

Evolution and Revolution

Dyer D. Lum

1886

Many of your Radical friends are loud in their denunciation of revolutionary agencies. Evolution they hold to be a peaceful process, and the exact opposite of revolution. They would “educate the people” to the desired state of intelligence as “the better way.”

In dissenting from this rose-colored view of human progress I affirm that revolutionary efforts have been the result of evolutionary processes. The fifteenth century, in which we had the rebirth of intellectual activity had its roots in preceding centuries and was revolutionary because it was opposed by established modes of thought. Luther in laying the foundation of religious liberty prepared the way for a deluge of blood. Through three centuries Luther had had precursors; became in “the fullness of time” and was the scribe of his age, yet entrenched privilege barred his way and the evolution of liberty led logically to revolution, until toleration arose from the exhaustion of both sides, carnage was rampant.

Religious liberty once having turned in foothold, the logic of events led the assault of liberty from the Church to the State, and the last century was the battlefield between authority and liberty for this outpost. Again evolution was summoned to halt in its march by legalized privilege, and revolution necessarily resulted.

In this century all our great questions have been of an entirely different character. Neither forms of religion nor government longer occupy public attention. Religion and politics are of the past; the questions of this age are *economic*. Evolution has carried man on to intellectual, religious and political liberty, and both the logical course of development and the problems of the age attest that the burden of the present demand is economic liberty, the rounding and completion of the full liberty of the individual, free from authoritative control whether by State or Commune. But again all signs point to the necessity of revolutionary agencies, for the march of events has already attained to the “dead line” beyond which vested interest will not permit peaceful progress.

It is not a question of the best method. Preference has no more scope in social than in physical evolution. It is above all a question of *facts*. The lines are being drawn sharply, and we must take sides. To hold aloof from the struggle and assert our individual liberty in inaction, is to play into the hands of privileged reactionists. The logic of events is speeding us on to combat privilege and talk about best methods is the incoherence of chattering idiots. We are in the current of the ages, and our duty is to strive to maintain a place in the vanguard, be the method what it may.

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