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The Meaning Of Revolution

In his vitally important article in this issue, Karl Hess properly refers to the genuine libertarian movement as a "revolutionary" movement. This raises the point that very few Americans understand the true meaning of the word "revolution".

Most people, when they hear the word "revolution", think immediately and only of direct acts of physical confrontation with the State: raising barricades in the streets, battling a cop, storming the Bastille or other government buildings. But this is only one small part of revolution. Revolution is a mighty, complex, long-run process, a complicated movement with many vital parts and functions. It is the pamphleteer writing in his study, it is the journalist, the political club, the agitator, the organizer, the campus activist, the theoretician, the philanthropist. It is all this and much more. Each person and group has its part to play in this great complex movement.

Let us take, for example, the major model for libertarians in our time: the great classical liberal, or better, "classical radical", revolutionary movement of the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries. These our ancestors created a vast, sprawling, and brilliant revolutionary movement, not only in the United States but throughout the Western world, that lasted for several centuries. This was the movement largely responsible for radically changing history, for almost destroying history as it was previously known to man. For before these centuries, the history of man, with one or two luminous exceptions, was a dark and gory record of tyranny and despotism, a record of various absolute States and monarchs crushing and exploiting their underlying populations, largely peasants, who lived a brief and brutish life at bare subsistence, devoid of hope or promise. It was a classical liberalism and radicalism that brought to the mass of people that hope and that promise, and which launched the great process of fulfillment. All that man has achieved today, in progress, in hope, in living standards, we can attribute to that revolutionary movement, to that "revolution". This great revolution was our father; it is now our task to complete its unfinished promise.

This classical revolutionary movement was made up of many parts. It was the libertarian theorists and ideologists, the men who created and wove the strands of libertarian theory and principle: the La Boeties, the Levellers in seventeenth-century England, the eighteenth-century radicals--the *philosophes*, the physiocrats, the English radicals, the Patrick Henrys and Tom Paines of the American Revolution, the James Mills and Cobdens of nineteenth-century England,

the Jacksonians and abolitionists and Thoreaus in America, the Bastiats and Molinaris in France. The vital scholarly work of Caroline Robbins and Bernard Bailyn, for example, has demonstrated the continuity of libertarian classical radical ideas and movements, from the seventeenth-century English revolutionaries down through the American Revolution a century and a half later.

Theories blended into activist movements, rising movements calling for individual liberty, a free-market economy, the overthrow of feudalism and mercantilist statism, an end to theocracy and war and their replacement by freedom and international peace. Once in a while, these movements erupted into violent "revolutions" that brought giant steps in the direction of liberty: the English Civil War, the American Revolution, the French Revolution. (Barrington Moore, Jr. has shown the intimate connection between these violent revolutions and the freedoms that the Western world has been able to take from the State.) The result was enormous strides for freedom and the prosperity unleashed by the consequent Industrial Revolution. The barricades, while important, were just one small part of this great process.

Socialism is neither genuinely radical nor truly revolutionary. Socialism is a reactionary reversion, a self-contradictory attempt to achieve classical radical ends liberty, progress, the withering away or abolition of the State, by using old-fashioned statist and Tory means: collectivism and State control. Socialism is a New Toryism doomed to rapid failure whenever it is tried, a failure demonstrated by the collapse of central planning in the Communist countries of Eastern Europe. Only libertarianism is truly radical. Only we can complete the unfinished revolution of our great forebears, the bringing of the world from the realm of despotism into the realm of freedom. Only we can replace the governance of men by the administration of things.

"The right of revolution is an inherent one. When people are oppressed by their government, it is a natural right they enjoy to relieve themselves of the oppression, if they are strong enough, either by a withdrawal from it, or by overthrowing it and substituting a government more acceptable."

---Ulysses S. Grant, 1885

Letter From Washington

By Karl Hess

What The Movement Needs

This may well be a long, cool summer of consolidation. The political establishment will be seeking to consolidate its power behind an advancing wave of law-and-order blue-nose, Constitutional 'constructionism'. (Constructionism is a new code word for reading the Constitution as instrument of state power rather than individual freedom.)

Radical opponents of the state also will be consolidating. The picture with SDS is now one of building new structures on either side of a schism. YAF is said to be facing a similar task with pro-state "trads" under lively assault from those with at least anti-statist tendencies if not fully fledged libertarian positions. The Resistance, after Staughton Lynd's moving plea for a "new beginning", will be attempting to broaden its base far beyond that of fighting the draft. And, of course, the Panthers will simply be trying to stay alive.

For libertarianism, burgeoning now as a movement rather than merely a mood, it will be a crucial time, testing the difference between the dedicated and the dilettante.

The young people in the movement are irrepressible and, in the long term, so is the movement. In the short term, however, much of its velocity will depend upon whether it attracts, along with its great and growing ranks of young militants, those few men of substance who, in the early stages of most movements, can make a difference of years in the movement's development. Engels' financial support of Marx is an example. The few who supported the early spokesmen of the New Left are a latter-day example. There are few similar examples on the right, interestingly enough, inasmuch as right-wing support almost exclusively has been toward the institutionalization of a currently vested interest (i. e. anti-Communism, corporate protectionism, class or race privilege, religion) rather than in the development of a new movement.

Because, therefore, there may be a man of substance, and libertarian values, somewhere, who, watching the movement develop, may want to participate in it rather than just talk about it, some words of friendly (dare we say comradely?) advice may be in order.

First there is the simple responsibility to be serious. Taking a pioneering interest without following through could be more destructive of morale than silence. For young people, particularly, the idea of faintheartedness may be the hardest of all to take. There always is hope that heroes will come along and it would be better to have that hope remain unrequited than to have it dashed.

Then there is resistance to a familiar syndrome, the notion of "one thing for sure, we can't do the whole job

alone." There are two points to make about this to anyone who may appear as a serious supporter of the libertarian movement.

1. You may have to.
2. If so, you can.

The first point, of course, is that it shouldn't make any difference how many are similarly interested. For an individualist and a libertarian, surely, his own interest should be sufficient to the action. If only one such person appears, that is 100% more than we have now anyway!

The second point is simply a citation of the need of the most effective use of what resources are available rather than any despair that they are limited. If they are all that there is, then prudence says only "use them well." And courage says, only, "use them!"

One consideration arising from that is the need to use available resources to produce a well-rounded *base*, if nothing else, hoping that on the base, subsequently, new support will arise. At the same time, securing a base also helps secure the on-going momentum of the movement itself, by recognizing that it *is* a movement and that it does require not just casual advancement but hard, full-time organizing, propagandizing, crusading and so forth.

If, on the other hand, there already was a more general sort of support available, the movement could afford what is now a luxury: the support of very specific researches or programs. As it stands, the urge to build various super-structures before the movement is firmly based *as* a movement is to tactically do just what such imprudence would do tectonically: create a top-heavy structure which would topple in any stiff wind.

One course, in forming the base, would be to inventory needs and evaluate priority versus cost and so forth. Practical as well as visionary men should examine this agenda carefully lest the caution of the one extinguish the beacons of the other or the passions of the latter ignore the prudence of the former.

Some of the items which should, in my view, earnestly be considered are these:

--Full-time movement organizers and co-ordinators, at least on a regional basis.

--Creation of even the most modest East Coast 'center' for libertarian studies to fill an incredible geographic vacuum. Although the West Coast has seen the development of such centers, the East remains barren.

--Support of our own movement activists, the spearhead people whose speaking on campus, pamphleteering, even arrests and trials, provide the sort of excitement centers which, to cite a compelling example, turned the New Left from a phrase by C. Wright Mills into the wedge which has now opened wide the entire range of radical, revolutionary developments in America.

--Entry into new media, such as films, for libertarian ideas as well as on-going encouragement for those who can break into the regular media. How many good libertarian books or articles go down the drain each year simply because potentially productive people cannot take the time, or afford to do the work on a speculative basis? The number, no matter how small, is too large if the libertarian mood is to turn into the libertarian movement.

--A campus organization. Plans for the Radical Libertarian Alliance already are well advanced *as plans*. But practical organizational work, production of recruiting materials and so forth requires some practical support which the non-existent means of the founding members

simply cannot provide. This does not mean that R. L. A. will not move at all, without added support. It will move, indeed, no matter what. Its founding chapters and members are not to be stopped. But its people know full well that they will not move with the summer-lightning speed of, say, SDS or YAF because, as in the one case, it does not have (thankfully) the relatively well-heeled zeal of a Progressive Labor Party to send travelers across the country and keep the literature coming or, as in the other case, it does not offer eccentric millionaires a chance to advance their own quirky causes by buying the energies of the young. R. L. A., to be precise about this point, would rather poop along on pennies than take *anybody's* money if it came marked with any word other than LIBERTY.

--Travel support for permitting libertarians with something to say to say it where the action is. The fact that the several outstanding libertarian-SDSers couldn't even afford the train fare to the Chicago convention is just another evidence of wasting major opportunities for want of minor investments.

Not one of those suggestions is made in a spirit of exclusion or primacy. They cover areas which seem common-sensical but they are intended to convey, first and foremost, a sense of base-building as opposed to panacea-pathing. The libertarian who says that this action or that action is all that should be taken or that this or that will 'solve' everything is avoiding action, not taking it.

Fixated, narrowly focused approaches may build egos but they can scarcely build movements. The purpose of a revolutionary, in one of the truisms of our time, is to make the revolution. To a libertarian that should mean that the advancement of liberty and the opposition to coercion by all means possible and necessary. It means each person making his part of the revolution as he can best do it, recognizing always that each part is subsumed under the vision of a movement. Many of us may be always restricted to just doing one job or another in the movement. None of us, happily, if we retain faith with liberty itself, will waste our time seeking to be leaders or wanting to be.

We do not want to lead or be led. We want to be free.

We now sense in a way that gives us ties with men in many lands and in many postures of political development, that being free always will be a chancy, iffy, and very conditional transitory condition until the institutions of coercive power have been brought down.

We have advanced through the stage when many thought that freedom could be found simply by retiring to a hilltop somewhere far distant. We know that such a hilltop may be by next Tuesday the site of another government radar station, just as the valley below it may be a detention camp.

We now know that men who want to be free cannot run forever. Sometime, somewhere they must stand firm--and fight, not as the state's agents fight, with bloody hands and blazing eyes, but as free men fight, in a movement of resistance, with respect for life, each man as he can and each man as he will.

My overall point is that a movement demands many elements. It requires public heroes and private genius; it must work out in the streets as though it were the confident spearhead of a triumphant cause, it must work in garrets and offices as though there would be no tomorrow, it must sometimes bite its tongue at tactical errors, loving the sinner even while deploring the sin.

It must seek its friends in other lands, creating a new citizenry of un-bordered liberty. It must create and recreate its literature. It must teach its young and, equally important, it must *find* its young.

It must sustain its weary, heal its wounded, and protect its cadre. And, above all, it must know its own heart and mind and be aware of itself *as* a Movement. Finally, it must have a sense of time and place, knowing where the world is and

not nostalgically looking back at where it was. And if it errs it should err on the side of dedication and vision, not on the side of inaction.

Libertarians are not determinists who feel that unseen, mystic forces move men and history in inexorable patterns, up and down fated graphs. Libertarians, being radicals, know that men can move history, that Man *is* history, and that men can grasp their own fate, at the root, and advance it.

Interestingly and compellingly, libertarians have been through much of this before in this lovely but looted land. The first American revolution, just as with the Russian, was almost a libertarian and not a statist victory. The victory, instead, of the Federalists, with their glib talk of "legal systems" and of measuring liberty in terms of special favors to those who would best "serve" society, was not a foregone conclusion any more than Stalin's victory was the end in Russia. Contrary forces now seethe in both lands.

Also, in the days before the first American revolution, men heard the same arguments we hear today--that we could never beat the system, so why try; why risk oppression by being uppity; why not keep on trying to go through channels and why not chuck it all because the majority of people don't want any trouble anyway.

In those days it was erring on the side of militancy and civil disobedience that gave libertarians the opportunity even to speak and to speculate. Caution then would have meant an even deeper gloom today (just look at the Mother Country!).

We are again at such a time and place.

You--whoever you are!--now have it in your power to some extent or another move history and advance libertarianism as a Movement and not a mere moral mutter.

This summer, then, should be the time when you decide just how seriously you actually do take the times--and yourself.

DEFENSE FUNDS

As the oppressive reign of the White Terror begins to roll over the land, defense of the elementary civil liberties of dissenters becomes ever more acutely necessary. Two new defense funds merit our interest and our contribution.

One is for bail money and legal and medical expenses for the arrested and wounded in the People's Park massacre. Contributions should be sent to: The People's Park Defense Fund, c/o Free Church, 2200 Parker St., Berkeley, Calif.

The other is for the defense of the eight political dissenters at Chicago last year who have been shamefully indicted by the federal authorities for "conspiracy to promote disorder and riot" under the infamous "anti-riot" Title XVIII of the Civil Rights Act of 1968. The entire spectrum of laws against "conspiracy", along with "incitement", are methods of suppressing, not concrete action but political defense and freedom of speech. Laws against "conspiracy" have no part in libertarian law, which is only concerned with defending persons and their rights against acts of invasion. Contributions toward the costly defense against this mass indictment may be made out to "Chicago Defense Fund", and mailed to the Capital Committee to Defend the Conspiracy, 28 E. Jackson Blvd., Chicago, Ill. 60604.

Recommended Reading

Faustino Ballve, *Essentials of Economics* (Irvington-on-Hudson, New York; Foundation for Economic Education, \$3.00 cloth, \$1.50 paper). The best single brief introduction to economics. Written from an Austrian rather than Chicagoite viewpoint. Fills an extremely important need.

Andrew Kopkind and James Ridgeway, "Law and Power in Washington", *Hard Times* (June 16-23, 1969). A brilliant muckraking dissection of the politics not only of Abe Fortas but of Fortas' important Washington law firm. Its editors are New Left radicals; this impressive weekly newsletter has improved considerably since the departure of Old Left liberal R. Sherrill. *Hard Times* is available for \$7.50 per year, \$6 for

students, at 80 Irving Place, New York, N. Y. 10003.

Frederic Bastiat, *Economic Sophisms* (Foundation for Economic Education, \$2.00 paper), and *Selected Essays in Political Economy* (Foundation for Economic Education, \$2.00 paper). The most significant writings of the great 19th-century libertarian *laissez-faire* economist. Both highly recommended, but the latter more important as containing more systematic articles.

Benjamin Page, "Signals from North Korea", *The Nation* (May 19, 1969). Indispensable if you want to find out what's going on at the next hot spot which the U. S. might be cooking up in Asia.

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