

VIOLENCE has no theoretical role in the functioning of democracy. But in practice it appears to be a necessary, if insufficient ingredient in the improvement of social processes designed to increase the range of individual freedom and self-determination in society. Violence, and civil disobedience, are central concepts in this article, the final in a series which evaluated the more orthodox means of demonstrating political preferences; referenda and proportional representation.

TURNING to the unruly mob in the street rather than to pen or printing press is a method which can work. Witness the effects of over 100 deaths since 1968 in Ulster. Suddenly Mr. Wilson, the ex-Prime Minister who might have done something about it earlier, is urging that thought should be given to proportional representation as a way of equitably distributing parliamentary power to the people. Should the Welsh and Scots and Liberals turn to civil disobedience, backed by bombings and street shootings, in order to gain full political citizenship of this kingdom?

The question of civil disobedience is more than academically interesting. It is relevant to all human societies that are insensitive to the needs of their members—which must exclude very few countries. I want to consider the issue by examining and contrasting the cases of two revolutionaries, George Jackson and Henry George.

Before he was gunned down in San Quentin, "Soledad Brother" George Jackson gave an interview in which he testified to the influence of Henry George upon his thinking. A greater contrast between two such men it would be difficult to find.

Jackson, the twenty-nine year old Negro serving a sentence of one year to life imprisonment for stealing a handful of dollars, who turned himself into a Marxist dedicated to violent overthrow of what he saw as a tyrannical system of exploitation of his kind, had only the space of a barred window through which to give vent to his feelings.

Whereas George, the journalist turned economist, was, through his teachings able to whip up a solid backing right across North America and penetrating into Europe which could have been moulded into a fighting force if he had not preferred oratory to urban guerrilla warfare. When men are convinced that they are fighting for their heritage—land, the source of life and wealth—they will turn to the barricades with vigour.

Yet for George such a programme of violence would have been anathema. His philosophy, let us be quite clear, was revolutionary: it sought to undermine the whole basis of property rights. That it can still fire men with inspiration is clear from the words of George Jackson:

"... do you know who I was really impressed with, although he isn't a socialist or communist? I was impressed with Henry George's stuff. I've read all his stuff..

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His single tax idea is not correct. But I like his presentation—I like the explanation he advanced explaining how the ruling class over the years managed through machinations to rob and despoil the people." (1)

The difference between the two men was in the means of achieving the desired goal—a society in which men live harmoniously with each other as equals.

That they shared similar revolutionary ends cannot, I think, be disputed. Jackson, as a Marxist, harboured the notions of a classless society of men and women fulfilling their creative lives in peace. George sympathised: "The ideal of socialism is grand and noble; and it is, I am convinced, possible of realization; but such a state of society cannot be manufactured—it must grow. Society is an organism, not a machine." (2)

The stress is laid on the difference in means of attaining the goal. George believed that a moral society could be attained through the Western parliamentary system provided appropriate fiscal measures—central to which was the taxation of land values—and individual safeguards to freedom were instituted.

Such a vision makes incredible demands on the impatient and on the victims of injustice. It demands the insight of a long term perspective; it demands the depth of character that makes forgiveness possible—now, while the savage act is being perpetrated, as well as tomorrow, when wrongs are set right; it demands a sophisticated insight into history and the workings of industrial society; it demands the belief in a social system in which the rights of privately owned capital can be balanced against the social claims of man.

In sum, it makes the kind of emotional and intellectual demands which many cannot sustain, for it presupposes the kind of environment in which men can afford *not* to resort to violence. In advanced industrial societies, technology has compensated a great deal for the loss of basic economic rights: most of us enjoy a standard of living which in material terms is far in excess of anything our ancestral land-sharing peasants of pre-enclosure days dreamt could be possible.

Contrast this with the picture we were shown for a whole week on Thames TV in mid-September: the illiterate, starving millions of the Third World, sapped of energy and so unable to resist disease, let alone the greedy misdemeanours of their fellow men. Little better-off are the poor of industrially advanced nations, be they Negroes in the USA or the peasants of Ireland.

These people feel a deterministic scheme at work. They are weighed down by poverty, ignorance and sometimes

Violence

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the constraints of religion. (Notable exceptions are the handful of Catholic priests in South America who are risking the wrath of Rome to take direct revolutionary action for their suffering flocks.) They intuitively realise the horrifying magnitude of the problems which face them.

Is it surprising that they will match this with a complementary philosophy; one of violent action to overthrow the existing social machinery completely, so that out of the institutional ashes will rise (they hope) a centrally-administered system which would ensure their continued control over the remainder of their lives? Does this, as a manifesto, not appear suitable for both shaking up apathetic peasants and destroying the powerful elites? It does, of course, and so Marxism makes its converts.

We can cite two contemporary examples in which citizens threaten civil society with disobedience and violence, on the ground that this is the only method by which they can attain their rights. In the first case, the victims have to directly confront the law *per se*. In the second case, the victims face the more insidious problem of confronting deep-seated attitudes antagonistic to their interests.

In recent months landless Indian peasants who have become totally cynical about the so-called land reform laws entered on the statute books, flying the Marxist banner, have confronted the police in large-scale demonstrations of civil disobedience, and have actually taken over tracts of land from landlords. This, they claim, is the only way to put food in their bellies. To wait for the politicians and the powerful landed interests is to wait for the cows to come home: in India, custom ensures that they rarely do.

In the USA, the negro and the so-called "Red" Indian have been the victims of savage historical abuse. We are only now, being regaled with the documentary evidence of the systematic genocide of the indigenous tribes of the continent. And, of course, we have few illusions about the black man—captured from Africa, sold and made to create fortunes for the cotton barons of the South. If this were but history only, there might be little point in recalling it. But the children of these peoples today continue to suffer the torments of economic, social and political segregation, which are nowhere endorsed in the Constitution. When the Black Panthers demand territorial segregation they are merely seeking final expression for the reality of systematic discrimination against their kind.

Who is right then, Karl Marx and his prescription for class revolution or Henry George and his liberal democratic principles? George appears to recognise the dilemma, and clearly did not exclude the possibilities of extra-parliamentary action. In his discussion on the use of force and poverty, he says that the consequences of treading a socialistic path which used force rather than unconscious cooperation are "the substitution of governmental direction for the play of individual action and the attempt to secure by restriction what can better be secured by freedom. It is evidence that whatever savours of regulation and restriction is in itself bad and should not be resorted to *if any other mode of accomplishing the same end presents itself.*"

Whether it can ever be said that one's choices are so totally circumscribed is a matter of controversy, and I will not presume to know what George would have said on this. But clearly the issue has to be settled by each of us in the context of particular cases. This is not to say that there are no general principles to guide us.

First, we must define civil disobedience: it is "an act of protest, deliberately unlawful, conscientiously and publicly performed." (3) Next, it must be accepted that a citizen has moral duties to a society on which he has made demands. Therefore, if he decides to usurp the civil law, his action must be justified. "Justification" assumes responsibility for actions, a personal integrity and a reference to some rational assessment of the "public interest."

And finally, when getting down to brass tacks, we have to consider very carefully the implications of the particular act. Noam Chomsky has listed some of these: Will the act help to achieve a just end? Would strictly legal means be ineffective? How do the overall social consequences of obeying the law compare with those of disobeying it? What are the effects on non-participants? Will the act deflect attention away from the ends, to pivot on the means? (4)

Now let us confront ourselves with a specific problem: that of returning property rights in land to the community. What do I do about it? Circumstances demand different answers. Here and now, I can honestly say that I have no right to jeopardise the social system in which I live: a high standard of living affords me the luxury of being able to wait. At the same time, I am morally obliged to agitate, within legally defined limits, for a change in an indefensible institution—the private ap-



propriation of the rent of land.

But were I a landless Indian or Brazilian, son of an expropriated peasant, my stomach would probably be

aching from hunger, my children consigned to a life of ignorance and poverty. I would take to civil disobedience and even bloody revolution if the chance presented itself. For the issue would not be just a moral one, but would carry with it immediate economic implications. The compulsion to take direct action would be great, even though this would more than likely manifest itself in petty theft rather than in a crusade for a moral cause.

When Henry George defended liberal democracy and freedom through fiscal instruments, he did so as a white man secure in the knowledge that no endemic barrier stood in the way of his earning an acceptable living. When George Jackson rejected democracy for a philosophy of violence, he did so as a black African trapped literally and metaphorically in a hostile country, and with little in the way of prospects.

In examining the role of civil disobedience, I have felt it right to place a heavy burden on those who seek non-parliamentary solutions. But two conclusions are relevant.

One is that history has provided us with many examples of civil disobedience being resorted to for honourable reasons. We should, therefore, not be too quick to dismiss this kind of action as the behaviour of irresponsible people, but should first enquire into the causes.

In a very real sense, of course, such activists are irresponsible: they refuse to accept responsibility for the actions and circumstances of their society, or alternatively they feel themselves estranged from political participation, and therefore denied the responsibility that arises through political obligation.

Secondly, violence and civil unrest can be viewed as boiling point on the thermometer of social feeling. If this

BLACK GHETTOS in U.S. cities have been strikingly free from large-scale rioting this year—but not because the ghettos are content. Conditions, in fact, may actually be getting worse. But there does appear to be a change of mood: Blacks are channeling their energies into organizing the kind of political clout other minority groups have used in this country to win progress. Observers note a growing realization that unity and organization may win the equality that violence could not.

Christian Science Monitor,

September 28.

is correct, then the regularity with which this point has been reached testifies to the politicians' manifest failure to respond sensitively to the expressed needs of the people.

The crux of liberal democratic philosophy is that there should exist real possibilities of effective bargaining by multiple groups, each prepared to accept the institutional arrangements just because these afford the means of resolving competing claims. The dissenters, whether violent or passive, feel themselves impotent within such a structure, which must therefore be deemed defective in some way.

So they turn to what British philosophers have dramatically labelled the "state of nature," in which the rule of positive (*i.e.* legislated) law recedes to the onslaught of another code of conduct. The lesson is that it is in the interests of all of us to assert individual responsibility before crises are allowed to destabilise society.

(1) *The Observer*, August 29, 1971

(2) *Progress and Poverty*, Chapter 15.

(3) Prof. Carl Cohen, *Civil Disobedience*, Columbia UP 1971.

(4) *The New York Review of Books*, June 17, 1971.

RATING IN NEW ZEALAND

BELOW is a summary showing the numbers of local government authorities grouped according to the rating system they use, as at the beginning of 1971

Local Units	Site Values Rating	Composite Rating	Total
Counties (incl. 3 Roads Boards)	76	32	108
Cities	21	2	23
Boroughs	97	18	115
Towns (Dep.)	2	4	6
Towns (Indep.)	8	2	10
Country Towns	84	19	103
Country Boroughs	2	—	2
	290	77	367

It will be seen that an absolute majority (79 per cent of the total) now use the site value of the land as the rating basis.

WHO SPEAKS FOR BRITAIN?

The Spectator, 9 October, 1971.

AT THIS TIME, at this curious juncture in our history where the country has been brought to a threshold for reasons it does not understand, where it is being pushed into a leap into the dark for reasons unknown to it, where it is baffled and unhappy and distrustful, where it gropes for the reassurance of familiar tones, it is—so far—Mr. Wilson who expresses its mind, who speaks for it. Over the past few months, while he has been moving into a position of opposition to the Government's European policy, no one would pretend that Mr. Wilson has shown himself to particular advantage. Mr. Heath, for his part, has sometimes seemed in contrast to be a knight in shining armour. But it is the leader of the Labour party, not of the Tory party, who has been putting himself into a position where the people are with him, and he is with the people.

We may be grateful to Mr. Wilson for ensuring that the leader of one of our two great parties is able to express the country's majority opinion on the great matter with which Mr. Heath is determined to confront it.