

Freedom's Greatest Asset

When President Roosevelt ordered our ambassador home from Berlin, and told the world it was because of the "unbelievable" things the Nazis were doing to Catholics and Jews, democratic peoples everywhere rejoiced.

At last, most of us thought, the German masses would see what civilized society thinks of the Nazi persecution of defenseless minorities. For here was an international development of such importance and of such concern to the German nation as a whole that Germany's newspapers would have to print it.

But Germany's newspapers did not print it. So far as we have been able to learn, the masses are still in ignorance of the real reason for Ambassador Wilson's recall. Even the report that Herr Hitler intended to speak at the funeral of Ernst Vom Rath yesterday afternoon, using the occasion for a tirade against the United States, proved unfounded. Had he done so, the Nazi press and radio would have been obliged to carry his words and the cat would have been out of the bag.

Dictators do not dare let their subjects know the truth. The first act of every such ruler is to gain control over press and radio. Thereafter the public hears nothing of what goes on outside except what the propaganda bureaus want it to hear. The propagandists can color the news to suit the occasion, suppress it entirely or invent it out of whole cloth. It is the boast of Dr. Goebbels, Nazi propaganda manipulator, that through his control of these instruments of publicity he can play upon the emotions of the German masses as a maestro conducts an orchestra. He can make them respond to calls to war or peace . . . or pogroms.

All of which points a moral. The most valuable single adjunct to liberty yet won by humanity, in all its thousands of years of struggle, is free speech and free press. Despotism cannot thrive where these exist. So long as men can speak and print the truth, no Hitler or Stalin can drive them like cattle in directions they do not wish to go. "Give light and the people will find their own way."