REVOLUTION AND PATRIOTISM


If the study of sociology should result in the discovery of fixed and comprehensive laws governing the group behavior of mankind, a curious paradox would seem to follow. For if such laws existed, the study of them would be futile—except for the satisfaction of what Veblen has named “idle curiosity”—since the laws would operate inevitably, whether understood or not. In point of fact, however, all that these “laws” appear to tell us is that this or that will be the outcome unless we will otherwise. There is, thus, in almost every sociological discussion an ethical implication, which becomes more prominent at critical times.

Such a time is the present. The disappointment of the hope, very natural under all the circumstances, that the millennium would begin the moment the war was over, the almost insuperable difficulties encountered in adjusting international relations, the critical internal conditions of many European nations, the collapse of Russia, and finally the appearance in many countries, even in the United States, of threatening subversive tendencies—all these causes have stimulated thinking of the ethical type and have demonstrated the need of it.

The great work performed by Professor Sorokin in his work on the sociology of revolutions appears to be in reality the stripping of camouflage from revolutionary propaganda. It is true that he looks at revolution from a purely scientific point of view, regarding it as a natural phenomenon—something that is bound to occur when the conditions are right, just as does the eruption of a volcano. It is, in point of fact, an uprush of inherited instincts that have been suppressed or unduly “cramped”. These inherited dispositions are certain to prevail over acquired habits of thought and behavior. They carry all before them—traditions, law, morality, religion—and this result is inevitable from the very nature of the forces involved. “Secondary reactions” cannot
stand against “primary reactions”. Such is the teaching of psychology, and such are the observed facts in all great revolutions. But it may be questioned whether the chief value of Professor Sorokin’s book lies, after all, in this naturalistic view of the subject, necessary as this may be for the sake of objectivity and clearness.

To adopt a principle stated by the late Charles Peirce, questions that involve human responsibility or “free will” are not really questions of fact but rather questions of the arrangement of facts. We may arrange the facts regarding crime, for example, so as to give the meaning, “It is impossible but that offences will come”, or we may arrange them so as to mean, “Woe to those through whom they come!” And both views will be correct. Similarly, we may arrange the facts regarding revolution so as to stress the idea that revolution is a natural phenomenon certain to occur under the appropriate circumstances—and this will be the true view for a ruler; or we may arrange them so as to mean that revolution, being the release of the lower instincts in large masses of men and being fated to pass through certain profitless and painful phases, is in no way a means to the “good life”, but an irrational and baneful thing from which we should all seek to be delivered—and this view (which assumes control of the future) is the natural and true view for a citizen.

From this latter point of view it is the meaning rather than the (ultimate) causation of revolution that is important, and the meaning is revealed by Professor Sorokin as perhaps no other writer has revealed it.

To write against revolution is not so superfluous a task as it may seem to those who desire above all things peace and order. In the abstract, most men would deplore the overthrow of the existing social order, but under the appropriate conditions the concrete revolutionary movement will always have its well-nigh irresistible appeal for many. Make men aware that revolution is invariably “a bad method for the improvement of the material and spiritual condition of the masses”. Prove by facts that while “verbally promising the realization of many of the greatest values, it actually leads as often and as much to opposite results”. Show that “whatever gains it yields are purchased at a prodigious
and disproportionate cost”. And make clear, as Professor Sorokin has done, that all this is true not merely of particular revolutions, but of revolution in general. Then you will have done something to increase the power of those restraints which are necessary to the welfare of society.

But it is not enough to be anti-revolutionary; it is necessary also to have a true conception of the value of nationhood. Here again the facts, scientifically and historically interpreted, must be relied upon to guide that moral purpose in mankind without which, it may be assumed, all knowledge and all effort would be vain. Surely, the serpent will bite without enchantment, and if men were utterly selfish or by nature traitorous, neither psychology nor history could change them a whit. But for normal persons there is inspiration in the account that Professor McDougal gives of nationhood in general and of the United States in particular. When we examine the facts, when we compare nationality with its alternatives, with anarchy or with a hypothetical world-state, we are fairly driven to the conclusion that “nations are indispensable means to the good life for the masses of mankind”. They furnish the only available means of harmonizing the social impulse and that of self-assertion and mastery. Nations, being historic growths, cannot be destroyed without irreparable loss. Though not perfect, they cannot be torn down and rebuilt, like mere mechanisms.

The echo in our emotions of this historic and organic character of the nation is patriotism. In another book, Professor McDougal has gone so far as to deny the value of all universal systems of morality and to found ethical consciousness in national consciousness. Without conceding the whole of this thesis, one may agree that patriotism is an important element in moral consciousness; that without it most men are, morally speaking, but half alive. And one may add that no one has labored to better effect than has Professor McDougal to find the deepest and surest foundation for this sentiment.

The hard-won unity of the United States of America is a real thing. Manifold causes help to make us one, both physically and spiritually. Unity of purpose has on the whole prevailed from the beginning. Americans have proved the strength of their
determination to be a united nation and to make that nation a political and social democracy.

This unity is precious not only for reasons that give value to all nationhood, but especially because of the democratic character of our government and our life. For democracy, as Professor McDougal points out, is not a mere accident or an experiment; it is of the very essence of nationality. The highest type of nation, the fullest form of nationality, cannot exist without it. "A true nation is a people so organized that all its members take part in its deliberations and decisions, are influenced by and in turn play their due part in the moulding of public opinion, the final arbiter in all questions of public policy. That is to say, a people can advance beyond the first steps in the scale of nationhood only by achieving democratic organization."

Briefly, then, the American Union, as an accomplished fact, represents the continuous and successful workings of a purpose to secure under democratic institutions the largest possible measure of the "good life" for great masses of people, and as such it is no mere fiction or accident, but an august reality.

Toward complete nationhood, however, one further step, thinks Professor McDougal, needs to be taken. The aspect of national unity most difficult for any democracy to attain is unity with respect to foreign affairs, and this is for America peculiarly hard. "The American Nation," says this candid critic, "has consistently displayed a naïve self-righteousness, a child-like belief in the purity and nobility of all its aims and actions in relation to other States, and a primitive, uncritical conviction of its moral superiority to all other States. At the same time it has naturally displayed a correlative childish impatience at all criticism coming from outside, a touchiness and petulance unbecoming to a great nation, and an incapacity to exert impartial moral judgment in international affairs." Whether or not this picture, when we actually contrast American diplomacy with that of certain more "mature" nations, seems overdrawn, few would dissent from the view that a wider and sounder knowledge of foreign affairs, and a greater disposition loyally to accept all treaties that have been constitutionally made, would be of advantage to the United States as a nation.
In its comprehensiveness and wide grasp of the situation, in its energetic frankness, and its essential justice and tolerance, Professor Abbott’s book is remarkable. Never lapsing into the attitude of the *laudator temporis acti*, nor confining himself to what might be called a technical criticism of political or economic doctrines, the author aims to outline the facts and to find the cause. “We all,” writes Professor Abbott, “admit the evils of unrestricted capitalism, and seek to stamp it out.” To that extent we are all Socialists! But “capitalism” is not the real root of our discontent. The principal cause is, in fact, “overproduction of the human species wherever industrialism has gone.” The whole problem, from jazz music to Communistic propaganda, is really a problem of masses.

This situation, which is a very real and serious one, faces equally the “proletariat” and the “bourgeoisie”. It is manifestly impossible to end it by abolishing industrialism or by exterminating a part of the population! Nor does the situation involve any necessary opposition between the classes. Both together are involved in it, and both must work it out. The real conflict is not a battle of one “class” against another, or of rival “interests”, such as labor and capital. It is a conflict of equalitarianism with democracy. No point seems better worth stressing than this. “Socialism” is the name of a doctrine; “Radicalism” is the name of a tendency which may be only liberalism, progressiveness, or an eagerness for prompt reform; but “equalitarianism” is the name of a spirit—it is the pervasive thing everywhere, the breakdown of distinctions, the voice of the crowd as a crowd.

To demonstrate the theoretical unsoundness of Socialism, of large programmes of nationalization, of Syndicalism, of the “economic State”, seems not so important as to define the issue between equalitarianism and democracy. The real distinguishing mark of all these proposals is the doctrine of “equality of enjoyment, of the right of every individual to have his equal share not only of the material rewards of life but of its amusements”. Opposed to the ideal of “leisure and pleasure in ample measure”—an ideal which in practice turns out to be almost wholly materialistic—is the democratic ideal of equality of effort and of obligation. “The real problem of social equality,” writes Professor Abbott, “is to
substitute for the ideal of a life with little work or none a spirit of endeavor to do and be something better than we are . . . This doctrine of equal endeavor must replace the principle of equal amusement among the modern moralities, whether of rich or poor."

The equalitarian spirit would abolish or radically alter our present institutions. That is its remedy for a situation which is indeed, as has been said, serious enough. Or, to state the case perhaps more exactly, this spirit finds its opportunity in the industrial situation already described. But it is one of the fallacies of the classic Socialism to suppose that this remedy is the only one possible and the one destined to be put into effect. The "dependence of the bourgeoisie upon the proletariat" has proved to be a fiction, and, indeed, instead of a dragging-down of the bourgeoisie to the level of the proletariat, what we have seen and what we are likely to see is rather a gradual elevation of large numbers of the proletariat to the level of the middle class.

Nor is it correct to suppose that the latter class has no fighting spirit and no programme. Just the contrary is the case. The middle class in this country appears to be energetic and fearless. The contented democratic part of the population far outnumbers the discontented Radicals, and if it possesses no definite unalterable programme and no doctrinaire theory, it has been the author of many reforms and of much progress. Even a partial enumeration is impressive. On the industrial side we have profit-sharing, share in management, stock distribution, group insurance, workman's compensation. As a part of the social and humanitarian effort, we have hospitals, public sanitation; public schools and universities, public libraries, churches and missions, boys' clubs, settlement work, Americanization.

Will the programme succeed! If not, it would seem that the high value of nationhood which Professor McDougall has so convincingly described would be lost, the indestructible union would be destroyed, and we should begin one of those fatal cycles which Professor Sorokin has outlined. The success of the alternative policies proposed would amount, in fact, to revolution. There are many signs that the democratic programme will finally prove adequate. If only we can keep America "the land of opportu-
nity”, if only reasonable “equality of opportunity” remains, if only the effort to raise the standard of living and of culture among the less fortunate be not frustrated by economic causes, there need be no fear of revolution.

Glancing back over the considerations discussed, one cannot help being once more impressed with the idea that every sociological problem involves the ethical element. Revolution is chiefly a moral disaster. The nation is preëminently a moral and spiritual unity, a union of purpose. Though the assault upon democracy carried on by the “new barbarians” has its economic cause, its fallacy lies primarily in its lack of a sound moral foundation. If such treatises as those just passed in review profit us, it is not because history or psychology furnishes us with new methods of controlling events, but rather because they reveal the true meaning of facts and ideas and enable us to pass moral judgments upon the situation before us.

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