

possible under the circumstances, recognizing that all Christian organizations in every country are limited and somewhat biased by the perspectives and pressures of the society in which they operate. Under Hromadka's leadership, the Christian Peace Conference gradually became a gathering place for Christians left of center in all parts of the world, for those concerned with peace and reconciliation and willing to take risks with national security for it, and those who were animated by a profound sense of fellowship with Christians in Eastern Europe in their witness.

The invasion of Czechoslovakia placed all of this in profound crisis, from which the Christian Peace

Conference has not yet emerged. Hromadka died in the midst of this crisis, having resigned from the presidency in protest against direct political pressure which removed his friend, the General Secretary, Jaroslav Ondra, from his post. This, too, sounds like a tragedy; but Hromadka did not see it as such. For him, this was one more tactical problem in the on-going business of bearing an effective Christian witness in the midst of political pressures. It was, if you like, a lesson to his colleagues in the Christian Peace Conference about the way in which a Christian organization maintains both its transcendence and its effectiveness. We can only hope that those of us who continue this work will learn this lesson well.

ALIENATION AND REVOLUTION

Bernard Murchland

A recent letter to the editor of one of the newspapers I read suggested that our present era should go down as the Age of Apprehension rather than the Age of Aquarius. The writer went on to list thirty "crises"—ranging from Russia to a higher rate of V.D.—that depress the minds of the citizenry. He then concluded: "And just in case any reader refuses to get drowned by these, there's always the H-bomb hanging over our heads." The news, to be sure, is rarely good these days. But it is more than a question of bad news. A letter of this sort rather vividly and even pathetically expresses the widespread sense of malaise that characterizes these times. We seem indisputably to be living through one of those periods of cultural collapse that periodically overtakes history, a time when the human estate is at low ebb, only tenuously connected to the sources of its replenishment.

In social criticism this awareness of collapse is usually dealt with under the rubric of alienation. What this term broadly refers to is that condition of unfreedom that obtains when human activity is forced rather than chosen, when it is not (to use Marx's language) self-activity. Lacking this essential freedom, alienated man cannot establish any satisfying relationship between the self and the world.

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He becomes reified and increasingly takes on the characteristics of those thing-like agencies that control his life. How shall this intolerable state be overcome? Today, the answer is unequivocal: through revolutionary action. Thus it is no accident that an age of alienation is also one of unprecedented revolutionary fervor. Revolution answers to felt needs and promises to heal the gaps of experience. The revolutionary spirit today is perhaps the only force that can channel man's creative energies toward renewal and a new order of things. The thrust of this spirit is to fuse ideas and experience, to expand the sense of the self and create the kind of society in which the self might flourish. The aspiration is, as Trotsky put it, to infuse the forms of existence with dramatic dynamism.

I want to say more about revolution by commenting on three prevalent attitudes which I believe to be false precisely because they would deny revolution as an effective agent of de-alienation. The *first* and most obvious attitude is that revolution is *per se* undesirable and that everything must be done to prevent it. This attitude amounts to a defense of the status quo. In our culture the perspective common to the majority of the people is defined by the analytic, pragmatic values of a dominant and dominating technocratic order. It never occurs to large numbers of people to question this order. It is assumed that

its stunning mastery of the natural environment will in due course be extended to the social order by a process of harmonious and gradual adaptation. For such people this order represents *the* rational way of doing things; it is thought to be inevitably in the service of greater economic well-being and moral growth. They assume, as Richard Shaull writes, that "life moves upward in spirals, that the lot of the dispossessed world can be improved without fundamentally upsetting our position in it, and that the values and patterns of life which we have labored long to develop will sooner or later be accepted and appreciated by the rest of the world."

Clearly, such an attitude must reject any thought of revolution as either desirable or possible. As a consequence, the great enslavement and alienation imposed by any uncritically accepted system goes largely unnoticed and unchallenged. Thus desensitized, large numbers of people lose their critical powers and mistake slavery for freedom, the irrational for the rational, and the desired for the desirable. Not unsurprisingly this kind of social and political rigidity sooner or later invites its own overthrow. The natural force of social dynamics finally breaks through such unthinking resistance to lay the groundwork for a new beginning, a *novus ordo saeculorum*. Unfortunately, the price paid in violence and bloodshed is usually great.

A *second* erroneous conception of revolution holds that now and again social conditions justify a revolution but only as a last resort, a kind of spasmodic effort that is in the final analysis justified by the stable order it envisages. What is important to this view is the intended outcome of the revolution, the new stable order, rather than the revolutionary activity itself. For example, the Declaration of Independence explains some of the conditions that legitimize revolution. Yet, ironically, the main sweep of United States history since that time has been profoundly non-revolutionary, so much so that today the country is bent indefatigably toward conformity. This is all the more ironical in that there are conditions in American society at present that more convincingly call for revolutionary action than those which justified the original break with England. The same fallacy also characterizes all utopian thinking—Marxist, Christian, or whatever. The assumption is that a time will come when there will be no cause for revolution, when a heaven on earth has been effectively realized—whether in the form of a classless society or the peaceful coexistence of lamb and lion or the accession of philosopher kings.

This attitude denies the on-going, *evolutionary* dimension of revolution and at the same time ignores a fundamental law of biological and moral growth. Radical cultural mutations are rare and on the whole undesirable. Rather, effective revolution consists in holding the conditions and institutions of society under the constant scrutiny of critical reason, so that their shortcomings can be more readily perceived and their strengths more effectively utilized. When Socrates was urged by his friends to flee Athens after he had been condemned to death, he refused on the grounds that such a course of action would contradict the basic tenet of his philosophy: namely, that the unexamined life is not worth living. The corollary of this is that the unexamined society is not worth living in. Socrates carried on his dialectic not only with the men of Athens but with the laws and institutions of the state as well. He had made an agreement with his state such that he really had only one alternative. "You must do whatever your state and your country tell you to do, or you must persuade them that their commands are unjust," he says in the *Crito*. The emphasis here is on the citizen's critical responsibility.

In a democracy the relationship between the citizen and his society is an intrinsic one. In order to change or improve the laws the citizen must work *within* them. The democratic principle is grounded in the fact that the laws hold their authority from the people. Thus, strictly speaking, there is only one way Socrates can appeal his sentence—by persuading his fellow citizens that they have erred in judging him. Since he failed to do so he is logically constrained to abide by the sentence. But it is not just a question of logic. It is also a matter of psychological identity. Socrates is what he is because he is an Athenian. He became a philosopher, practitioner of dialectic, because the laws of Athens al-

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lowed him to do so. Thus, to put himself outside the laws, he would also have to abandon his philosophy. But this would be self-contradictory and would compromise his identity. To opt out would be to deny both the democratic principle as well as the social function of critical reason. Thus Socrates saw the condition of freedom as critical alertness. He believed that by the power of reason man can free himself in some significant measure from the evil that exists in his social world. In one (but only one) of its important aspects education is for the intelligent critique of society. It would be permissible, of course, to escape from a tyranny or overthrow it. But a democracy defines a more creative interaction between citizen and society. Indeed, it defines revolution in terms of this creative interaction, a permanent adaptation of reason to social conditions.

Unless we see revolution as a form of evolution, a kind of critical exchange between man and his society, we render it a virtually impotent concept. It could mean no more than a static return to the same state of affairs (which, of course, is the original astronomical meaning of the term), the rise and fall of empires in a cyclical, pointless fashion, the replacement of one system by another as in some South American *coups*. But if this be the reality of revolution, it could not be the agent of new beginnings. It could not, in a word, answer to the deep aspirations of modern man. For this reason, I find the traditional definitions of revolution in terms of sudden social upheavals and/or radical transformations in the governmental process misleading when not, in fact, false. Even those violent outbursts history books have familiarized us with were preceded by evolutionary social and cultural changes. When, for example, Eugene Kamenda writes that "Unless we confine the term 'revolution' to the field of convulsive changes we shall find revolution everywhere, all the time," one understands the perspective from which he writes but wonders why he is reluctant to accept revolution as an on-going affair. Or this statement of Chalmers Johnson: "Creative political action is the specific antidote to revolutionary conditions." My point is rather that creative political action is revolutionary. When social structures are flexible enough to answer to new needs and respond to the intimations of reason and imagination they foster the kind of revolution that is the very substance of a democratic community.

Third and finally, there is no need to assume that revolution must always be accompanied by violence. Given the facts of human nature as we know them, the future of violence in some form or other is relatively safe. But the sense of revolution I urge would

have as one of its happiest effects the reduction of violence. I have in mind something like the theory of revolt that Albert Camus explained in *The Rebel*. Camus observed that the *de facto* course of revolution from Rousseau to Stalin has led inevitably to a reinforcement of state power, usually in the form of authoritarian dictatorship. Contempt for man and mass murder are acceptable tools for modern revolutionaries who, Camus noted, begin by demanding justice and end by establishing a police force. Thus the Jacobins prepared the terror in the name of Liberty; Khrushchev invaded Hungary in the name of History; and we can all think of crimes that have been committed in the name of Democracy. (Quite a few of them are being committed on the campuses these days.) It is rather like torturing people in the name of Christ. This kind of revolutionary is inspired by abstractions, he is led to commit excesses under the banner of slogans and words with capital letters. He is at bottom an ideologue who wants reform at any price. Camus argued (and his analysis is becoming more and more justified by events) that the historical revolutions of the past two or three centuries were animated by a romantic quest for totality which resulted in despotic and apocalyptic ideologies. In rebelling against the old absolutism, the revolutionaries substituted a new absolutism. Starting from the premise of unlimited freedom they arrived not illogically at unlimited despotism.

It is this unlimited character of modern revolutions, one might almost say their wantonness, that Camus deplored so consistently—in a word, the irrationality that blinded both the Left and the Right to concrete, human needs. It is not easy to find a balance between freedom and justice, as Camus learned from hard experience. When he condemned Soviet atrocities and took the position that no cause was worth the sacrifice of human life, he was criticized as a simple-minded idealist and ostracized by many of his former friends. Yet he continued to refuse to justify murder on grounds of political expediency and saw as clearly as any of our contemporaries that there is a kind of revolution that is far worse than the evils it sets out to cure. In harkening back to the Hellenic emphasis on limit and moderation, on reason and nature, Camus was in effect rejecting the blood-letting absolutism of modern history. This philosophy of finiteness seems to me an excellent guiding principle for the kind of revolution needed today. It would, I believe, help protect us against the romantic *putschism* that on all sides postures as revolution and make us aware that there are far more effective ways to accomplish revolutionary goals.