

The Nature of Revolution

By

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Introduction by Paul Roazen

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On February 26, 1968 Louis Hartz made a presentation on "The Nature of Revolution" to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee chaired by William Fulbright. When N. Gordon Levin brought the existence of this document to my attention, it immediately stirred vague memories; I can recall Hartz talking a bit about his Washington, D.C. appearance, and it even seems to me that I can remember an expression of distaste on Hartz's face as he described something of what he felt about his encounter with Senator Karl Mundt, a right-wing member of the committee. I regret to say that nobody I knew at Harvard, at least in the Government Department, would have been much impressed one way or the other by Hartz's testifying before Fulbright's committee. In those days it seemed an unspoken matter that Hartz was one of our outstandingly brilliant faculty members; although it had at the time been somewhat surprising when Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. left the History Department to join President Kennedy's administration, by 1968 so many Harvard faculty members had regularly taken part in high public matters that a Senate committee hearing was bound to seem like small potatoes.

For McGeorge Bundy to have gone to be a White House assistant was a noteworthy political event; later Henry Kissinger would also depart from the Harvard Government Department for high public position; neither of these actions could possibly be compared to the significance of Hartz's going before Fulbright's committee. And yet, as one thinks back over it now, the fact of Hartz's testimony was in its own way extraordinary. I can think of no other example of a prominent political theorist being asked by Senators for his or her viewpoint; Hannah Arendt's own On Revolution had appeared in 1963, but it was a sign of Hartz's standing by 1968 that it was he who was to appear. The originality of his presentation, a characteristic part of Hartz's general thinking, held the attention of the Senators who participated in the session.

It seems to me that the series of statements Fulbright solicited on The Nature of Revolution, from someone like Crane Brinton as well as Hartz, must also have been an aspect of the apparent political futility of Fulbright's position. By then the Vietnam War seemed to some of us a hopeless morass, although nobody I knew ever anticipated the extent of the widening of the conflict in Southeast Asia that eventually took place, or how many years it would be before the American military presence was formally withdrawn. Less than a month before Hartz's appearance the Tet Offensive had broken out on January 30, 1968. Almost simultaneously with his testimony Generals Westmoreland and Wheeler were pressing for President Johnson to agree to send another 206,000 men to Vietnam; that story did not appear in the New York Times until March 10th. Immediately afterwards the Senate Foreign Relations Committee moved into high gear,

and many answers were demanded from Secretary of State Dean Rusk. Only a few days before they had had the leisure to spend just over three hours listening to Hartz's presentation. The New Hampshire Democratic primary took place on March 12, 1968; and on March 31st Lyndon Johnson withdrew his name from the presidential race.

These were times of high political drama, and Hartz's talk has to be put in its context. I do not know much about Hartz's practical politics; I talked with him in the midst of the Cuban missile crisis, but normally I would not have thought of exchanging comments with him about the Vietnam War. That was an exceptionally painful period, and another member of the Department had stopped speaking with me essentially because of our differences over the war. I do not think I ever thought Hartz could be "in favor" of it, and he never spoke at any of the later critical faculty meetings; I do remember him being eloquent in behalf of conciliation, or at least non-exacerbation of tensions, in the midst of a departmental discussion of a confrontation with students. Hartz was, however, as much a part of the establishment as Fulbright himself, and I would not have expected any irreverence from him about public officialdom. For several years I like others had simply assumed that an entirely different course of action than Johnson had been pursuing was completely within the practical powers of the Presidency, and that our job was a problem of rational persuasion; the level of frustration among those of us who were relatively conservative opponents of the war could be terrible.

The theoretical argument Hartz undertook to establish on Feb. 26th formed an integral part of his prior thinking. For over a decade he had been maintaining that the American Revolution was more truly a war of independence than a revolution, and that all American history needed to be put in a comparative historical framework. He had made this point throughout his The Liberal Tradition in America (1955), and extended it in his "fragment theory" of The Founding of New Societies (1964). He lived best in a world of abstractions, which is partly why his Senate performance at such a critical juncture seems so striking. If he did, for example, read the New York Times regularly, I never noticed it; as far as I was concerned he was a little "out of it" when it came to everyday politics. And so when Senator Gore happened to ask Hartz about President Johnson's outline of 14 points for a peace in Vietnam, I am not at all sure that Hartz's uncharacteristic evasiveness of response did not mean that he had never heard of the plan before.

The central thesis of Hartz's talk to the committee was partly in the tradition of a passage from D. H. Lawrence's Studies in Classic American Literature (1922) that Daniel J. Boorstin used to like to quote; Lawrence had maintained:

Those Pilgrim Fathers and their successors never came here for freedom of worship. What did they set up when they got here? Freedom, would you call it?

They didn't come for freedom. Or if they did, they sadly went back on themselves.

All right then, what did they come for? For lots of reasons. Perhaps least of all in search of freedom of any sort: positive freedom that is.

They came largely to get away – that most simple of motives. To get away. Away from what? In the long run, away from themselves. Away from everything. That's why most people have come to America, and still do come. To get away from everything they are and have been.

The work of Boorstin and Hartz does bear certain similarities, which Hartz was ready to acknowledge despite Boorstin's harsh book review of The Liberal Tradition in America. The differences between Boorstin and Hartz were striking, however, since Hartz was insistent on the relevance of the ideological substance of the belief systems held by the founders of the republic. Here Hartz's viewpoint parted company with Lawrence's own romanticism.

In contrast to Boorstin, and Richard Hofstadter as well, Hartz had never been especially attracted to any doctrinaire version of Marxism. The values Hartz cherished were liberal ones, and he believed that they formed the essence of the American tradition that he sought both to conserve as well as to criticize. The Marxist interpretation of history did deeply influence his thinking, but at bottom his position most resembled that of a New Dealer. Even his first book, Economic Policy and Democratic Thought: Pennsylvania, 1776-1860 (1948), which examined the role a state could play in early American economic development, fit in with the New Deal emphasis on the fraudulence of the theses of FDR's enemies; laissez-faire functioned as a tendentious myth, and Hartz (like Oscar Handlin) provided empirical evidence to undermine the rhetoric of the Right.

Hartz's Senate testimony should be read for a further elucidation of his already published views. America did not experience, except on the margins, the trauma of a revolt against feudalism. When a social revolution abroad enshrines liberal values, we are sympathetic, but if it goes sour, as it usually does, we repudiate it. When it becomes involved with collectivism, we are against it both because it entails violence and is illiberal. Our fresh involvement with the world in the 20th century has produced an amalgam of liberalism and nationalism, or "Americanism." We need to transcend the limitations of our perspective if we are to deal realistically with conditions elsewhere. Hartz's work does seem to have survived, and to be broadly influential now even among those who had had no personal contact with him. Hartz struggled in behalf of preserving the best of the American liberal tradition, and he deserves to be remembered as one of the most powerful although not uncritical proponents in its behalf.

Basis of the American Response

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, American liberal culture was established by the Puritan migration of the 17th century, rather than by a social revolution, and this fact has made it difficult for us to understand the movement of social revolution abroad. The difficulty, however, was not a critical problem for America in the 18th and 19th centuries, although it is writ large in our response to the European revolutions of that era. It is only in the 20th century that the problem has become entangled with our destiny. Nor is this alone because of the content of social revolution has tended to shift from liberalism to collectivism, or even because the revolutionary spirit in its collectivist form has become international in purpose. It is also because, simultaneously with these developments, America itself has emerged as a great power. This has brought us, on the world plane, face to face with an experience of revolution which on the domestic plane we have not had.

There are formal and there are substantive issues involved in the effort of a nation, created out of migration, to understand the experience of revolution. Of course Americans have always had an instinctive feeling for nationalist uprisings, due to their

own revolution against Britain, but in the case of social upheaval the grounding of the nation in the Puritan escape from Europe produced from the outset major problems of appreciation. For one thing, the process of migration makes possible a remarkable degree of ease and success for the liberal movement in America, since the old feudal enemies have been left behind in Europe and it is unnecessary to guillotine them or to struggle with their ghosts after death. Hence the Americans have difficulty understanding not only the violence of French revolutions abroad but the fact that they always seem to “fail.” To be sure, there is bound to be sympathy for the liberal objectives, since in a liberal society you can hardly get a Burkean rejection of 1789 based on the aristocratic perspectives of the *ancien régime*. But this sympathy is always dampened in the end for the American by the inexplicable inability of the foreigner to be sufficiently moderate, sufficiently successful. Since he has forgotten the significance of his own ancestral flight from the medievalism of Europe, he finds it hard to escape explanations of the situation based on national character.

The formal problem of violence and failure is exacerbated, of course, when the substance of revolution ceases to be liberal and becomes collectivist. Then the American is detached in experience from the very values of the foreign revolution. Actually this difference is not as large as it could be. First of all, even the Paris Commune and the Russian Revolution seek the fulfillment of egalitarian norms which are also enshrined in the liberal ethos: they, too, are “children of the enlightenment.” Moreover, since it is not in Paris but in Russia and the East that the collectivist version of revolution triumphs, it is not hard to see that that version seeks to accomplish many of the goals that the liberal version earlier accomplished in the West: the modernization of society as against a feudal background. It is by now practically legendary that Marxism, instead of inheriting developed societies as Marx thought it would, is viewed as itself an instrument of development. But these links, real as they are, do not alter the basic issue. Whatever the origins of collectivism or its uses, it is bound to challenge the faith of a nation that from the outset has been deeply individualistic. And the American, alienated to begin with from social revolution, is bound to seem doubly alienated when its leadership passes from Locke to Marx. Even the mild European socialisms of 1848 produced, as all historians of the subject have noted, a distinct break in American attitudes.

Liberalism Versus Collectivism

It will always be a fascinating historical problem how a collision ultimately takes place on the world plane between a migrant liberalism and a transformed Marxism. Of course, Marx himself, if he did not foresee the fate of collectivism as an instrument of development, did preach world revolution. And in this sense, from his West European home, he prepared the ground for the world ambitions of Communist ideology. But in the American case, whatever its illusions, one need not have supposed that there would have been a world position. Instead the thrust of the Puritan migration was precisely to retreat from the world. To be sure the Americans had a sense of mission, but instead of involving a Trotskyite concept of subversion, it involved the notion of a special purity preserved in the New World, of a “little Israel,” as Cotton Mather put it. And yet, as it happened, the force of national power brought America on the world scene at precisely the moment that world communism became grounded in an effective Bolshevik force. The First World War, in fact, can be viewed as the symbol of both developments.

As with all human encounters with new experience, the American confrontation of social revolution on the world plan in the 20th century has evoked both regressive and rational reactions. On the one hand there has been from the outset an impulse to surrender more passionately than ever to the earlier responses, to embellish them with new outbursts of nationalism and messianism. But as these have failed to exorcise the phenomenon of social upheaval, as it has even under Communist auspices steadily gained ground, there has been a pressure to go beyond the old view. That pressure is bound to increase. And as it does, not only will we come closer to the nature of an experience we as a nation did not have, but we are bound to discover, finally, why we did not have it. We are bound to discover the crucial importance for us of the Puritan flight from Europe, just as we are bound to appreciate the complexity of the revolutionary situation that the Puritans left behind. Perhaps this is one of the consolations involved in the sudden need to understand others, that it inevitably leads to a better understanding of self. In any case it is hard to see how we can successfully handle our current encounter with the world of revolution without a considerable increase in both of these virtues.

Migration and Its Consequences

The legend of the Mayflower is the great legend of our history, and yet few Americans realize how thoroughly it excludes from that history the possibility of a social revolution. For if, as we are told, the glory of the Pilgrims was that they fled the social oppressions of Europe, how could they have a revolution against those oppressions after they arrived in America? How could they destroy in the New World the "canon and feudal law" which, as John Adams put it, they deserted in the Old? Of course, not even the settlers of New England, let alone those of the South, were pure liberals of the Lockean type: they were still entangled with aspects of the European medieval order. But the fact is that they did leave behind the central structure of aristocratic Europe, and doing so they escaped not only that structure but the need to destroy it on its own ground. Indeed the very psychology of escape, of getting away, is America's substitute for the European psychology of social revolution. And one cannot help noticing, in viewing that psychology, that it not only projected our ancestors out of Europe but across the entire American continent also. The legend of the covered wagon supplements, in a secondary way, the legend of the Mayflower.

It is not hard to show that it was the flight from Europe which made possible the completeness and the ease with which American liberalism triumphed. Who will say that the Puritans and other non-conformists who fought in the English Revolution of the 17th century were, as human beings, essentially different from those of their brethren who came to America? And yet the liberal movement they represented gave way in the end to a restoration. To be sure, it renewed itself again and again throughout English history, but always in a kind of symbiotic struggle with older institutions it could not completely destroy. This, too, of course, is the pattern of liberal history on the continent as well: a succession of violent moments, compromise victories. America escapes this pattern precisely because it leaves behind the medieval ghosts who will not die in Europe. Leaving ghosts behind, according to a certain wisdom, is impossible, for men tend to bring their miseries with them. But curiously, this wisdom must be qualified in the historical sphere, for experience shows that precisely those institutions which a revolutionary cannot destroy he can effectively desert. Indeed I would argue on the basis

of the American experience, if it would not confuse my categories, that the only really successful revolution is in fact a migration.

Problem of Conceptualization

Today there are fewer scholars than there would have been 20 years ago who would contend that the American Revolution of the 18th century was itself a social upheaval of the European type. We have moved, actually to some extent because of the education that world experience has given us, steadily away from the mood of J. Franklin Jameson and Charles Beard on this count. At bottom the issue is one of conceptualization. There are facts in the American case, but without a theory of social revolution, grounded in the alteration of social systems and class relations, they can lead us down any number of erroneous paths. It is not enough, if you wish to prove the presence of a social revolution, to collect a list of changes social in character. This is what Professor Jameson did in his epochal Princeton lectures of 1925, The American Revolution Considered as a Social Movement (1926). The list was long. But it included all manner of developments which no theorist of social revolution, from Marx to Prof. George Pettee, would have considered relevant to the question. The increase of domestic manufactures which followed the colonial nonimportation agreements did not establish and it did not alter the basic American bourgeois system: it merely promoted the industrial side of it. The burst of settlement beyond the Alleghenies which came from the liquidation of the British restriction of 1763 did not touch an issue of class relations: it merely extended the national bourgeoisie westward. The abolition of imprisonment for debt did not inaugurate the triumph of an American proletariat: it merely protected men from the vicissitudes of currency fluctuations and business risk.

Continuity with the Past

To be sure, there are other aspects of the American Revolution more vividly reminiscent of the great European upheavals such as the expulsion of the Tories and the confiscation of their estates, the abolition of primogeniture and quitrents, the disestablishment of the Anglican church, and a general loosening of the status atmosphere which took place during the Revolutionary years. But here the problem of conceptualization is, if anything, even more important. For in the very context of the social revolution archetype we have to forge a new category which contains a migration experience outside it. I have already noted that the early American settlers, bourgeois as they were, continued to cling to many feudal habits of mind. No fragment of European culture which migrates outward is a pure organizational form and colonial society was not a lucid embodiment of the theoretical categories of John Locke or Thomas Paine. But it is, of course, one thing for a society to be torn between feudalism and liberalism, and another for it to be centrally liberal but feudal at the margins. That is the problem we face here. The Tories tended to be elitist but they were still bourgeois, and even if it could be demonstrated that more acres of land were confiscated in their case than in the case of the French aristocracy, their social status would be not increased by this fact. Quitrents and primogeniture were falling into disuse even where they existed in America in 1776, which is not surprising, since there was neither a true aristocracy nor a true peasantry on the American land. The revolutionary spirit of social democracy, though real, was merely an intensification of a mood in the colonies which every foreign observer, including Crèvecoeur, had noted since the 17th century. In all of these cases, what we are dealing with is not a revolt but a reflex action, a shaking off by a liberal

fragment of Europe of some of the medieval marginalia which clung to it as it migrated across the Atlantic. And this conceptualization, when placed alongside that of the revolutionary archetype, leads us to a conclusion concerning these changes which is not a matter of degree but a matter of kind. The outstanding thing about America's "social revolution", instead of being its break with the past, is its continuity with the past.

Democratic Changes in the 18th Century

It is this continuity, this fulfilling relationship of the Revolution to the migration, which also nourishes the democratic changes politically of the late 18th century in America. American society was already spiritually and socially democratic when the "radicals" created their famous State constitutions in 1776. To be sure, there is a purely imperial element here which is important. British colonial policy had not involved the centralized control which prevailed in the French and above all the Spanish colonies of the Western Hemisphere. It had involved a fair amount of "salutary neglect," as Burke put it, which permitted the growth of self-governing institutions in the colonies prior to the revolutionary movement. Indeed, as we know, colonial outrage against the Acts of Trade was due in part to the fact that they represented a departure from the historic British attitude. Hence the American colonists were prepared by prior experience for the responsibilities imposed upon them by their new institutions. It is certainly a matter of relevance that the American leaders were men like Sam Adams and Patrick Henry who had sat in colonial assemblies for years, rather than a group of alienated Latin American Creoles whose experience had been confined to the most marginal aspects of government and administration.

But the issue of popular rule is not entirely a matter of leadership, as both the Latin American and the European experience show, but a matter also of the electorate at large. And what we find, when we uncover the relevance of British imperial policy, is a hidden reciprocity between the autonomy which that policy nourished and the social milieu generated by the character of the American migration. A culture of independent farmers, bred in puritanism and liberalism, lay at the base of the expanding power of the colonial assemblies. And when those assemblies broke loose from Britain, and converted themselves into popular government, it was this power which sustained them. Of course, I am not contending that the constitutions of 1776 were entirely democratic, or that American society could have supported them if they were. The old elitist streak continued, yielding a "reaction" during the constitutional era, supporting the leadership of a wealthy Whiggery. It is not until Jackson that the old gentilities collapse, that the American electorate gains full confidence in itself. But Jackson is prefigured by the Revolution, and the democracy of that era is inconceivable without the social support that a liberal society established for the politics of self-government during the colonial time. Step by step, we are led back to the Mayflower, to a tiny group of bourgeois settlers who left the basic spirit of feudal subordination behind in Europe in the 17th century.

Social Revolution in the Civil War

I suppose it is in the Civil war that Americans come closest to the taste of social revolution. But this is not because Northern "capitalism," as some critics argue, overturned Southern "feudalism." Southern society was part of the American bourgeois world, both in the capitalist base of its plantation order and in the Jeffersonian base of its intellectual tradition. Indeed it is this very membership of the South in the American community which is involved in the curious kind of radicalism that the Civil War

yielded. For what was at stake here, instead of the clash between two social systems, was the definition of the status of the Negro in terms of the morality of one system: the national liberal system. And this, in its own curious way, was a matter of “revolutionary” distinctions, of pure and uncompromising antitheses. For in a world where men are equal, a slave is either not a man and an object with no rights or he is a man and the necessary recipient of all rights. There is no middle ground here. The Declaration of Independence does not provide for a waiting period before human beings are given their “inalienable rights.” It does not provide that only a few “inalienable rights” be given to certain groups of men. Under such circumstances it is not surprising that when the issue of slavery exploded in America, when Garrison arose to claim that the slave was a man rather than an object, the matter could not be contained by the compromise formulae of Clay or Calhoun. America experienced here, within liberal culture, the same intransigent confrontations that France experienced when in the 18th century liberal culture faced other cultures. At the same time, without minimizing the intensity of this encounter, which may have been even greater than the French, one is bound to stress again the common premises which contained it on both sides. After Emancipation the North and the South came together again in a unity which historians have described as miraculous. Was it really miraculous? Or was it, like other aspects of American “success,” traceable to the cohesion which the Puritan 17th century had implanted forever in American life?

American Attitudes Toward European Revolutions

When the Americans viewed the chain of revolutions that broke out in Europe in the 18th century, they responded, not surprisingly, with the instinct of their history. They welcomed the initial struggle for liberal institutions, especially if it involved the issue of national independence, gathering in public meetings, lighting bonfires, issuing editorials. But when that struggle began to show excessive violence, when it began to involve “hanging and shooting,” as one writer noted in the Latin American case, the “mild and merciful” people of North America proceeded to withdraw their affection. And, of course, as the current of revolution began to shift from the liberal to the socialist direction, as the Communards appeared in Paris and the Bolsheviks in Moscow, the Americans turned away in practically universal horror. From the French Revolution onward the American response to revolution abroad is like a love affair which is constantly turning sour, like an infatuation which is forever ending in disenchantment.

Of course, this love affair was, from the outset, a reciprocal matter, for the Europeans were enchanted with America as well. But we certainly cannot say that there was any larger analytic wisdom on the European side than on the American. If the Americans did not realize that their responses were governed by the peculiar ease with which migration had delivered them into the liberal world, the Europeans did not realize either that this large fact separated them from the men across the Atlantic. It is notorious that the American Revolution was interpreted by the French as a basis for their own social revolution, and if we are interested in precedents for the Jameson-Beard approach to that Revolution, we can note that they go back on the European side to the 18th century itself. But all that this meant was that, as the Americans withdrew from the radical phases of the European effort, they intruded into the transatlantic revolutionary romance a pathetic note of rejection. One feels this even in connection with revolutionaries who were received in America itself, and even in connection with those who symbolized mainly nationalist aspirations. Does not one feel that Louis Kossuth, for example, for all

the wild enthusiasms which greeted him in the North and West, encountered a final touch of frigidity?

Diversity in American Outlook

There is no need, of course, to argue that the American outlook on revolution abroad was a monolithic one. The visit of Kossuth himself is a case in point, for he was on the whole rejected in the South, which also had a special ax to grind whenever, as in France in 1848, a revolutionary movement tended toward the emancipation of slaves. But the diversity was not merely regional. It was a matter of the political parties as well. We know that the French Revolution was a bone of contention for a period between the Federalists and the Democrats, and the term "Jacobin" entered for decades into the American political vocabulary by virtue of its attachment to Jefferson and his friends. But the matter goes beyond the 18th century. Mr. E. N. Curtis, for example, in a careful 1924 study of American editorial reaction to all the French revolutions of the later period, those of 1830, 1848, and 1871, notes that the Whig press was always more cautious in its sympathy, the Democratic press more unrestrained.

And yet these diversities did not alter the basic pattern of the national response. If they had altered it, if the division between Whig and Democrat had been based on the European revolutionary issues themselves, as when Germany in 1848 split along French lines, we would have to reassess the whole of our history. For then it would be evident that the struggles of Europe were in fact those of America as well, that nothing had been escaped through the colonial migration. But this was far from the case. True, in the polemical shadow world of the 18th century when Democrats were not only Jacobins but Federalists were aristocrats, it was possible for Jefferson actually to believe that his own cause depended to some extent on that of the French. But since the American aristocrats were in fact bourgeois businessmen of the Hamiltonian type, there was no basis for this identification. And it did not prevent Jefferson from joining in the end the national repudiation of the Revolution because of its violence and authoritarianism. By the time we reach the Continental revolutions of 1848, moreover, the Whig aristocrats have themselves become Harrison log cabin Democrats, so that there is hardly a chance even for the illusion in which Jefferson engaged. To be sure, the European revolts had some inspiring influence on the reform movements of the 19th century, as in the case of the labor movement or Transcendentalism or Free Soilism. But this was a far cry from the precipitation of identical struggles such as took place within the European community. When the time came, as with Jefferson, it easily gave way to the disenchantment with Europe arising out of the national perspective.

Response to European Revolutions

There is a sense in which the moderation bred by the American migration experience clashed in its consequences with the democracy which came out of it, insofar as the response to the European revolutions went. For the moderate phases of the European revolutions were, of course, those in which a wealthy Whiggery tended to dominate, both in the case of the French Revolution and succeeding revolts. The democratic phases, when a Jacobinism took over, tended to be the violent phases. Thus we have the paradox, at the very height of the Jacksonian movement, of a universal sympathy even on the part of the Jacksonians for the French Revolution of July which in fact brought to power a big bourgeoisie which the Jacksonians themselves would have overthrown. Of course 1830 was a step forward after Charles X, and it had the additional

advantage, from the standpoint of American charm of having Lafayette as one of its leaders. But when one compares the acceptance here with the rejection which took place during the final phase of the French Revolution of 1789, or of 1848 when the Second Republic moved into its radical period, it is easy to see that moderation itself is a virtue when we are dealing with a democratic country which, as Tocqueville put it, "has never had a democratic revolution."

Of course, there is a tendency for the Jacobin political thrust to coincide in Europe with the emergence of proletarian radicalisms that threaten the bourgeois content of revolution. This was even true in the case of the original French Revolution when the Hébertistes and the Babeuvists appeared, although it is interesting that there is little in the literature of the American revulsion which takes note of them. However, there is no doubt that the appearance of even a mild socialism in 1848, of Ledru Rollin and the national workshops, was enough to produce general American dismay. There was no outcry in America against the suppression of the June revolt of the workers in Paris, as there was none over the suppression of the Communards in 1871. Here was violence, and plenty of it, but it was being used for "order and for law," as one editorial writer put it. Of course, by the time we reached the Russian Revolution, the bourgeois phase of the European revolutionary pattern is telescoped and the proletarian phase extended. The Bolsheviks swallow up what would have been the Jacobin epoch, mingling a maximum of violence and social heresy, and the sympathy of the Americans is confined to the short-lived period of the provisional government. Here was a case where the American romance with European revolution ended peculiarly abruptly, and gave way to a disaffection which lasted peculiarly long.

I have said that the American attitude toward revolution is a matter both of process and of content. Certainly this is documented in the 18th and 19th centuries. The violence of Europe alienates the American even when the liberal substance is involved, and when the substance is changed the American is alienated quite apart from violence. But the American, of course, is only faintly aware of the historic distinctions involved here, and when he views the Europeans he tends to do so not in terms of history but of character. And yet is character, whether the foreigner at the moment be good or bad, enough to understand him? Is it enough to grasp the problem he faces? Indeed one might ask even other questions. Who is the European if not an American who stayed in Europe? And who is the American if not a European, blessed by the experience of flight, who has arrived in America?

The 20th Century

When one considers our position in the 18th and 19th centuries, complacently sizing up the European revolutions, it is almost poignant to contemplate the desperate degree to which we have become involved in the current of revolution abroad in the 20th century. And yet there was always, in the sheer isolationism of our earlier position, its sheer subjectivity, a potential for world response. There was the possibility of a nationalist Americanism, a certain democratic messianism, based on the very unconscious reflexes being displayed. It is not surprising that at the moment of the encounter between America and the Bolshevik Revolution these possibilities were the first to fulfill themselves. And indeed, if there were a shred left of the luxurious irresponsibility of the 19th century, one might even be tempted to accept them. But the

shift on this score has been complete. Given our world position, reason itself compels us to transcend the old perspectives.

The matter of nationalist response goes back, in fact, to the moment of the migration itself. For when the English Puritan comes to America, he is no longer completely “English,” which means that he has to find a new national identity. And where is that identity to come from if not from Puritanism itself, the ideal part which he has extracted from the English whole and which alone he possesses. Hence the part becomes, as it were, a new whole and Puritanism itself blossoms into “Americanism.” A crisis of self-definition implicit in the migration experience resolves itself in a new nationalism compounded out of the migrant ideology. The force of that nationalism is felt everywhere in early American politics. When Jefferson calls Hamilton an “aristocrat,” what is he implicitly saying if not that Hamilton is somehow outside the legitimate American community, the collective spirit of a nation entirely liberal? And yet Jefferson does not call Hamilton “un-American,” though that is in fact what he is saying. The term “Americanism” does not arise until the 20th century, until collectivists have replaced aristocrats as the symbol of alien ideology. But surely this development cannot be disassociated from the presence of an aggressive worldwide Communist movement, fortified by external national power. It was the fate of the Bolshevik Revolution to precipitate a final definition of the ideal nationalism latent from the outset in American life.

Now it cannot be said that this development, whatever its utility in providing reassurance or in fortifying the national will, contributed to a solution of the problem of historical understanding that I have been discussing here. This is not alone because nationalism is an emotion rather than a conceptual tool. It is because the purpose of “Americanist” nationalism had been from the outset, as we have seen, to hide the fragmentary nature of the colonial cultural element which had detached itself from Europe, to inflate the Puritan part into a new whole equal and competitive, as it were, with the national “wholes” of Europe. Under such circumstances, how could it promote an understanding of the uniformity of American bourgeois culture in contrast to that of France, of the ease and speed of American liberal success in contrast to that of Europe? To be sure, the voyage of the Pilgrims is an article of faith in this nationalism, but curiously never in order to expose comparative historical truth. Almost from the outset – which shows how powerful the instinct for the new nationalist identity is – the Pilgrims cease to be escaping European ideologists and become the gods of a special cosmos.

American Messianism

Nor is American nationalism wholly without its implications abroad. Since it masks the relativity of American history, since it converts, as it were, an ideology into a universal, it is easy to assume that it can be instantly relevant to all societies. The kind of absolutist evaluations of European experience which we have seen at work in the American response to 19th century revolutions can be reflected in an aggressive outlook on the world plane. I suppose Wilson, with his fond hope that Europe could be immediately democratized and Americanized after the First World War, will always stand as the classic symbol of this view. Nor, once again, can one fail to notice the historic coincidence of Wilson and Lenin. For if Wilson dreamt of the American projection in terms of Europe and the peace treaty, the messianism he represented

gradually became, as the Bolshevik Revolution expanded, one of the main American responses to it.

In its most modern form this messianism not only projects the nationalist absolutism but some of the very historical illusions that I have been discussing. Indeed nothing perhaps proves more vividly the way in which nationalism fails to solve the analytic problem than its capacity to nourish the distortions of our history which arise from a forgetfulness of its origin. Thus it is often said that the Americans are the traditionally true revolutionaries of the world. It is said that revolution is precisely what America has been given to “export.” And the American Revolution is brought forward, as are the sympathies of the French and the other Europeans for it at the time. The whole cluster of ancient misunderstandings is activated. There is a sense, to be sure, in which American bourgeois culture has been “permanently revolutionary.” This is in its own internal energies. We are capable of destroying landscapes and reconstructing them, of tearing down buildings and creating new ones, on a scale vaster than any to be found in the world. And in fact this very drive has nourished the immensity of our industrial achievement. But while in an odd sense it is “revolutionary,” this orientation flows itself from the emancipations that the initial migration engendered, from the escape from the traditional European order. It is when the middle class is unrestrained by even a memory of feudalism, when its Puritan intensities are given utterly free reign, that we get the American initiative.

American Emergence from “Underdevelopment”

One cannot help noticing the relevance of this fact to the issue of “underdevelopment” in terms of which, as I have said, the appeal of Marxism has been transformed in the 20th century. After the American Revolution the United States was in a certain economic sense an underdeveloped country, which makes our history analogous to that of newly independent Asian and African countries, not least because some of the difficulty derived from the British colonial system. Indeed, as in new nations today, Americans turned to government for the promotion of needed economic enterprises. And yet, if American industrialism came late, not until the latter half of the 19th century, when it came it was staggeringly successful. And the reason is that it was projected into a tradition which, as I have suggested, was in terms of modernity and utilitarianism even more advanced than that of Europe. We cannot hide the fact that such a tradition does not exist in India or Nigeria. Those countries, as they emerge from colonialism, seek to emerge also from a premodern world of values. They are only beginning to accomplish the cultural break with medievalism which we had accomplished long before our battle against George III.

It may seem that I am being deliberately brutal in this romanticism as a historical norm; I do not subscribe to it as an ethical norm either. Ethically the American revulsion against violence is defensible, and one need not quarrel with the morality of Jefferson’s rejection of Bonaparte. But even unattractive things are historical facts. And my point is that no amount of illusion concerning their origin, however spontaneously it arises from familiar experience, can promote a realistic orientation to them.

Granted the pull of the past, our experience today is on the side of realism. That experience alters, indeed in a sense it reverses, our history. For what does it do if not return us to the revolutionary situation that we left behind in the 17th century? There is an epochal quality about America’s world involvement from this point of view which we

may not yet adequately appreciate, for few countries can claim so dramatic a shift in their history as a return voyage of the Mayflower. Of course, this will not undo the pattern of the past. It will not change the character of the American Revolution, reverse the Jacksonian expansion of the suffrage, or give us a different Civil War. But it will challenge us to reevaluate every one of these events in terms of the escape from revolution which shaped them, and doing so, to reassess our historic response to revolution itself. It will challenge us to see that the difference between Americans and others is not a difference between men but between men caught in different historic situations. If we seize this wisdom, whatever our goals in the world, we will have taken a step toward their achievement.