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REVIEW OF CIVIL ENGINEERING QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR COMPETITIVE EXAMS

- Sinclair Lewis is a great author, whose more celebrated novels (Elmer Gantry, Main Street, Arrowsmith, Babbit) all portray middle-American life in the early 20th Century (the good and bad). Lewis is unafraid to satirize and lampoon the most disgraceful features of our culture."It Can't Happen Here" was written after his career had peaked and is not quite of the standard of the above works. Lewis was very concerned about the rise of fascism in the 1930's and the indifferent (or even sympathetic) reactions many Americans had to it. His point was that totalitarianism could happen here, particularly in such a mood of indifference and denial.The book is a fascinating portrayal of the ascension of Senator Buzz Windrip, who upsets FDR for the Presidency in 1936, on a 15 point, fascistic platform (state control of all banks, huge buildup of the military, persecution of Jews and unbelievers, subjection of blacks, etc.). Within six months, Windrip manages to abolish state governments, consolidate all universities, mussle the press (including the books main character, Doremus Jessup), etc. Riots and revolts break out, but they're repeatedly crushed by Windrip's private army, the Minute Men.In time, Windrip sets up concentration camps for all dissenters, while likewise employing a successful state propaganda organ to convince the world that life in America is much better. But a massive resistance movement develops, joining socialists, liberals, even mainstream conservatives (it's lead by Windrip's Republican opponent in the '36 election), and staged from Canada.The book centers around the life of Doremus Jessup, small-town Vermont newspaperman, and his family, in their active resistance to the "Corpo" regime. Though his life is destroyed by the end, Jessup continues to work for the revolutionary movememt (which succeeds in invading much of the midwest afterwhich Windrip is overthrown in a coup by his cheif aide).The book is a fun read, and evokes much sympathy for the Jessups and their co-conspirators. At the same time, it lacks the careful realism of Lewis' other works. The time-span is less than three years, which is fairly implausible. Lewis fails to address the fact that the U.S. (like Great Britain and Canada) is fundamentally different in background than Germany, Italy or Russia. America's strong democratic tradition and passion for individual liberty would make establishing and maintaining a successful dictatorship would be very difficult here (though perhaps not impossible, particularly in the depths of the Depression). Certainly, it'd take more than a few years and would involve much more bloodshed than depicted in this book.However, Lewis' book is quite thought-provoking. One of the byproducts of our successful democracy is that Americans often take their most basic rights (such as free speech and association) for granted. This book forces one to reflect on how lucky we are to live where we do and when we do, and always be vigilant in defense of our rights. In this era, with Bush and Ashcroft trying to curtail some of those rights in the name of "homeland security", such reflection is needed.I reccomend "It Can't Happen Here", but not to those unfamiliar with Sinclair Lewis. Read at least one of his better works (listed above) first.

- I give this book mixed marks, but I still reccomend it. Its premise and argument get five stars; its execution as a novel may get two. I think the premise of this book shows flashes of genius, and several aspects of it are still both funny and chilling by turns. The features of the book that are most clever are its conception of what an American fascist president would look/ sound like, and its sketch of how power may change hands from a rational democracy to a corporatist/ fascist state. "Buzz Windrip," the "Corpo"-party's figurehead, is anti-federal, anti-press, pro-corporation, willfully anti-

intellectual, speaks in a chummy, populist idiom, and he drips with sentiment and religiosity. His brown-shirt-like security force, which eventually supersedes the national army, is called "The Minutemen," and they wear quaint, throwback uniforms. One notes Windrip often says things that Michelle Bachmann or Rick Perry or similar "folksy" candidates nowadays intone. E.g., "When I am protestingly dragged from my study and the family hearthside into the public meetings . . . I try to make my speech as simple and direct as those of the Child Jesus talking to the Doctors in the Temple." We know this personality on the major political stages moreso in 2011 than we would have in 1960, oddly, when it was cooler to be rational in politics than it is now (God help us). Sections of Windrip's ghostwritten autobiography called "Zero Hour" are highlights of the book and seem like they could have been written by several known candidates within the last five years. As a cultural

argument, this book is often good: e.g., the Corpo University, filled with sports, military rituals, and bland engineering courses, is made a utilitarian cog in the statist machine in ways suggesting not only counter-reformation-style "patriotic" editing of textbooks and setting of curricula (see Texas, 2010), but also state universities that have devolved into technical colleges for "citizens" or consumers rather than places that encourage robust thinkers. But as serious fiction, the book struggles to define its characters, who mostly remain prototypes, and worst of all, the action in the book is often rendered in sketchy, synoptic ways that resemble an authorial outline. Lewis wrote this book quickly, and it wasn't to its benefit. Lewis seems to impatiently avoid giving events in the novel any gradual drama, poetry, or suspense: rather, the novel is a rapid (and long) catalog of events that merely . . . "happen." That many of the events are tragic, darkly funny, and plausible, doesn't redeem the novel from its rather hackneyed style and mode of development.