successful lawyer. Next is 30-year-old Mary, the wife of a respected local doctor, Fowler Greenhill, and mother of an eight-year-old son, David. The youngest is 18-year-old Cecilia, or "Sissy," who is in high school and hopes to become an architect.

Jessup's family members all play important roles in the plot, but Sinclair Lewis also uses them to explore how people from Jessup's social and economic class can respond to tyranny differently, with varying effects. Of course, Jessup's class background is also Lewis's, as well as many of his readers'. Thus, Lewis uses the Jessup family to offer a practical roadmap—and a series of practical warnings—for how to act under tyranny.

Doremus Jessup parks his Chrysler in his ugly cement garage, and on his way into the house, he smacks his shin on the lawnmower, which the family's "incompetent and vicious" handyman Oscar "Shad" Ledue has left out. Inside, he goes up to the study, which is his personal haven in his unassuming white clapboard house. It's a complete mess, filled with assorted books and junk.

Lewis carefully points out the flaws and inconveniences in Doremus Jessup's life: his garage is ugly, his handyman is a fool, and his study is in disarray. Yet Jessup tolerates these imperfections and continues to live a relatively satisfying, quiet life. This makes him unlike most of the acquaintances he met after dinner, who are wealthier than him but still obsessed with getting even more money, power, and status. Of course, this basic conflict between humility and destructive greed is central to the novel's political drama.

Jessup sits and opens his mail. The Isaiah College professor Victor Loveland has written to report that his students are now conducting military drills, and that the Board of Trustees—including Frank Tasbrough—has banned all criticism of the military. The family mutt, Foolish, comes into the study and wakes up Jessup's caged canary. The familiar animals soothe Jessup, and he forgets his worries and falls asleep.

Loveland's letter shows how, long before the election, the U.S. is already gravitating toward fascism: speech is no longer free, and the division between military and civilian life is disappearing. The canary in Jessup's study is a clear reference to the idiom of a "canary in the coal mine"—or an early indicator of coming danger. Of course, Lewis uses this heavy-handed metaphor to suggest that many more atrocities are coming, and that Jessup should not be so complacent. After all, if nations show warning signs of fascism long before they actually hand power to fascist dictators, then intellectuals like Jessup ought to recognize the signs and start fighting back as soon as possible. (This is precisely what Lewis was trying to do by publishing this book.)

CHAPTER 4

The 1936 national party conventions are in six weeks. The Republican candidate will probably be the unassuming senator Walt Trowbridge, and the firebrand Berzelius "Buzz" Windrip is sure to win the Democratic nomination. The crafty, sociable Windrip grew up in a small Western town and now runs his home state like a tyrant. He installed an obedient fool as governor and spent millions building roads, supporting farmers, and expanding the state's militia. When the state prosecutor charged Windrip with corruption, the militia saved him by occupying the state capitol building.

This description clearly links Windrip to Huey Long, whose political career was nearly identical. Windrip's actions as senator show that he uses popular public investments to win support, while building up a private army and seriously weakening democratic checks and balances in order to give himself more power. While he claimed to be supporting the people, then, his corruption charges suggest that he really only cared about his own self-interest. Needless to say, he will likely run the whole country the same way if he wins the presidency.

After six years in the Senate, Windrip decided to run for president. He is promising a guaranteed income to every American, and he has fervent support from prominent clergymen. The mastermind behind his campaign is Lee Sarason, his secretary and a former newspaper editor. Nobody knows where the droopy-faced Sarason came from, what he has done in his life, or what he truly believes. They do know that he's an extreme sadist, an expert journalist, and far more powerful than an ordinary congressional secretary. He's just 41, but Windrip is only 48.

Huey Long's signature policy proposal was also a guaranteed income, so Lewis's Depression-era readers would have immediately recognized Windrip as his stand-in. Meanwhile, Lee Sarason's backroom dealings clearly suggest that Windrip's public statements don't reflect his real interests or intentions. Sarason's journalistic career is a minor detail, but it's an extremely important one because it presents Sarason, who uses journalism for evil, as a character foil for Doremus Jessup, who uses journalism for good.

Windrip has already published a popular book, **Zero Hour—Over the Top**, which Sarason actually wrote. It mixes biography and politics—in one well-known passage, it uses Windrip's childhood suspenders as a metaphor for the dishonesty in Marxist economics and the beauty of Fascism. Within a few sentences, the book calls for war with Japan and rewriting the Constitution to eliminate the checks and balances on presidential power.

Windrip's book contains no evidence or argumentation—instead, it seeks to win over readers by entertaining them. Specifically, it links Windrip's charismatic personality with memorable anecdotes and appeals to emotion. Thus, readers end up supporting Windrip's program because they like and trust him, not because he helps them truly analyze the problems the nation faces. Of course, Windrip's influential book is also significant because it shows how literature can shape public opinion—which is exactly what Lewis hoped to do with this novel.

Meanwhile, the nation's most popular political figure is Reverend Paul Peter Prang from Indiana. Millions of people listen to his weekly radio show, which is modeled after the famous radio priest Father Charles Coughlin—who learned to mass-produce culture just like Henry Ford mass-produced cars. Prang is fickler and more emotional than Coughlin, and he shapes public opinion more than anyone else in the nation. Like every other major political figure, Prang is calling for nationalizing major industries and increasing wages—so it's difficult to know what he really wants.

The fictional Paul Peter Prang and his real-life counterpart Charles Coughlin show how mass media can function as a ready-made propaganda tool. Books and newspapers could reach a wide, educated audience, but they were no match for the radio, which could instantly reach millions of people around the country (or world). Like Windrip, Prang merges politics with entertainment: he uses vague but popular ideas to manipulate his audience, while hiding his real motivations.

But Prang *does* profit handsomely from his followers, who pay a high price to attend his talks and join his organization, the "League of Forgotten Men." He controls the group entirely, and he clearly wants to become the nation's "Priest-King," which is why Doremus Jessup considers him "a real Fascist menace." Compared to Prang and Windrip, the likely Republican candidate and honest political realist Walt Trowbridge looks boring and uninspiring.

Just like Windrip, Prang is really motivated by self-interest, and his political grievances are just a ploy to gain power, wealth, and status. These grievances depend on turning democracy on its head. Prang encourages millions of people who are suffering in the Great Depression to view themselves as "Forgotten Men" who have been excluded from American democracy. Then, he tells these "Forgotten Men" that their survival depends on electing an anti-democratic *leader, like Buzz Windrip, who will defend their interests. In a nutshell, Prang tells his followers that democracy has failed them, and so their self-preservation requires destroying democracy and handing absolute power to a dictator.*

CHAPTER 5

In a brief quote from Buzz Windrip's **Zero Hour**, Windrip describes newspapermen as greedy, godless swindlers who secretly plot to manipulate politicians and extort the common man. Then, the chapter begins with Doremus Jessup waking up and stretching in the morning. He's a rough sleeper, so he and Emma sleep in separate bedrooms. It's Saturday, the day of Prang's show, but Jessup's son Philip is also visiting town for a picnic. The whole family will be there, as will Lorinda Pike and Jessup's closest friend, the rugged but intellectual Montana cowboy Buck Titus, who moved to Fort Beulah to run his late father's farm.

The next 15 chapters will also start with epigraphs from Zero Hour. Each epigraph shows how Windrip's political career relies on deceit by ironically commenting on the chapter that follows. For instance, in this epigraph, Windrip attacks dishonest journalists (like his campaign manager Lee Sarason) just before the reader again meets the novel's hero, the honest journalist Doremus Jessup. Jessup's picnic plans show that he's still deeply connected to his family and friends, even if his relationship with Emma is no longer what it used to be.

Shad Ledue helps set up the picnic, grumpily complaining the whole time. Philip comments that Doremus should fire Ledue. Doremus agrees that Ledue is a terrible worker, but he also finds him curious. For instance, Doremus adds, Ledue is now backing Buzz Windrip in the election. Philip replies that even though Windrip sounds like a demagogue, he's really going to protect "the decent clean [American] people" from Jews and Communists. When Doremus hears this, he sighs in resignation.

Shad Ledue is the antithesis of Doremus Jessup: he's ignorant, arrogant, and lazy, while Jessup is educated, humble, and prudent. Throughout the book, their relationship serves as a metaphor for the nation's political predicament. Ledue does whatever he wants and takes advantage of Jessup, because he believes in nothing but power and self-interest. Meanwhile, Jessup tolerates and continues working with Ledue because he believes in following higher moral principles, like respect and equality. Finally, Philip's conspiratorial thinking shows that Windrip's propaganda can persuade nearly anyone, regardless of their class or education—not just the "Forgotten Men" like Ledue.

The Jessup family has its picnic at Doremus's cousin Henry Veeder's farm just outside town, on Mount Terror. While the other men wrestle and argue, Doremus lays on the grass and gazes out at the beautiful valley, and the women set up the food. Everyone eats and chats cordially about their lives. The picnic lacks the "modern and neurotic" pace of the 1930s—it may as well be the 1800s again, except when Buck Titus mentions all the "Messiahs," like Windrip and Prang, who are trying to save the country from itself. Julian Falck, the Reverend's handsome young grandson, also visits the picnic. Along with the wealthier but less intellectual Malcolm Tasbrough, he's fighting for Sissy Jessup's heart.

In addition to representing Jessup's peaceful, carefree life, this idyllic picnic scene also shows how people's everyday lives can be totally independent from politics when the government grants them a certain level of freedom. The novel hinges on the contrast between realist liberals like Jessup, who believe in letting people live the lives they wish and changing the world slowly through democracy, and idealistic "Messiahs" like Windrip, who believe in seeking absolute power and then using that power to build the world they envision.

Meanwhile, Doremus Jessup fiddles with a borrowed portable radio to catch Bishop Prang's show. Prang's voice is forceful but charming. He reads a verse from the Book of Jeremiah, in which God tells the invading Babylonians to destroy Jerusalem, and says that the same is happening in America today. He lists the League of Forgotten Men's demands: control over the banks, better pensions for retired soldiers, a cap on fortunes and inheritances, more power for unions, and a ban on "International Jewish" finance, communism, anarchism, and atheism. Prang declares that the Forgotten Men are done waiting, and that wealthy senators and bankers must give up their power to the common man.

Prang's apocalyptic rhetoric interrupts the Jessup family's quaint picnic, foreshadowing how Windrip's presidency could upend Jessup's life (and the nation's fragile but functional political system). Like Windrip in his Zero Hour, Prang tries to appeal to as many listeners as possible by mixing legitimate policy proposals (like pension reform) with allusions to important cultural symbols (the Bible) and attacks on a standard but ill-defined list of enemies. Thus, while Prang's policy proposals may seem reasonable, his rhetoric is dangerous because he is really telling his "Forgotten Men" that they would be right to seize power by any means necessary.

Prang officially endorses Buzz Windrip and declares that the League will propel him to the presidency. Emma Jessup comments that Prang sounds like a left-winger, but Doremus replies that Buzz Windrip will soon be running the whole country as a fascist dictatorship. Julian Falck and Buck Titus joke about Windrip, and Fowler Greenhill insists that "America's the only free nation on earth," and that a revolution just "couldn't happen here!"

Emma points out that, at first, it sounds like Prang's policy proposals will benefit most people. But Doremus sees that these proposals are just an excuse to get Windrip into power. The real purpose of Prang's broadcasts is to turn the public against democracy by convincing them that the nation's survival depends on acting in the kind of strong, unified way that only a dictatorship can. Once they believe this, the people will hand Windrip power and allow him to dismantle democracy. Once he does, he may or may not fulfill his policy proposals—but he absolutely won't give up power.

CHAPTER 6

In the chapter's epigraph from **Zero Hour**, Buzz Windrip says he'd choose "a wild-eyed anarchist" over an elite politician, any day, because he wants to fight "Poverty and Intolerance." Then, the chapter begins by noting that Doremus Jessup's family worries about his health, but that he sees himself as strong and resilient. His greatest pleasures in life are secretly drinking, smoking, and staying up late. Normally, he's never grumpy, except before his morning coffee—but now, after Prang has endorsed Windrip, Jessup is speechless and worried in the mornings, which worries Emma.

This chapter's epigraph is ironic because Windrip is exactly the kind of elite politician he decries—he's just pretending *to be a common man. In contrast, Doremus Jessup does not even pretend to be a common man, but he actually cares far more about fighting "Poverty and Intolerance" than Windrip does. Sixty-year-old Jessup's daily routine is dull but satisfying—until he realizes that Windrip is likely to win and starts worrying about the future.*

While the townspeople have long seen him as a radical left-winger, Jessup is really just "a mild, rather indolent and somewhat sentimental Liberal" who mistrusts theatrical and contemptuous politicians. For instance, when he wrote in his paper that life in Soviet Russia might not be so bad for common people, he caused a public outcry and lost a third of his readers. But he doesn't believe in Russian socialism—he loves American free speech and privacy rights, and the Communists he has met are Puritanical fanatics.

Jessup is no political radical, but two things make his political beliefs radically different from other Americans'. First, he takes all viewpoints seriously, including unpopular ones that most Americans would reject out of hand. And second, because he always thinks that he can learn more, he refuses to become a fanatic: he never claims to have the perfect solution or demands that his ideas get implemented, no matter what the cost. Clearly, though, his readers are fanatics: their reaction to his editorial shows that they have already made up their mind about Russian socialism, despite not knowing the first thing about it. In turn, this shows that tyrants like Windrip don't suddenly turn a peaceful, liberal society into a totalitarian nightmare—instead, they harness existing fears and prejudices in order to convince the public that victory is more important than democracy.

Jessup's only real political activism was supporting the union's strike against Frank Tasbrough's quarry company. Tasbrough and his friends still resent Jessup for this, and Jessup is still friends with the Communist strike leader, Karl Pascal, and his Socialist friend and coworker John Pollikop. If it weren't for his wealthy ancestors, Jessup realizes, he would probably be one of Prang's "Dispossessed." Emma still doesn't understand him, but he tolerates her complaints.

Again, Jessup's willingness to stand up for his principles sets him apart from most of his community. Whereas people like Tasbrough only care about their own status, Jessup empathizes with the quarry workers because he recognizes that his own socioeconomic status was largely an accident and could have been completely different. In fact, he also empathizes with Prang's "Dispossessed"—he understands the problems they face but thinks that Prang and Windrip are manipulating them into supporting the wrong solutions.

CHAPTER 7

In this chapter's epigraph from **Zero Hour**, Berzelius Windrip compares himself to Jesus and claims to hate attending public meetings. Then, the chapter begins in late July, as Doremus Jessup awakens to a thunderstorm and realizes that Windrip is about to be nominated for the presidency at the Democratic Party convention in Cleveland. The party is down to four candidates. The three besides Windrip hold rallies outside the convention.

As always, the chapter's actual events immediately belie Windrip's quote: despite claiming to hate public meetings, he obviously craves the power and attention that comes with them. Meanwhile, the thunderstorm in Vermont clearly represents the coming political turmoil. Lewis's heavy-handed foreshadowing is designed less to create suspense than to point out how powerless and frightened Doremus Jessup feels in the face of the nation's dangerous political trends.

When Colonel Dewey Haik formally nominates Windrip, he asks everyone to refrain from chanting the senator's name. A procession of Civil War and World War I veterans walk down the aisle in the convention center. Windrip bows to them and cries while the band plays patriotic songs. The veterans hold up pro-Windrip signs, and the crowd applauds thunderously. Behind them in the procession are poor families, dressed in rags and also holding up pro-Windrip signs. And behind them, the last man in the procession is Bishop Paul Peter Prang.

Haik's fake humility couldn't contrast more with Windrip's showy (but equally fake) procession. This irony shows not only that Windrip's campaign is fundamentally based on deception, but also how easily people can be deceived—especially as part of a mass political movement. Each group in the staged procession represents one of Windrip's key constituencies: the military, the poor, and the religious traditionalists.

The audience cheers Windrip for four hours. But first, Mrs. Adelaide Tarr Gimmitch sings a patriotic version of "Yankee Doodle," with special lyrics about Windrip. (The song is all over the radio, and the country, by evening.) She also sings Windrip's more serious anthem, "Bring Out the Old-time Musket," which was written by Lee Sarason and the polymath Dr. Hector Macgoblin. The song compares Windrip to Abraham Lincoln and calls for the U.S. to conquer the whole world. As Doremus Jessup listens to it on the radio, he predicts that Windrip will eventually trade the old veterans for fresh young soldiers. He hears a menacing thunderclap outside.

Gimmitch's songs again show why it's so dangerous to turn politics into feel-good entertainment. The songs create a cult of personality (a heightened sense of idealization) around Windrip, encouraging listeners to cheer him on as a person *while ignoring what he plans and does as an actual* leader. *For instance, "Bring Out the Old-time Musket" explicitly calls for the U.S. to invade other countries (which would inevitably start another world war). But by presenting this proposal for endless war through a song, Gimmitch encourages Windrip's followers to support it because they feel an emotional connection with it—not because they actually think that fighting more wars is a good idea.*

By evening, the balloting is deadlocked between Windrip and President Roosevelt. Doremus Jessup brings Foolish the dog to Father Perefixe's home, where the Rev. Mr. Falck, Buck Titus, Louis Rotenstern, Dr. Greenhill, and R.C. Crowley have assembled. The men listen to the convention on the radio and complain about their wives making them sleep early. At the convention, Colonel Haik announces that Buzz Windrip is going to bed, then reads a letter explaining his platform: he opposes banks but supports bankers, wants to raise wages and lower prices, favors unions but opposes strikes, and wants the U.S. to be economically self-sufficient but also conquer the world.

Windrip's platform consists entirely of several absurd contradictions. It's simply impossible to do everything he proposes (such as supporting labor unions without allowing them to strike). Clearly, Windrip isn't planning to actually enact this agenda—instead, he's just trying to win votes by promising everyone exactly what they want. While real-life fascists are generally more subtle, Lewis makes Windrip's dishonesty particularly blatant in order to show his readers why it's so important to think critically about real-life political candidates and their promises.

In the early morning, the convention officially nominates Berzelius Windrip for president. Doremus Jessup, Buck Titus, Father Perefixe, the Rev. Mr. Falck, and Foolish the dog are devastated. When Jessup returns home, Shad Ledue is chopping wood. He's at work on time, which is unusual, and he tells Jessup that he's voting for Windrip, who will immediately give everyone money. Ledue plans to spend his on starting a chicken farm. Jessup points out that Ledue killed his chickens last time, and Ledue replies that there were too few to be worth caring for. Jessup comments that Ledue has given Windrip his imprimatur (stamp of approval), but Ledue doesn't understand.

Shad Ledue's response to the nomination gives Jessup (and the reader) a close-up look at the psychology of fascism—and particularly the unique way it would work in the U.S. Even though Windrip's platform makes it impossible to discern his true goals and loyalties, Ledue is totally convinced that Windrip will personally look out for him. *In other words, Windrip deliberately tailors his message to appeal to arrogant, greedy, naive individualists like Ledue. Lewis suggests that, for better or worse, such people abound in the United States and would likely form the base for a fascist political movement.*

CHAPTER 8

In a quote from **Zero Hour**, Windrip claims he's not particularly educated—except about the Bible, the law, and writers like the fascist and occultist William Dudley Pelley, whom he considers a great patriot. Then, the chapter begins with Windrip's 15-point platform: first, a board appointed by the president will control the nation's entire financial system and nationalize any industries it sees fit. Second, a similar executive-controlled board will decide which labor unions are legitimate and incorporate them into the government, while banning fake, communist, and radical unions. Third, the government will protect private enterprise and property. Fourth, Windrip will protect freedom of religion—but he will also ban Jews, atheists, agnostics, and anyone who refuses to pledge allegiance to the U.S. flag from working in government, education, law, or medicine.

Windrip's platform makes his real intentions clear: he wants to nationalize industries not for the whole country's benefit, but for his own personal benefit. Similarly, his labor proposal might initially appear to benefit unions, but actually, it really just benefits himself, *by giving him absolute power to ban any unions that oppose him and his allies. The same is true of his religion policy: he pays lip service to religious freedom, then promises to severely and arbitrarily restrict it in order to maintain cultural uniformity. In contrast, Windrip does propose absolute protections for private property, which signals to the wealthy that he really* will *protect them.*

Fifth, Windrip's government will place a cap on personal income ($500,000), wealth ($3 million), and inheritance ($2 million). It will tax away anything above this cap. Sixth, the government will also cap profits from war-related manufacturing at six percent (and also take anything above that amount). Seventh, the government will gradually expand the U.S. military until it's the largest in the world. Eighth, Congress will immediately double the amount of money in circulation.

Windrip's wealth cap proposal contradicts his promise to respect all private property rights—and this makes it clear that he will end up discarding at least some of his platform. His plan to expand the military would have seemed far more radical to Lewis's readers than it will seem to modern Americans. This is because the U.S. did *dramatically expand its military in the decade after this book was published (due to World War II), and because the U.S. has by far the world's largest military budget as of 2022. However, in the 1930s, when the U.S. spent very little on defense, Windrip's proposal would have meant dramatically changing the U.S.'s role in the world and the military's role in American society. Finally, modern readers can likely predict that instantly doubling the money supply will cause massive inflation and widespread economic devastation for workers.*

Ninth, the government will condemn anti-Jewish discrimination and tolerate Jewish people who assimilate to American culture and support Windrip. Tenth, Black Americans will be banned from voting, public office, law, medicine, and education. Each Black family's income will be capped at $10,000 per year, but hardworking Black seniors can petition a board of white people to request pensions. Eleventh, the government will create a board to evaluate social security and unemployment plans. Twelfth, women will be removed from the workforce so that they can become mothers and homemakers. Thirteenth, communists, socialists, anarchists, conscientious objectors to war, and pro-Russian activists will be punished with decades of hard labor or execution.

Again, Windrip pays lip service to liberal values of tolerance and freedom, while actually promising intolerance and persecution. His empty promises might convince some concerned citizens that he's not as dangerous as he appears, but the groups his policies affect will clearly understand what they mean. Jewish people will face consequences if they fail to toe the government line, women and Black people will lose all their rights and return to a state of servitude, and political dissidents will immediately be labeled as communists and silenced. Tellingly, Windrip doesn't firmly commit to actually enacting his bold, popular pension reform proposals. This again confirms that his loyalties lie more with the elites he claims to hate than with the common working people who support him.

Fourteenth, the U.S. will pay all soldiers' bonuses immediately as lump sums. And fifteenth, Congress will amend the Constitution to give the president absolute power over the government. Finally, an addendum to Windrip's platform explains that all of his proposals, except the fifteenth, will only be enacted if the public supports them.

Windrip's 15th point is Lewis's satirical way of suggesting that any policies a fascist leader introduces are essentially meaningless, because without checks and balances on the leader's power, those policies can be amended or revoked at any time. This point is by far the most important, because it shows that Windrip's true goal is to seize absolute power for himself and dismantle the checks and balances that traditionally keep American democracy stable. After all, his addendum shows that everything else *in his agenda is negotiable—besides his desire to become a dictator.*

Emma Jessup finds Windrip's platform confusing and contradictory, but Doremus thinks it's clear. Windrip will bring big business to his side by threatening them with taxes and nationalization. He wants to take over unions and protect the property of businesses and churches who support him. Companies will get around his restrictions on war profits, and they'll take advantage of the inflation he creates by expanding the money supply to pay off their debt for cheap. He will take away the rights of women, Jewish people, Black people, and all of his opponents (whom he'll call "Communists"). Windrip's advisory board will never actually create a new social security system, but Congress *will* hand him absolute power over the whole government. Windrip and his inner circle will eliminate their opposition and set up a dictatorship.

Emma and Doremus Jessup's opposite reactions show why critical thinking is key to stopping tyranny. Many Americans might respond to Windrip's platform at face value, like Emma, because they assume that it only represents Windrip's sincere policy proposals. But others, like Doremus, read between the lines and recognize that the platform's purpose is largely rhetorical—it's designed to project a specific image, as much as advance specific policy goals. In reality, Doremus realizes, all of Windrip's plans to help ordinary people are merely optional, while all of his plans to restructure the government and give himself more power will be irreversible. In other words, Windrip's platform is just a toolbox for creating a totalitarian dictatorship further on down the line.

Doremus Jessup declares that he has to do what he can to stop Windrip—but that he and his family might be shot for it. Emma asks him to be careful and worries about his carelessness. But Father Perefixe, Sissy, Lorinda Pike, and the housekeeper Mrs. Candy are furious about Windrip's platform, too.

Once he realizes that a Windrip dictatorship is coming, Jessup starts asking the crucial questions that will occupy him for the rest of the novel: what can he do to stop Windrip? How can dissidents rebel against a dictatorship that does not protect their rights to free speech and assembly? How should Jessup balance his duty to fight the dictatorship, for the sake of morality and his nation, with his duty to protect his family?

CHAPTER 9

In an epigraph from **Zero Hour**, Buzz Windrip writes that patriotism, not intelligence, makes the best politicians—and he believes that white Americans are the greatest nation in the world. Windrip spends the rest of 1936 campaigning around the country, supporting everyone (including opposed groups, like the Bartenders' Union and the Anti-Saloon League) and always mimicking the local people's style. He's a short, ugly man, with a giant head and long, straight black hair that "hint[s] of Indian blood." Rumor has it that, during law school, he posed as a country doctor and sold fake remedies that killed several people.

Obsessive patriotism is always a key element of fascism, because it encourages people to relate to politics and their country primarily on an emotional level. Windrip's campaign strategy shows how he does this: he convinces everyone that they should support him because he is just like them. But in reality, his political shape-shifting shows that he's loyal to nobody at all. Put differently, Windrip prefers patriotism to intelligence because he doesn't want people to think critically about his candidacy and proposals.

Doremus Jessup simply doesn't understand how Windrip can charm so many people with his endless, vulgar lies and empty promises. Reportedly, Windrip is an incredible actor, with an unusual knack for understanding and connecting with his audience. He's "a Professional Common Man" who just repeats ordinary prejudices—for example, he loves pancakes, dogs, Ford, and millionaires, and he hates tea, poetry, and foreigners. Meanwhile, Lee Sarason is a master of publicity: for seven years, he has coached Windrip to stick to this foolish country persona. And Windrip's wife also fits the persona: she stays at home in the West, devotedly raising two children, tending to her garden, and studying the Bible.

Unlike Roosevelt, whose appeal rests on his New Deal policies, Windrip simply attracts voters because he's a successful entertainer. And if his followers are more interested in entertainment than good government, then Windrip can remain popular so long as he entertains people—no matter what policies he actually implements in office. This is why dictators frequently set up cults of personality: their personas help them distract from and cover up their abuses of power. But Lewis also uses Windrip's "Common Man" persona to satirize Americans themselves. Windrip plays on their hatred for elites—even though he's an elite himself—and convinces them that giving him power really amounts to giving power back to the people. But in reality, he's just exploiting their naïve, greedy, and xenophobic tendencies—including their firm belief that the U.S. is exceptional and will never fall into tyranny like Europe.

Wherever Windrip goes, he turns hotel rooms into chaotic campaign offices. He spends all day talking on the phone or to visitors, and every few minutes, he gets furious and throws his coat on the floor. All sorts of people visit him—he promises them anything they ask for, and he gives interviews on any and every subject. He wins over most of his visitors, except the journalists. And, needless to say, he never keeps any of his promises.

Lewis shows his readers Windrip's dishonesty and tyrannical personality by giving them a behind-the-scenes view into his campaign. Yet, in the novel, most Americans support Windrip because they lack this inside information. By pointing out how voters are blind to Windrip's obvious depravity, Lewis implies that most ordinary people—including his readers—could also find themselves supporting a tyrant if they fail to look for the warning signs.

Sophisticated Lee Sarason takes care of building relationships with foreign diplomats, and he masterminds Windrip's strategy. For instance, he wrote **Zero Hour** and won popular support by strategically spurning an English duke. Windrip's running mate is the genteel Southern planter and former governor Perley Beecroft, who—along with Sarason—has comforted the rich by showing them that Buzz's talk about redistribution is just empty rhetoric. Windrip is a political genius: he has spent his whole life building a loyal following, and he publicly announces his opposition to fascism and Nazism as the same time as he advocates it.

Sarason simultaneously helps develop Windrip's populist persona and builds the alliances with wealthy elites that Windrip needs to actually win power. So does Beecroft, who shows these elites how Windrip's presidency will actually benefit them, while remaining boring enough to not tip off common voters. Notably, by disavowing fascism at the same time as he runs on a fascist platform, Windrip takes advantage of the naïve illusion that the U.S. is exceptional and that fascism "can't happen here."

CHAPTER 10

In an epigraph from **Zero Hour**, Buzz Windrip writes that inflation is a myth because the U.S. has so many natural resources. The chapter begins by listing Windrip's supporters. They include the farmers, professionals, and unemployed people suffering in the Depression. There are also veterans, preachers, the KKK, union leaders, dishonest lawyers, pious prohibitionists, and anti-bank millionaires, all looking for political favors. Many foolish intellectuals, like Upton Sinclair, even think that Windrip will save the U.S. economy from the Depression. Major newspapers like *The New York Times* oppose Windrip, but religious publications have taken up his cause. So have several European political and military leaders, and of course, Mrs. Adelaide Tarr Gimmitch.

With the exception of the idealistic intellectuals like Sinclair and Gimmitch, Windrip's motley crew of supporters share no common political ideology or economic interests. In fact, they don't seem to have any underlying principles at all. Instead, all that unites them is greed: they only care about whether they will personally benefit from Windrip's regime (and not about their fellow Americans or their country's overall trajectory). This is one example of how Lewis believed that fascism could easily adapt to the U.S.'s individualistic culture. It also foreshadows how society starts breaking down later in the novel, as most Americans look out for nobody but themselves.

Buzz Windrip and his team—Bishop Prang, Senator Porkwood, and Colonel Osceola Luthorne—give constant radio addresses and take a 40-day campaign trip around the country on a luxury train. Windrip gives hundreds of speeches and meets about two million people. Lee Sarason oversees Windrip's public relations team, an army of young, attractive women who answer calls and letters.

Lewis emphasizes how the mechanics of Windrip's campaign fundamentally contradict his persona. While he acts like a spontaneous common man, in reality, he lives in opulence and carefully plans all of his appearances. Everyone he meets feels like he's putting on a special performance just for them, but in reality, he's repeating the same act over and over—to the point of mass-producing it.

Colonel Haik travels around the country, making surprise appearances in random places like a copper mine and a Massachusetts fishing village. Haik grew up in a privileged Tennessee family, then spent his career practicing law in the rural west and dabbling in military training. Finally, Dr. Hector Macgoblin speaks to educators, professional associations, and cultural groups. At a town in Alabama, when Macgoblin proudly declares that Black people are culturally inferior to white people, a mob of Black veterans runs him out of town. Doremus Jessup sees Windrip's campaign as "Revolution in terms of Rotary."

Like Windrip, Haik works hard to appear spontaneous and in touch with common working people—but it's all a carefully manufactured illusion. Meanwhile, Macgoblin's racist speech shows how much of Windrip's appeal to working-class white voters depends on helping them feel superior to other groups. Thus, rather than actually helping his supporters, Windrip can merely repress minority groups to make these supporters feel powerful and maintain their support.

CHAPTER 11

In this chapter's epigraph from **Zero Hour**, Windrip writes that, just like he became popular in school when his teacher singled him out for being stupid, he succeeded in the Senate when people insulted him. In contrast to Windrip's campaign, Walt Trowbridge's is meek and technocratic. Trowbridge comes up with a plan to gradually redistribute wealth, but he excites nobody. Meanwhile, the country's seven Communist parties each field a hopeless candidate, and President Franklin D. Roosevelt refuses to support Windrip and starts a new party instead, the Jeffersonians (or "True Democrat[s]"). Most of Congress, the socialists, and many governors and mayors support Roosevelt. But Trowbridge and the Jeffersonians are doomed, because they defend "integrity and reason," when the public wants primitive emotions instead.

The race between Windrip, Trowbridge, and Roosevelt demonstrates why fascism poses such a potent threat to democracies like the U.S. While Trowbridge offers practical solutions to the nation's economic woes and Roosevelt has a proven record of addressing them through the New Deal, Windrip steals the spotlight anyway. By traveling the country and broadcasting his views on the radio, he makes his personality the most important issue in the election. In other words, he makes the election about loyalty and emotion, not policy. Thus, Lewis shows that defending democracy requires ensuring that "integrity and reason" remain the core of political life.

In Vermont, Doremus Jessup wonders what to do: he wants to support Roosevelt, but he still respects Trowbridge (and knows that he has better chances of winning). He attacks Windrip in his **Informer** columns, and he spends his days interviewing voters around town. He's dismayed to see that most of them support Windrip—not because they believe that he will turn the whole country around, but because they believe that he will personally send them cash. They love Windrip's promises to tax the rich, permanently restrict Black people's rights, and give everyone a minimum of $5,000 per year. Fort Beulah residents even buy new appliances on credit from Raymond Pridewell's store, since they assume that they'll be able to pay everything off once Windrip gets elected.

Doremus Jessup's profession as a newspaperman gives him a deep sense of civic responsibility. He recognizes that Windrip's candidacy is based on presenting an appealing myth to the world, but he also believes—at least initially—that he can fight that myth by providing accurate information to the public. However, when he starts interviewing locals, he quickly realizes that they are too determined in their support for Windrip to change their minds because of mere facts. This raises one of the novel's central questions: to what extent can truth fight propaganda? And if it can't, then what can?

Shad Ledue's outlaw friend Alfred "Snake" Tizra, the unkempt dairy farmer Aras Dilley, Lorinda Pike's business partner Mr. Nipper, and Emil Staubmeyer all giddily tell Doremus Jessup that Windrip will make them rich. Louis Rotenstern, Frank Tasbrough, Medary Cole, and R.C. Crowley also support Windrip, claiming that he's not as much of a populist as people think. And, to Jessup's surprise, Shad Ledue gives speeches, organizes rallies, and even leads a parade for Windrip. Sissy Jessup's two suitors, Julian Falck and Malcolm Tasbrough, argue about Windrip when they visit her: Falck opposes him, while Malcolm proudly quotes pro-Windrip editorials. Sissy points out that Windrip seems to be splitting the country in half.

Politics begins to divide the characteristically peaceful, quiet town of Fort Beulah. But the two pro-Windrip factions in town support him for opposite reasons: working-class people like Shad Ledue wrongly believe that Windrip will fight the rich on their behalf, while the actual rich, like the Tasbroughs, know that Windrip is actually on their side. Yet both groups assume that they will be personally rewarded for loyalty to Windrip. This prospect is dangerous because it suggests that Windrip's government will do away with one of the central tenets of a representative liberal democracy: that the law ought to treat all citizens equally, regardless of their personal beliefs.

CHAPTER 12

In this chapter's epigraph from **Zero Hour**, Buzz Windrip declares that the U.S. should fund the universal $5,000 wage by producing all of its own goods—"even coffee, cocoa, and rubber"—and promoting international tourism. The chapter opens with Doremus Jessup attending Windrip's final rally, which is two days before the election. After arriving to New York in the foggy November evening, he feels overwhelmed by the crowd. He decides to take a taxi instead of the train, but the taxi gets stuck in traffic.

Windrip's call for national self-sufficiency is impossible and absurd, not least of all because coffee, cocoa, and rubber simply do not grow in the continental U.S. With Jessup's trip to New York, Lewis plays with classic tropes about the political and social differences between small-town America and the big city. Of course, he does this ironically, because small-town Jessup is the elite intellectual defending modern democracy, while the man he's coming to see in the city, Buzz Windrip, claims to represent traditional small-town values.

After checking into his hotel, Jessup walks around the city. He notices several men arrogantly swaggering down the street, dressed in blue mock army uniforms. He realizes that they're Windrip's militia, the Minute Men, who are led by Colonel Haik. They wear five-pointed stars (because the Jews and Soviets use six-pointed stars) and white and khaki shirts (because European fascists all wear colored shirts).

Needless to say, the Minute Men's superficial differences from the Soviets and European fascists don't make them any less dangerous. In fact, every fascist regime has incorporated partisan paramilitary forces into the government, in order to police the public and help the fascist leader and party maintain power.

Jessup enjoys a Chinese dinner and then heads to Madison Square Garden. On his way, he passes through enthusiastic crowds, who shove policemen and sing Windrip songs. He sees group of nine Minute Men attack an elderly FDR supporter and then a naval officer who tries to intervene. They knock the officer down and start kicking him in the head with their boots. A block later, 30 Minute Men assault a group of Communists. Jessup is surprised to see "a scrawny Jewish intellectual" run into the crowd, hitting Minute Men left and right. A group of FDR supporters steps in to protect the communists, but then the riot police start arresting them in order to protect the Minute Men.

Jessup witnesses a frightening scene of political violence, a herald of the nation's fate if Windrip wins the election. Of course, Lewis is writing ironically when he says that the police are protecting the Minute Men—they're really doing the Minute Men's bidding by arresting their victims. Perhaps the police sympathize with Windrip, or perhaps they recognize that the Minute Men are more powerful than they are and so choose to obey them. Either way, this alliance between the police and the Minute Men shows that Windrip has already transformed American political culture, undermining the expectation that the government should treat different citizens equally, regardless of which politicians they support.

The Minute Men stand guard all around and throughout Madison Square Garden. The crowd is mostly working-class "Manhattan peasants" who are worried about financial insecurity and the future. The rally begins with a band performance, a prayer, and a lackluster speech from Senator Porkwood. Colonel Haik's speech is more convincing: he cracks several jokes, tells a story about a wise carrier pigeon in the Great War, and then introduces Buzz Windrip. The crowd goes wild as a group of Minute Men leads Windrip into the auditorium.

Windrip continues to undermine democratic and legal norms by having his private Minute Men force, not the police, guard his event. To Jessup, this red flag contrasts with the audience's obvious desperation and the entirely mediocre performances from the band and Senator Porkwood. Put differently, thus far, Jessup's evening has shown him that Windrip's campaign is deeply pathetic, but also extremely dangerous.

Windrip's speech begins with an awkward story about visiting New York when nobody knew his name. Windrip describes (and misremembers) his platform, then starts rhapsodizing incoherently about freedom, justice, patriotism, and so on. But Doremus Jessup is surprised to find the speech so absorbing. Everyone in the audience feels like Windrip is revealing hidden truths directly to them. Windrip declares that he's not running to win money or power for himself—instead, he wants money and power for the *people*. He wants to create a perfect democracy, with trustworthy representatives instead of corrupt political machines. Windrip actually seems reasonable, honest, and compassionate—Jessup starts to wonder if he might even be right. But after the speech, Jessup can't remember a thing that Windrip said. He leaves the rally sure that Windrip will win.

This scene is extremely significant to the novel as a whole because it's the only time that Jessup actually sees Windrip face-to-face. This means that it's also the reader's only chance to see Windrip directly, through Jessup's eyes, and evaluate whether the real man lives up to the myth. In fact, Jessup is disarmed to find that Windrip is both far more buffoonish than he expected, yet just as persuasive—and therefore dangerous—as he feared. Jessup sees firsthand how Windrip wins support by building a strong emotional connection with his audience, without making realistic policy promises. Yet even though Jessup knows that Windrip is lying, he still enjoys the speech. This suggests that ordinary people—who don't share Jessup's education, knowledge of politics, and deep commitment to liberal values—probably don't stand a chance of seeing the truth behind Windrip's rhetoric.

Surely enough, on election night two days later, Jessup sees a parade march past his house, singing Mrs. Adelaide Tarr Gimmitch's new song about Buzz Windrip's victory. The song says that any "Antibuzz" who voted against Windrip is a traitor and should be jailed. Jessup sees Shad Ledue and Aras Dilley marching with the parade, and Francis Tasbrough following it in his car. Later that night, the parade burns down Louis Rotenstern's shop sign and beats up the town's curly-haired jeweler Clarence Little. The following evening, Jessup finds a poorly-written death threat on his porch. He doesn't tell anyone, but he wakes up several times at night, worried.

Windrip wins the election, and his followers immediately start demanding loyalty to him, which shows that Jessup was right to worry about him setting up a fascist state. Even Louis Rotenstern, who tried to protect himself from anti-Semitism by outspokenly supporting Windrip, is suddenly under threat. In addition to ranking citizens on a hierarchy (based on loyalty, race, religion, gender, etc.) Windrip's followers will also clearly use every available tool to shut down their opposition. This means that Jessup's core liberal values are in serious peril—most of all, the freedom to speak and publish dissenting opinions. For the rest of the novel, Jessup and the reader can only wonder why more Americans didn't recognize and act to stop the threat that Windrip posed far earlier on.

CHAPTER 13

In **Zero Hour**, Windrip writes that when he retires, he wants to move to a place like Florida or Santa Fe and spend his time reading classic literature. Even though Doremus Jessup knew that Windrip would win the election, he's still alarmed. "Hell with this country," he thinks, and he decides to lock up in his study and read the classics. He tries and fails to relearn Latin, and he starts feeling guilty for disengaging from politics. Windrip is trying to form a congressional majority by blackmailing his opposition, challenging election results, and even making one congressman disappear.

Unlike in Windrip's epigraph, Jessup retreats from the world not to relax, but because he feels powerless. He doesn't know what, if anything, he can do to fight Windrip's coming tyranny. He tries to bury his head in the sand—but, tellingly, he fails. He feels such a strong moral obligation to act that he cannot stop thinking about the country's descent into fascism. Ultimately, this sense of morality is what sets Jessup apart from most of the people around him.

Since the Depression started in 1929, Jessup has felt stuck and insecure. For centuries, capitalism and the U.S. government gave Americans "the privilege of planning." Jessup's minister grandfather planned to give Jessup's father a theological education and build a new family house. Then, Jessup's father saved money so that Jessup could go to college and pursue his dream of working in publicity. But now, Jessup has no idea what the country's future will hold, so he can't make any plans for his family. As an editor, he's used to knowing all about history, politics, and economics, but he suddenly feels like he knows nothing—and like nobody else does, either.

Lewis argues that stability and order help a society develop by enabling people to make and execute long-term plans. In this kind of society, people can choose their own life paths and freely pursue new, innovative ideas. The Depression already disrupted this stability by destroying people's livelihoods and confidence in the financial system. Then, the American people elected Windrip because he promised to end the crisis and bring back the stability of the past. But Jessup thinks that Windrip will do the opposite instead: he will undermine stability further by taking away the fundamental freedoms on which it is based.

Julian Falck visits Fort Beulah on Christmas break, and Jessup gives him a ride home one night. On their way, they stop at John Pollikop's garage for gas, and they meet Karl Pascal, the communist mechanic. Pascal tells Jessup that he's actually excited for Windrip to take office, since there's nothing like a "pro-plutocrat, itching militarist dictator" to start the revolution. Falck asks how Pascal can reconcile communism with loving the U.S. Pascal replies that he loves the U.S.'s informality and democratic spirit but hates its extreme inequality and low wages. Jessup asks if Soviet forced labor camps are any better than the U.S.'s poverty wages, but Pascal calls this a weak comeback and insists that Americans will "do [communism] a whole lot better."

Even though Jessup and Karl Pascal are friends, Jessup is just as wary of Pascal's politics as he is of Buzz Windrip's. In fact, Lewis suggests that communists and fascists share many traits, including their hope to build a utopia through a political revolution and their belief that everything else in the world is just a stepping stone towards this utopia. (This is why Pascal is happy about Windrip's election: he thinks it will make everyone else join his communist revolution.) While Lewis clearly takes Pascal's concerns about inequality seriously, he seems to believe that the best way to create a more equal society is by strengthening democracy and giving everyone a say in politics (rather than dismantling it through a revolution, so that a few communist leaders can run the economy for everyone else).

The theatrical John Pollikop, the garage's owner and Jessup's former bootlegger, stops in to chat. He makes fun of Karl Pascal and says that the socialists would have defeated "Buzzard Windrip" if they had the communists' support. Pascal jokes that Pollikop has never really read Marx and declares that Windrip's election is just a reflection of the country's deeper economic issues. In fact, Pascal and Pollikop are still merrily debating when Jessup and Julian Falck drive away.

Lewis uses Pollikop and Pascal's friendship to satirize the endless factional divisions that prevent left-wing politics from gaining traction in the U.S. While the fascists rally around Windrip, win the election, and start planning to replace democracy with dictatorship, the leftists are too busy bickering about theory to actually take action. By showing Pascal and Pollikop enjoy their lively debates, Lewis suggests that leftists might ultimately get involved in politics for the same twisted reason as fascists: because they view it as a source of entertainment.

Doremus Jessup has always sought alone time in his study, where his family and the townspeople can't bother him. Now, he spends his evenings there, meditating, editing articles, and avoiding Windrip's supporters. After returning home from Pollikop's garage, he finishes an editorial about the threat to democracy from communism, fascism, and all the other utopian ideologies that believe they can save the world. Society can never be perfect, Jessup writes, and people will always envy their neighbors and face the same issues, like aging, disease, and natural disasters. Only arrogant "rabble-rousers" think that they know the definitive solutions to these problems.

Jessup starts to clearly formulate his critique of illiberal politics—meaning any political movement that claims to have the formula for a perfect society and demands highly concentrated power so that it can enact that formula. Thus, while Lewis saw fascism as the most imminent threat to the U.S. in the 1930s, he also clearly saw communism, religious fundamentalism, and other ideologies as just as dangerous. Followers of these ideologies also believed that they could save the world and thought that this special ends would justify any possible means, including violent and repressive ones.

Jessup notes that people have believed they can save the world for centuries, from Peter the Hermit (who led the Crusades) and John Ball (who led a rebellion to redistribute wealth in the 14th century) to the Jacobins, Bolsheviks, and utopian religious leaders like John Alexander Dowie. He decides that Brigham Young was the only "rabble-rouser" who actually created something enduring. And he concludes that he respects the non-idealists who don't think they have the solution to everything, and who don't rush to murder everyone who disagrees with them.

Many journalists, politicians, and social scientists think of fascism as a uniquely modern phenomenon. But Lewis carefully links it with other social and religious movements throughout history, going back centuries. He argues that they all follow the same pattern and share the same root cause: "rabble-rouser[s]" convince idealistic, gullible, or desperate people to hand them power by promising to save the world. Then, they abuse their power and fail to fulfill their promises. Jessup believes that liberal democracy is the solution because it ensures that nobody *ever gets this kind of power.*

Jessup even starts to wonder whether the American Revolution and the Civil War were worth it. Couldn't the U.S. have gradually abolished slavery, Jessup asks, instead of sending a generation of men to die in the Civil War, which fueled a Southern racist backlash and eventually led the U.S. into the Spanish-American War? Couldn't the Thirteen Colonies have stayed in the British Empire and helped establish true world peace? Is the U.S. really any better off than Canada and Australia? Of course, conservatives are just as bad as the radicals—especially when they scorn everyone who wants to improve society. Above all, Jessup admires the Abolitionists. He just wishes they were less idealistic. He concludes that "idealists have been the worst enemies of human progress."

Lewis exercises his freedom of speech to the fullest by showing Jessup question the two wars that most Americans view as noble, necessary, and core to their national identity. While readers may see him as cynical, in reality, his thoughts show a profound optimism about human nature. He believes that people can solve their problems democratically through cooperation, tolerance, and foresight. In a way, he is imagining a utopia of his own: a world where war is no longer necessary to settle human conflicts. But it's not clear whether this approach will be enough to defeat Windrip's dictatorship. In fact, while Jessup will always remain committed to liberal democracy, the tactics he uses to fight for it will change radically over the course of the book.

CHAPTER 14

In **Zero Hour**, Windrip writes that he wishes that all the Christian churches could unite together. Like Jessup's pastor father, Doremus Jessup is a Universalist. There are few other Universalists left in Fort Beulah, so Jessup seldom goes to his father's old church—but after Windrip's election, he does. He reminisces about his childhood while he listens to a visiting student give a lackluster sermon about sin. He wishes that the student's speech could inspire and encourage him, but then he realizes that this is exactly what Windrip offers his followers. He visits the Anglican church instead, but the Rev. Mr. Falck's sermon doesn't console him, either. He can't stand the congregation's formal style and haughty attitude.

During the student's sermon, Jessup realizes that he relates to religion in much the same way as most Americans now relate to politics: it's his way of seeking comfort, meaning, and connection. But he sees how this can search for meaning become dangerous—wishing that everyone would follow the same church is no different from wishing that everyone would rally behind Windrip. In fact, this is why so many people turn to fascism: it appeals to their fundamental human instincts, like their desire for order and a sense of collective social purpose.

Lorinda Pike—who doesn't go to church—spends that Sunday afternoon cleaning up her boarding house, the Beulah Valley Tavern. Doremus Jessup visits her there. They agree that Windrip will set back women's rights, and Jessup says he wants to move to Canada, but Pike declares that the country needs newsmen like him—and she needs company. He jokes that he's too old to get sent to jail, and she jokes that he better not be "too old to make love." He suddenly feels much better. After a brief conversation about Emma, Jessup and Pike discuss their affair, which they agree is exciting, harmless, and well-hidden.

Lorinda Pike gives Jessup the sense of purpose and excitement that he fails to find at church. In addition to their sense of humor and interest in politics, they also share a kind of cynical humanism. Namely, they are deeply concerned about other Americans' well-being, but also deeply skeptical about other Americans' capacity to make wise decisions. They both feel a strong obligation to save American democracy from Windrip, but they don't yet know what to do and recognize that this will put them in harm's way. Indeed, they foreshadow the coming chapters in their conversation about whether they should escape to Canada or stay in the U.S. and resist the administration.

Jessup approaches the window, then notices someone watching him and Lorinda Pike from across the street. It's Shad Ledue, who's supposed to be working. Jessup says he has nothing to hide, but he's also thinking about the death threat he received. At that moment, Sissy walks in the door. She, her father, and Lorinda Pike have tea. Afterwards, Jessup crosses the street and finds Shad Ledue hiding in the bushes. Ledue claims that his motorcycle just broke down, and Jessup politely offers to drive it home, but Ledue says no, insults Sissy's driving, and says good night. Jessup feels like a stupid pushover but offers Ledue his car anyway. He drives Sissy home in hers, because she really is a terrible driver.

Jessup believes in treating everyone with honesty and respect—something that Shad Ledue absolutely doesn't do for him in return. This conflict creates an ongoing personal dilemma for Jessup: can he treat Ledue ethically without letting Ledue take advantage of him? Of course, this speaks to a more fundamental question that is central to this novel: how can love defeat hate? In fact, Doremus Jessup's relationship with Shad Ledue is a metaphor for the conflict between democracy and fascism. Jessup's struggle to put his foot down with Ledue parallels his struggle over whether deception, betrayal, and even violence could be justified in the fight for democracy. This struggle is all the more complicated because democracy resolutely bans deception, betrayal, and violence. Thus, dealing with Ledue (and fighting for democracy) might require Jessup to suspend his normal ethical principles and decide that the ends justify the means—just like the idealists he spoke out against in the last chapter.

On their way home, Sissy criticizes Doremus's overly cautious driving, then comments on his frequent visits to Lorinda Pike and suggests that they're having an affair. Doremus denounces the suggestion, but Sissy says that an affair probably wouldn't even hurt her mother Emma. Doremus asks if Sissy even knows anything about sex. Sissy sarcastically jokes that she's happy to have never learned about it, but that sex would probably help Doremus focus his energy on fighting Windrip. She admits that she's still a virgin, but probably not for long, given how her relationship with Julian Falck is going. (She has given up on Malcolm Tasbrough, who's now an avid Windrip fan.) Doremus admits that Sissy's impropriety embarrasses him, but Sissy says that, with the country in crisis, there isn't "time for coyness and modesty."

The clear generation gap between Doremus and Sissy underlines how Doremus might have to change his patient, cautious, puritanical ways in order to truly contribute to the fight against Windrip. In contrast, Sissy's relationship drama and advice to her father about his affair show that she's open-minded, confident, and courageous. She's precisely the kind of newly liberated young woman that Windrip and his cronies want to destroy. But unlike her father, she's also the kind of person who won't hesitate to act on her values. It's unclear if that makes her the kind of idealist that her father hates, the kind of activist that the U.S. will need to stop Windrip, or both.

At home, Shad Ledue forgets to bring the keys inside and insults Sissy again, so Doremus Jessup finally fires him. Ledue proudly declares that he is leaving to go work for the League of Forgotten Men, anyway. Within weeks, Ledue requests a donation from Jessup and starts turning people off from his newspaper when he refuses.

Jessup finally works up the courage to fire Ledue—which represents how, as he ponders the horrors of the coming Windrip administration, he is becoming bolder and more decisive. Meanwhile, Ledue's new job with the League illustrates one way in which authoritarian organizations are particularly dangerous: because they value loyalty above all else, they tend to reward greed and conformity, while punishing talent and imagination.

CHAPTER 15

In an epigraph from **Zero Hour**, Windrip writes that he's just a normal, humble man who prefers to avoid conflict—except when he has to defend the people against evils, like the big Sangfrey River utility company. The chapter begins two weeks before the inauguration, with Windrip announcing his cabinet. He starts with Lee Sarason as Secretary of State, the tax-evading banker Webster R. Skittle as Secretary of the Treasury, and Colonel Osceola Luthorne as Secretary of War (even though his title is honorary and he has no actual military experience). Bishop Prang and Father Coughlin both turn down posts in the government, but Dr. Macgoblin will fill a new position, Secretary of Education and Public Relations, and Senator Porkwood will be Attorney General.

To no one's surprise, Windrip fills his cabinet with his unqualified campaign advisors. This sends a clear message to all Americans: Windrip will reward loyalty with power. He does not care about his appointees' experience, competence, or commitment to public service, but only whether they consistently support him and his choices. This is a sinister way to set up a dictatorship: it ensures that nobody in the government is likely to disagree with Windrip—and anyone who does can never get enough power to challenge him. Finally, Hector Macgoblin's curious new job shows how controlling information is one of fascist regimes' strongest tools for controlling the population. His new job essentially combines education and public relations into a department of propaganda.

Windrip appoints his "embarrassing friends and enemies" to faraway ambassadorships: he sends the writer Upton Sinclair to Britain, the businessman Milo Reno to France, and the nationalistic Mississippi Senator Bilbo to Russia. Mrs. Adelaide Tarr Gimmitch demands a cabinet position but ends up in Hollywood writing movies instead. As a joke, Windrip offers Franklin D. Roosevelt the ambassadorship to Liberia. Roosevelt turns down the offer and even skips Windrip's inauguration, which thousands of journalists and visitors from all around the world attend. Windrip arrives in his old car, leading a procession of veterans and Minute Men.

Windrip quickly identifies which supporters will continue to serve his interests and which may turn against him or cause him trouble in the future. More specifically, he ostracizes all of the followers who sincerely believed in his political message—like Sinclair (who wanted wealth redistribution) and Gimmitch (who wanted to rejuvenate the national spirit through patriotic songs and senseless wars). In contrast, the followers he rewards care more about money and power than ideology. Thus, Windrip's actions make it clear that all of his promises on the campaign trail were just a ploy to gain power—which he plans to use however he likes, with no regard for anyone else.

After taking the oath of office, Windrip promises to give the people "the *real* New Deal" and "a whale of a good time." Then, he moves into the White House, immediately declares the Minute Men to be a new branch of the Army, and orders the government to arm them. The next morning, Windrip demands that Congress pass a bill to give him absolute control over legislation, law enforcement, and the courts. When it refuses, Windrip declares martial law and orders the Minute Men to arrest the dissenting congresspeople.

Windrip doesn't just take power—he launches a coup d'état, overthrowing the U.S.'s democratic system and replacing it with a one-man dictatorship. He ensures that government institutions are loyal to him personally, not to the people or the Constitution, like they're supposed to be. Worst of all, by making the Minute Men part of the army, he ensures that his decisions will always be loyally implemented, and that nobody can expel him from office through force.

Riots break out across the country. A mob of Black activists clashes with Minute Men outside the D.C. jail—two shots ring out and hit the Minute Men. Then, Windrip gives an impassioned speech ordering Minute Men across the country to kill anyone who gets in their way. The Minute Men massacre the mob in D.C. The rest of Congress assembles and passes Windrip's bill—which the Supreme Court can't stop, because its members are under house arrest.

Readers may not have expected the atrocities to start so soon—Doremus Jessup certainly didn't. But by writing these massacres into his novel, Lewis tries to shock his American readers out of their complacency. He underlines how dangerous the U.S. president's powers would be in the wrong hands, how difficult it would be to stop a dictator once they are already in the White House, and how dangerous it is to fight for democracy under an authoritarian regime that refuses to protect democratic rights and freedoms.

When Bishop Prang starts questioning Windrip's coup, his broadcast rights get cancelled, so he visits D.C. to talk with Windrip. Within a day, he's in jail, supposedly for his own protection. (So are many journalists.) A quarter of Prang's Indiana hometown travels to D.C. to protest, but when they arrive, they learn that Prang has gone mad and been locked up in an asylum. He's never heard from again. Meanwhile, loyal Minute Men start to arrest and kill disloyal squadrons who refuse to do things like arrest treasonous nuns. General Emmanuel Coon even gives up his progressive politics when Windrip puts him in charge of the army. At his first major speech, Windrip warns the public about the country's "powerful and secret enemies" and praises dictatorship. The country still loves him—and he has only been in office for eight days.

Prang's disappearance again demonstrates that Windrip has no qualms about betraying his followers, even as he demands absolute loyalty from them. Without checks and balances on his power, Windrip can do absolutely anything he wants—including empowering his followers to terrorize the population. By presenting this terrorism as a necessary war against "powerful and secret enemies," he carefully blurs the distinction between his own interests and the public interest. In other words, he encourages the public to view whatever he decides to do as the best course of action for the country (and therefore elect not to challenge it). Thus, Lewis shows his readers that, under a dictatorship, there is no rule of law *anymore: nobody can be sure that they will remain safe and free if they follow the rules (or be punished if they break them).*

CHAPTER 16

In **Zero Hour**, Buzz Windrip writes that he doesn't really want to be the president—just to serve the people. The chapter begins with a description of Buck Titus's small, bare, but well-kept farmhouse in the woods, which Doremus Jessup visits periodically to talk politics. In the **Informer**, Jessup writes that Windrip's hysterical dictatorship won't last. He's afraid of being arrested, but he still thinks that *"it can't happen here."* With his "earthy American sense of humor," Windrip is very different from European fascists—but Jessup doesn't know whether this is a good or bad sign. After the inauguration, Lorinda Pike also starts visiting Titus's house—she often argues passionately with him about literature.

Windrip's epigraph again shows how, by blurring the line between the public interest and his own private interest, he fools the American people into thinking that his selfish actions are actually for their own benefit. This shows why critical thinking is essential for a healthy democracy: people like Doremus Jessup can help alert the public to dishonest political tactics by showing how leaders' promises don't line up with their actions. Nevertheless, despite his education, knowledge, and experience, Jessup still struggles to make sense of the dictatorship. Of course, Lewis thinks that his readers will share this difficulty: they will struggle to identify fascism when it takes on distinctly American cultural traits, like an "earthy American sense of humor."

By the end of February, Windrip is still in power. The Minute Men have violently repressed strikes and protests all around the country, half the Supreme Court has been replaced, and many congressmen are still in jail. Windrip's allies are winning enormous government contracts, and there are no more U.S. states—just eight huge provinces (which are divided into districts and countries). Thus, Doremus Jessup now lives in "Northeastern Province, District Three, County B, township of Beulah." Many Americans are frustrated to lose their states—but forget that they've never received their promised $5,000 a year.

Windrip consolidates power both through violence and by changing the structure of the government. Pro-democracy activists clearly are *resisting Windrip, but he's winning the battle against them. This is largely because Windrip can control the Minute Men nationwide, while the activists and dissenters aren't unified and don't have clear political goals. By reorganizing the U.S. into provinces and districts, Windrip replaces the old federal system with a unitary system in which everyone answers directly to him. In other words, he gives himself even more power by taking away the states' autonomy.*

Colonel Dewey Haik becomes commissioner of the Northeastern Province, while the slick ex-governor John Sullivan Reek becomes the commissioner of District Three. Reek orders all of the district's journalists to meet him at the district headquarters, the former Dartmouth College campus in Hanover. Before Doremus Jessup leaves to attend, Sissy, Julian Falck, Buck Titus, and Lorinda Pike write him a rhyming poem about how dreadful Haik and Reek are. On his drive over, Jessup sees hundreds of Windrip propaganda billboards, all sponsored by major corporations. When he arrives, several old men tell him that the Minute Men took their jobs, and the Minute Men are guarding the whole campus.

The fate of Dartmouth's campus is a metaphor for how fascism replaces free thought and critical inquiry (the university) with repression and propaganda (the government offices). Of course, this metaphor foreshadows the future of Jessup's career as a journalist—after all, he's going to Hanover to learn about the government censors' plans for his newspaper. The propaganda billboards he sees on the way strongly suggest that he will no longer be able to publish his critical, independent editorials.

At the conference, Commissioner Reek announces that all journalists should contact the government directly for all news, rather than asking its dishonest, unreliable opponents. Then, Reek introduces District Three's four county commissioners: an elderly lawyer, a spirited clergyman, a shy laborer, and for Doremus Jessup's county, Minute Men battalion leader Shad Ledue. Ledue calls Jessup a fool who doesn't understand economics, but promises not to give Jessup any trouble if "he behaves himself!"

In addition to losing his independence as a writer and editor, Jessup learns that Shad Ledue, his petty nemesis, will now have practically absolute power over his life and work. The reader already knows that from Jessup's perspective, Ledue is rude, foolish, and vindictive. By showing the administration give Ledue so much power, then, Lewis both creates a conflict for his protagonist and highlights how authoritarian governments create perverse incentives and promote corrupt governance at every level of society.

CHAPTER 17

In **Zero Hour**, Windrip quotes a passage from II Kings in the Hebrew Bible, in which a messenger from the invading Neo-Assyrian Empire tells the people of Jerusalem that the Empire will help them survive by taking them to a land of abundance. The chapter begins with Shad Ledue establishing County B's local government in Fort Beulah. He takes over the old county courthouse and hires Emil Staubmeyer as the Assistant County Commissioner for the Beulah region. Doremus Jessup realizes that he'll get to see the Windrip administration up close.

This chapter's epigraph is yet another example of Sinclair Lewis's use of irony: the messenger appears to be saving the people of Jerusalem by promising them riches and safety, but he's really announcing that the Empire is about to invade and force them off their land. There's an obvious parallel between this quote and Windrip's political strategy: Windrip also appeases the public with false promises of wealth and glory, when his real plan is to rob them blind. Of course, the quote also represents Shad Ledue taking over Fort Beulah with the same false promises as Windrip.

The Minute Men are growing, as its members now receive salaries on top of their almost limitless "expense money." Thousands of National Guard members and Great War veterans are signing up, and Lee Sarason is creating Minute Men battalions at every college in the nation. Still, most new recruits are down-and-out farmers, factory workers, and criminals. The Minute Men start calling Windrip "the Chief" and assembling to sing their poorly written new anthem, "Buzz and Buzz."

Windrip exploits his absolute control over the national budget to expand his loyal private army. Unlike an ordinary army, which would pledge to serve a nation in its entirety, the Minute Men pledge to serve Windrip as an individual. By making the Minute Men the best alternative for desperate job seekers during the Depression, Windrip creates a system of organized corruption, in which the only route to wealth and power for most Americans is by doing Windrip's personal bidding.

Then, crisis strikes: someone realizes that the Soviet emblem is actually a five-pointed star, just like the Minute Men's. The Minute Men order every member to propose a new emblem. They end up choosing Lee Sarason's proposal: a ship's wheel, which symbolizes the government, the automotive industry, and the Rotary Club. Sarason proudly announces that the wheel also resembles the Nazis' swastika and the KKK's triangle logo. "Buzz and Buzz" is rewritten to name the steering wheel instead of the star.

Lewis uses this inane "crisis" to suggest that fascism is tragic and terrifying in large part because it's so foolish. Apparently, Windrip, Sarason, and millions of Minute Men failed to recognize this serious design error for months because they know nothing about the communists they despise so obsessively. Their solution is just as foolish: Sarason holds a rigged contest, chooses his own emblem, and invents an incoherent justification for it. Lewis's message is that because fascism rewards loyalty and bans dissent, it reshapes society around leaders' dangerous half-baked ideas.

Windrip declares that the League of Forgotten Men is no longer needed, since it is already victorious. So, he dissolves it. He also dissolves all political parties except his own, the American Corporate State and Patriotic Party. Lee Sarason creates the "Corporate State" based on Mussolini's Italy: the economy is divided into six industries, each industry chooses worker and employer representatives, and these representatives elect the National Council of Corporations, which sets all business-related policy. Of course, President Windrip appoints Lee Sarason as the National Council's permanent chairman. Sarason gets the deciding vote over all policy and absolute power to ban anyone unfit from the Council. The Council also bans all labor strikes.

Windrip really dissolves the League because of its political demands and its connections with Bishop Prang. Like most authoritarians who can get away with it, Windrip also dissolves other political parties in order to crush his opposition and increase his chances of staying in power. He replaces these independent organizations with a new system that ultimately answers to his right-hand man, Lee Sarason, and therefore gives him near absolute control over the economy. The council system's real purpose is not to set industrial policy, but rather to give workers and business leaders the illusion of power, so that they do not turn against the administration.

Windrip's Corporatist supporters call themselves "Corpos," but their enemies call them "Corpses." They promise that as soon as they can find the money, they will give every family $5,000. In the meantime, the Minute Men take all unemployed people to labor camps and hire them out to private companies for a dollar a day. The government announces that it has miraculously ended unemployment. The companies fire all their higher-paid employees, who quickly join the camps and retake their old jobs at the new dollar-a-day rate. Of course, room and board at the camps costs them 70-90 cents per day. While some of these workers are frustrated to have lost their homes, cars, and bathrooms, the daily announcements from Windrip's administration make them feel better by reminding them that they're helping build a whole new world, and that they're superior to Jewish and Black people.

Whereas a universal $5,000 wage would create a vast middle class, universal labor camps give the government and big businesses a nearly unlimited supply of nearly free labor to increase their profits. Windrip continues abandoning his campaign promises whenever it's convenient and profitable, but the public seems to be resisting him less and less—whether because people who oppose the government understand the repression that they'll face or because they increasingly accept Windrip's public messaging. In fact, it's no accident that this messaging grows more absurd at the same time as his policies grow more dystopian and repressive. Lewis uses this pattern to show how profoundly unchecked power can corrupt society, and how easily ordinary people can be tricked into accepting it.

While the government's $5,000 promise eventually fades away, it does fulfill its other promises, like inflation: wages triple, while prices rise by far more than triple. Scared by the price increases, foreign countries stop importing American food. But big business owners double their wealth by immediately paying off their debts and refusing to raise wages.

Just as Jessup and his wealthy pro-Windrip friends predicted, the new administration's economic policies favor the elite, not common workers. This runaway inflation isn't an accident—it's an intentional strategy to dramatically redistribute wealth toward Windrip and his allies.

The government also fulfills its promises to minority groups. Minute Men massacre Black people in the South, leading to riots. Jewish people are required to pay double for hotels, stock trade commissions, and bribes to government inspectors. In Fort Beulah, the patriotic Louis Rotenstern gets to keep his shop as long as he charges Minute Men a fraction of the official price. But the Jewish merchant Harry Kindermann loses all his business. He ends up selling sausages on the street and living in a shack, where his wife dies of pneumonia.

Windrip's racist policies likely remind readers of historical fascist atrocities—especially the Holocaust. But it's essential to recall that Sinclair Lewis wrote this book very early in Hitler's regime, before the Holocaust began. In fact, Nazi Germany's racial policies in 1936 were very similar to the discriminatory laws that Lewis describes in this passage. He uses this passage to draw an explicit connection between the widespread anti-Semitism in the U.S. and the institutionalized anti-Semitism of Nazi Germany.

After all of the unemployed go to labor camps, social workers have nothing to do. So, the government hires them in the camps to identify everyone who opposes the Minute Men and Corpos. Any social workers who object to this work get sent to jail, or to the Minute Men's private concentration camps. Around the country, local Minute Men also get free rein to arrest and torture anyone they want. Dissidents who can afford to flee start leaving for Canada, Mexico, and Europe, where they begin publishing anti-government magazines. The government seriously tightens border security to stop these "lying counter revolutionists."

The government effectively creates a secret police to eradicate free thought and severely punish anyone who does it. Yet the fleeing dissidents show that this effort can never fully succeed—and no matter how dire the situation becomes, a small subset of people will always be willing to put their lives on the line for democracy. Again, readers may view this passage as prescient, because it closely resembles what actually happened throughout Nazi-occupied territories in Europe during the decade after Lewis published this book.

Twelve Minute Men guard Walt Trowbridge, who is settling into a dull retirement at his South Dakota ranch. On the Fourth of July, Trowbridge invites his guards to join in the fireworks and beer. They do, and while they nap after the festivities, a plane full of soldiers quietly lands on the ranch. The soldiers handcuff the Minute Men and then fly Trowbridge to safety in Canada. Trowbridge starts an opposition newspaper, and Doremus Jessup and thousands of other dissidents start smuggling copies down into the U.S. By the end of the year, Trowbridge has set up a "New Underground" to help thousands of Americans escape to Canada.

By showing the clever forces of democracy outsmart the foolish troops of fascism, Lewis again suggests that one of democracy's great advantages is that it distributes wealth and power based on merit, while fascism does so based only on loyalty—and systematically rewards incompetent yes-men as a result. Indeed, Trowbridge's New Underground offers a rare glimmer of hope in the novel's otherwise bleak version of the U.S. In fact, Lewis names the New Underground after the Underground Railroad in order to show that the fight against fascism would have to be just as vast and important as the fight against slavery.

CHAPTER 18

In **Zero Hour**, Windrip writes that he loves the peace and quiet of small-town America. The chapter begins with Doremus Jessup attending his 40-year reunion at Isaiah College and meeting with the Classics professor Victor Loveland, who has just been fired for opposing the government. His colleague Dr. King, a chemist who was just fired for being Jewish, is going to work for the electric company. Jessup meets with the college president, Owen J. Peaseley, who denies firing Loveland for political reasons. Peaseley also reveals that he will be the district's new Director of Education, which means that he will be ensuring that editors like Jessup are "spreading correct Corporate ideals and combating false theories."

Isaiah College's closure and Peaseley's new job as an official government censor further show that the administration is cracking down on free thought, speech, and media in order to prevent the American people from recognizing and opposing their crimes. Peaseley clearly cares about his own professional advancement more than the ethical and social values he's supposed to uphold as an educator. In fact, Lewis suggests that this kind of petty self-interest and careerism is the lifeblood of fascist governments, because it gives leaders the eager, obedient bureaucrats they need to carry out their sinister plans.

A large company of Minute Men is training in Fort Beulah, but Doremus Jessup doesn't pay attention to them until they stage a major parade in August. They march in unison to the Civil War song "Marching to Georgia," led by Shad Ledue on horseback. Jessup enjoys the show, even though he hates what it represents. The same month, Jessup writes up a positive review of a satirical minstrel show that mocks the fools leading the new government.

The Minute Men sing "Marching Through Georgia," which celebrates the Union victory in the Civil War, in order to link Windrip's administration to the idea of mobilizing the nation to fight for freedom. This shows that, even after taking power, they stick to the same tactics: they win public approval by treating politics as a form of entertainment. But the satirical minstrel show demonstrates that Windrip's enemies can also do the same thing. In fact, just like Sinclair Lewis himself, these performers use satire to oppose fascism and defend democracy.

The next month, Jessup learns that that Secretary of Education Hector Macgoblin is purging teachers he dislikes from the nation's schools and universities. One night, after spending the day at Columbia University, firing professors who voted against Windrip, Macgoblin calls up his old professor, the biologist Willy Schmidt, who now lives in New York. Macgoblin learns that Schmidt is visiting Rabbi Vincent de Verez, who lives nearby, so he stops in with his two bodyguards for a visit. He demands whisky from the Rabbi and declares that Jewish people should leave the U.S. The Rabbi explains that his people are used to being persecuted and only believe in God, not Windrip. Schmidt says that Macgoblin should be ashamed to have given up his principles, and the Rabbi orders Macgoblin and his goons to leave.

Macgoblin is highly unstable and clearly unqualified to evaluate the work of the nation's professors. This is exactly why he's such an asset to Windrip's administration—one of the best ways to suppress free speech is by developing a reputation as cruel and unpredictable. Macgoblin's relationship with Schmidt suggests that he once had the potential to become a respectable, educated intellectual. But his absurd anti-Semitism shows that he chose to embrace ignorance and paranoia instead, for the sake of his own short-term gain. Needless to say, Lewis uses this scene to show how fascist societies replicate this pattern on a grand scale: through repression, they encourage millions of people to become angry ideologues instead of critical thinkers.

Macgoblin pulls out his gun and shoots both Schmidt and the Rabbi de Verez. But at trial, Macgoblin claims that he was trying to stop Schmidt and the Rabbi from conducting Jewish "ritual murders," and he is declared innocent. A reporter writes Doremus Jessup a letter about the case, and Jessup angrily starts writing an editorial that criticizes the government's incompetence and malice. The newspaper's typesetter, Dan Wilgus, worries that the editorial will get the whole staff shot, and he urges Jessup not to publish it. But Jessup insists.

Macgoblin's sham trial shows how fascism distorts the legal system: rather than preventing and punishing wrongdoing, the courts now perpetrate and justify it. Jessup hopes that he can help set the record straight through journalism. Macgoblin defends himself by citing classic anti-Semitic conspiracy theories, ones that are still popular today. Again, Lewis carefully reminds his readers about the clear parallels between anti-Semitism in Nazi Germany and the U.S. during his era. To modern readers looking back at the history of European fascism, Lewis's message takes on an even more chilling, urgent tone: atrocities like the Holocaust could easily "happen here" in the U.S., too.

Doremus Jessup shows a copy of his article to his star reporter Otis "Doc" Itchitt and Julian Falck. Doc Itchitt says that nothing will go wrong, but Jessup suspects that Itchitt might try to turn him in and take over the **Informer**. At home, Emma worries that the Corpos will put Doremus in prison, while Sissy isn't sure what she thinks, and Julian Falck thinks that it's noble to speak against the new government. Doremus declares that he has a professional obligation to write the truth, but pretends to be returning to the office. He heads to visit Lorinda Pike at the Tavern instead.

Jessup's strong moral compass sets him apart from most other characters in the novel (including Itchitt and Emma), who immediately choose self-interest over any moral principles they believe in. Yet Jessup still struggles to balance his family's personal safety with his obligation to inform the public. If journalists cannot tell the truth anymore, Jessup worries, then the majority of Americans will never have the chance to see Windrip's crimes for what they truly are.

But first, Jessup visits his daughter Mary's family. He finds Mary writing letters at her desk while her husband Fowler Greenhill, their son David, and Greenhill's partner Dr. Olmsted discuss David's future. David says that he wants to be a doctor like his father, or maybe a newspaperman like his grandfather. Greenhill declares that he'll summon Doremus Jessup with his "magic power" to ask about being an editor—and then he goes to the door and lets Jessup in. Jessup chats with the family for about 10 minutes, and Greenhill reveals that Shad Ledue is trying to get him become the Minute Men's medical officer, but he won't do it.

By showing Jessup visit his respectable, loving family, Lewis emphasizes how difficult it will truly be for him to choose between publishing his editorial and keeping a low profile to protect his loved ones. Lewis thereby suggests that even principled, socially conscious people like Jessup will struggle to make the sacrifices necessary to save democracy from fascism. Meanwhile, young David's aspirations are significant because they speak to the mindset of the nation's youth. Over the course of the novel, as David's aspirations start to change, the reader will learn how the Windrip administration is transforming young people's values and goals.

The Beulah Valley Tavern is busy with tourists from New York, so Lorinda Pike isn't available until after 10 p.m. Doremus Jessup asks her to read his editorial—he has less than an hour to decide whether to publish it. Pike decides that he should. She explains that Shad Ledue visited the Tavern and demanded lower prices for Minute Men. She has also learned that her business partner, Mr. Nipper, is suing her in the county court tomorrow. Jessup advises her to hire his dumb but detail-oriented lawyer, Mungo Kitterick, because the district's new judge, the "perfect gentleman-Fascist" ex-banker Effingham Swan, will be presiding over the trial.

Jessup asks Lorinda Pike for advice because she shares his strong moral compass and extraordinary courage. Sinclair Lewis clearly believes that the fate of democracy will lie in the hands of people like them, since the majority of Americans—like Ledue, Nipper, and Swan—will choose conformity and self-interest over justice and equality. In fact, Nipper's lawsuit is just an opportunistic attempt to seize control of the business from Lorinda: he knows that the new government wants women in the home, not running businesses, and he sees a great financial opportunity in this misogyny.

Lorinda Pike predicts that either she and Jessup will grow paranoid and isolated, or they will dedicate their whole lives to joining the resistance against Windrip. She asks if Jessup is still planning to publish the editorial, and he says yes. He couldn't reach the office to stop it even if he wanted to, and although he's frightened of what will happen to him, he's sure about publishing it. Pike joyously kisses him, then goes back to work. Jessup barely sleeps that night.

Lorinda Pike suggests that for people committed to liberal democratic values—like equality, tolerance, and free expression—risking one's life to fight fascism is a better option than living idly under it, powerless and afraid. So, despite their fears, she and Jessup take their first definitive steps toward joining the resistance.

CHAPTER 19

In **Zero Hour**, Windrip writes that politicians shouldn't confuse ordinary people with the facts, and that it's easier to convince people in the evening. The chapter begins with a description of Doremus Jessup's comfortable office in the three-story **Informer** building downtown. In the morning, he looks out the window and watches a group of townspeople reading and discussing the day's *Informer*. More and more join, turning the group into an animated mob, and Jessup starts to worry. A Minute Man calls to burn down the building and lynch the "traitors" inside, and then the mob grabs weapons from Pridewell's hardware store and smashes in the *Informer* building's front display window. Jessup runs downstairs and tells the mob to stop—but they rush at him instead. A man grabs his arm and tries to break it.

Windrip attacks the value of truth in the epigraph, and then a mob attacks Jessup for daring to publish the truth. This episode shows how high-stakes the battle over free speech can become. Windrip and the Minute Men aren't the only ones who want all dissent silenced—they've also convinced millions of Americans that speaking out against the government amounts to treason. But this underscores the importance of Jessup's mission to inform the public—most Americans still accept Windrip's propaganda and fail to grasp how nefarious his policies actually are. Thus, Lewis is posing the question of how intellectuals can work to inform a public that does not want to be informed.

Suddenly, Shad Ledue marches into the **Informer** office and stops the mob. He announces that the Corpos are taking over the building, and his Minute Men take Doremus Jessup to jail. Jessup worries about Emma and Lorinda. He realizes that one of the Minute Men is Aras Dilley, but Dilley pretends not to recognize him. Jessup enters the courthouse and jail building through the back door, remembering all the times he entered it through the front as a reporter. The guards lead him to a tiny, foul-smelling cell with nothing but a bed, stool, sink, and tiny window.

With Jessup in jail, Fort Beulah will lose its only remaining source of independent news. Shad Ledue finally uses his new, arbitrary power to get back at Jessup—but he may not even realize that he's actually saving Jessup from the mob. Meanwhile, Ledue's poor farmer friend Aras Dilley has also clearly benefited from signing up for the Minute Men. This again shows how Windrip secures the loyalty of his most desperate but unqualified followers by giving them prominent government jobs.

Jessup spends all day in the cell, consuming nothing but tap water and cigarettes. He reminds himself that many prisoners have it far worse, and he tries and fails to get used to his uncomfortable stool and bed. He blames himself for Windrip's dictatorship—he thinks that he should have resisted it earlier and more forcefully. But now, it may be too late. Jessup worries that he'll have to choose between Emma and Lorinda, and he wonders how Lorinda's case went in court. Just after midnight, Aras Dilley wakes Jessup up and leads him to the courtroom. Jessup notices that Dilley has ruined his Minute Man outfit and remembers that he was just a poor local farmer.

Jessup realizes that he started speaking out against Windrip far too late—stopping Windrip from winning the election would have been far easier than stopping him now, once he already has absolute power over the government. Of course, Sinclair Lewis is sending his readers a message: it's much easier to stop dangerous political movements like fascism in their earliest stages. Intellectuals, activists, and concerned citizens should always *be vigilant about threats to democracy.*

Lorinda Pike and Mr. Nipper leave the courtroom, and Aras Dilley joyously tells Jessup that the judge has given Nipper total control over the Tavern. Then, Jessup enters the courtroom, where Shad Ledue, Emil Staubmeyer, and Military Judge Effingham Swan sit on the bench. Swan flamboyantly apologizes to Jessup for the trouble, declares that a formal inquiry is unnecessary, and comes down to the courtroom floor. He claims that he only called Jessup in to ask for advice—but Jessup reminds him about the editorial and demands to know the charges against him. Swan says they're "just trifling things," including libel, treason, and inciting violence.

Judge Swan's extremely formal, theatrical personality again shows how fascism uses style to mask substance. Just like Windrip, Swan uses a phony persona to distract from the reality that he uses his extreme power to arbitrarily strip people of their rights, property, and dignity. In fact, he doesn't seem to care or understand anything about Jessup's "trifling" case—even though he has absolute power to decide the fate of Jessup's life and newspaper. Thus, Swan again demonstrates the terrifying combination of cruelty and ignorance that Lewis sees at the heart of fascism.

Judge Swan asks Jessup to "play along" with the government in the **Informer** and write up a list of everyone he knows who is against the administration. Jessup requests his lawyer, Mungo Kitterick, but Swan informs him that he no longer has any rights, because Windrip has declared martial law. Jessup points out that many of Swan's catchphrases are from popular detective stories, and Swan asks if Jessup is mocking him—just like Lorinda Pike did. Shad Ledue says that everyone knows about Pike and Jessup's relationship. Jessup angrily lunges at Ledue, but Swan stops him. Ledue declares that Lorinda Pike is having sex with Mr. Nipper, too—and most of the men who stay at the Tavern.

Judge Swan is really asking Jessup to betray his friends and allies. While the reader knows that Jessup would never do such a thing, Swan's nonchalance suggests that most of the people he threatens eventually do comply. And while Doremus Jessup and Lorinda Pike easily see through Swan's act, they can't do anything to stop him without democracy or a free press: Swan will continue to have power so long as Windrip wants him to, and Windrip will likely want him to so long as Swan agrees to prioritize the regime's agenda over justice.

Jessup feels totally helpless and alone. Judge Swan declares that he *could* just have Jessup executed—and he certainly wants to. But instead, Jessup will be released on parole and tasked with teaching Emil Staubmeyer how to run the **Informer**. Jessup will continue writing editorials, under Staubmeyer's command, starting with an apology for his attack on the government. He will also have to serialize **Zero Hour** in the *Informer*.

Jessup is helpless and alone: under fascism, he has no rights and the government reserves absolute power over his life and safety. He will survive, but only because the regime wants to turn him into a propagandist to serve its own ends. Thus, it no longer seems that he can survive without completely sacrificing his democratic principles.

Suddenly, Dr. Fowler Greenhill walks into the courtroom. (The Minute Men guards let him in, as he has cured their "unmentionable diseases.") Greenhill tells the judges about his service in the Great War and declares that Jessup, the town's "most honest and useful man," ought to be free. Fed up, Judge Swan orders Greenhill to be shot. Shad Ledue agrees, and Aras Dilley drags Greenhill outside. There are several gunshots and a terrible scream.

Jessup's worst fear comes to fruition: his decision to publish the editorial leads to the death of an innocent family member. In fact, Swan orders Fowler Greenhill executed not for any crime, but because he stands up for justice and honor in a courtroom that spurns both. By killing off Greenhill at this stage in the novel, Lewis again tries to shock his American readers out of their complacency by reminding them not to take their civil rights and free, democratic society for granted.

CHAPTER 20

In the novel's final epigraph from **Zero Hour**, Windrip writes that Jewish people are inherently cruel, while "Nordic" people are inherently kind. The chapter begins by explaining that after having Dr. Fowler Greenhill shot, Shad Ledue, Emil Staubmeyer, and Effingham Swan justify their decision by testifying that Greenhill's house was full of subversive literature (like Marx and Trowbridge). The government seizes all of Greenhill's property, so Mary and David have to move back to Doremus Jessup's house. Mary is overwhelmed with grief: she doesn't leave her room or speak at the dinner table. In contrast, nine-year-old David talks constantly, bothering everyone else, and Emma constantly worries, but about the wrong things: she thinks that Doremus going to jail reflects poorly on the family. (But Lorinda Pike was proud of him.)

Just like Hector Macgoblin after the murders of Willy Schmidt and the Rabbi Vincent de Verez, Swan and his cronies get away with murdering Fowler Greenhill by making up an excuse that plays into Windrip's agenda. Of course, it's no surprise that the new regime overlooks their extreme abuses of power—by doing so, it makes Windrip's own abuses of power seem more acceptable. Meanwhile, the Jessup family deals with the personal fallout of Fowler Greenhill's death. Needless to say, they are just one of the countless American families facing similar devastation under the new fascist regime. Thus, their experience offers a window into the widespread suffering that abandoning democracy could create in the U.S.

Surprisingly, work isn't too awful for Jessup. Emil Staubmeyer reveres Jessup and stupidly praises everything he does. Thus, Jessup never has to really apologize for his editorial, and he gets away with a technique he calls the "Yow-yow editorial." In the first part of an editorial, he gives a strong, well-written critique of the government. In the second part, he refutes that critique as badly as he can. He often considers quitting his job, but he has to support Emma, Sissy, Mary, and David. Still, he feels no different from a dishonest salesman who sells scam products to support his family. But fortunately, Jessup won't accept dishonesty forever.

Jessup intentionally becomes a terrible propagandist: he takes advantage of Staubmeyer's incompetence in order to keep publishing editorials that reflect his actual liberal values. This shows how authoritarianism's tendency to value loyalty over competence can backfire. Specifically, it leads to mismanagement and dysfunction, which leaves the government open to legitimate criticism and often alienates the public. Over time, these failures can plant the seeds of a resistance movement. After all, Lewis clearly believes that people will always exchange ideas and rally around the best ones, even if oppressive governments try to restrict this exchange as much as possible.

Jessup knows that he could escape to Canada with $20,000, and that his family could probably survive on just $1,000 a year. But he doesn't know what he would do in Canada, and he knows that Emma would hate living in poverty. So, like people everywhere living under tyranny, Jessup continues weighing whether to stay or go. When he mentions quitting, Emil Staubmeyer and Shad Ledue remind him that his freedom is still conditional. He hates that Staubmeyer rewrites his prose to favor the government and has moved into his office.

Jessup imagines trading his affluent but deeply unpleasant life in the U.S. for an impoverished but free and purposeful life in Canada. He recognizes that his own values sharply conflict with Emma's: while she just wants to live comfortably, he wants to publish freely and contribute to the resistance against Windrip. In fact, this is the same conflict that resurfaces over and over again throughout the book: most people care primarily about their own status, wealth, and safety, while a noble minority cares far more about the state of society as a whole.

Jessup's only solace is meeting with Lorinda Pike, who has started organizing young women through cooking classes and preparing them for the revolution. Karl Pascal is also still organizing. He asks Jessup to join the Communist Party, but Jessup explains that he's a steadfast liberal intellectual who has no interest in supporting Russia and different interests from the working class.

Unlike Doremus Jessup, Lorinda Pike and Karl Pascal channel their anti-fascist sentiments into actual political activities. Yet Jessup decides not to join them because he doesn't share their perspective or political goals. They want to create a different kind of authoritarian utopia, while he wants a return to democracy.

Meanwhile, Father Perefixe decides to return home to Canada, and the formerly pro-Windrip miller Medary Cole gets fed up with the Minute Men. One day in October, the Corpos send 70,000 Minute Men to capture "every known or faintly suspected criminal in the country." After swift military trials, they are variously executed, imprisoned, released, or hired into the Minute Men. (Medary Cole cheers this policy.)

The mass arrests are clearly a sham designed to win support from gullible law-and-order types like Medary Cole. In fact, Cole's quick about-face again reflects Lewis's belief that fascists can easily use lies and propaganda to fool a majority of people into supporting truly abominable policies. The novel doesn't depict the widespread trauma and suffering that these arrests are sure to inflict on the "suspected criminal[s]" and their families, but readers need only remember Fowler Greenhill's execution to understand it for themselves.

Next, the government overhauls the education system, closing independent universities and forming new Corpo ones, starting with Windrip University in New York and Macgoblin University in Chicago. These new universities teach an "entirely practical and modern" curriculum, with no "intellectualism" or "tradition" involved. Macgoblin directs a team of scholars to develop this curriculum. They replace history with a course on the superiority of Anglo-Saxon civilization, literature with recent newspaper clippings and political speeches, and science with courses on practical issues like mining, canning, and band music. Sports and military drills become the core of the new curriculum, which only takes two years to complete. When Doremus Jessup learns about the new curriculum, he remembers that Isaiah College has been shut down, and that Victor Loveland is now teaching in a Corpo labor camp.

In the universities, as in the media, the fascist government replaces critical thought with rigid propaganda. Before, universities taught citizens to think independently about themselves and society, while the news served to help them make wise, informed collective decisions. But now, universities and the media have abandoned these high-minded goals—they merely push for the government's agenda and chosen narrative. Put differently, rather than fostering free thought and helping people explore multiple perspectives on the world, they now function to suppress free thought by telling people exactly what to believe. Needless to say, both Lewis and his protagonist Doremus Jessup see this as a tragic loss and view freedom of thought, education, and expression as one of liberal democracy's greatest advantages.

CHAPTER 21

One November morning, Doremus Jessup decides not to go into the office. He finds no real news in the papers from Boston and New York, and he tries and fails to read a popular new romance novel. He listens to Emma and Mrs. Candy discuss chicken pie recipes instead. Sissy comes home and declares that she's quitting high school rather than pledge allegiance to the Corpos and Minute Men every morning. Julian Falck comes, too, and explains that the Corpos are shutting down Amherst College. He's looking for a job, but the Minute Men and labor camps seem to be his only options. Sissy proposes selling the wooden beams from old barns to interior decorators.

On this morning, Doremus Jessup grows distressed because he feels like he's the only one who truly recognizes the urgent, tragic realities of the new fascist government. The newspapers have been censored, the romance novel is about fantasy rather than reality, and Emma and Mrs. Candy simply don't seem to care what Windrip is doing. Jessup's surroundings show him how easy it would be to forget about Windrip's crimes—and thus also how imperative it is to remember them. Fortunately, Sissy and Julian Falck share Jessup's concerns because the government is also crushing their dreams.

Doremus, Sissy, and Julian Falck rush off to ask Lorinda Pike about their new business idea. At the Tavern, Pike offers them doughnuts and takes them to the pantry, where they discuss Sissy's plan. It won't work, Lorinda Pike concludes, because all of the construction jobs now go to companies that support the government. Back outside in the car, Sissy and Julian discuss their plans for marriage and children. Fortunately, Doremus finds Julian a job as a driver and assistant for Fowler Greenhill's old partner, Dr. Marcus Olmsted. Julian quickly decides that he wants to become a doctor, too.

The savvy Lorinda Pike points out that it's now impossible to succeed in business without directly pandering to Windrip's government. Of course, this is by design: Windrip and the Corpos have seized total control of the economy, so that they can turn any industry they like into a profitable scheme for themselves. Julian Falck finds a fitting job, but he and Sissy cannot pursue their goals because they have no security about the future. They have lost "the privilege of planning" that Jessup described in Chapter XIII.

CHAPTER 22

Berzelius Windrip celebrates his birthday, December 10, by outlawing all opposition to the government. The punishment will be execution or imprisonment in the regime's new concentration camps. John Sullivan Reek and Shad Ledue open a concentration camp at Trianon, an old girls' school near Fort Beulah.

Windrip's new policy is a monumental step toward further repression and violence. But it probably won't surprise most readers, because it's just a way to formalize the protocol that Windrip's regime already follows. Lewis's message is clear: from repression and propaganda to concentration camps and mass murder, all of fascism's most abhorrent crimes can also "happen here" in the U.S.

Doremus Jessup learns that all around the country, people are rebelling against the Minute Men—and then being captured and executed, left and right. Americans everywhere are watching what they say and even start using code names for Windrip and Sarason. There is a "nameless and omnipresent" sense of fear. More and more well-known public figures—including several well-known journalists—have gotten arrested for opposing the government.

As tensions rise, Jessup still wonders if he can do more to help fight Windrip. Yet he knows that he's already under close surveillance, that he will be killed if he joins the resistance, and that disorganized rebellions are unlikely to overthrow the government. In fact, by showing the government crush these rebellions, Lewis presents the reader with a series of key political questions: what kind of popular movement would it take to stop a fascist government? How large should it be, how should it be organized, and what should it believe in?

The government is also burning subversive books. Dewey Haik elects Effingham Swan and Owen J. Peaseley to set the list for the Northeastern Province. They ban idealistic writers like Thoreau and Emerson, plus "atheistic foreigners" like Wells and Tolstoy. One night, Shad Ledue visits the Jessups to check their books, but Doremus has already hidden his subversive ones, and Ledue doesn't find them. Instead, he confiscates Jessup's father's beloved 34-volume Dickens box set. Later, Doremus attends the book burning with the Rev. Mr. Falck. Karl Pascal turns up and demands his books back, and Shad Ledue sends Pascal to the Trianon concentration camp. He's the second Fort Beulah resident to go, after an electrician who has already died and been forgotten. There is almost no dissent left in the U.S.

The fascist crackdown continues—and it's brutally effective at suppressing dissent. With book-burning and concentration camps across the country, the U.S. has become all but unrecognizable in less than a year. Even for a committed democrat like Doremus Jessup, resisting the government looks less and less worthwhile. Thus, even though Lewis suggests that people will always resist tyranny and fight for democracy no matter how dire the situation, he also shows that the situation can become extremely dire. After all, fascists can use the powers of the state to consistently win this fight and crush democracy activists. In fact, as Shad Ledue's behavior shows, fascists can use the power of the state to attack pretty much whomever they want, for any reason they can imagine.

CHAPTER 23

The Minute Men go through all of Doremus Jessup's private letters in his study and the **Informer** office. Emil Staubmeyer starts ignoring him, and Shad Ledue starts questioning him about his connections to Walt Trowbridge. Jessup realizes that he's probably going to Trianon soon. The local fruit vendor and a homeless man also approach him to ask strange questions. One day, Buck Titus calls him and asks to meet with his whole family, plus Lorinda Pike and Julian Falck.

Like everyone else living under Windrip's administration, Doremus Jessup knows that his freedom depends entirely on the arbitrary decisions of a few cruel, unqualified officials like Shad Ledue. Since Ledue already hates him, all of his interactions take on extraordinarily high stakes: if a Minute Man or government spy catches him, a single error could cost him his life.

Everyone is anxious at the meeting. Sure enough, Buck Titus reports that the government is arresting editors, and Jessup is next. The whole family has to leave for Canada tomorrow. Titus will help liquidate Jessup's investments and drive everyone across the border with his fake Canadian plates.

Jessup has long dreaded this moment—but he's extremely fortunate to have Buck Titus warn him and help plan his escape. Jessup and Titus's friendship shows that trust and solidarity are crucial to surviving dictatorship. After all, tyrants can only remain in power so long as they isolate and terrorize the people who live under them.

Jessup protests that he hasn't done anything wrong and doesn't want to leave his country, which he has a duty to help. But Titus declares that he'll get killed anyway. Mrs. Candy says that he should think about how the women in his family will feel if he gets killed, and Lorinda Pike insists that they can all do more to help the U.S. from Canada. Sissy reveals that Shad Ledue has asked her out, and that she's frightened of him. Jessup finally agrees to go to Canada, but he's secretly planning to return to the U.S. as soon as his family is safe across the border.

Like so many other anti-fascist intellectuals throughout history, Jessup realizes that he may have no choice but to go into exile. He feels that escaping to Canada would mean giving up on the fight against fascism and abandoning his fellow Americans. Yet he also realizes that his whole family is under threat, and he concludes that he will feel more comfortable dedicating his life to the resistance if his family is safe in Canada.

Jessup spends all of the next morning at the office, but he takes a long lunch break and rushes home to pack with the family. He brings clothes, a book, and all the money he can withdraw, while the rest of the family brings trifles like lingerie, photo albums, and toys. He anxiously says goodbye to Lorinda Pike in the bathroom and admits that he's planning to return. Buck Titus packs Doremus, Emma, Sissy, Mary, David, and Foolish the dog into his car. Julian Falck says goodbye to Sissy—he wishes he could go, too—and Mrs. Candy gives them a coconut cake.

After living in Fort Beulah for generations, the Jessup family has to leave their hometowns on extremely short notice. For their whole lives, the U.S. has been politically stable, and they have been free to live their lives with little interruption. But the state of the country has changed radically in less than a year, and the Jessups are no longer safe. They barely even have the chance to bid their beloved friends and community goodbye. And they begin their daring escape, unsure when—or if—they will ever return.

The Jessup family departs, and Buck Titus drives them north, up perilous, icy backroads toward the border. He's an expert driver—for instance, when the windshield freezes over, he just sticks his head out the window and continues. Doremus Jessup is overwhelmed with fear, and he tries and fails to cheer up his family. After several hours, the car gets stuck in a snowdrift. Sissy, Buck, and Doremus struggle to get it moving again, while Emma makes coffee in an abandoned shack. Everyone drinks it with Mrs. Candy's cake. The car gets moving again, and the family continues on their way.

Buck Titus singlehandedly makes it possible for the Jessup family to escape—clearly, they wouldn't have been able to make this treacherous drive without him. Thus, Lewis again emphasizes how, under tyranny, social networks are the foundation of effective political resistance and, often, the key to survival. Readers already know what is happening to the numerous dissidents who never get the opportunity to escape: the government executes and imprisons all of them.

Buck Titus takes them down an abandoned trail through the woods to the border, but a searchlight catches them, and two Minute Men walk down a hill to the car. Buck Titus shows the guards his Canadian license, and Doremus Jessup feels like he's a slave escaping to the north on the Underground Railroad. The guards say that the car can't pass the border until the Battalion Leader comes to check on them in several hours. So, the Jessups try several other border posts—but get rejected at all of them. They turn around and drive home.

Doremus Jessup wanted an easy resolution to his dilemma, having hoped to bring his family to safety in Canada while dedicating his own life to fighting Windrip's regime. But now, after their failed escape attempt, the Jessups will return to an uncertain future back in Fort Beulah. And Doremus must face the grim reality that if he chooses to resist the government, he will inevitably endanger his family. In other words, acting in the nation's best interests will mean failing to act in his and his family's best interests.

CHAPTER 24

Back in Fort Beulah, Jessup worries that Emil Staubmeyer and Shad Ledue will find out about his escape attempt. He finds it more and more frustrating to write in favor of the administration, and he starts to lose hope. But one weekend, Philip calls to say he's visiting from Worcester. This instantly raises Jessup's spirits. But when Philip arrives, he seems too polite and formal. He wonders about Fowler Greenhill's death, since he respects Judge Swan's "wonderful reputation," and that night, he admits that he's visiting because of his father's problems with the government.

Philip Jessup's dogged faith in the new administration shows how status, wealth, and education by no means protect people from falling for Windrip's populist propaganda. In fact, it's just the opposite: because Philip belongs to the nation's legal elite and knows prominent men like Judge Swan, he views the government as legitimate and respectable. Ultimately, Philip serves as a character foil for his father: both struggle to balance their commitments to family and country—they just disagree about which side has the nation's best interests at heart.

Philip asks if Doremus is really against the Corpos—yes, he is. Even though he didn't vote for Windrip, Philip now loves and respects the administration. Doremus points out that the same administration murdered Fowler Greenhill, and Philip replies that the administration's noble ends justify its violent means. Doremus angrily declares that the government is just talking about noble ends as an excuse, and that Philip sounds exactly like the communists who try to justify the Bolsheviks' atrocities. Philip says that he's no communist, and he declares that Windrip has stopped communists from invading the country (which is a government propaganda line).

Philip and Doremus's argument hinges on a more basic disagreement about how much power the government should have: Doremus believes that it should be limited, while Philip believes that it should be able to do anything it wants to achieve its goals. In turn, this disagreement depends on a fundamental difference in trust. *Philip thinks that politicians like Windrip are honest and really want to achieve their campaign promises, while Doremus recognizes them as liars and their promises as propaganda. Specifically, Doremus sees that populist authoritarians like Windrip demand more legal powers (such as the power to overrule Congress) by claiming that these powers are necessary to pass broadly popular laws (like the universal $5,000 basic income). After convincing the public to grant them these extraordinary powers, populists then use those powers not to enact the policies they promised, but rather to enrich themselves and their allies.*

Philip also celebrates Windrip for ending unemployment and stopping crime, and especially for spiritually "revitaliz[ing] the whole country" through military discipline. He declares that, like Europe, the U.S. is finally overcoming liberal democracy and "selfish individualism" to create a system really run by the people. He thinks that the U.S. should start expanding into Mexico and Central America, and that Doremus should start supporting the Corpos if he wants to avoid the "mighty serious trouble" that he's headed for. In fact, Philip reveals that he's now joining the Corpos as an assistant military judge. Doremus calls him a "traitor" and "stuffed shirt," then kicks him out of the house.

Philip makes the connection between Windrip's government and the powerful fascist movements in Europe more explicit than ever before. Despite the U.S.'s differences from Europe, Sinclair Lewis suggests, it still has all the core risk factors for fascism: a deeply conformist culture, an extreme reverence for the military, and a widespread belief in the nation's destiny to expand through conquest. Finally, Philip also reveals that he's joining the government, leaving the reader to wonder whether he truly believes in any of what he has said, or if he's just repeating what the government requires him to say to keep his new job.

CHAPTER 25

Christmas at the Jessup household is full of fear and mourning. The day before, Shad Ledue comes to the house and asks about Doremus Jessup's connections to Karl Pascal. Mary calls Ledue a murderer and threatens to kill him. Louis Rotenstern and Buck Titus come over to spend Christmas with the Jessups, but Aras Dilley visits after dinner and drags Rotenstern away for questioning. The next day, Jessup learns that the Corpos have sent Rotenstern and the hardware seller Raymond Pridewell to Trianon. Jessup realizes that he's next, and he decides that he should quit the **Informer** before he gets arrested.

Fascism even ruins Christmas: the Jessups spend the holidays full of worry, because they know that their very survival is on the line. But when Doremus Jessup realizes that he's probably going to the camps no matter what, his fear actually fades away. Mary has undergone a similar shift, fearlessly criticizing the government because, with her husband already dead, she feels that she has nothing left to lose. Put differently, the more desperate a tyrannical government makes its citizens, the more likely those citizens are to fight back.

Professor Victor Loveland has returned from the labor camp to work as a quarry clerk. He tutors the jeweler Clarence Little, who always wanted to learn Greek but couldn't afford to go to college. But when a plainclothes Minute Men officer overhears them complaining about how hard life has become under Windrip, he drags them to the courthouse to be tortured, then sends them to the Trianon concentration camp. Lorinda Pike helps Mrs. Loveland and her children get back on their feet. Meanwhile, the county gives several poor, loyal farming families land on Mount Terror and moves them into Henry Veeder's house. Veeder complains, so he ends up in the camp, too.

Because Windrip gives every Minute Man the absolute and arbitrary power to send others to their death, people like Loveland, Little, and Veeder can be imprisoned simply for saying the wrong thing or crossing the wrong person. As a result, they cherish their scarce freedoms. Indeed, Loveland and Little's tutoring sessions prove that people can still salvage meaningful lives under tyranny—even if their imprisonment shows that this opportunity is never guaranteed, as it can be under a liberal democracy.

Doremus Jessup marches into Shad Ledue's office to quit the **Informer**, but Ledue doesn't let him. In fact, Ledue says that the only reason he hasn't sent Jessup to Trianon is that he loves seeing Jessup work as Staubmeyer's lackey, especially since *he* was Jessup's hired man for so many years. So, Jessup drives to Hanover and personally tells the "pale and hesitant and frightened" Commissioner Reek that he wants to quit. Reek agrees—he even offers to hire Jessup on the newspaper he owns. Jessup wonders if Reek is turning against the Corpos, or just afraid of losing his job. Nevertheless, after 37 years at the *Informer*, Jessup officially quits.

Shad Ledue foils Jessup's plans just because he can—he even admits that his decisions are driven by personal grudges and loyalties, and not by any ideology or clear political goals. Meanwhile, Reek's distress shows how a bureaucracy built on this kind of arbitrary power inevitably backfires: Reek is clearly worried about what will happen if other officials turn against him. This shows that even the Minute Men and Corpos face the same terror and uncertainty as ordinary people like Doremus Jessup, because they know that their colleagues in the government have strong incentives to betray them.

A few days into retirement, Doremus Jessup hatches a plan. But he only tells Julian Falck, since it will involve some "high treason." He wants to contact the communists—even though he disagrees with their ideology, they're the boldest resisters around. Falck agrees to talk with Karl Pascal next time he visits Trianon with Dr. Olmsted. Two days later, Falck tells Jessup about the concentration camp. It stinks of human excrement and is full of defeated men, who live six to a 12-foot by 10-foot cell. Karl Pascal, who has a huge scar on his face, passed along the name of a man in Hartford. Henry Veeder doesn't recognize anyone, and he twitches and jumps whenever there's an unexpected sound.

After passively disagreeing with the government for a year, Jessup finally decides to dedicate his life to the active resistance against it. He tries to contact the only organization he knows that shares his strong opposition to Windrip. He hopes that he will be able to contribute to their effort, even if he doesn't share their ultimate goal of building a communist society. Meanwhile, Julian Falck's description of the concentration camp shows what awaits Jessup if Shad Ledue finally decides to come after him. Again, Lewis describes these deplorable conditions in order to remind his readers that fascism's worst atrocities can happen in the U.S.

The man in Hartford sends Jessup to New Hampshire, Boston, and then finally the Eastern headquarters of the Communist Party, which is in a nondescript Connecticut farmhouse. An old woman opens the door, and when he says he's visiting Ailey, Bailey, and Cailey, she lets him in. He sits and reads a dictionary while he waits. Bill Atterbury, a famous union leader and the current Party secretary introduces himself as Mr. Ailey. In a back room, Jessup also meets the Russian who calls himself Mr. Bailey and Joe Elphrey, the millionaire economist and banker's son who calls himself Mr. Cailey. They ask if Jessup would be willing to follow difficult orders, but when Jessup starts to explain that he has different goals and mentions Walt Trowbridge's name, the men get angry at him, so he leaves.

Jessup tries and fails to dedicate his life to the resistance. The communists are so orthodox and intolerant that they refuse to engage with anyone who doesn't share their views—even though they clearly need the help. By mocking these stuffy, impractical communists, Lewis suggests that activists should focus on immediate policy objectives (like stopping fascism) rather than long-term political ideals (like the right type of communist utopia to build once the revolution is over). While Jessup is forced to look elsewhere for his new political movement, he also sees that the communists probably wouldn't have accomplished much, anyway.

Doremus Jessup hates retirement. He can't stand wandering around the Fort Beulah shops, pretending to enjoy golf, or spending all day at home, which bothers Emma. (She even encourages him to go visit Buck Titus and Lorinda Pike.) Once, Jessup visits the **Informer** offices, and he sees that Doc Itchitt has effectively taken over the paper. Otherwise, Jessup just waits for something to change.

Jessup's idleness and anxiety in retirement resembles his emotional state at the beginning of the novel, before the election. Just like in that period, when he felt sick about Windrip's rise, he again feels like the world is collapsing around him, but he's powerless to stop it. And unlike Emma, he cannot bear to simply look the other way.

In February, a man who claims to be an Albany insurance salesman named Mr. Dimick starts to follow Jessup around, day after day. One night, he visits Jessup's house, explains that he's from Trowbridge's New Underground, and tells Jessup to call the paper salesman Mr. Samson if he wants to join. Jessup calls Samson immediately and signs up.

At long last, Jessup gets the chance to join a large, well-organized movement and dedicate his life to fighting fascism. So far, he has tried to operate alone, but he long ago recognized that one-off newspaper editorials will do little to shift public opinion against Windrip unless they're part of a coordinated national campaign. The New Underground is this campaign: it has the resources to seriously challenge Windrip's claim to power.

CHAPTER 26

After the **Informer** finishes printing at 11 p.m., Dan Wilgus hides several pieces of eight-point movable type from the storeroom in his jacket. On his way out of the office, he meets Doc Itchitt. They complain about Doremus Jessup's politics, trade a Minute Men salute, and say good night. Outside, Wilgus leaves the type in a bucket in an old car, and the drunk farmer Pete Vutong drives the car to Buck Titus's house and empties the bucket into a ditch. The next morning, Titus retrieves the type, and that night, Wilgus uses it to print an anti-government article by "Spartan"—or Doremus Jessup—in Titus's basement. This is how the New Underground operates in Fort Beulah, now that the Corpos have banned all unlicensed printing.

Doremus Jessup quits his job as a government propagandist to become an anti-government propagandist for the New Underground instead. He uses the same tools and skills as before—he just publishes the truth about the administration, instead of the government's official positions. His transformation again shows how the media's effect on society depends entirely on who controls it and whether it can operate freely. Indeed, the New Underground focuses on publishing uncensored news because it recognizes that Americans will never turn against Windrip until they learn the truth about his administration's crimes.


Dan Wilgus has joined the New Underground less out of opposition to the government than out of frustration about Doc Itchitt taking over the **Informer**. The Fort Beulah cell is headquartered in Buck Titus's basement, and it has about two dozen members, including Doremus Jessup, Buck Titus, Dan Wilgus, Lorinda Pike, Julian Falck, Dr. Marcus Olmsted, John Pollikop, Father Perefixe, Henry Veeder's wife, Harry Kindermann, Mungo Kitterick, and Pete Vutong. Every week, representatives from the broader New Underground contact Jessup, who is busy running the press. Lorinda Pike sets the type, and Emma, Sissy, and Mary help bind pamphlets.

The New Underground not only allows Jessup and his fellow dissidents to publish the truth—it also gives them the sense of community, trust, and purpose that they need to survive under the Windrip regime. The government has harmed all of its members in some way, and they are banding together to seek justice. In contrast, most Americans have grown paranoid and withdrawn under the new government because they know that nearly any misstep could land them in the concentration camps.


The Fort Beulah New Underground publishes pamphlets by Jessup ("Spartan") and Pike ("Anthony B. Susan"), in addition to *Vermont Vigilance*, which compiles banned news from other New Underground sects and overseas papers. Jessup quickly learns about the government's unspeakable atrocities all over the country. For instance, Windrip shot two of his personal bodyguards, the entire congregation of a synagogue was murdered with gas, and a New Underground messenger was dropped in a well and forgotten. John Pollikop worries that such atrocities will continue, even if Trowbridge takes over. (Jessup replies by calling Pollikop a communist.)

When he worked at the Informer, *Doremus Jessup often felt that the more newspapers he read, the less he knew about what was actually happening all around him. But now, while working for the New Underground, he confirms all of his worst fears about the government. Jessup now clearly sees why the government wants to censor the news: the public will turn against Windrip if it finds out about his crimes. Thus, merely publishing the truth is one of the most powerful steps that anyone can take to stop fascism.*

Jessup struggles to translate the German news into English—it's very pro-Windrip, and the language is extremely difficult. He also publishes some articles about labor issues from the communists' otherwise useless *New Masses*. He receives dozens of other publications, hidden in tissues, catalogues, cigarette cartons, and more. And he feels like he's at the forefront of history, even though he has to spend his days pretending to be a bored retiree. He occasionally finds time to read in his study, too.

Jessup's job is to read global news—both credible and not—and then republish articles that are relevant to the struggle against Windrip. For instance, the German news will help his readers understand how Windrip is cooperating with other fascist regimes around the world, while the few useful articles from the New Masses *will show them how Windrip's policies are affecting ordinary people. This job fits Jessup's political leanings very well because, rather than following one overarching, utopian ideology, he believes in combining many different perspectives to address real political problems.*

The unassuming fishmonger Whit Bibby helps distribute the New Underground pamphlets by taking them to Truman Webb's farmhouse. Julian Falck and Dr. Olmsted also shelter refugees headed for the border in Webb's house—where Webb's grandfather also sheltered escaping slaves back in the 1850s. Buck Titus and John Pollikop scatter pamphlets all over Frank Tasbrough's quarry, so the workers can retrieve them. Finally, Sissy Jessup and Mrs. Candy's cousin get evidence on the granite scam that Tasbrough, Shad Ledue, and Commissioner Reek are running together.

While Jessup takes care of national and international news, the other members of the New Underground try to win over local people in Fort Beulah by investigating issues that are relevant to them. It's little surprise that Ledue, Reek, and Tasbrough are using their power to rig the system and enrich themselves—after all, this is the entire purpose of Windrip's government. Finally, Lewis once again connects the New Underground to the Underground Railroad in order to suggest that the struggle against fascism is part of the long American tradition of seeking freedom by resisting tyranny and oppression.

CHAPTER 27

Of everyone in the Fort Beulah New Underground, Mary Greenhill is the most determined and extreme. For instance, she and Buck Titus boldly distribute crumpled-up pamphlets around Burlington, and she hides leaflets inside drugstore magazines. Meanwhile, Lorinda Pike quits working at the Tavern and becomes Buck Titus's live-in housekeeper instead, so that she can dedicate more time to the cause. This also gives her and Doremus Jessup time and space to carry on their affair—while neither of them believes in monogamy or worries about Emma, they prefer not to sneak around. Jessup finds Pike more attractive than ever, and he doesn't mind running errands around town for her.

The New Underground's most dedicated activists are women who fly under the radar by taking advantage of misogynistic stereotypes. Mary Jessup and Lorinda Pike both know that the government will presume them to be innocent and powerless, so they can organize for the New Underground in plain sight. Meanwhile, Doremus Jessup and Lorinda Pike do the opposite, using their New Underground activities as cover for their affair. It's clear that they've never felt freer: even if they're now living under a horrific dictatorship, they're no longer holding back on politics or love out of fear.

One morning, Doremus Jessup lays next to Lorinda Pike in bed and fantasizes about the fabulous life of adventure and revolution they will lead together. Pike asks for a cigarette, then admits that she wants to cut off their affair—she thinks they should be dedicating more energy to the New Underground and less to each other. In fact, Mr. Dimick has formally asked her to open a new cell up at Beecher Falls, by the Canadian border. But Jessup knows that this was really her idea. She admits that she can't love him until the world is free from its chains. She asks for a final kiss, because she will be leaving for Beecher Falls later today.

Jessup and Pike disagree about whether their relationship helps or hurts their activism. While Jessup becomes attached to the idea of a rebellious romance, Pike worries that they might be selfishly allowing their romance to eclipse their rebellion. She feels guilty for continuing to indulge her own freedom while so many Americans suffer under Windrip's tyranny, so she decides to choose politics over love. Ultimately, she and Jessup both recognize that this sacrifice is necessary for the sake of their cause.

CHAPTER 28

The data that Sissy Jessup found in Shad Ledue's notebook helps the New Underground piece together the Corpos' graft scheme. But in April, Julian Falck tells Sissy that he wishes she would stop spending time with Shad Ledue and Emil Staubmeyer. Sissy reminds Falck that Ledue keeps giving her valuable information. Falck warns that Ledue could rape her, but Sissy says that this would be a small price to pay to save people from the Corpos.

Sissy Jessup is willing to take great personal risks to help stop the Windrip government's abuses. With her connections to the New Underground and proximity to Shad Ledue, she has a unique opportunity to take down the local Corpo administration, and she refuses to squander it. Unlike the majority of Americans, who cope with the new regime by ignoring other people and focusing on their own safety, Sissy decides that saving others is more important than protecting herself.

At dinner that night, Shad Ledue dresses like a caricatured "City Villain," and Emil Staubmeyer's date is an aging widow who wears too much makeup. The couples drink cocktails and eat bland sandwiches in Ledue's opulent but boring hotel suite, and then Staubmeyer and his date leave. Ledue asks Sissy for a kiss. Even though it makes her sick, she pretends to be as innocent and coy as she can. She thinks about how all the men she has dated—except Julian Falck—have tried to seduce her in exactly the same way but all still believe in their own unique prowess.

By highlighting Ledue and Staubmeyer's poor sense of style, Lewis suggests that they are impostors—ordinary, foolish men who have stumbled on power and money through no fault of their own. While they view themselves as elites who deserve their status, in reality, they only have power because they are both loyal to their higher-ups in the government and too incompetent to threaten them. In other words, Ledue and Staubmeyer's attitude shows how fascism hands power to the people least worthy of exercising it.

Ledue clumsily puts his hand on Sissy's knee and accuses her of still thinking of him as nothing more than her family's farm hand. She replies that she fondly remembers growing up with Ledue around (which is a lie). She also says that her father Doremus also used to work as a farm laborer (which she thinks is a lie, but is actually true). Ledue clumsily pulls Sissy toward him, but she says that he's manly enough to be gentle with her. He asks if she really likes Julian Falck—she says no, but starts fantasizing about working with Julian to help Ledue's next victim escape. She asks Ledue whom he's arresting next, but he suspects that she's trying to get information out of him. She says no—she just wants to watch him arrest someone. But he won't give her a name.

Ledue's grotesque, overconfident advances reflect his inflated ego and absurd sense of entitlement. Just like the millions of Americans who foolishly thought that Buzz Windrip would personally make them rich, Ledue foolishly thinks that he's the sexiest man in town, when he's really one of the most revolting. Specifically, he thinks that his government job has changed him, making him respectable and attractive. But in reality, his off-putting personality hasn't changed at all, and his government job only makes him far more *repugnant to the people living under his tyranny.*

Ledue maniacally grabs at Sissy's breasts, and she starts to yell in fear. She tells him that he wouldn't want to be with the kind of woman who has sex with a man right away. She stands up, sees Ledue's keys in his bedroom, and then asks to wash her face in the bathroom. Ledue agrees, and she goes into the bedroom, locks the door, and uses a pencil to make a rubbing of the keys. But it doesn't work, and Ledue starts banging on the door. She quickly powders her face, runs out to the salon, and tells Ledue that she has to leave. In the hallway, she meets Julian Falck. She's distraught because she feels like a terrible spy.

Sissy's worst fear nearly comes to pass: Ledue tries to assault her, and she knows that because of his position in the government, he will never face punishment for anything he does to her. Fortunately, the brutish Ledue still sincerely believes that Sissy is attracted to him, so he contains himself. In fact, he never even realizes that he has made Sissy uncomfortable, or that she clearly has ulterior motives for meeting with him. Thus, while she's by no means a very good spy, she gets away because Ledue is simply too oblivious to recognize what she's doing.

However, Sissy *does* convince Julian Falck to join the Minute Men and start collecting intelligence from the inside. They plan to stage a public breakup in order to convince the townspeople that Julian has switched sides—but when they meet to do it, Sissy is so frightened to see Julian in a Minute Men uniform that she yells and embraces him.

Sissy's experience inspires Julian to also become a spy. This shows one reason why resistance to tyranny is so much more effective when it's organized: activists can help one another become more effective by sharing tactics, information, and inspiration. Meanwhile, Sissy and Julian's fake public breakup is a comic inversion of her meeting with Ledue: with Ledue, she struggled to pretend to love a real Minute Man, but now, she struggles to express her real love for a fake Minute Man.

CHAPTER 29

The New Underground journalists and pamphleteers are talented, but unlike the Corpos, they're bound by facts. The Corpos hire many prominent former journalists, scholars, and public relations agents, and they tightly control most mainstream newspapers. There is less and less real news, but more and more comic strips, alarmist headlines, and polemic articles about the Corpos' economic success. Windrip and his inner circle tout their new programs on daily radio addresses, and new government-subsidized movies about heroic Minute Men flood Hollywood. The Windrip dictatorship may have seemed folksy and good-humored at first, but within a year, it is as brutal and terrifying as any in Europe. As Doremus Jessup reads the political theory he hid in his sofa, he starts to think that all dictatorships use exactly the same sadistic tactics, no matter their ideology.

Lewis depicts Doremus Jessup's political theory reading sessions in order to argue that tyranny really does *follow a distinct formula. Even though dictators always describe themselves as unique geniuses, in reality, they usually use the same predictable—and preventable—tactics. First, Lewis explains how authoritarians use censorship and patronage to manipulate the media to their advantage. They don't simply shut down the free press—instead, they pay off its workforce and gradually replace its content with propaganda in order to sustain the illusion that it's still free. Thus, it would be a mistake to imagine a fascist society as lacking information media—instead, it's just the opposite. Fascist regimes try to drown out the truth by setting up* too much *information media.*

Windrip's economic policies also follow the same pattern as other dictatorships: besides a few bankers, businessmen, and soldiers, everyone in the country gets far poorer. The government uses accounting tricks to make the economy look healthy, like increasing minimum wages that nobody is eligible to receive. Windrip increases funding for the Minute Men so massively that even loyal followers start to wonder why. The administration seizes farmers' land and crops to pay for it, and people across the country start to starve and lose hope.

Next, Lewis explains how dictators achieve their economic goals—enriching themselves and their allies—while using violence and deception to prevent the public from noticing or resisting their tactics. Windrip applies this strategy by identifying all parts of the economy that aren't under the government's control, then destroying them or incorporating them into the government through the Corpo boards. Once his administration has full control of the economy, he can distribute power and profit however he wishes, to further his own political goals. Notably, Windrip's famous $5,000-a-year promise is no longer even on the table—his voters must either forget or admit that they were duped.

The government starts taxing all leisure activities—which people stop attending anyway, because they're so afraid of the government's spies. Doremus Jessup, once the chattiest man in Fort Beulah, now avoids everybody except his New Underground colleagues. He envies the large, well-organized resistance movements working in Rome and Berlin—in contrast, Fort Beulah's tiny New Underground cell is drab and boring (especially now that Lorinda Pike is gone). Jessup feels like his shabby pamphlets can never defeat the well-organized Corpo propaganda machine. Besides, the world seems to have long given up on morality and justice.

Third, Lewis uses Jessup's day-to-day life to show how dictators maintain control over society by dividing and isolating the ordinary people who might resist them. By arbitrarily persecuting citizens, dictators spread fear and paranoia, which prevents people from organizing (or even hoping) for change. In fact, this strategy is so successful that it makes Jessup feel isolated and powerless, even though he knows that the New Underground is actually a well-organized nationwide movement, much like the ones fighting fascism in Italy and Germany.

In June, Francis Tasbrough calls up Doremus Jessup and passes on some confidential information: Windrip is replacing Secretary of War Osceola Luthorne with Provincial Commissioner Dewey Haik, who will be replaced by John Sullivan Reek. Tasbrough might be getting Reek's job as District Commissioner, and he wants Jessup's support. In fact, Tasbrough wants Jessup to officially join the Corpos and offers him control of the **Informer** (or a prominent government job) if he does. Jessup says no, and he tries to forget about the call.

Finally, Lewis uses Tasbrough's promotion to remind the reader that loyalty and self-interest are the most important currencies in a dictatorship. Tasbrough only supports Windrip because Windrip offers him power and money. And he doesn't realize that if he's willing to sabotage his rivals to secure power, then his rivals will also certainly be willing to sabotage him. Finally, his decision to ask for Jessup's support shows that he doesn't know the first thing about Jessup's actual beliefs—the reader already knows that unlike everyone in Windrip's government, Jessup isn't interested in betraying others for power and money.

CHAPTER 30

To Doremus Jessup's horror, the Corpos accuse an innocent local newspaperman of publishing the New Underground pamphlets and send him to the concentration camp. Emma Jessup doesn't understand why Doremus bothers to criticize the authorities, but she's glad that Lorinda Pike left town (since Pike's "wild crazy ideas" are a bad influence on Doremus). Still, Emma is annoyed at Doremus's irregular schedule, new working-class friends, and obsession with politics. Like her grandson David, Emma quite enjoys watching the Minute Men march through town.

Emma Jessup cares less about the imprisoned editor than about how Doremus's activism reflects on her reputation. She is aware of neither the New Underground's true purpose nor Doremus's affair with Lorinda Pike. In this sense, she represents the ordinary middle-class Americans who simply ignore things that don't affect their daily lives. Like fascism, this mindset puts style before substance—Emma thinks only about her own daily life, not about moral principles or anyone else's lives. Needless to say, Lewis viewed this small-mindedness as a dangerous trend in American life, because it encourages people not to recognize or fight for one another's rights.

Just as predicted, Dewey Haik takes over as Secretary of War, while Francis Tasbrough becomes the District Commissioner. However, the new Provincial Commissioner is not John Sullivan Reek, but rather Judge Effingham Swan. (Swan immediately—but courteously—arrests Reek and several assistant commissioners.)

Judge Swan's arrest spree shows how dangerous it can be to build a government around self-interest, corruption, and arbitrary, unlimited power. In such administrations, officials stand to gain by sabotaging one another and destabilizing the entire chain of command. In contrast, when officials are democratically elected or appointed based on merit, they have strong incentives to be competent and cooperative.

Meanwhile, the Corpos start earnestly pursuing the New Underground. Doremus Jessup notes a Corpo spy repeatedly striking up conversations with him, and he starts taking extra precautions whenever he visits Buck Titus. One day, he notices Shad Ledue following him on his route to Titus's house. When Dan Wilgus arrives, he reports that Aras Dilley was prowling around outside the house in disguise. Jessup, Wilgus, Titus, and Father Perefixe dismantle their secret printing press, and John Pollikop drives it to Truman Webb's house before dawn. The next day, Julian Falck invites Shad Ledue and Emil Staubmeyer over to play poker at Buck Titus's house—they look all over for pamphlets but can't find any evidence.

Jessup and his New Underground compatriots knew that this day would come, because their pamphlets threaten the government's effort to control all media in the U.S. And with the district government headquartered in Fort Beulah, it's no surprise that the Corpos catch onto them. Fortunately, it isn't difficult to notice the Corpos' spies or outsmart Shad Ledue and Emil Staubmeyer. Indeed, the poker scene again shows that fascism's greatest weakness is its tendency to prioritize loyalty over skill. This is why Windrip consistently hands power to incompetent people like Ledue and Staubmeyer.

Over the next several days, Doremus Jessup notices the same spy following him, and he tells Truman Webb to stop printing pamphlets for the time being. Jessup struggles to sleep, and for the first time in years, he yearns for Emma. On the Fourth of July, the Jessup family attends the Minute Men's grand parade. That evening, a huge car drives through the thunderstorm up to the family's porch. Five Minute Men jump out and enter the house. Their leader, an Ensign, smacks Jessup in the face and arrests him. They tear through his books and find a pamphlet that he has been writing, then drive him to the courthouse, where they stick him in the back of a truck with Buck Titus, Truman Webb, and Dan Wilgus.

Jessup's freedom finally runs out. It's significant that he gets arrested on the Fourth of July: this represents how Windrip has turned core American values on their head, all while claiming to keep them alive. For instance, Windrip's Minute Men parade is supposed to represent freedom and independence, even though the Minute Men are really a force of repression and terror. Unlike in a democracy, where suspects are presumed innocent and supposed to be treated humanely, in Windrip's U.S., Jessup is presumed guilty, and the Minute Men make a point of treating him as cruelly as possible when they arrest him.

The men are all in too much pain to really hold a conversation. After a three-hour ride, they get out at the old Dartmouth campus—the District Three central offices. Jessup remembers that Francis Tasbrough is the Commissioner now, and he briefly feels relieved. The Minute Men lead Jessup to an old classroom, where he immediately falls asleep on a stiff wooden bed. When he wakes up, the Minute Men hand him coffee and bread, then lead him outside and taunt him for being a newspaper editor. One of the Minute Men thinks it's funny to ask Jessup how he writes, bring over a piece of paper, and stick Jessup's nose in it.

Jessup knows that the Windrip government runs entirely on arbitrary decisions and personal favors, so he has good reason to hope that his relationship with Tasbrough will save him. Meanwhile, the Minute Men's strange, childish insults show how they're brainwashed to think of journalists and publishers as evil enemies of the state—even though the government also relies on them to spread its propaganda.

The Minute Men throw Jessup into a cell with several other prisoners, including Buck Titus, who has a deep gash on his forehead. For an hour, the cell's guard whips Jessup whenever he slouches. The Minute Men lead Buck Titus away, and Jessup hears him scream through the wall. Then, it's Jessup's turn. He expects to be meeting Frank Tasbrough, but instead, it's the Ensign who arrested him yesterday. The Ensign declares that Jessup is a communist and sentences him to "twenty-five lashes—and the oil."

It's little surprise that the Minute Men freely torture Jessup and the other prisoners. Without any democratic limit on their actions, they only answer to officials like Judge Swan—who are likely to demand more cruelty, not less. Meanwhile, Lewis uses the Ensign's accusation of communism to show how authoritarianism turns due process into a joke. The reader knows that Jessup hates communism, but the Ensign uses it as a justification for torturing him anyway. Truth, evidence, and testimony no longer matter in Windrip's legal system: charges and convictions are just formalities that the Minute Men must go through before they impose whatever punishments they want on whomever they want.

The Minute Men drag Jessup to a foul-smelling basement, pour castor oil down his throat, tear off his clothes, lay him face-down on a bloodstained table, and start to whip him with a metal rod. He falls unconscious, and when he wakes up, he's lying on the floor, covered in his own diarrhea (from the castor oil). For the next three nights, the Minute Men repeatedly wake him up, demand to know if he's a communist, and beat him when he says no. By day, the Ensign continues questioning him—he even declares that Buck Titus has confessed everything, but Jessup knows that this is a lie. During his half-hour exercise walks in the yard, Jessup sees Buck Titus and Dan Wilgus (whose nose is crushed, and who looks partially paralyzed). In the morning, the guards tell him that Wilgus has hanged himself.

Sinclair Lewis uses this brutal torture scene to warn his readers about what can happen when a society abandons liberal principles of due process and restraints on the use of force. It's also a direct reference to Fascist Italy, where castor oil was commonly used in torture and mob violence. The circumstances surrounding Dan Wilgus's death are intentionally unclear: Lewis lets the reader decide for themselves whether Wilgus really committed suicide, or whether the guards actually beat him to death. Either way, it's clear that his horrible mistreatment by the Minute Men is responsible for his death—and it's even clearer that none of them will face any consequences for it.

Then, Jessup goes to an old English classroom for his trial. The judge isn't Francis Tasbrough, but Effingham Swan—who is reading the pamphlet Jessup wrote, detailing his crimes. But Francis Tasbrough *is* present—he testifies that Jessup opposes the government because he's jealous about not receiving a political office. Shad Ledue testifies that Jessup tried to recruit him into a plot to assassinate Judge Swan. Ultimately, Swan sentences Jessup to a minimum of 17 years in the concentration camp, plus execution if he tries to escape—and 20 more lashes and more castor oil, effective immediately.

Jessup is in his sixties, so 17 years in the camps may amount to a life sentence. Of course, Judge Swan bases this sentence on his personal feud with Jessup and not on any solid evidence that Jessup broke the law. Tasbrough and Ledue's sham testimonies are neither fact-checked nor relevant to Swan's decision. Through this decision, Lewis again warns against concentrating so much power in one person's hands—which is precisely what fascism does by discarding the rule of law.

CHAPTER 31

The prison van takes Doremus Jessup to the Trianon concentration camp, which occupies the filthy, derelict buildings of an old girls' school nine miles from Fort Beulah. The camp superintendent, Captain Cowlick, is too mild-mannered to support torturing the inmates—but also too mild-mannered to stop the Minute Men from doing so. When Jessup first arrives, Cowlick lets him spend a month in the hospital, and the drunkard prison doctor even lets Dr. Olmsted visit him from Fort Beulah. Olmsted updates Jessup on his family and friends: Emma, Mary, and Sissy are safe at home, Lorinda Pike is still free, and Buck Titus is at a different camp. Julian Falck, now a Minute Men Squad-Leader, is still feeding information to the New Underground. And Olmsted is still distributing pamphlets and helping refugees escape to Canada.

The Trianon camp's leadership is just as dysfunctional as the rest of Windrip's bureaucracy. Cowlick may be responsible and humane, but he still does the administration's bidding by letting his guards act out their worst impulses. This shows how, under fascism, even though ordinary bureaucrats might not participate in or agree with atrocities, they're forced to tolerate them anyway. Fortunately, thanks to the regime's incompetence, most of the Fort Beulah New Underground is still free—and Doremus Jessup gets to keep coordinating with it. Even with the novel's protagonist in prison, then, the fight to save the U.S. from Windrip is still far from over.

After leaving the hospital, Doremus Jessup is lucky to be assigned to clean the camp (instead of having to chop trees on the sadistic Ensign Stoyt's chain gang with the other inmates, or suffer in solitary confinement or torture chambers). With this job, Jessup's longtime "bourgeois pride" starts to fade—although, to Karl Pascal's disappointment, he's still no communist. Cleaning also gives Jessup the opportunity to chat with the other prisoners—including two of his cellmates, Pascal and Henry Veeder, as well as Raymond Pridewell, Louis Rotenstern, Clarence Little, and Victor Loveland.

Jessup has spent his whole life writing, editing, and managing a newspaper. This is why janitorial work helps him overcome "bourgeois pride"—it reminds him about the dignity in ordinary manual labor. Of course, Jessup is still privileged to have this job, since the rest of the prisoners have to do backbreaking manual labor. Ironically, despite receiving this special treatment, Jessup is also the guiltiest of all the prisoners. For instance, Veeder, Pridewell, and Loveland are in Trianon for briefly complaining about the government, while only Jessup actually joined the effort to overthrow it. Thus, as horrific as Jessup's experience has been under the Windrip government, Lewis reminds the reader that many people still have it far worse.

Jessup shares his tiny cell with five other men. He gradually gets used to the stench and the indignity of his condition, but he never gets used to the waiting. He doesn't know if he'll get shot, be freed, or manage to escape. He and his cellmates constantly discuss escape plans, but they know that there are snitches everywhere. For instance, Clarence Little reports Henry Veeder's escape plan and gets released as a reward. Emma, Mary, Sissy, David, and even Philip (who's now a judge for the Corpos) all visit Jessup, but under the Minute Men's supervision, they can't say anything interesting. Jessup also receives plenty of useless, censored letters. He starts to wonder if freedom would even be worth it.

Life at Trianon is miserable, but in this passage, Lewis emphasizes several ways in which it's no different from ordinary life under the Windrip administration. For instance, Jessup is unable to plan anything, feels a constant sense of anticipation and foreboding, and can't find accurate information about the government—just like when he was editing the Informer *and settling into retirement in the outside world. Thus, the concentration camp is only an intensified version of the fascist world outside—which is why Jessup starts to wonder if life would even be worth living if he managed to escape.*

Karl Pascal becomes Jessup's closest friend and confidant in the camps. Most communists get shot immediately, but Pascal knows all of the guards' dirty secrets, so they actually treat him well and bring him gifts. When Aras Dilley gets transferred to Trianon, even *he* starts bowing down to Karl Pascal.

Pascal knows how to fight the Minute Men on their own terms: he understands that might makes right under fascism, so he protects himself from the guards' abuses by becoming a serious threat to their own safety.

On one September morning, Jessup watches Ensign Stoyt and the firing squad march Henry Veeder out of the quad. He hears gunshots, then sees them return with Veeder's body. Worse still, Julian Falck and his grandfather, the Rev. Mr. Falck, arrive at Trianon. The guards repeatedly torture Julian, the first Minute Men spy captured in the area. Jessup worries that, with Julian gone, Shad Ledue will finally rape Sissy.

In the camps, the government metes out the most serious punishments to the least serious offenders. Jessup's cousin Henry Veeder gets executed for the minor crime of complaining about the government stealing his house. His death, like Fowler Greenhill's, offers a dire warning about fascism's potential to invert the basic tenets of politics, turning the government into a tool for spreading senseless cruelty and unspeakable violence. Julian Falck also pays a serious price for daring to oppose the government—but the government tortures him instead of murdering him, because he has important information about the New Underground.

By the end of September, Doremus Jessup starts to recover from all the beatings—but then Ensign Stoyt conveniently drags him out of bed in the middle of the night, beats him, and takes him to Captain Cowlick's office. Cowlick offers to give Jessup a clean bedroom and preferential treatment if he reports on Julian Falck's "subversive activities." Jessup refuses, so Ensign Stoyt drags the Rev. Mr. Falck into the room and declares that he has snitched on Jessup. But Falck denies it, so Stoyt knocks him to the floor and kicks him while he prays to God for vengeance.

The guards want to turn Jessup against his New Underground comrades, so they give him special treatment. Sometimes, they're unusually humane, so that he knows what he stands to gain if he gives away his comrades; other times, they're exceptionally cruel, to show him the consequences if he doesn't. Yet this is far from the first time that Jessup has had to choose between his own self-interest and the common good. And not even Trianon can compromise his staunch commitment to the latter principle.

The novel quotes a long excerpt from a Parisian literature professor's article about visiting the U.S. The professor adores the Minute Men's dynamic parades, and when he visits a government labor camp, all the workers assure him (through a translator) that they are happy to be there and well-fed. Hector Macgoblin tells the professor that there are no "concentration camps," just re-education schools to free unfortunate souls who have been brainwashed by liberalism. The professor concludes that France and Great Britain should give up parliamentary democracy and embrace "the all-powerful Totalitarian State."

This ironic interlude serves to once again underscore propaganda's power. The professor understands none of the horrors that the reader has seen, because his only source for information about the Windrip administration is the administration itself. When he reports his findings to people across the world, they will develop an equally unrealistic vision of the administration. Indeed, when he encourages France and Great Britain to embrace Windrip's model, this also shows how tyranny can spread across borders, as fascists learn from their successful counterparts in other countries. Of course, this is indirectly Lewis's way of warning his American readers against idealizing Italy and Germany, which at the time of the book's publication (1935) were projecting an idealized image to the outside world by using the same kind of extreme censorship tactics as Windrip.

The next month, John Pollikop gets arrested and dragged to Trianon. He and Karl Pascal instantly start bickering about socialism and communism—and Doremus Jessup feels relieved. Meanwhile, Shad Ledue is angry. The administration refuses to promote him, despite his amazing skill at arresting traitors, and all of his old friends are afraid of him now. He wants Sissy Jessup—she has stopped visiting, but he'll do anything to have her.

In Trianon, John Pollikop and Karl Pascal recreate their real-world dynamic from the auto shop. Lewis uses this humorous scene to once again emphasize that Trianon is just an extension of the rest of fascist society, as well as to mock radical activists' tendency to get so stuck in theoretical arguments that they fail to address dire challenges in the real world. Meanwhile, Shad Ledue's disappointment shows how fascism also fails its most loyal soldiers. First, it attracts them through false promises. Ledue thinks that he will get promoted just for succeeding at his job, when in reality, promotions are part of a corrupt patronage system—the only way to get promoted is by either sabotaging or paying off one's superiors. Second, Ledue thought that cruelty and violence would win him respect and popularity, but now, he realizes that it just isolates him from everyone else.

CHAPTER 32

The respected journalist, diplomat, and anthropologist Dr. Lionel Adams is touring the country, asking his fellow Black people to be patient and realistic with the new administration (which has re-enslaved them). Shad Ledue attends one of Adams's lectures as the official government censor—but he hates Adams's proper accent and tuxedo, so he arrests Adams on the spot and sends him to Trianon. Ensign Stoyt throws Adams in Doremus Jessup and Karl Pascal's cell—until Adams gets too friendly with them, and Stoyt moves him to solitary confinement.

Dr. Lionel Adams, the novel's only Black character, will strangely never appear again. He is a stand-in for real-life assimilationist leaders like Booker T. Washington, and Lewis uses his imprisonment to suggest that it's futile for minority groups to try and negotiate with fascists, whose entire political ideology revolves around racial and national hierarchy. Modern readers may wonder why It Can't Happen Here *focuses almost entirely on white characters, especially if minority groups experience the worst treatment under Windrip's administration. One explanation for this choice might be Lewis's own blind spots or his concern about racist readers. But another is that Lewis omits non-white Americans in order to point out how much of fascism's worst violence is invisible to average citizens. Historically in the U.S., the white majority has endorsed horrible atrocities against non-white minority groups.*

In late November, Shad Ledue gets locked up in Trianon. The other prisoners are surprised—they speculate that Ledue wasn't sharing enough graft money with Francis Tasbrough. But mostly, they plan to kill him. But, like all the other government officials imprisoned in the camp, Ledue has a special private cell and doesn't mix with the general population. Doremus Jessup tries to convince the others to spare Ledue—he thinks that, rather than helping topple the regime, assassinating Ledue will only invite retaliation. But his cellmates—now Karl Pascal, John Pollikop, Truman Webb, a surgeon, and a carpenter—have already made up their minds. During exercise hour, the prisoners gather around Shad Ledue's room, light a wad of trash on fire, and throw it inside. The cell erupts into flame, and Ledue burns to death.

Shad Ledue's unexpected imprisonment again shows that not even government bureaucrats are safe under fascism, which gives them broad discretion and strong incentives to sabotage one another. Of course, Ledue's imprisonment also gives his victims an opportunity for revenge. Just like he callously imprisoned them for whatever reason he wished, they callously end his life without ever learning why he ended up in the camps. (The reader will not learn either, for several chapters.) Yet murder is far from an ideal way to win justice, even if it may have been the prisoners' only option under Windrip's fascist government.

After Shad Ledue's death, the Corpos fire Captain Cowlick and replace him with Snake Tizra, who immediately offers to pardon anyone who will give away Ledue's killer. Of course, the other inmates promise to kill anyone who offers this information. Doremus Jessup concludes that his prediction was right: killing Ledue did more harm than good. Effingham Swan leads an inquiry into Ledue's death and decides to randomly execute 10 of the 200 prisoners—including Victor Loveland—and step up punishments for everyone else. In December, Tizra bans visitors and letters, and he starts isolating new prisoners from the general population. Everyone wonders whether this is a punishment or an attempt to keep out important news.

The Corpos can always find more violent people to do their bidding. The prisoners kill Ledue, and then they have to deal with his sadistic friend Snake Tizra instead. With this twist, Lewis suggests that fascists can always find an infinite supply of selfish, obedient lackeys willing to commit an infinite amount of violence. The problem with fascism is the political structure itself, and not just the individuals who commit atrocities within it. This is why killing Ledue backfires, and why Jessup firmly believes in attacking fascism through nonviolent political activism. The alternative is to violently attack the people who happen to be running the fascist government. But doing this just means inviting a new, more vengeful cohort to replace them.

CHAPTER 33

Most of the Fort Beulah New Underground has either gone to Trianon or quit out of fear. Mary Greenhill now leads it, and just Sissy, Father Perefixe, Dr. Olmsted, and a few others remain. They do what little they can, mostly by helping refugees. But Mary wants to do much more. Before Shad Ledue goes to Trianon, she makes plans to assassinate him—and then decides to kill Effingham Swan instead. She visits the camps and asks Doremus and Buck Titus to promise to care for David, in case anything happens to her. Then, she withdraws all of her money, writes up a will, says goodbye to her family, and moves to Albany, the provincial capital.

The Trianon prisoners have gotten their revenge—and now, it's Mary Greenhill's turn to avenge her husband, Fowler's, murder. More than any other character in the novel, she's willing to die for the New Underground's cause. (Her financial preparations indicate that she knows she's not coming back.) Indeed, just like Snake Tizra's tenure at Trianon, Mary's radicalization shows how violence tends to invite further violence in response. This creates an escalating cycle that inevitably ends in tragedy.

In Albany, Mary Greenhill joins the new Women's Flying Corps. She's already an expert driver and mechanic, so she becomes a successful pilot in no time. She also succeeds in her bombing classes and takes a special interest in grenades. She takes her sixth solo flight in November, on a morning when Effingham Swan happens to be boarding his official plane to fly down to Washington and meet Windrip. Over the radio, Mary jokes with the ground crew about someone blowing up Swan and Windrip. She flies over Swan's plane, throws three grenades at him, and misses three times. Swan's plane starts descending to land. Mary nosedives her plane at Swan's and crashes into it. They both die instantly.

Committed pacifists like Doremus Jessup wouldn't appreciate Mary's tactics, but readers might feel a sense of relief and catharsis at Judge Swan's death. But Lewis also uses it as a warning: he wants to show his readers how easy it can become to endorse political violence. In fact, the sense of righteous anger that drives Mary to kill Swan is the same feeling that drives people to attack marginalized groups in the name of fascism. Of course, there is a clear difference between Judge Swan's crimes and Mary Greenhill's response to them—most importantly, Mary knows that she has no way to get justice besides violence. Still, Lewis wants his readers to know that anyone—including they themselves—could easily start down the perilous road to accepting political violence and fascism.

CHAPTER 34

Before his arrest, Julian Falck was busy passing information from the Minute Men to the New Underground. He was even chasing a promotion in Hanover, so that he could steal information from Francis Tasbrough directly. One day in September, he was conducting an official drill (and Sissy Jessup was watching). Then, Shad Ledue approached him, called him a traitor, and arrested him. Sissy hasn't even been allowed to visit him at Trianon.

Shad Ledue dies at Trianon in late November; this chapter flashes back to explain how he ends up there. First, he makes a point of arresting Julian Falck in front of Sissy, since he sincerely believes that they are fighting for her heart. He suspects neither that she has no real interest in him, nor that she is also a spy for the New Underground.

After Mary dies, the government names her a military heroine. Philip Jessup visits from Massachusetts and declares that everyone in the family is insane—except himself and his mother, Emma, whom he tells to rent out the house and move in with him. She does, and she brings David with her. Sissy decides to go work for Lorinda Pike instead, and in the meantime, she stays in Fort Beulah to rent out the house.

The government has probably rebranded Mary as a hero (and Swan's death as an accident) in order to avoid admitting that they had been infiltrated. But with Mary dead and Doremus in Trianon, the Jessup family finally splits up along political lines. While tragic, this is also a relief, since their relationships were already quite tense. Philip gets to save Emma from the rest of the family's liberal influences, while Emma gets the safe, respectable family life she desires. And Sissy gets to dedicate her life to the New Underground without worrying about her mother's complaints.

Shad Ledue takes the opportunity to visit Sissy—it's early November, and he's still the County Commissioner. Sissy can't stand being around Ledue, but she's also afraid of what he'll do if she crosses him. She plays a song for him on the piano, then starts to fantasize about killing him. He invites her to visit New York with him, go see some Corpo plays and drink "honest-to-God champagne wine," and then marry him. She says that they can't live on his low government salary, and he reveals that he has been making secret deals with local shopkeepers to defraud the Minute Men.

Ledue manages to catch and imprison Julian Falck for espionage, but he never realizes that Sissy Jessup is doing exactly the same thing. Similarly, his clumsy proposal again shows that he knows nearly nothing about the world outside Fort Beulah. And his ignorance once again reveals why *he's the County Commissioner: fascist leaders intentionally delegate power to incompetent people like him because they're easy to control. However, Ledue has taken the bold step of abusing his power* without *official permission. Even though all of the other Corpo officials are* also *running graft schemes, Ledue's could land him in trouble with his superiors.*

The next morning, Sissy Jessup drives to Hanover and tells Francis Tasbrough about Shad Ledue's plans. Ledue immediately disappears. Sissy feels horrible about getting Ledue killed, but she still feels that it was necessary. Ex-governor Isham Hubbard, Ledue's successor, rents the Jessup house. Sissy moves away and leaves the Fort Beulah New Underground in Father Perefixe's hands.

Just as Mary takes out Judge Swan, Sissy takes out Shad Ledue. It's telling that even a loyal Minute Man like Ledue doesn't get a fair hearing in the Corpo courts. Just as Ledue wielded arbitrary power over others' lives and livelihoods for so long, Tasbrough now wields arbitrary power over his. In fact, Tasbrough's snap decision suggests that he isn't imprisoning Ledue for breaking the law, but rather for failing to bring him in on the graft scheme. In other words, when Tasbrough sends Ledue to jail, this is just another example of one fascist official undercutting another for personal benefit. The anecdotes about Isham Hubbard and Father Perefixe are clever jokes for the careful reader. First, Hubbard's move will turn the Jessup house from a bastion of liberal resistance into the nerve center of Corpo power in Fort Beulah. (This is a metaphor for how fascism enters and takes over democratic institutions.) Second, Father Perefixe is from Canada and has been talking about moving back ever since Windrip's election. But, ironically enough, he's now the only remaining New Underground activist who hasn't *left.*

Sissy Jessup and Lorinda Pike run a mostly empty tea room in Beecher Falls. They discuss Mary's death: Lorinda thinks that Mary clearly wanted to kill Swan, but the Corpos covered it up by treating her as a hero. She also tells Sissy that she will be bribing Aras Dilley to help get Doremus out of Trianon and into Canada. A few days later, Lorinda and Sissy receive shocking news from the New Underground: Lee Sarason has overthrown Buzz Windrip.

While the Trianon prisoners struggle to make sense of the little information they receive, Sissy Jessup and Lorinda Pike are far better informed due to their work with the New Underground. Indeed, Sarason's coup d'état may explain why absolutely no new information enters Trianon from December onward. Meanwhile, in a government as corrupt and unstable as Windrip's, it's little surprise that getting Doremus Jessup out of Trianon is as easy as paying a small bribe. These developments underscore how deception is the norm in Windrip's government.

CHAPTER 35

During his two years as president, Buzz Windrip grows bitter, lonely, and frustrated. He hates that Canada, Mexico, and South America refuse to join the U.S. empire, that his aides refuse to stroke his ego, and that his bodyguards beat him at poker. While Windrip wallows in self-pity, Lee Sarason is slowly gaining power over the Corpos. Eventually, everyone knows that Sarason really runs the show.

The novel's concluding section begins with this chapter, which sets aside the story of Doremus Jessup and takes a look at the inner workings of the Windrip administration instead. After the inauguration, Windrip's insatiable appetite for power and attention starts to destroy him from the inside out. Even after transforming the entire U.S. to satiate his thirst for power, he constantly feels unfulfilled, so he makes increasingly unrealistic demands on the people around him—and increasingly gives up on governing.

But Windrip cares as much about Sarason's opinion of him as the country's. When he notices their friendship souring, Windrip gives one of Sarason's duties—leadership over the Minute Men—to Dewey Haik. He hopes that Sarason will get angry, then ask for forgiveness and rekindle their friendship. But Sarason coldly ignores him instead. Windrip even gifts Sarason an expensive TV set, but Sarason doesn't budge. Furious, Windrip nearly sends Sarason to jail. Then, Perley Beecroft quits the vice presidency, infuriating Windrip even more. But he can't kill Beecroft, so instead, he has a dozen random people executed in the concentration camps.

Sarason knows that Windrip cares more about people's opinion of him than actually running the U.S. government, so he learns to accumulate more power by manipulating Windrip's emotions. Meanwhile, Lewis uses Windrip's farcical attempts to win back Sarason's favor and bone-chillingly arbitrary executions to suggest that, at its core, fascism is really about projecting juvenile emotions onto politics. Specifically, both fascist leaders and their followers use politics not to achieve specific policy ends, but rather to satisfy their fantasies of power, domination, and popularity.

Windrip is so frightened of getting assassinated in the White House that he lives in a nondescript, heavily guarded 12-room hotel suite instead. One day, Lee Sarason visits, and Windrip suggests taking control of the Minute Men back from Dewey Haik or hiring Osceola Luthorne to help run it. Embarrassed, Sarason reveals that the government has already killed Luthorne. Windrip complains that the newspapers don't carry any useful information anymore, and that he liked Luthorne because of the jokes he made during their poker matches. In fact, just like Shad Ledue, Windrip feels desperately empty and lonely.

Windrip lives in a hotel room, in a constant state of stress and panic—just like he did on the campaign trail. His fear of assassination may be a joke about Huey Long (who was assassinated just before this book's publication). Of course, when Sarason explains that the administration has already assassinated Luthorne, this makes Windrip's fear of assassination look both frighteningly legitimate and deeply ironic. It seems legitimate because it shows that Sarason is making life-or-death decisions without Windrip. And it seems darkly ironic because Windrip's administration is murdering so many people that he can't even keep track of them all. Finally, Windrip's feeling of alienation shows that fascism destroys social bonds everywhere in society, even at the very top.

Windrip tells Sarason about his plans for a great empire and suggests that he might make Sarason the "Duke of Georgia" or "King of Mexico." Sarason coldly replies that this would be "very amusing," and then he changes the subject and suggests imprisoning Perley Beecroft for treason. Windrip says no, because Beecroft is his friend. Sarason agrees, then returns home, where he lives with a number of strapping young Minute Men.

This conversation suggests that Windrip makes arbitrary, emotional decisions on the spur of the moment, while Sarason is trying to fulfill a grand, secret scheme. Lewis jokes about Sarason's sexuality (insinuating that he's gay) in order to mock the popular conspiracy theory that fascists (particularly Nazis) were really gay men who wanted to build a militaristic society around their strict ideals of masculinity. Instead, Lewis traces fascism to the combination of desperation, populist politics, and technological change in the interwar period—not an obscure gay conspiracy. Of course, the reality is more jarring than the conspiracy because it implies that fascism really can *happen anywhere, and that ordinary people really can participate in it.*

Later, at a cabinet meeting, Lee Sarason reveals that Perley Beecroft has fled to Canada and joined Walt Trowbridge's resistance. Rebellions are also sprouting up in the Midwest—Minnesota and the Dakotas are even considering secession. Windrip angrily yells at his advisors, particularly Sarason, and insists that the Midwest loves him. Sarason proposes bringing Americans back together by starting a war with Mexico—Webster R. Skittle and Senator Porkwood dislike the idea, but Dewey Haik and Hector Macgoblin love it. Windrip insists that, even though the U.S. is destined to conquer Mexico, it's not ready yet. He worries that, if their regime arms too many people, it might just get overthrown. In fact, he even says that Sarason was wrong to create the Minute Men. But Sarason points out that Windrip keeps contradicting himself on this point, and he walks out of the room. Windrip says that he can't stand Sarason's ungratefulness.

The same pattern repeats itself: Windrip views all political decisions as referendums on his own popularity, while Sarason explores genuine policy solutions that will allow the regime to maintain power. Clearly, the New Underground movement is well-organized and poses a substantial threat to the regime. This gives important context to the preceding several chapters. From Doremus Jessup's perspective in Vermont, it wasn't clear if the New Underground was accomplishing anything at all, but this passage affirms that his efforts were actually crucial to building a broad coalition against the government. Finally, the administration's debate about invading Mexico shows how fascist regimes use imperialist wars to at once convince the public that they are fulfilling the nation's destiny and to distract the public from their failures.

That night, Lee Sarason, Dewey Haik, and Hector Macgoblin visit President Windrip in his hotel room. Sarason holds a dagger, and Windrip calls out to him. Windrip even reminds Sarason about the time he lent him money to go visit his dying mother. Sarason and Haik decide that it's better to send Windrip into exile than kill him. In 10 days, Windrip is in Paris, spending the millions of dollars he stole as president. The world quickly forgets him.

This coup d'état should be no surprise—readers learned about it at the end of the last chapter. But this *chapter has illustrated why Sarason viewed the unstable, narcissistic, sentimental Windrip as unfit to govern. While Sarason sticks to ruthlessly promoting his self-interest, Windrip isn't even committed to real fascist principles, just his own popularity. This combination allowed them to succeed in the campaign—Sarason plotted everything, while Windrip just connected with people. But Sarason and his allies now believe that this is no longer a viable strategy for running the country.*

The rest of the administration quickly joins forces to support President Lee Sarason, who announces to the country that the cabinet has ousted Windrip for embezzling money and making treasonous anti-war agreements with Mexico. Sarason starts appointing his favorite young Minute Men to high government offices and holding orgies at the White House, like a Roman emperor.

Other officials quickly switch their loyalties from Windrip to Sarason because they care primarily about power, not ideology. In other words, they never truly believed in Windrip's message—they just hoped that he would give them power and money if they supported him. Now that Sarason has taken over, they do the same thing once again.

Yet thousands of idealistic Corpo supporters and Minute Men immediately oppose the new Sarason regime. These people, like General Emmanuel Coon, deeply believe in Windrip's message. They think that despite all the bloodshed, the Corpos are really trying to build an equal, orderly, authentically American alternative to communism and consumerism. They don't think the government is abusing its powers, because they don't read about it in the news—and they know that the news is honest. So, they're shocked when Sarason ousts Windrip.

After glimpsing the Windrip dictatorship's atrocities and following Doremus Jessup's ordeal in Vermont, readers might be astonished to learn that many Americans still genuinely believe in Windrip's message and platform. But readers should also remember that Windrip has successfully prevented most Americans from accessing truthful news about his administration. Thus, his supporters' continued belief in him again speaks to propaganda's immense power, which can even persuade people to ignore the contrary evidence right in front of them. Ironically, Windrip's propaganda is so successful that it backfires—many Americans refuse to support a fascist government without him at the head.

Lee Sarason and Dewey Haik demand a war—they think it will unify the country, scare foreigners, and make them look heroic. Sarason writes a nonsense poem about Mexican women marrying American men, then turns it into a military song and starts holding drills. But Hector Macgoblin warns Sarason that Haik is after him. Sure enough, a few weeks later, Haik shoots Sarason and declares himself the new president. Macgoblin flees to Haiti.

Sarason's coup d'état ultimately destabilizes the government even further. Since there are no longer any independent institutions to ensure an orderly transfer of power, Haik can easily do to Sarason precisely what Sarason did to Windrip. And their manufactured imperial war shows that Lewis fully understood fascism's most dangerous tendencies even years before they led to the breakout of World War II. Fascists understand national greatness in terms of power and domination, so they inevitably try to extend their reach—and control their population—by starting wars.

Dewey Haik is far more extreme than Windrip or Sarason. He prioritizes efficiency over all else, so he officially abandons Windrip's $5,000-a-year promise, fires all the feeble soldiers and overly corrupt officials (like Francis Tasbrough), and orders the Minute Men to save time by beating fewer prisoners and executing more. He even enlists ministers to preach the virtues of his war with Mexico and spy on their congregations. Under "the good king Haik," nobody opposes the government and lives to tell the tale.

Haik abandons the pretenses that Windrip and Sarason used to disguise their sadistic, elitist, greedy policies. In other words, he takes fascism further than his predecessors, openly using violence and terror to rule the U.S. with an iron fist. But it's no surprise that he does this successfully: Windrip has already made it possible by dismantling democracy's checks and balances. Without these checks and balances, anyone who manages to overthrow the president gets to become a dictator, so the most ruthless and violent officials—like Haik—take power. This is Lewis's greatest argument against fascism: by distributing power based on strength, it encourages conflict and brutality inside the government, in society at large, and in foreign policy.

CHAPTER 36

After Dewey Haik takes power, the inmates at Trianon finally get news of the outside world. Doremus Jessup learns about Mary's death and the coups. Karl Pascal is growing bitter and impatient, and Jessup can't stand his bigotry and anger toward anyone who questions communism. One day, Pascal spends an hour complaining about how the Corpos self-righteously believe they're saving the world, and then another hour explaining why the self-righteous communists really *are* saving the world. He worships holy communist Russia but complains when anyone praises anything about degenerate capitalist America.

Karl Pascal's bitter dogmatism reveals the dangerous similarity between communists and fascists: both believe that the best way to improve society is by handing power to violent dictatorships. Pascal is just as certain about his own beliefs as the fascists are about theirs, and he also believes that absolutely anything would be justified in order to build the communist utopia that he imagines. In contrast, Doremus Jessup thinks that power corrupts the people who hold it, and that utopian ideas are dangerous fantasies. If communist revolutionaries seize power to try and create an equal society, Jessup thinks, they will prove no more successful—and no less wicked—than fascists like Windrip.

Doremus Jessup concludes that the communists are just as bigoted and idealistic as the fascists. The real global struggle today, he decides, is not communism versus fascism, but bigotry versus tolerance (or tyranny versus liberalism). In fact, he firmly believes that keeping "the free, inquiring, critical spirit" alive is more important than just setting up the right kind of social and economic system. The worst part about the Corpo radicals, Jessup thinks, is that they've turned good people like Karl Pascal into radicals, too.

Sinclair Lewis uses Doremus Jessup's interior monologue to present his own case for liberal democracy. Fascists and communists try to impose a single formula on society through force and repression, while liberals embrace "the free, inquiring, critical spirit"—or rationality—to decide political issues through debates that take different perspectives into account. Lewis by no means thought that the U.S. was a perfect, inclusive democracy in the 1930s. But he did *clearly think that it was on the right track and would only self-destruct by handing power to fascists or communists.*

Doremus Jessup wants nothing more than to escape. One day, to his surprise, Aras Dilley tells him that Lorinda Pike is plotting to get him out. Dilley makes a hole in the fence and start drinking with the on-duty guard every night, until the guard starts to reliably pass out. One evening in January, he tips Jessup off. Jessup glances at Karl Pascal and Truman Webb, crawls through the fence, and hides in a New Underground furniture van. He remembers that Judge Swan warned that he would be executed if he tried to escape, but mostly he just revels in his freedom. The New Underground hides Jessup in many different places and transports him in many different ways until he reaches a remote farmhouse. Sissy and Lorinda Pike are inside.

Aras Dilley helps Jessup escape simply because Lorinda Pike bribed him to do it. Like most of the other Minute Men and Corpo officials, Dilley is loyal to the government—but only as a mercenary. He has no true principles besides self-interest. Of course, this norm explains why Windrip's government was so unstable at every level: the selfish, unscrupulous people who agreed to join it eventually found better opportunities elsewhere. In contrast, the New Underground functions in exactly the opposite way. Its members join based on their moral principles, and they stand to lose far more than they stand to gain by participating in the organization. For instance, while the New Underground frees Jessup from Trianon, his links to them also put him there in the first place. Still, for Lewis, this conflict between morality and self-interest is the cornerstone of the fight between democracy and fascism.

Doremus Jessup is dirty, gaunt, and weak, but alive. Sissy and Lorinda Pike give him a warm bath, fresh clothes, and hot food. He feels like he's in heaven. He's a stone's throw from the Canadian border, and crossing it is far easier now than it was during the family's first escape attempt. Still, Sissy and Lorinda decide to disguise Doremus by dying his hair and shaving off his beard. He protests, but when they finish, he loves the way he looks. Doremus and Lorinda spend three final days alone in the farmhouse, and then Lorinda and Sissy take him to the border. As soon as he crosses over, he already misses the U.S.

Jessup's sweet freedom only underscores the horrors of fascism: after his time languishing in the concentration camps, even the most ordinary comforts now seem like extraordinary luxuries to him. Above all, he cherishes the chance to spend time with the two women he loves most. Fascism has torn Americans' families apart and infused their lives with a constant sense of fear and suspicion, but Jessup's relationships with Lorinda and Sissy are still completely trusting and authentic. Yet going to Canada will mean leaving them behind.

CHAPTER 37

In Montreal, Doremus Jessup's beard grows back, and he gets used to life as a free man. He quickly befriends the rightful president, Perley Beecroft, and the communist "Mr. Cailey," Joe Elphrey, who was kicked out of the Party for collaborating with socialists and Democrats. Elphrey declares that the masses' *real* representatives should set up their own dictatorship, and Beecroft hopes for the U.S. political system to just revert to the turn of the century. But Jessup is simply grateful to be able to speak his mind in public again. He hopes that the next U.S. government won't just shamelessly serve big business. In fact, Walt Trowbridge just sent away a major oil magnate because he now believes that the state must serve everybody.

For Doremus Jessup, going from the fascist U.S. to democratic Canada is like traveling back in time: he suddenly gets back the freedom and peace of mind that Windrip's administration stole from him. Of course, Lewis uses this scene to show his readers how pleasant it truly is to live in a free democracy, as compared to a fascist autocracy. This is doubly true for intellectuals like Jessup, whose profession depends on the freedom to publish ideas. Lewis knew that as he wrote this book in 1936, many Americans had never known anything besides *democracy, and so they were willing to embrace fascism or communism.*

Despite his newfound freedom, Doremus Jessup intensely misses his family. His Canadian hosts aren't interested in his stories about escaping the camps—they've heard thousands already, and the country is already saturated with American refugees seeking jobs. Thus, Jessup spends his time crowded around café tables with other American exiles, sharing dubious stories, reading the news, and dreaming of returning home. By day, he continues writing "packages of literary dynamite" for the New Underground. He requests a position as a secret agent in the American West, but Beecroft thinks he's too old, and it's too dangerous.

While he deeply appreciates Canada's liberal democracy, Jessup is still thinking mainly about his own country, the United States. He refuses to simply give up on the New Underground's struggle, just because he's managed to escape. Actually, just the opposite is true: Jessup's imprisonment and escape have made him all the more dedicated to fighting fascism. He plays a crucial role publishing pro-democracy propaganda for the New Underground—in fact, his friendships with Perley Beecroft and Walt Trowbridge show how even ordinary people from small towns like Fort Beulah can play a key role in the nation's fight for democracy.

By mid-1939, Corpo newspapers are full of staged reports about Mexican raiders attacking U.S. towns. The whole U.S. starts to mobilize for war, including by drafting five million young men into the military. Doremus Jessup and Joe Elphrey consider this ridiculous. But they feel the same way about all wars—except the new rebellion against the Corpos, which is taking over virtually all the territory north and west of Cincinnati. Most of the rebels originally supported Windrip but soon realized that he was handing power and wealth not to the people, but to a few criminal businessmen.

The government sends countless young Americans to their deaths and uses propaganda to justify it. This dystopian situation leads Jessup to question his staunch pacifism—he finally considers whether violence might be justified to overthrow fascism. While he still rejects violence on principle, he also understands that fascists are willing to use extreme violence to preserve their power, which makes it difficult to overthrow them without using force. Yet Jessup understands that it's hypocritical to reject all wars except the one he happens to believe in—after all, fascists say exactly the same thing about their own wars. To make sense of this contradiction, Lewis must either show that activists can overthrow fascism without violence or show that a pro-democracy revolution is somehow more legitimate than a fascist or communist one. But the latter is difficult, because fascists and communists also always claim to be acting in the people's interests.

The rebellion starts small, but in August, General Emmanuel Coon joins, declares Walt Trowbridge president, and establishes an official headquarters at Fort Snelling in Minnesota. Much of the army defects to join Coon, and they win a few battles before the revolt runs out of steam. It fails because Americans aren't educated enough to decide what they really want out of politics, besides more money for themselves. Without "a clear, sure theory of self-government," the rebels neither gain nor lose any more territory. So, in October, Walt Trowbridge sends Doremus Jessup to Minnesota as a spy for the New Underground.

Countless Americans finally understand the fascist government's lies and atrocities clearly enough to take up arms against it. Yet the nation doesn't simply fall into another civil war, in which the victorious side gets to implement its system of government. Instead, Lewis shows that the nation's future depends on persuasion*—if the rebels want their democracy back, they must make the American people* believe *in democracy (or "self-government"). Thus, Lewis concludes that a democratic revolution is different from (and superior to) an authoritarian one because it tries to seize power through the pen, not the sword. While an authoritarian revolution tries to seize power by directly overthrowing the government, regardless of what the public thinks, a democratic one builds power by building popular support. A successful democratic revolution doesn't* need *to use violence because it grows large enough to outnumber—or even win over—tyranny. Fortunately, political persuasion is what intellectuals like Doremus Jessup do best, and this explains why Lewis chose to make Jessup the hero of his novel.*

CHAPTER 38

Doremus Jessup packs his things and waits in the hotel lobby until it's time to leave for his train. A seductive looking woman walks by—it's Lorinda Pike. She embraces Jessup and gives him some final news before his departure. Buck Titus, Julian Falck, Karl Pascal, and John Pollikop are still alive in the camps, Father Perefixe is running the Fort Beulah New Underground, and Emma and David are happy with Philip in Worcester. Sissy is still working for the New Underground and dreaming of marrying Julian, and Francis Tasbrough is District Commissioner again. His new housekeeper, Mrs. Candy, reports on all his activities to the New Underground.

The novel's closing chapter begins with Doremus Jessup departing to start his new life as a full-time democracy activist. While the fascist regime hasn't collapsed yet, it has never looked weaker. In fact, for the first time in many months, Jessup feels like his personal contribution to the struggle can make a pivotal difference. His meeting with Lorinda Pike is primarily a plot device to give the reader a final update about the novel's other major characters. Many of their fates hang in the balance—ultimately, they will depend on whether Jessup and his movement succeed.

Lorinda Pike says goodbye, and Doremus Jessup boards his train. He realizes that nobody will be able to contact him, since he won't have a stable address. In fact, he's not even Doremus Jessup anymore—his new identity is William Barton Dobbs, a traveling harvesting machinery salesman from Vermont.

To become a New Underground spy, Jessup literally has to sacrifice his identity. This is a metaphor for how fighting for and participating in democracy requires putting the common good before one's own personal interests.

Sometime later, Mr. William Barton Dobbs (Doremus Jessup) wakes up in a conservative region of Minnesota that's still loyal to the Corpos. He eats a hearty breakfast and reads the Corpo propaganda news, which falsely states that Walt Trowbridge is dead and that the U.S. has won another battle in Mexico. A group of Minute Men march past the hotel, timidly singing a war song. They're embarrassed because they no longer know if the townspeople support them. In fact, Mr. Dobbs and his dozens of New Underground agents have converted many locals to the rebels' side.

Unlike Sissy and Julian Falck, Jessup isn't spying on the Corpos and Minute Men. Instead, his job is to help ordinary people truly understand the fascist regime and join the resistance instead. In fact, he's doing exactly the same thing that he used to do as a newspaper editor: fighting lies with truth in order to improve society. This is also a metaphor for Sinclair Lewis's own goals in writing this book: he believed that he could help the American public recommit to democracy by showing them the dire consequences of fascism.

Mr. William Barton Dobbs (Doremus Jessup) drives through the beautiful, vast Minnesota prairie in his Ford convertible until he reaches a slim yellow farmhouse. Upstairs, he meets seven of his agents, and each reports on their activities. One is struggling to convince farm owners that they should pay their workers decent wages, another fights to convince Finnish settlers that Trowbridge isn't a Soviet-style communist, and a third can't figure out how to win over "vaguely pro-Nazi" Germans. Jessup offers them all pointed suggestions—for instance, the third agent should tell the Germans that Haik wants to send them all back to Europe. But on the drive to his next stop, Jessup wonders whether it's really ethical to fight fascism with lies.

Jessup and his agents demonstrate how grassroots activists can launch a democratic revolution from the ground up. Their mission is simple: they must talk to ordinary people about their lives, inform them about the nation's dire political situation, and seek their voluntary support. Whereas the fascist regime maintains power through coercion and violence, the New Underground's democratic revolution depends on telling the truth, respecting others, and viewing all people as equals. In fact, this is Lewis's primary case for democracy: it's the political system that naturally forms when everyone treats everyone else as equals. Any other system can survive only through injustice and repression. In fact, by encouraging the free and equal exchange of ideas, Jessup and his comrades are actually training people to participate *in a democracy, too.*

Mr. Dobbs spends that night at a rebel couple's rural cabin. He has his recurring dream about Trianon. In the dream, a soldier lets all the prisoners out of their cells. They assemble outside, where General Coon declares that they are all free, because Haik has been captured. The crowd includes Dan Wilgus, Buck Titus, Julian and the Rev. Mr. Falck, Henry Veeder, John Pollikop, Truman Webb, and even Karl Pascal. Lorinda Pike, Emma, Sissy, Mary, David, Foolish, and Mrs. Candy wait in the distance. Shad Ledue starts to chase them—and then the dream suddenly ends. Jessup's host wakes him and reports that the Corpos are coming for him. So, Jessup rides away, deep into the woods, toward the sunrise, because "a Doremus Jessup can never die."

The novel's conclusion leaves the fate of American democracy uncertain. But Jessup's dream represents the freedom and safety that he associates with living in a democratic society. Of course, he is dedicating his life to rebuilding this kind of society in the United States—but Lewis's readers already live in a democracy, and he hopes that his novel will convince them to cherish and defend it. After all, the novel's final line celebrates democracy's defenders. By declaring that "a Doremus Jessup can never die," Lewis insists that people will always rise up against authoritarianism, no matter how severe the cost, and suggests that their contributions to society will live on for generations.

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