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# O N R E V O L U T I O N

(A commentary broadcast by radio station KPFA, Berkeley, Aug. 9, 1962)

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Last month the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions in Santa Barbara, a creation of Ford Foundation's Fund for the Republic, published a little pamphlet entitled "On Revolution". It is a conversation between Scott Buchanan, professor of philosophy and former dean of St. John's College, and Joseph Lyford, a former journalist now on the Fund's staff. You can get a copy free by writing the Center, Box 4068, Santa Barbara.

It's the kind of high-level conversation you would expect from a professor of philosophy and a journalist. (A journalist, according to a newspaper friend of mine, is a newspaperman who wears spats.) That's the kind of conversation it is. Neither of the gentlemen claims to have been in jail yet, but they look kindly on idealists who get into the clink, and Professor Buchanan seems to think he might make it himself one of these days.

The professor and the journalist draw a contrast between the University of San Marcos in Peru and universities here. Speaking of the Peruvian University, Mr. Lyford, the journalist, says "there is an ideological ferment going on in this university and in others in Latin America that seems to be totally lacking in most of our own universities."

Professor Buchanan disagrees with the common view that revolutions don't come off unless people are hungry. "In my opinion," says the professor, "revolutions don't happen unless there is a deep sense of injustice."

The professor is right, isn't he? If one is hungry along with all one's neighbors, who is there to revolt against? But if some of the neighbors are well-fed, their homes adorned, their children educated--not because they work but because they own a lot of land--while my family is hungry, my home a hut, my children degraded--not because I am lazy but because I am landless--then you have the setting for revolution. When all are hungry, we know beyond doubt that the only relief is to apply ourselves more effectively to Nature's storehouse. But when a few get rich without producing anything and others who work stay poor, the poor naturally entertain revolutionary ideas. Injustice not hunger, is the true mother of revolution. Speaking of a group of younger students here, Professor Buchanan says, "The education they are getting is dull and conformist and affluent in its source and in its general temper, and this is intolerable to them." They are also

very much aware, he says, that what they are taught has "a curious smearing effect on most of their concerns." Many sociologists say they "don't know what the word justice means."

If the sociologists don't know what justice is, they cannot sense injustice. They cannot be revolutionaries. What they really mean, perhaps, is "I am well enough off; don't bother me." But that may be unfair, for justice is more an economic than a sociological concept. If the sociologists don't know what it is, maybe the economists have failed them.

Before I get the Professor on somebody's list, I should say he is not speaking necessarily of violent revolution.

It may be [he says] that in the next period of the world's history this will be the great discovery, that revolutions can happen without violence if there is enough understanding of what the revolutionary process is. To put it in its most paradoxical form, a legitimate government should be able to find some way of extending its understanding, its intelligence, its reason, and its tolerance to the revolutionary process. I sometimes think that the only future for this country is that it will realize this about revolutions all over the world and will help to bring a theory of revolution to bear upon our foreign relations. It would be a great thing if we could discover what it is that would bring revolution in as a legitimate process.

In that sense, although it is paradoxical to say so, a government can somehow prepare itself for a revolution against itself and gain in depth of understanding and even of justice by doing so. I suppose the ballot is the great classical case. The ballot took the place of a revolution, and now we have regularized it so that every four years in the case of the national government, and in shorter intervals in other cases, we arrange to have a revolution. We kick the rascals out, is the phrase. This is a fairly violent phrase in its origin. It's humorous now because we do it with the usual business about campaigns and elections, but even in these you find the spirit is there. There is a fight.

Fighting is a good word when you use it politically. We're going to fight for this, we're going to kick the rascals out, we're going to get rid of the tyrannies involved in an old regime that has become all tangled up. The ballot is a great example of an orderly process that now manages to use the principle of revolution periodically in political life and community life. This is a great discovery. There must be other things of this sort. This is what we are looking for.

Well, let me try to help find what the professor is looking for. Let me tell you about two little revolutions, both growing out of a deep sense of injustice--one of them irrational, disorderly and a failure; the other rational, legitimate and a success. The one that didn't come off occurred in Ecuador 40 years ago. The one that succeeded--whose fruits we still enjoy--took place in California's Central Valley several years earlier. Forty years ago the large Cayambe Valley in Ecuador was almost entirely owned by two families. It is also a relatively densely populated valley, filled with Indian tenant farmers and minifundia. Lester Mallory of the State Department told the story:

Some shysters, posing as Socialist idealists, went to Cayambe and told the Indians they had discovered a deed proving that the whole valley belonged to them, that, if enough contributions were made, they would prove the case in court. The Indians scraped the bottoms of their almost empty pockets and moved into the big estates, gaily, as if going to a fair. They staked out sizable plots for themselves. The shysters decamped, the Indians were driven off the land by troops, and the uprising came to an end--but not the feeling among the Indians that they had a right to the land, and we are told that the Cayambe Valley today is a hotbed of Communist agitation.

The scene sixty years ago in California's Central Valley was comparable. We think California is a state of large landholdings today--and it is, too--but sixty years ago it was much more so. Henry Miller, the Cattle King, could drive his herds from Oregon to Mexico and camp each night on his own land. But there were a number of small holders who wanted to farm the land more intensively. They needed water to do so. They formed irrigation districts, with taxing powers, to build canals and dams. At first they levied the taxes on land and buildings together, but this was felt to be unfair. After a time they exempted improvements and levied on land only.

Henry Miller and the other great landholders didn't like the law. They contested it all the way up to the Supreme Court, calling it "communism and confiscation under guise of law." But they lost. They were compelled by the irrigation district taxes to let go of land they were not using, or not using very well.

In testimony presented before an Assembly Interim Committee on Water three years ago, Robert Durbrow, Executive Secretary of the Irrigation Districts Association, told of the revolutionary effects of this law.

Irrigation districts [he said] do not tax improvements on the land, and this has been a primary reason why this type of

district promotes development. All land in a district is assessed (taxed), whether it is irrigated or not, and this tends to put idle lands into production, or cause them to be put up for sale, as landowners can't continue to pay substantial taxes and not have the land in production. In irrigation districts, too, all registered voters can vote at district elections, whether they are landowners or not. As land goes into irrigation production, families of workers are required to farm the lands, and these families form the nucleus for colonization of land as it becomes available through sale, inheritance, tax deed, or otherwise.

Bert Smith, who was at the time editor of Western Water News, published by the Irrigation Districts Association, made the same kind of report at an international conference in San Francisco five years ago.

In the assessment techniques which were provided in the State law, [said Smith] we find one of the very basic concepts of the irrigation district movement. Irrigation districts assess on the basis of the cash value of the land, exclusive of the improvements. Beyond a doubt, this type of assessment resulted in the dividing of the large farms of the early days and the passing of the land from the few to the many. The large, unirrigated farm was definitely penalized in the operation of the assessment. The small farmer who worked to plant his orchard or his crops and build his buildings was encouraged--improvements were not penalized. This concept in the irrigation district act has persisted and continues today to be one of the basic factors in our district system.

The California law achieved by legitimate methods precisely what the Indians of the Cayambe Valley in Ecuador failed to achieve by direct action 40 years ago. It achieved a revolutionary transfer of land "from the few to the many".

Returning now to Professor Buchanan, you will recall he said:

It may be that in the next period of the world's history this will be the great discovery, that revolutions can happen without violence if there is enough understanding of what the revolutionary process is.... It would be a great thing if we could discover what it is that would bring revolution in as a legitimate process.

One of the key processes for which Professor Buchanan is looking is the one employed by California's irrigation districts.

Look at it this way. In Ecuador's Cayambe Valley revolution the troops pointed their guns at the poor and landless who trespassed on the great estates of the rich. But in California's Central Valley revolution, if the sheriff was there, his guns were aimed at the rich and powerful who tried to interfere after their uncultivated holdings were sold for taxes.

Land value taxation is one of the great institutions Professor Buchanan is looking for when he says, "It would be a great thing if we could discover what it is that would bring revolution in as a legitimate process." Land value taxation is revolution the legitimate way.

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