



Review and Reflection

BY
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THOUGHTS ON THE REVOLUTION

WHICH REVOLUTION? Well, almost any one. Let us begin with doings in England in the seventeenth century.

After the fall of Charles I, the Commonwealth was going to give the common man a new start. During this period a group of people calling themselves "Diggers" started cultivating unoccupied land in the belief that the land was given by God to all mankind and that each man had a just title to what he laboured to produce. This shocking heresy outraged Roundhead and Cavalier alike, and the Diggers were put down.

Later, the English started the King business all over again—which would not have been so bad if they had made it mean something. But the Lords, in the "Glorious Revolution" of 1688, along with some legal reforms, managed to free themselves from the obligation to pay land rent to the Crown, and instead started the modern system of taxing labour and commodities.

When the Americans had their revolution, the notion that land taxation might be the basis of public revenue was quickly shelved by the revolutionary leaders, who were mostly landed proprietors. And when the French got around to having their revolution, the same idea was lost in the confusion.

At that time when it was thought that the people were finally discarding ancient privileges, Edmund Burke got scared and wrote a tract upholding the traditional landed gentry; Thomas Paine replied, supporting the new spirit of equality. Both could have spared themselves the trouble. One thing the French revolutionaries were careful about was landed property, and the Declaration of the Rights of Man did not overlook, in its final point, that property is a "sacred and inviolable right." (In those days, property *meant* landed property.)

When the Reign of Terror got under way and dozens of heads rolled every day, proprietors around the Place de la Revolution complained that the stench of blood was depreciating real estate value. This, more than humanitarian considerations, ended the Terror.

It seems that during the turmoil of the various revolutions the idea gets briefly tossed up that land is the key to the problem, and should be made more

freely available to labour. But this, unfortunately, gets squashed in the mad grab for power and privilege.

The same idea came to light at the beginning of the Russian Revolution, and was submerged with the Bolshevik takeover. While landlordism in the traditional sense may not have triumphed in Russia, what has evolved is a ruling clique of power and privilege dominating the economy, while the rest of the population queue up for the necessities of life.

After World War II we were going to have One World—well, two worlds, East and West—or rather, three worlds, with the Third World the buffer between the other two. What we have got is a whole set of worlds with the creation of a lot of new nations all clamouring for different things in their own interests. The new revolution of emergent nations has turned out to be a sorcerer's apprentice, merely multiplying the portfolios, the horn-rimmed glasses, and the voices saying "My government says." My government says it wants the power and the glory and the fat of the land for its ruling clique. Perhaps it may not actually say so, but that is its object, and this, more than the aspirations of the people, may account for the strident "nationalism" of today.

And what of the people, There is a model school and a model hospital. For the rest, they struggle and suffer in silence—and pay, as they have done for ages. And sometimes they rise up, trusting their new leaders.

Now brave little Anguilla revolts against big bad St. Kitts and Nevis. That Man of the People, Ronald Webster, has for his economic adviser a Florida real estate speculator. Here we go again.

After all the revolutions things have not changed so very much since the mediaeval Inn of the Four Alls. Its sign showed a king who says "I reign over all"; a bishop who says, "I pray for all"; a soldier who says "I fight for all" and a poor ordinary man who says "I pay for all."

Yet the thought is tantalising—that there could be a real revolution which somehow did not end the same old way; one that really established full freedom, true equality and economic justice for all. I live in the hope of such a possibility.