AGAINST REVOLUTION

by

GILBERT SELDES

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THE JOHN DAY *PAMPHLETS*—No. 10

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"There is nothing inevitable about a revolution in America until the weak-mindedness of those in possession makes it inevitable.

"The purpose of this pamphlet is to put revolution on one side and all other proposals on the other."

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THE JOHN DAY PAMPHLETS are launched in the belief that the present times demand this swift and terse medium for expressing urgent ideas. Henry Richard Tedder, Librarian of the Athenaeum Club of London, wrote for the Encyclopædia Britannica the authoritative definition:

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"For I predict that both of the two opposed errors of pessimism which now make so much noise in the world will be proved wrong in our own time—the pessimism of the revolutionaries who think that things are so bad that nothing can save us but violent change, and the pessimism of the reactionaries who consider the balance of our economic and social life so precarious that we must risk no experiments."

—JOHN MAYNARD KEYNES

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I

NOTHING is inevitable—not even revolution.

We can hardly say that "these are the times that try men's souls." Our minds are on trial, and for thirty months our minds have been either paralyzed or hypnotized. In our few moments of lucidity we have observed the minds of our leaders in action,* and have arrived at the conclusion that something much more powerful than the human intelligence will be needed to pull us through. War, for instance, or the repeal of prohibition, or the wholesale destruction of food products, or, since we have no money, a new industry like the automobile or the radio. Or, failing all these (and we are convinced they will fail us), a revolution. The reason we hear so much of revolution is that it is the alternative to every one of the others. It is a perpetual threat, the gangster's "or else" in political terms. Like the "unthinkable war" it has become not only thinkable but everlastingly present in our thoughts. It has, in fact, lodged itself so firmly in our minds that we can hardly divert our thoughts from it. Yet there is nothing inevitable about a revolution in America until the weak-mindedness of those in possession makes it inevitable.

The first sign of this flabbiness of mind is in the loose chatter about revolution at dinner tables and at speakeasies, and perhaps around the modern equivalent of the cracker barrel. Especially if one is rich it is very smart to say that revolution, like prosperity, is around the corner—only revolution has chosen the nearer corner. It is the sign of a generous mind for the rich to say if they were poor they would be revolutionary too. It is an in-

* See: *Oh, Yeah?* (Viking Press).

tellectual smartness, as if "facing the revolution" really meant facing an existing fact, and there is a kind of snobbishness in it, too, because facing the revolution has a spurious gallantry at a time when gallantry costs nothing and is quite unnecessary. It is a little too easy to play the part of the French aristocrats going to the guillotine in the two hours between the last cocktail and the first night of a new musical show. I do not overestimate the importance of the chatter of the idle and half-educated rich, although precisely the same chatter filled the salons of the old régime in France, who invited journalists and philosophers to amuse them after dinner with horror stories of the collapse of civilization, and let their civilization collapse because they were so entertained by the minds of others they stopped using their own.

A little more important is the surrender of the publicists. Revolution is chic not only socially but intellectually, so that it becomes an indiscretion to say that on the whole you are not an enthusiast for the destruction of the present social system. The reason is that the peculiar paralysis which has come over our minds has prevented us from analyzing the idea of revolution. We have not gone through the hard labor of dissociating the revolutionary method from a hundred generous impulses and a thousand noble objectives, which can be much more economically attained without revolution. In theory we are all in favor of the abolition of poverty and we are ashamed to say that we are against revolution, because it implies that we are in favor of starvation. The purpose of this pamphlet is only to point out that the idea of revolution needs examination and that it is still humanely honorable to be against revolution as a method.

The prosperous and the powerful are the ones who will lose most by a revolution and it ought to be brought home to them that they are largely responsible for the paralysis of mind which has kept us from building the necessary barricades against the enemy. From the mo-

ment the panic hit us our leaders have done all that men can do to prevent us from thinking. Our minds were choked by these and a thousand other weeds while we were awake, and we were put to sleep with the promise that if we slept for sixty days we could dream ourselves back into the happy times before the gong rang in Wall Street for a reckoning in billions.

I put it this way: that we are facing either revolution or the talk of revolution because for two and a half years we have not been allowed to look forward. Our maximum allowance in time was sixty days; our maximum allowance in space was around the corner. Our bankers and industrialists and statesmen kept insisting that the past would automatically recur, that wages would not be lowered, that jobs would not be lost, that Europe would pay, that no one in America should starve, and that the standard of living—radios for the poor and yachts for the rich—should never go down. The only dream which these hypnotists permitted to us was a dream that we had had before. Psychoanalysts would have no difficulty with this formula: the recurrence of the distant past is a sign of infantilism and defeat. The rebellion of an infant is a tantrum. The rebellion of the infantile mind in adult society is hysteria, or you might say, revolution.

The present examination of revolution as a method is based on the two propositions that revolution is not inevitable and at the present time not desirable. It assumes that one can be against revolution without defending the present order and even without belittling the objects of revolution. It is definitely against revolution as a method and against the revolutionary mind.

To save white paper and to give the reader a run for his money, I condense the background into propositions. I am not at all sure that even if all of them are wrong the argument which follows is invalid.

(1) We have no data to prove the inevitability of any revolution. We call those inevitable of which we approve.

(2) Inevitable revolutions which fail go down as footnotes in history under the names of treason and riot.

(3) We do not even know the symptoms of the inevitable. The Russian Revolution began as a strike of women workers.

(4) So long as the revolutionaries and the idle-minded continue to talk about the inevitable revolution, the country is comparatively safe. It is the grim silence which follows that is dangerous.

(5) There has never been a real revolution in a highly industrialized country. (The political change in Germany was a concealed term in the Armistice imposed by the Allies.)

(6) Marx predicted that the great industrial countries would be the first to advance, or collapse, into communistic socialism. His success as an economist in Russia was, in effect, his annihilation as a prophet.

(7) It is permissible to suspect that what was inevitable for Russia may not be even desirable for America.

(8) There is nothing more old-fashioned than the radical revolutionary; revolution as a method is five thousand years old and one hundred years too old.

(9) Everything has changed except the revolutionary ideal. That has only worn out.

(10) The methods of revolution were developed for use in small cities surrounded by distant villages; they need to be re-adapted to mechanized urban civilization.

(11) The real radical today is the man who is an anti-revolutionary. He knows that we have lost our jobs, but that is no reason why we should also lose our minds.

(12) Change is the great enemy of revolution. Revolutionaries in power naturally stop being revolutionaries. The Soviet Republic, one of the oldest established régimes in Europe, is a highly conservative government naturally following Spinoza's dictum that the first duty of a State is to protect itself.

(13) Capitalism has proved itself fluid and manageable enough to adapt itself even to a universal war. It

has changed far more than the ideas of its critics, although not necessarily in the direction they desired.*

(14) If there is to be a revolution in America it need not be a revolution à la Russe.

The revolution in our mind's eye is not a blueprint and not a drawing. It is a movie; we see ourselves commandeering motor cars to rush down to the banking centers, and if there is to be looting we have picked our favorite shops. At this point, the movie goes suddenly dark and we need not one minute, but ten years, to change reels. Unfortunately, we will not see the new film, the happy engineers and the farmers dancing in the wheatfields, unless we live through the period of darkness. It is because we do not think of those ten years that we are so gay and gallant about revolution.

What will happen in the ten years after a revolution succeeds no one can tell. But the fact that we cannot be certain is no excuse for panic or hysterical enthusiasm. The things that will happen will be the result of definite forces (the revolution) working on conditions we know perfectly (the conditions of contemporary American life). We know what will happen if a man hits a church-bell with a hammer, which is what happened in Russia; and we know what will happen if a man hits an electric light with a hammer, which is what will happen in America. Our revolutionaries intend to give life more abundantly, but so far as I know, no plan exists by which a hundred million Americans will quickly and without appalling suffering be transformed into the happy children of the field, factory and workshop. I do not understand the functioning of American industry and put myself in the hands of a man who does. What follows is largely from Stuart Chase's "Men and Machines," including his quotations from other sources.

"Who understands the technological functioning of

* "The bourgeoisie, historically, has played a most revolutionary part."—Communist Manifesto, by Marx and Engels.

these municipal services, and their interlocking relationships? Where are the men to replace the handful of technicians who might sever or irreparably wreck their own service, hardly knowing the extent of the ruin it might cause? When no one man in the Telephone Company understands the latest dial system—it takes about five of them to master it—where is the central intelligence to nurse a great city through a nervous breakdown? The answer is, nowhere. What is worse, the problems involved are far too complicated to be grasped by any one mind, or by any small group. It would take a very considerable intelligence service, functioning continuously, with a large clerical force and elaborate filing system, to provide any sort of insurance against a metropolitan calamity.

"The factor of tenuousness applies not only to cities. If the 200,000 trained enginemen were blotted out of existence tomorrow, the social and industrial life of the nation would be paralyzed. Mines, factories and public utilities would cease production. Food supplies would accumulate remote from the great markets. Babies would die while men and women fought for bread and meat. It would take not months, but years to train the men necessary to restore the constant reliable flow of commerce.

"By themselves alone, the technicians can, in a few weeks, effectually incapacitate the country's productive industry. . . . No one who will dispassionately consider the technical character of this industrial system will fail to recognize that fact. Mr. Veblen estimates the number of men necessary to do this at 'no more than a minute fraction of one percent of the population.'

"An engineer once told me how something in the order of one hundred key men, operating its veins of water, power, gas, sewage disposal, milk supply, communication, could bring the life of a great city to an end—almost as neatly as though its every crevice had been soaked with poison gas. . . . The machine has presented us with a central nervous system, protected with no spinal vertebrae, lying almost naked for the cutting. If for one reason or

another, the severance is made, we face a terrifying, perhaps a mortal, crisis. All previous cultures have got along with hardly any central nervous system at all; they could be destroyed only village by village, for each was largely self-sustaining."

All of this has to do with a single factor, which Mr. Chase calls "technological tenuousness." I suppose it would be idle to remark that the financial structure is at least as delicate as the industrial one, since a revolution would annihilate banks and bankers in its first blow. There are other factors to consider, not so spectacular as the subterranean vaults and the devious minds of great bankers, but dreadfully important to the functioning of a revolutionary state. There is, for example, the psychology of the bourgeois. It cannot be a matter of indifference that the Russian revolution could promise a more comfortable existence to three-quarters of the population, and that in America it would have to promise to at least half the population a more dismal one. It may be contemptible to desire comfort, but the eradication of this desire is a difficult and almost magical performance. Revolutions appeal to those who have not; they have to be imposed on those who have.*

One of the puzzles of the Russian revolution is why the streetcar systems of Leningrad and Moscow had to break down. I am sure that the practical communists who feel that they may be at any time called to power in America, have plans to prevent the breakdown of our essential industries and communications; they assume that these will continue to function in spite of the fact that the people who live on them and believe in them will be dispossessed. They do not count on friction and inexperience and incompetence. The Russian revolution,

* "The masses go into a revolution not with a prepared plan of social reconstruction, but with a sharp feeling that they cannot endure the old régime."—The History of the Russian Revolution, by Leon Trotsky.

with less internal opposition than we should have, was for five years a breakdown. From the point of view of a revolutionist, a breakdown is absolutely essential. The old institutions must be swept out of the way, and we should admire the Russians for completing the work of destruction so promptly. Considering the more elaborate and more delicate organism in America, we might with generosity set ten years as the limit of destructiveness.

Revolutions are not made by expert technicians and businessmen; they are made by the dispossessed and the disinherited; that is to say, by the irresponsible. This is no discredit to revolutionaries. The established order at any given time is too busy solving its problems to elaborate a program. The disinherited are the ones who have time to think and they are under no obligation to preserve what they do not particularly like. The whole assumption behind a revolution in America is that the revolutionaries could either supplant the one hundred thousand key men or compel them to continue at their positions. I see no reason in the world for accepting that assumption. Even if one-tenth of them were missing the cost in human misery would be colossal.

II

I have said that it is possible to be against revolution without defending the present order. More practically, I should say that whoever is against revolution must be willing to change the present system. We need not be too proud to learn from our adversaries. The great fear of the revolutionist is that the present order will adapt and improve itself; he has to persuade unwilling disciples to reject every offer which tends to diminish the poverty of the poor, while it continues to admit the existence of the rich. Revolutionaries want the capitalistic system to become more capitalistic (in the sense of being more selfish). They want to keep to the Marxian prophecy of the richer rich and the poorer poor. They will accept no

hand of friendship, and I do not blame them. Their whole satisfaction in life depends on the unmitigated selfishness and stupidity of their enemies. They reject profit-sharing and joint-ownership and high wages and even labor-management, because all these things prevent revolutions and because, so they say, they are all forms of charity.

I agree with revolutionaries in believing that the charity system is outworn. But the charity of the rich to the poor is not the only one. There is the appalling charity of the poor to the rich. On the great lists of charitable contributions from the rich to the poor only a few items are anonymous; on the infinitely longer list of charity which the poor have given to the rich no names occur. The unmonied ones have had the exquisite tact to keep their benevolence a secret. The rich have given to the poor a little food, a little drink, a little shelter and a few clothes. The poor have given to the rich palaces and yachts, and an almost infinite freedom to indulge their doubtful taste for display, and bonuses and excess profits, under which cold and forbidding terms have been hidden the excess labor and extravagant misery of the poor. They have given their strength in the coal pits and their courage in the breadlines, so that the rich might not be deprived of their necessities. They have given what is perhaps more precious to them, their security and their peace of mind, and have lived their lives precariously, always on the edge of danger, uncertain of the next day's food or the next month's rent, terrified of living lest they lose their jobs and terrified of dying lest their wives and children starve.

This is the system which revolutionaries want to destroy *before* it can improve itself. For there were, there still are, signs, portents of change in the industrial sky. The profit system—the system of working exclusively for profit—was beginning to be unsatisfactory to the

capitalist as well as to the worker. The worker was becoming aware of the gap between the myth of independence and the facts of mitigated wage-slavery; he was beginning to work out the primary mathematics of dividing his wages by unemployment. The capitalist, at the same time, was beginning to allow himself a few fruitful doubts; his system does not shine on the defensive, and it was continually being attacked. The "revolutionary" idea of management divorced from ownership was mentioned; it hardly sounded revolutionary to millions of small stockholders who had never been invited to manage anything, but it suggested that the great industries were becoming too complicated to be run for immediate profit alone. Another *malaise* of the capitalist was the overwhelming importance of high-pressure salesmanship. For a season, a year, or a decade, it might drive out the spectre of diminishing returns; but pressure was itself falling a victim to that dismal law, and there was always a chance that the American people might put their backs up and refuse to buy what they did not need. (The panic saved them from that unaccustomed exercise; they simply refused to buy what they could not afford.)

A few old pirates remained; enough of them to give the impression that American business was still ruthless. But the hand of the financier was upon the rest, checking the extravagance of new industries, even if it could not cut down the bonuses of Mr. Eugene Grace. A number of effectively placed individuals were beginning to feel that industry was too powerful, that the relation of one business to another was too complex, to let any part of it run amuck. But like the revolutionaries, the capitalists clung to the catchwords of the past, especially to "rugged individualism" which was being undermined by government control and interference at a hundred points. They kept on talking about the American system, comically hanging on to the hands of the clock, as if by doing so they could actually change the time.

The alteration of the spirit of American industry was

both accelerated and checked by the Great Boom. Prosperity meant that, with reasonable exceptions, strikes were not the protests of starving men, but of the comparatively few men who preferred justice to prosperity. Given the Red scare, the discontented could be put down with the almost universal blessing of the country, and the specific benediction of the American Federation of Labor, now nestling cozily in the arms of the National Civic Federation and taking week-ends in the Chambers of Commerce. This tended to make capital arrogant. On the other hand, the brilliant discovery that people with money, even if they were workers, spent money and so rolled up profits, made capital tender. The lamb was not to lie down with the lion, exactly; it was to work and spend for the lion. Certainly for five years people believed that the rich were rich not because the poor were poor, but because the poor were getting rich. A generation ago a yacht meant ten thousand laborers living in squalor; three years ago a yacht meant only ten thousand laborers driving their own cars.

The profit system was not a good system because, as a general rule, it concealed its deficits. It reported enormous profits and omitted underpayment, in the bad years, and unemployment even in good years. There was no room on the schedule of expenses for the human factor, the uninsured, the discharged at forty, the over-worked. These were charges which the state or the community took over.

"But if you are going to give up the profit system," some people say, "you are yielding everything to the revolutionists." This is nonsense, quite apart from the fact that giving up the profit system would refuse at least one thing to the revolutionary spirit: the chance of having a revolution. The profit system cannot be given up in a day; it can only be modified. What can be given up are the excesses of the system: its excess pressure and its excess yield. The profit system is the one which works for profit regardless of the general good; to give it up

means surrendering profits of 2,000 percent and bonuses in the millions; it means surrendering the right to manufacture adulterated foods, poisonous cosmetics, gimcrack gadgets, and selling them by misleading publicity. If a fair profit will not bring in the investor and the inventor, on whom our industry depends, something more dangerous and despicable than stupidity has overtaken the American people.

I doubt whether, in actual practice, we have much choice. Something more attractive and less expensive than revolution has to be offered—and offered with promptness and honorable goodwill. So far the American system's offer has been merely a return to the past, carefully omitting what everyone knows, that the past led to precisely such disasters as we are now enjoying. At the end of two and a half years of unemployment the dull and defeated may be enchanted by the prospect of a job. But those thirty months have sharpened the wits of the workers and they want something more. Industrialists, statesmen, and financiers have so far offered us no security against *their* mistakes.

III

Because the capitalist system has been too busy enjoying its independence in the past, and is too busy protecting itself now, it has no ready defences and is the natural prey of the revolutionary. It has no bid to make against his bid, and even if it had, it would remain at a disadvantage. The man in possession can only bid as much as he is willing and able to pay; the revolutionary, having nothing, can offer everything. The irresponsibility of the revolutionary mind is the result of a long and happy experience in not being called upon to make good.

The words, "the revolutionary mind" are vague. They include admirable philosophers of the art of revolution, like Trotsky, inspired practical leaders like Lenin, as well as the rabble which constitutes their lunatic fringe.

I am using the phrase here in a limited sense, to mean the mind which neither plans nor carries out revolutions, but which is attracted by the abstract idea. You see this mind at work in the unhappy and thwarted adherents of all revolutionary movements, in men and women who have made a half-hearted effort to succeed under the present system and have failed; you see it just as clearly in those intellectuals who have given up the effort to save the order by which they subsist, and in the semi-literate educated rich who think that a revolution would be an exciting spectacle. To all of them the idea of revolution seems hard, certain, and firm, as if by rejecting all compromises and denying all hope of improvement, they were ridding themselves of illusion and "grappling with reality." It is as if a prizefighter were to prove that he was not afraid of his opponent by going into a permanent clinch. The addict of revolution sees a white sheet on a dark night and calls for admiration because he insists that it is a ghost.

Revolution is not facing the facts; it is running away from them, an adolescent's dream in which the hero punches the villain's nose and is rewarded with the hand of the rich and beautiful princess. To face the facts is to solve one dull and difficult problem after another; it is the hard way of making decisions, even if they are mistakes, and to foresee the problems which each solution brings up. *Revolution cancels the problems without arriving at the answers.*

It is important to uncover the romantic and adolescent mind in the revolutionary disciple. (It is also important to discover the infantile mind in solid businessmen and Presidential candidates; those who are still expecting Santa Claus, with prosperity in a bag, to come down the chimney have led us into enough trouble, as it is.) The revolutionary flight from actuality is not the only one that has occurred in the past ten years, and while we can't learn much about revolutionary tactics from the other flights, we can learn something of the motive if we

discover where all these escapes are leading. They are varied enough to include some highly attractive resting places, like the folders in a tourist agency. Those who cannot stand prosperity have taken refuge from the complexities of the world in Tahiti or in the warm comfort of a psychoanalyst's office; they have fled from machinery to worship Mother Earth; from the disappointments of maturity to worship children; from the hard predatory grasp of the dominant white, to adore the negro and the Indian; from the problems of the intellect, to the subconscious; from here to the most distant places of the earth and from now to the visionary past or the visionary future—"anywhere, anywhere out of the world." The rout of the defeated has not been so spectacular; it has been pitiable. They have been the great simplifiers, standing against gluttony and lust, against even the moderate satisfactions of the appetites, in favor of some ascetic ideal, some purities and sanctities which the average common man rejects.

All these flights are from the common to the extraordinary, from the normal to the abnormal, from the complications of daily life to a real or pseudo-simplicity, from the difficulty not to solution, but to annihilation. Politically and economically, the idea of revolution is a South Sea Island dream of warm suns, the simple life, food growing on trees, and naked girls in worshipful attitudes. It gives us back our social innocence and our economic Golden Age. Like all the other forms of escape it betrays a resentment against discipline; the true revolutionary, arriving in Russia now, is appalled by the harsh discipline, the tyranny, the regimenting of opinion, the denial of political freedom, which he sees there.

It is, perhaps, agreeable to call revolutionaries "maladjusted," but the unfavorable word clarifies nothing. Why, for instance, should a man adjust himself to slavery, or dishonesty, or humiliation? The boast of America has

always been that its stalwart sons have refused to adjust themselves to poverty and have made themselves rich; so we are not the ones to toss the inferiority complex about loosely. But it does serve us to know that the revolutionary mind is essentially like the mind of the primitivist, the nature and child worshipper, the phobiac of the modern world. That he is looking for a world-order better suited to himself is as natural as the bootlegger's belief in prohibition. But it reminds us that there are two motives in the soul of the revolutionary and that the second one is the hope of a better world for himself. The other, first in time and significance, is his revenge on a world which has been inhospitable and indifferent, his hope to destroy the present system.

Both of these motives can be seen at work in the attitude of revolutionaries toward contemporary Russia. There is pride in the destruction of the first five years and something like dismay at the prospect of the next Five Year Plan. It is not the radical, but the non-partisan altruist and the non-political engineer who takes pride in the great dam at Dnieprostroy. The radical is still in a warm glow over the destruction of the Imperial wine cellars and the abolition of God; the reason he hopes that the Soviet system will work, is that by working it will help to destroy the capitalist system; it is a disappointment to his hopes that the international revolution has been (even temporarily) shelved in favor of the Five Year Plan. The radical who was willing to defend the annihilation of a free press in Russia (in papers perpetually suppressed by the U. S. Post Office) now finds that press as eulogistic of Henry Ford as it once was of John Reed.

It happens that Henry Ford is of peculiar interest to us. The witch-hunters of 1918 to 1923 (who discovered a Red under every bush) never prepared us for the sight of Ford (the "revolutionary" in mechanics) and Stalin (the conservative heir of a revolutionary state) working hand in hand.

What happened in Russia and the attitude of Americans to what happened in Russia, are both extremely important for analysing the revolutionary mind. They signify that the day of the machine-wrecker has passed, that *there are no revolutions against the industrial system,* only revolutions for the control of the industrial system. This excludes the moral side of the Russian revolution, the intention to control the industrial system so that it brings slavery to none and profit to few. The enthusiasts for the Russian system are deeply offended by a purely economic analysis of the Soviets;* as economics, Sovietism is a shift in power and lacks magnificence; as economics, in fact, it has not yet been proved a complete success. It is only a success in calling out extraordinary devotion, an amazing willingness to suffer, and a profound faith; that is to say, it is a success because in the immediate background there is still the spirit of revolution. Nevertheless, if we are not enthusiasts for revolution itself, we have to be cold about Russia—cold, not hostile. We have to see that the original intention to make agriculture the foundation of the state has, under pressure, been changed. It is perfectly true that if America and Western Europe had not been the slaves and masters of industry, Russia might have stuck to her agricultural plan and remained the paradise of the revolutionary. The moment Russia decided that she could not live isolated from the world, she turned industrial; and the revolutionary, although it takes him a long time to abandon Russia entirely, has already gone over emotionally to Mexico, which is glorified because it is the home of peasants and native artists and natural craftsmen, and has no radios. Every hundred thousand tons of steel and concrete in Russia is a monument over the grave of a worshipper of revolution whose faith has died.

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* "The immediate aim of the Communists is . . . conquest of political power by the proletariat."—Communist Manifesto, by Marx and Engels.

The next factor in the Russian change is even more important to us because it deals not with the revolutionary mind, but with revolutionary practise. My assumptions are:

(1) That some destruction must occur in a revolution;

(2) That the opposition in America will be serious and destruction will therefore be great; and

(3) That the delicacy and complexity of American industry will make restoration a difficult and long-drawn job.

On these assumptions, and considering what happened in Russia, it seems to me reasonable to suppose that my figure of ten years of chaos is not excessive. At the end of that time we shall begin importing engineers and technicians and heavy machinery from Russia to start our industrial system over again. The intervening ten years are, in fact, a central argument against revolution as a method. They point to a weakness even in the prospectus of the revolutionist. If I were not quite so loyal a supporter of the present system, I would explain this in an open letter to the revolutionary.

"Dear Fellow-radicals," I would say, "do you mind my suggesting that you could do a great deal better than you are doing? You have an extraordinary opportunity. You are the only ones who can think freely and act decisively. The presidents, the bankers, the factory owners, and even the little shopkeepers, are not willing to undergo the mental and physical strain of preventing a disaster. You, whose minds have been kept sharp and clean because you have nothing to save, can bring on the disaster whenever you like. Bad times are your good times.

"But if some of us are doubtful, please do not assume bad faith. So far as we know, you haven't made us the one promise which would really ennoble your whole program and make revolution worth while; that is, you have never promised to destroy industry. You have only promised to destroy some of its manifestations, such as capitalism and slavery. But we have to assume that after you

are in control, we shall still have factories (airy and well-conditioned and charming, no doubt, but factories none the less). You are not Gandhists; you are not proposing a simple rural life for America. You are not working on the devolution of great cities. I think, perhaps, a few years ago you had these things in mind, but the great dam and the workmen's cities of Russia have misled you. I am sure you intend to present to us a whole series of garden suburbs. But you have not had the courage to announce that the end of the motorcar has come, and the end of steel and rubber and oil. You are only changing methods.

"You have been denounced for a slavish imitation of Russia, but in one respect you are singularly American, in accordance with your idea of America. The change you offer has been entirely a material one. Since the bolshevists gained control in Russia your idealism has been shot to hell. You are no longer pacifists, since you are willing to go to war for communism; you are no longer libertarians, since you favor the suppression of freedom of speech and assembly; you have junked democracy and Christian ethics and altruism and have come down to earth.

"But you forget what you used to insist upon: the hypocrisy of the American people, who may be practical in practical things, but who dearly love a high ideal, something that sounds well. You have neglected to supply this. Your program so far is negative.

"I suggest that you go back to 'three acres and a cow,' or if you can't manage that, one acre and three cows. There, at least, we had escape from the inhuman brutality of city life, with the promise of 'spiritual advancement.' You have been talking to us as if we were Russian peasants who had just learned to read, and who had never experienced the comforts of life. I suppose that New Russia's Primer, since it was an official publication, is still in good standing, and I beg you to read it carefully and notice how glamorous the hard words of mining and hydro-electric engineering become in Mr. Ilin's text;

and then notice how drab are the half dozen sentences which he devotes to the purpose of all this. A whole book on engineering and ten lines on education, entertainment and leisure! But these are exactly the proportions which, according to our critics, have always obtained in America. In short you have offered too much and at the same time too little.

"The too much is your panacea. There, as usual, the capitalistic system has been your best friend. For twenty years it has done everything you could have hoped it would do; it has been callous and stupid and muddle-headed and arrogant and wasteful and ostentatious and ignoble. You couldn't ask for a better friend than your worst enemy. So that now your panacea is infinitely more attractive than it could possibly have been before the war. You are the only people who, without a conference or a congress, can instantly settle the whole problem of reparations, war debts and private loans—by your usual method of cancelling. You are the only people who can instantly abolish unemployment and inequality. If you hurry, you can spare the American people that peculiarly amusing and at the same time degrading spectacle, a presidential election. It is pleasant to think of your revolution which will cancel the forty-eight different statutes of divorce and at the same time put an end to radio advertising; from you alone we can count on having a new housing system and the disappearance of hot dog stands. We can even be sure that you will either abolish prohibition or enforce it, a blessing either way. Every other scheme for the improvement of the world promises to remove the beggar from the streets; you alone promise to remove the millionaire as well. All the others plan to abolish poverty by raising taxes; you plan to make poverty universal by abolishing taxes. You promise a world without snobs and headwaiters, without arrogant doormen and rich patrons of the arts, without cheap farces in the theatre, without pornography and Congressmen

and all the ills that flesh is heir to. That is what makes your dream so attractive.

"But you do not promise enough because, although you know you will have to destroy a good part of the industrial system, you are offering no beautiful way of living to take its place. This is the one point on which the capitalist has you. The capitalist says 'the present system is extremely attractive to *me*, and is as good as *you* can get; possibly it will become a little bit better for you—I can't lose by that.' This is a meagre promise, whereas you, who undertake to get rid of all the defects of the system, have been too hard-headed and too practical and, of course, too short-sighted, to tell us that we will all be happy peasants singing behind the cows. You have lacked imagination; you have made us think that the purpose of your revolution is not to create an earthly paradise, but to shift power and to create a new division of profit.

"The best thing in your offer is that when your revolution has occurred, America will be a happier land, although not a changed one. If that is so we are justified in wondering whether the price you set is worth paying and naturally enough that is not a question for you, but for us, to answer."

IV

There are two possible answers to revolution: force and the offer of a better America at a cheaper price. I am not at all sure that force would be ineffective. The trouble with it is that it might do all the damage of revolution without accomplishing its ends; soldiers on God's side are as destructive as those on the Devil's. The alternative is safer, but it requires intelligence. So far we have had two methods of dealing with disaffection. The less popular one was a liberal industrial policy; hard-boiled industrialists hated it because it was the thin side

of the wedge, a surrender of their divine rights; the hard-boiled radicals hated it because it seemed to make working men contented without cutting into the profits and privileges of their employers. The more common policy was calling out the police. The incredible Kentuckians with their toothpicks and horseplay in front of Theodore Dreiser's room, hardly strike one as being fit to manage men and mines; yet they were following the typical American method of dealing with those who can no longer tolerate injustice.

Something more intelligent is wanted. There has never been a positive capitalistic program. In the mind of the radical cartoonist capital is united, firm and solid; actually it has been, until the last few years, composed of hostile particles. The pirates of railroads and oil and steel have been so busy under-cutting each other, or slashing each other's throats, that they have left themselves unguarded on two sides: from the bourgeois public and from the radical agitator. If they had combined to serve the one, which they could have done with profit, they need never have feared the other. Now, when the agitator has his greatest chance, the public has no faith in public utilities, there is no national feeling for the railroads that cross the nation, and scandal has touched every public officer from the township clerk to a presidential minister.

The whole essence of capitalism is investment, which looks toward the future; and yet capitalism has been so short-sighted that it has barely recognized the facts even of the present. It has been so devoted to private rights that the only private right left to it now seems to be the right to commit suicide. It has tried to defend practical business by teaching us Horatio Alger myths; it has had no faith in humane and sensible dealings, and it has gone on believing that human sacrifices to the glory of protective tariff were admired throughout the country. It has never enrolled powerful publicists in its behalf—it has preferred to bribe a few college professors.

It has had no unity, no plan and very little faith in itself.

Quite possibly the financiers and their statesmen are hopeless in this crisis. If they grow panicky, they may start the wrong kind of counter-revolution before the revolution breaks out, making the mistake of the communists and trying to persuade us that we need a Mussolini rather than a Lenin, or a Hitler rather than a Hoover. We do want a counter-revolution, but it cannot be led by the Ku Klux Klan, largely because it must be a counter-revolution in thought.

One method the capitalists have not tried. They have been modest and let us feel that leadership must come from our politicians; they might as well come out into the open and announce their plans themselves. If all the great bankers and all the great industrialists cannot save us from dissolution, they might as well abdicate; their factories and their fortunes will be of precious little use to their children. A few men of intelligence are still willing to preserve America from destruction; they may have radical ideas, but they are not revolutionists. I suspect it would be a relief to them to be called into the councils of powerful men—men who can put plans into action instantly.

I do not know how far Mr. Gerard Swope would modify his plan to conform to the ideas of Mr. Wiggin, Mr. Filene, Mr. Mazur, Mr. Mitchell and Mr. Stuart Chase, nor how far they would yield to Mr. Swope. But they and two dozen others (and the house of Morgan to be sure) might survey the condition of the country and might offer something—the richest and most intelligent men in the country agreeing upon an immediate plan of action, not a Five Year Plan, but a Five Months' Plan. They might have to work with a hostile Europe, or a friendly one. Good economics are wanted; but far more important at the moment is some indication that the effective heads of the present system, the men with brains

to think and with power to put thought into action, have been driven to thinking, and to thinking together. I am not proposing any economic solution of our difficulties because I have neither the necessary experience nor the mental equipment necessary to handle the experience of others. It is not necessary for those who are opposed to revolution to supply the precise alternative; that is a job they can deputize to others so long as they are willing to say that any plan is better than revolution.

The purpose of this pamphlet is to put revolution on one side and all other proposals on the other. The one thing of which I am fairly certain is that no proposals can be of any service so long as two ideas remain in the public mind. One of these ideas is that the panic was inevitable, and the other is that the revolution is inevitable. In both of them the human mind abdicates. And although the human mind is not nearly so admirable an instrument as we are sometimes inclined to believe, it is the only defense we have against chaos.

We brought the panic upon ourselves by bad thinking. We can save ourselves from revolution only by good thinking.

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