

CHAPTER XXIV

Our Revolutionary Children

THE FOREGOING CHAPTER, originally written for an organization interested in educational reform, was re-written for *Human Events* and given a new title: "For Our Children's Children." The article attracted considerable attention, and one reader sent me a check for \$1,000 to finance the start of these suggested student organizations. Not being temperamentally equipped for organizational work, I did not know what to do about it, and kept the check in my desk for some weeks. I contemplated returning it with thanks. But, one day I mentioned the matter to a member of the staff of the Foundation for Economic Education, which was then publishing some pamphlets on the free economy and limited government, and he suggested a *modus operandi* which solved my problems: I was to spend the money to get the names of interested students and the Foundation would put them on their mailing list. So, I incorporated the Inter-collegiate Society of Individualists and began operations.

We started with some 600 names of students, gathered here and there, and in ten years, after a number of vicissitudes, the organization has acquired a list of some 12,000 names. As graduates are dropped, new students take their place, and altogether some 30,000 have been serviced. Also,

my original idea of organizing the students into groups has taken form, and lecturers teaching various phases of the philosophy of individualism are being sent to the campuses. I do not have much to do with the work, acting merely in an advisory capacity, having long ago turned over the managerial job to a young man with vision and dedication. The principal on which ISI operates is characteristic of the philosophy of individualism; namely, that there is in the nature of things an "educable elite," a self-selective group of minds that are inclined to ask questions about fundamentals and of hearts that yearn for freedom. Students must ask for the literature sent to them and are periodically asked if they wish to have their names dropped from the mailing list. Nothing is required of the students other than that they read the literature. The campus groups are loosely organized, and their activities are neither directed nor supervised. Some issue their own publications, others go in for campus politics, and a few concern themselves with public issues; all of them take a hand in promoting lectures.

All in all, within the last few years a ferment of what is called "conservatism" has appeared on the campus. I do not know whether the effort of ISI have caused this phenomenon, or whether ISI came along at the right time to capitalize on the inclination of youth toward revolution. It is about time for a change in the thought pattern to manifest itself. I came into this world when freedom was taken for granted, and in due time saw how youth began questioning the validity of freedom, how their questioning led to the introduction of socialistic institutions, and toward the end of my life I now see these institutions being challenged by a new crop of young minds. Imbedded in every revolution are the

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seeds of another. No sooner do men settle down at a given set of ideas, a pattern of living and thinking, than fault-finding begins, and fault-finding is the tap-root of revolutions.

Many reasons are offered in explanation of this historical restlessness. One reason that will serve as well as any other is that we are all born young, very young. It is the natural business of the young mind to ask "why," and since nobody has answered that question with finality, the field for speculation is wide open. And so, as youth finds flaws in the going answers it makes up its own, and because they are new, as far as youth is concerned, they are guaranteed against flaws. Somehow, the flaws do show up and another generation mounts its hobby horse in quest of the Holy Grail, the Brave New World. Revolution is inherent in the human make-up.

Suppose we came into this world with all the disabilities and disillusionments of, say, the age of sixty. In that event, mankind would never have moved out of its cave apartments, never would have heard of the atom bomb or the New Deal. The only function of old men—or, at least, their only occupation—seems to be to find fault with the panaceas that possessed them in their youth. The price of experience is the loss of faith. With disillusionment comes resistance to change, and the obstinacy goes so far as to find fallacies in the infallible ideas of their sons. Nevertheless, youth hangs on to the ideas in which it has a proprietary interest and change does come.

A revolution is a thought-pattern born of curiosity and nurtured on an ideal. Every generation dreams up its own thought-pattern and attempts to institutionalize it, but be-

cause the preceding generation hangs on to what it is used to, the transition from the old to the new must be gradual. From the perspective of history it seems that on a certain date one revolution died and another was born. We think of the nineteenth century, with its ideas on natural rights and laissez-faire economics, as suddenly ushering in a reversal of the feudal tradition. But, the Voltaires and the John Lockes and the Mills were plowing and planting some time before 1800, and if you do some digging you'll find the roots of the nineteenth century in earlier times. Even so, while we are enjoying, or rueing, our own revolution it is a certainty that youth is critical of it and is building its successor.

There is a measure of fun, if you are inclined that way, in trying to discern in the prevailing current of ideas the direction of the next revolution. It is an interesting game, even though you know you cannot be on hand to say "I told you so." It is a game that takes the bitterness out of disillusion and robs pessimism of its gloom.

Our own revolution, the one that seems to have started on the first day of January, 1932, is identified with the doctrine of collectivism. Briefly, the doctrine holds that improvement in our way of life is attainable only if we discount the individual in favor of the mass. The mass is all that matters. The doctrine does not deny the existence of the individual, but relegates him to the status of a means, not an end. To support itself, the doctrine takes refuge in the psychological theory of environmentalism, that the individual is only the product of the mass, that he could not function except as an accessory of the mass.

The mass, however, is lacking in a self-propelling force and is in need of some pushing. For that purpose a political

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machinery comes into existence, preferably by way of something called the democratic process. The individual serves the march of progress by submitting himself to the direction of that machinery. In the end, the doctrine holds, the individual will prosper because of the equal distribution of the abundance that comes from collective action under the aegis of the political machinery.

That is the central idea of our current tradition. It is the idealization of the mass and the negation of the individual; its *modus operandi* is political action; its goal, as always, is the undefined Good Society.

So dominant is the doctrine in our thinking that it amounts to a dogma. It is implied, if not explicitly stated, in every field of thought. The aim of modern pedagogy is not to prepare the individual for his own enjoyment of life, but to better serve the mass; the psychologist makes adjustment to mass-thought the measure of healthy living; jurisprudence puts social responsibility ahead of individual responsibility; the economist studies institutions, not people; philosophy rejects speculation as to the nature of man or the meaning of life as effort that might better be put to the practical problems of society. Ours is the culture of the "all" rather than the "one."

The end-result of this kind of thinking, the practical result, is the worship of the State. This is the necessary consequence of the idealization of the mass, for since the mass can operate only under political coercion, then that coercion becomes the necessary condition of all life. The State is a self-sufficient agent. It operates on a plane higher not only than that of the individual but also higher than that of the mass. It is not only super-personal, it is super-mass. The

State, then, is the modern golden calf, with this essential difference, that its power is demonstrable, not assumed; it does guide, direct and control all of us. Hence, we adore it, make sacrifices to it and hardly question its infallibility, even though we might point out imperfections in the current hierarchy. The reigning president may be in error, but the State can do no wrong.

Just how far out current revolution has gone along this path is seen when we make comparison with that of the nineteenth century. The dominant doctrine of that era held the individual to be the be-all and end-all of all life. He was the only reality. Society was not a thing in itself, but was merely an agglomeration of individuals working cooperatively for their mutual betterment; it could not be greater than the sum of its parts. The individual was not the product of his environment, but the responsible master of it.

The nineteenth century had a dogma, too, and it went by the name of "inalienable rights." These were held to be personal prerogatives, inhering in the individual by virtue of his existence and traceable to God alone. Government had nothing to do with rights except to see that individuals did not transgress them; that was the only reason for government. Its functions were purely negative, and when it presumed to act positively in the affairs of men it was not minding its own business; it should be called to account.

In the practical affairs of men, doctrines and dogmas have a way of losing their virtue; even integrated philosophies fall apart when men start applying them. The individualism of the nineteenth century suffered considerable mayhem, even from those who paid it homage—the advocates of *laissez-faire*. Their insistence on doing as they pleased

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turned out to be insistence on the right to exploit others, a right they could not exercise without the help of the very State they were pledged to hold in leash. They built up the power of the State by demanding privileges of it.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, this privilege-business had given individualism a bad character. The reality was far short of the earlier dream. Youth was quick to detect the faults of individualism as practiced, condemned it, and went to work on its replacement. The cure-all they hit upon was the doctrine of equalitarianism. Curiously, they promoted the new idea in the name of natural rights; if we are all endowed equally with the quality of rights then it follows that we have a right to what everybody else has. That was, at bottom, not only a revolt against the injustice of privilege, but also a rationalization of the sin of covetousness. At any rate, equalitarianism called for an extension of privilege, not the abolition of it; and since privilege is impossible without political coercion, the equalitarians turned to the State for support. All kinds of reforms were advocated and all of them strengthened political power at the expense of social power. It never occurred to those who, like Dickens, struck a blow for bigger and better "poor laws" that they were preparing the ground for social security, which reduces the individual to wardship under the State. Meanwhile, Karl Marx was developing his rationale for collectivism. The collectivistic revolution was born in the matrix of individualism.

That is the point to keep in mind when we speculate on the future, that revolutions are born in revolutions. And they are always being born. Curious youth never fails to detect inadequacies in the tradition it inherited and is impatient

to write a new formula. On paper, the formula is always perfect, and perhaps it would work out as predicted if the human hand would not touch it. Take the case of liberalism (nineteenth century,) which was the political expression of the individualistic thought-pattern. At the beginning, when liberalism was emerging from its adolescence, its only tenet was that political intervention in the affairs of men is bad. Hence, it advocated whittling away of the power of the State, without reserve, and proposed to abolish laws, without replacement. This negativeness was all right until the liberals got into places of power, and then it occurred to them that a little positive action might be good; only the laws enacted by non-liberals were bad. The fact is—and this is something the State worshippers are prone to forget—that the comforts, emoluments and prerogatives that go with political office have great influence on the shaping of political policies; for the State consists of men, and men are, unfortunately, only human. And so, liberalism mutated into its exact opposite by the beginning of the twentieth century. Today it is the synonym of Statism.

Who knows what revolutionary ideas youth is toying with right now? We live entirely too close to the present to judge the direction of its currents. We are either pessimists or optimists and in either case are poor witnesses. Those of us who are enamored of the "good old times" point to the prevalence of socialistic doctrine as evidence that the "world is going to hell," while proponents of socialism take the same evidence as proof of the immediacy of their millennium. Both sides are probably in error. It should be remembered that the present crop of teachers, who are also the

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writers of text books, are the product of the socialistic revolution in the early part of the century, and are necessarily convinced of its virtue. Their denial of natural rights, for instance, is as natural as was the espousal of that doctrine in 1850. However, the pessimists can take comfort in this fact, that though the professors do exert some influence on their students they cannot stop curiosity. If the history of ideas is any guide to the future, we can be sure that a change is in the making, that youth is brewing a revolution; it has been at the job since—well, since Socrates was accused of undermining the morals of the young.

To predict with any accuracy the revolution of the twenty-first century would require the equipment of a prophet. But, and here again relying on the evidence of history, we are on safe ground in anticipating a renaissance of individualism. For, the pendulum of socio-economic thought has swung to and fro over the same arc since men began to live in association, and there is no warrant in believing that it will fly off in a new direction. Modern collectivism—going by the various names of communism, fascism, socialism or the less frightening “controlled economy”—is in many superficials quite different from the “divine rights of kings”; but in their common rejection of the individual the two frames of thought are alike. Or, the individualistic doctrine of salvation that tarnished the glory of Rome had none of the economic overtones of nineteenth century individualism; but, though theologians might object to the observation, the underlying idea of salvation is the primacy of the individual, not the collectivity, and that is easily translated into the free economy. A discarded tradition never returns in its

former garb; in fact, it takes a lot of disrobing to recognize it. Only an historical expert can trace the New Deal of Modern America to the New Deal of Old Rome, or to recognize Sparta in Moscow.

Whatever the character of the new revolution may be it will not show itself until the present revolution has run its course. There is some disposition to stop it in its tracks, but that is in the nature of things a futile occupation. Even the opposition to the present collectivistic trend is tainted with it, as it must be. Those who fight socialized medicine tooth and nail would fight equally hard any effort to drop socialized education, unable to see that both institutions are cut of the same cloth; and those who view with alarm the teaching of collectivistic doctrine in our public schools are plugging for a politically-managed curriculum more to their own liking. Likewise, while the "free enterprisers" rail against the subvention of farmers they are strong for the subvention of manufacturers through tariffs. We are immersed in the prevailing tradition, and until it wears itself out and is replaced by something new, nothing can be done about it. The best we can do is to find fault, which is the preliminary to the coming revolution.

Of this, however, we can be sure: enrolled in some nursery or freshman class right now is a Voltaire, an Adam Smith, a John Locke or a Godwin, some maverick who will emerge from the herd and lead it to new pastures. Youth, as always, is in a ferment, is dissatisfied with things as they are. Well, since the only direction youth can go is away from the current collectivism toward its opposite, those who cherish the individualistic stock of values must try to peddle them to these embryonic revolutionists. We must polish up our

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ancient arguments, apply them to the current scene and offer them as brand new merchandise. We must do a selling job. Youth will not buy us out, lock, stock and barrel, but will be rather selective about it; they will take what seems good to them, modernize it, build it into a panacea and start a revolution. God bless them.