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MY STRUGGLE

Could Adolf Hitler become President of the United States? That had indeed happened for the last thirty years. I was determined not to let such a fate befall our country again.

Mr. Hasbrook had been presenting his Western Civilization classes with an unusual assignment for much of his teaching career. It portrayed an apocalyptic scenario in which the United States had lost a devastating war, ceded vast amounts of territory and resources, and was reduced to a second-rate power. A presidential election was approaching amidst these troubled conditions, in which there were three main candidates: Ernest Taylor, a thinly disguised communist; Albert Hunter, a far-right extremist; and Paul Hinden, the sole candidate upholding democracy. I quickly realized that this simulation was a parallel to a real-world situation in history. The United States represented Germany following World War I. Albert Hunter represented Adolf Hitler.

For the past thirty years, no other student had recognized this, and every class had elected either Hunter or Taylor. My mission would be to convince my fellow students to support democracy rather than fascism or communism.

However, this was not as easy a task as it first seemed. "Hinden," the stand-in for Paul von Hindenburg in real life, was 83 years old and in poor health. In contrast, both "Hunter" and "Taylor" held out promises of prosperity and social reform. To further complicate matters, Mr. Hasbrook privately requested that I not reveal the candidates' identities prematurely. I kept this promise, but at the cost of an easy victory for democracy.

The first round of voting confirmed my fears. Hinden possessed the support of only myself and one other student, while Hunter led the field with 14 of 31 votes. Since no candidate held a majority, Mr. Hasbrook instructed his class to prepare short speeches for use in a runoff election. In my speech, desperately afraid that the Hitler surrogate would win, I made the near-fatal error of solely attacking the opposing candidate while failing to sufficiently support my own. Several Hunter supporters did indeed defect, but to the wrong side. Taylor, the communist, was now the major threat.

The next day of class saw a stalemate. In free-form debate, I barely prevented Taylor from gaining a majority and gradually built up support for Hinden. I joked about the advanced age of our own excellent teacher to rebut criticisms of Hinden's age. Also, I contrasted Hinden's solid record with the lunatic and extremist views of Hunter and Taylor.

Slowly, my arguments earned my classmates' support and respect, and ultimately their votes. Hinden's popularity grew. A runoff election eliminated Taylor, setting the stage for the final showdown.

I delivered an emotional appeal favoring democracy over fascism, freedom over dictatorship. Hinden won the conclusive vote for the first time in Mr. Hasbrook's lengthy teaching career. I had endured much criticism from my classmates in the process of getting Hinden elected, but was vindicated once Mr. Hasbrook confirmed who "Hunter" and "Taylor" actually were. Due to my struggle, liberty had triumphed.