

Liberalism Series

Remarks of Elmer Davis at Bennington College

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It is unfortunately necessary in these times for a lecturer on any controversial topic to tell you before he starts his general bias on the things he is talking about. The tendency to gang thinking has been strong in this country for years, especially in the so-called intellectual world, and has of course been much intensified lately by the spread of various religious creeds, especially Communism, which profess to embrace all truth. If a man is a Communist you can tell in advance about what he is going to say on any subject; if he says something else, it only proves that he is a bad Communist.

I am not a communicant of any church, theistic or secular; but since I am to discuss liberalism, and since liberalism is in pretty wide disrepute at present, it seems no more than fair to say that I am a conservative by temperament and a radical by opinion; so it is quite possible that I may be unfair to liberalism from either angle. With that out of the way, we can go ahead to discuss the peculiar shifts in the content of the word, and the idea, of liberalism in recent times.

A liberal, according to Webster's dictionary, is one who is

"not bound by authority, orthodox tenets, or established forms; inclined to welcome new ideas; friendly to suggestions or experiments of reform in the constitution or administration of government".

But this general definition needs (and in the dictionary immediately receives) some qualification. A liberal is also an adherent of certain European parties of that name, and the content of those party doctrines has affected the general idea of the meaning of the word. Liberalism on the continent of

Europe originally implied almost any opposition, mild or extreme, to the despotic repressions of the Restoration period. Accordingly its emphasis was on democracy; on civic liberties, freedom of speech and the press and assemblage; and above all on nationalism--what has since come to be known as self-determination. It was simply the reverse of the dynastic and despotic policies of Metternich and the Emperor Alexander.

In England, on the other hand, owing to the peculiarities of English economic and ideological development, and especially in the latter part of the nineteenth century to the personality of Gladstone, Liberalism was, if not anti-nationalist, at any rate anti-imperialist, in politics and economics. It also happened to represent the interests of bourgeois manufacturers against the landholding aristocracy--a tendency which was latent in Continental liberalism too, but never came openly to the front except in the case of the National Liberals of Prussia. So it is apparent that the word already had various and sometimes contradictory meanings, before it ever became current in the United States.

I suppose the chief reason we have never had a major Liberal party, so-called, in this country was that American party lines were drawn before the word liberal came into common use as a term in politics, and that names are even more powerful with the American public than with those of other nations. But the party founded by Thomas Jefferson was in fact a liberal party, and has on the whole remained so ever since. One great difference between American and European liberalism must be noted, however; in Europe, where the aristocracy was everywhere agrarian, liberalism naturally came to represent the bourgeois manufacturing interest. In most of the United States the landholding aristocracy was weak; accordingly liberalism was agrarian--it represented the small farmer.

Even in the South, which we in our time think of as traditionally Democratic, the great planters were mostly Federalists, and afterward Whigs.

Liberalism was agrarian in this country and conservatism came to represent the industrial and financial interest--due partly to our peculiar economic situation at the end of the eighteenth century and partly to the personality of Alexander Hamilton--a self-made man, an adventurer if you like, who had no hereditary position to serve as his springboard to power and consequently had to build his own party. Hamilton was an imperialist for personal reasons, but most of the Hamiltonians were content, like Fafner, to lie quiet and hold on to what they had. The expansionist drive in this country was carried on by the liberals--by the Jeffersonians, the small farmers who wanted to annex more free land.

So you will observe that even in the nineteenth century the meaning of the word Liberal was somewhat confused. Neither the Gladstonians in England nor the Jeffersonians in the United States were bound by authority or established forms; neither had to fight, at least in theory, for the civic liberties for which Continental Liberals struggled. But English Liberalism was industrial and anti-imperialist; American Liberalism was agrarian and imperialist in politics, even though in economics it held to free trade like the English Liberals. In each case this economic slant was a matter of interest; free trade was good business for American farmers and for English manufacturers.

The Civil War completely distorted American political thinking and political issues for a generation; there was not much real liberalism in this country between 1865 and the early years of this century. On the whole the Democrats--chiefly because they were usually out of office--inclined rather to the liberal side; but their one outstanding figure in those days was the

great conservative Grover Cleveland. The first appearance of the word Liberal in American political terminology, so far as I know--perhaps some of you who are more learned in American history may correct me on this--was in the presidential campaign of 1872, with the Liberal Republicans. But their Liberalism consisted of not much more than a feeling that the South should no longer be treated as a conquered province, and that Congressmen and Cabinet officers should not steal. Neither of these doctrines proved popular, in 1872; so Liberal Republicanism disappeared underground, to reappear a dozen years later as the mugwump movement. The name of Liberalism vanished, and has never reappeared to this day except as the title of some fugitive independent ticket, in local elections.

Yet if you had asked the average American at the end of the nineteenth century what he thought about Liberalism, he would have said that he was for it. What did he mean? He probably could not have told you, except vaguely; Liberalism connoted to him opposition to a hereditary aristocracy and a state church, a zeal for civic liberties; it certainly did not connote, in most cases, a devotion to the interests of rich manufacturers. Ask him to name an outstanding Liberal and he would instantly have mentioned Gladstone; but his idea of Liberalism was apt to be much more of the Continental than of the English type. When the manifest-destiny drive, quiescent ever since the fifties, got started again at the time of the Spanish War, it was led, to be sure, by conservatives; but the liberal Roosevelt was one of its most enthusiastic advocates, and its most stubborn opponent was the conservative Cleveland.

Thinking about liberalism, you will note, was still confused. As somebody--I forget whether it was Frank Kent, Gerald Johnson, or James Truslow Adams--remarked a few years ago, through all that period the typical American

was Hamiltonian in practise but Jeffersonian in theory. He would stubbornly insist that all men were equal even when he was doing his best to keep them from having any chance to be so. And yet the admiration for liberalism which he would express in speech, if not in behavior, was not wholly meaningless. Gradually liberalism had come to connote a middle course between conservatism and radicalism. As Mr. Simeon Strunsky, himself a liberal of long standing, has lately put it in the New York Times, Liberalism meant and still ought to mean "progress with order". As opposed to the radical who felt that progress was so urgently needed that order could be overlooked; and to the conservative who insisted on order even if there was no progress.

Yet so strong is the power of words, of traditionally honored names, that this country has never had a major party which called itself either Conservative, Liberal, or Radical. Those names had a European, an un-American flavor; when an agrarian radicalism reappeared toward the end of the nineteenth century it called itself Populism, and later Progressivism.

In the triangular presidential campaign of 1912, accordingly, we had a conservative, a liberal, and a radical party; but none of them were called by those names. I pick out that year, partly because it is as good a starting-point as any other for the history of the contemporary United States, partly because it was about that time that I myself came to the surface and became actively aware of what was going on. The election of 1912 ended with a victory for liberalism--that is, for Woodrow Wilson with a program of moderate reform, of progress with order.

Nobody can say how well those domestic reforms would have worked, if the war had not come along. Wilsonian liberalism was designed to meet a situation which within a year or two had profoundly changed. In foreign policy, it was the liberalism of Gladstone, rather than that of Jefferson; it proposed, sincerely

enough, to reverse the imperialistic nationalism of the past fifteen years. Yet before Wilson went out of office he had conquered two neighboring republics and twice invaded a third, besides becoming involved in the European war. His intentions were excellent; his theories, granted the continuation of the conditions they were designed to fit, seem reasonable enough. But he could not adjust himself rapidly enough to changing realities, and his failure to do so has perhaps more than anything else been responsible for the discredit into which Liberalism has fallen in this country.

Again the war distorted political issues and political thinking; from 1918 to 1929 America was dominantly conservative with a stubborn undercurrent of radicalism; liberalism was not much in evidence. True, Mr. John W. Davis, appearing before the Democratic national convention of 1924 to accept its nomination for the presidency, blew the trumpet for a great campaign of liberalism. Neither then nor later did anybody find out just what his idea of liberalism was, except that Cabinet officers should not steal. This turned out to be no more popular a notion in 1924 than it had been in 1872; against the threat of Lafollette radicalism the larger number of voters stood by conservatism, and conservatism accordingly ruled us till it blew up from spontaneous combustion a few years later.

II

But I am talking about the history of a word. In 1913, when I left college and began to look around, there was a great deal of talk about liberalism. Reasonably enough, you might think, when a party liberal in fact if not in name had just swept the country; but it was not political liberalism that people meant. Progressivism was then the sacred word, even though the Progressive party had been beaten; if a man called himself a liberal in politics

a faint suspicion attached to him, it was generally felt that in fact he was probably something much worse.

Liberalism, twenty-odd years ago, had more of a social and moral implication. A liberal was a man who believed that women ought to be allowed to smoke, and to vote. He probably felt, also, that the sheath skirt and what were then called the new dances did not portend the immediate collapse of traditional sexual morality. (In that, as it turned out, he was wrong.) All this was suspect, but not so much so as political liberalism. To call yourself a Progressive, whether you were a Republican or a Democrat, was respectable; but about liberalism there hung a faintly raffish aura; it was felt to be one of those things that are all well enough when you're in Europe but would never do at home. A man who professed himself a Liberal lay under suspicion of not getting his hair cut often enough, perhaps even of not brushing the dandruff off his coat collar; a female Liberal might be capable of the most horrendous affronts against public decency, such as wearing her hair short, or going without stockings in hot weather. (I doubt, however, if even the most radical and abandoned woman of those days could have been persuaded to wear shorts in public.)

Mr. Strunsky, above mentioned, has lately complained that after the war the good old pre-war title of Liberal was taken over by what he calls "a much tougher crew--Radicals, Reds, and so on". I hesitate to take issue with Mr. Strunsky; his memory is longer than mine, and he is and was a practising Liberal, which I never have been. At the same time, I think this confusion was evident enough before the war. There was for instance, when I came to town in 1913, an organization in Greenwich Village known as the Liberal Club. Its membership included some who would nowadays be classed as liberals; some radicals of all sorts--mild radicals, Socialists, Syndicalists and even Communists; and

a great many young people who had no particular opinions at all--young people who had come to Greenwich Village to get away from home. About the only issue on which virtually the whole membership could have been united was Feminism. The liberalism of the Liberal Club meant votes for women, smokes for women, jobs for women. But in politics it meant anything from anarchist terrorism to a devotion to the initiative, referendum, and recall. In economics, anything from pure Communism to things as they were, only managed a little more honestly. In morals, anything from promiscuity (then known as free love) to a rigidly chaste monogamy--a state, to be sure, in which only the bolder members dared admit that they were living.

Liberalism, in short, meant in those days anything critical--mildly or violently critical--of things as they were in any branch of human life. But as most minds were still dominated, consciously or implicitly, by the evolutionary optimism of the nineteenth century, the average man felt that things as they were either were all right, or could at any rate be set right without very much effort. Accordingly, pre-war Liberalism was not quite respectable. Because it was not respectable it was popular with those who for various reasons--chiefly youth--wanted to thumb their noses at conventionality. The young people of that brief Golden Age wanted--as Bernard Shaw quite accurately expressed it for them, in a play of the period--they wanted to lose their respectability, without giving up their self-respect. The commoner forms of pre-war Liberalism gave them that opportunity, and were accordingly embraced with enthusiasm by a great many young people who were destined to settle down into pillars of the established order when they were a few years older.

All of which is of course the normal pattern of human history. It deserves notice here only because of the peculiar character of pre-war Liberalism.

It was not quite respectable, it was a defiance of majority opinion--yet people who in those days had to confess that they had a liberal in the family did so, indeed, with some embarrassment; but still with a lifted eyebrow, a smile of amused deprecation, a hint that of course dear Laura doesn't mean all the dreadful things she says. Votes for women, indeed!--and cigarettes, and tango teas! She'll talk, and act, very differently, when she has a home of her own, and children.

The present situation is somewhat different.

III

After twenty years, the word "liberal" is again a term of abuse; but much more bitter abuse, and abuse from a different direction. Once again, for the moment, liberalism is a defiance of the majority opinion; yet even now there are bold spirits who dare to profess it--and I am afraid that we cannot hope that they will change their minds as soon as they grow up and have families of their own. For who are the outspoken liberals of today--those who proudly drape themselves with that abused name, as with a banner? Herbert Hoover; John W. Davis; George Horace Lorimer; Nicholas ^Murray Butler. No use waiting for them to grow up and get over their nonsense.

So unless Webster's dictionary is wrong Dr. Nicholas Murray Butler is inclined to welcome new ideas; Mr. Herbert Hoover is friendly to suggestions or experiments of reform, in the constitution or administration of government. (We all know that he was friendly to one great experiment, noble in motive and far-reaching in purpose; but that would hardly qualify him as a liberal by any hitherto known definition of that word.) All this is very strange--as strange as the fact that twenty-odd years ago a man who held genuinely liberal opinions

in politics had to call himself a Progressive, unless he wanted to be suspected of having dandruff on his coat collar. What these gentlemen mean, of course, is that they perceive now--ex post facto--that things were not quite perfect in 1929; that something ought to have been done about the set-up as it was then--but not quite so much as has been done. If we give Liberalism the very general definition offered by Mr. Strunsky--progress with order--these gentlemen might perhaps be called Liberals; but so could the Roosevelt administration, which does not precisely fit any other definition of liberalism, but is at any rate midway between radicalism and reaction. But I am afraid that Mr. Hoover and Mr. Davis and so on want a little less progress than Mr. Roosevelt has given us--not that that is anything to hurrah about--and a little more order, as order was defined up to 1929.

Why don't they call themselves conservatives, or even reactionaries? There is nothing intrinsically disgraceful about either of these terms. A conservative--this is my definition, not Webster's--is a man who wants to keep things as they are until he can be persuaded that something else would work better; a reactionary is a man who wants to go back, to turn back the clock--but to turn it back to a time which he thinks is better than this one, and which he believes can be restored essentially as it was. No moral obliquity in that. But reactionary is a term of abuse, just as radical used to be; and conservative, for some reason, is a word that most Americans have always been afraid of. So it comes down to this, that the only people who are not ashamed to call themselves liberals in the United States at the present day are the conservatives. This is at any rate a straw that shows which way the wind is blowing, quite as well as a Literary Digest poll.

But there are a few genuine liberals left in this country, even in public life. One of them is ex-Senator Jim Reed of Missouri, one of the last examples of the simon-pure Jeffersonian. At the end of the Democratic national convention in Chicago in 1932 he made a speech, a general disquisition on politics and economics, which was traditional liberalism of the purest dye. It would have been full of the most up-to-date and respectable ideas, if it had been delivered in 1832. Many of us who had been brought up in the spirit of Jeffersonism wished, as we listened to Mr. Reed, that the conditions which these ideas had been devised to meet still prevailed--but they vanished with the open frontier.

Well, there are other liberals; the most conspicuous, probably, is Senator Borah. Like Mr. Hoover, Mr. Borah was devoted to the great constitutional experiment of prohibition, something a little hard to reconcile with the general idea of liberalism; but in all other respects his liberalism is above suspicion, even if at times he seems totally unable to agree even with himself. When the American Liberty League was organized, calling for a return to old-fashioned liberal principles, some of us felt that the sort of liberty its founders were chiefly concerned about was liberty for big money. They were sincere, beyond any doubt; they genuinely believed that liberty for big money meant welfare for the nation; still, your inclination to sympathize with them would normally be determined by the size of your income tax.

Mr. Borah, however, professed to take the American Liberty League at its face value, though I fear in a somewhat Socratic mood. He only suggested that its platform, so zealous for those constitutional guarantees that were enacted to protect the freed slaves, and have been chiefly used to protect great corporations--that this platform should include something about economic freedom. Said Mr. Borah:

"What is liberty in this twentieth century? The power to fix the

price of the things that I must have, in order that I may live and not die, is my master, and the fact that I may enjoy free speech, and read a free press, does not ameliorate my servitude. The monopoly which crushes my small business, as is now being done in thousands of cases, and sends my family to the bread line, takes away all my enthusiasm over the right of trial by jury. The power to exploit the weaker and the more unfortunate in the economic world brings more misery to men, women and children than the denial of the right to peaceably assemble and pass resolutions. There is no liberty worthy of the name without economic freedom and social justice."

Mr. Borah's sincerity is beyond question. When some gentlemen shed tears over what the NRA has done to a poor parts presser, you know that what they are really worrying about is what it may do to General Motors or the United States Steel Corporation. (I am very much afraid that their apprehensions are quite unfounded.) But when Mr. Borah attacks the NRA in the interest of the little fellow, you know he means it. I happen to believe that Mr. Borah is economically behind the times; that to break up monopolies, in industries which naturally tend to monopoly, is as foolish as to wreck machines and go back to hand labor; that the way to secure economic freedom in those industries is to see that the monopolies are managed in the interest of society and not of a small group. But at any rate Mr. Borah hit the weak spot of this latest manifestation of the new liberalism. So far as I have seen, the American Liberty League has made no reply to him. I do not say that it has made no reply; but I read the papers pretty carefully, and I have not seen any. I do not see what reply it could make, except to disband.

Meanwhile another newly baptized liberal has offered a different viewpoint on economic freedom. When Mr. Hoover published his book, The Challenge to Liberty, a good many people felt that his idea of economic freedom was too much like the old laissez-faire doctrine. The past century has taught us that however admirable in theory, laissez-faire means in practise liberty for the strong man, the rich man, the cunning man, to do as he likes and take what he wants, no matter how many other people he may shove to the wall. A liberal of

longer standing than Mr. Hoover, namely William Allen White, seems to have been a little perturbed by omissions or ambiguities in the Hoover book; at any rate he wrote a letter which evoked from Mr. Hoover the following explanation:

"I hope that some day our people will learn that property rights are not the foundation of human liberty. Those foundations lie in the other rights which free the spirit of men-- free worship, opinion, thought, etc. . . . The property rights are a downright question of human behavior, in support of and subordinate to the other rights."

Mr. Borah, you will notice, does not think that a man has much freedom, when he cannot get work and his family cannot get food. Mr. Hoover takes a more spiritual view. Further Mr. Hoover continues:

"When governments take or destroy property rights they not only extinguish motivations to initiative and enterprise, but they invariably use economic power to stifle the other rights."

I do not know where he gets his evidence for this. I am unable to recall any case in history where a government began by destroying the economic freedom of the rich, and went on to abolish free speech and all the other civic liberties. There are governments which have abolished all kinds of liberties; but they have either destroyed them all together or attacked political and civic liberty first. Mr. Hoover is here talking pure Marxianism yet even the Russian Communists for tactical reasons permitted private property in land for a decade. Possibly what he means is that property rights are more stubbornly defended than any others, by people who have enough property to make it worth while. Most of the rich do not seem to agree with Mr. Hoover that property rights are subordinate to free thought and free speech; nor, logically, does he seem to agree with himself, if he is so sure that the destruction of ownership means the destruction of free opinion too.

As a matter of fact, plenty of despotic governments have abolished all political and civic liberties, and still left property rights untouched, at least for those who supported the government. And in theory, I do not see why a democratic government supported by a popular majority could not abolish property rights without attacking political and civic liberty at all. That is the program of the Socialist party in the United States and of the Labor party in Great Britain; and what would make it impossible of execution? Only the determination of the rich, after they had lost a free and fair election, to resist expropriation by force. It is the theory of orthodox Marxians, of course, that the rich always will and indeed always must resist by force. I am not so sure. A good many people who were rich in the later twenties seemed to suspect, by the winter of 1932-33, that there was something basically wrong with our system. That feeling, I think, will be far stronger and far more widespread after the next depression--if we ever get far enough out of this one to have a next one.

At any rate, in justice to Mr. Hoover, it must be noted that he did eventually recognize that government is not the only menace to economic security.

"Unrestrained use of property rights by the individual (he says) can also abuse, dominate, and extinguish the more precious liberties and securities. Therefore governments must enact laws against abuse and dominations and must umpire these matters."

That, it seems to me, is precisely what the Roosevelt administration is trying to do; and I am afraid it is failing. Mr. Hoover, of course, seems to think that the administration is trying to abolish party; and he is afraid it is succeeding. Well, I think that private property in production goods will still be with us when Roosevelt is succeeded by somebody else, whether in 1937 or later. Its abolition will be the job of whatever government has to clean up

the next depression; and I only hope that the men who make up that government will not agree with Mr. Hoover, and the Communists, that you cannot abolish property without abolishing free thought as well.

At any rate, a difference between Mr. Hoover's views on economic liberty, and Mr. Borah's, becomes apparent. Mr. Borah is thinking about the liberty of the poor, Mr. Hoover about the liberty of the rich--sincerely and patriotically, beyond any doubt; convinced that this is the way to ensure the general welfare. It must be remarked that liberals of the Borah brand are scarce nowadays; they are men who have been liberals all along, and have been somewhat discouraged, if not driven to forsake their faith, by the failures of liberalism and its consequent disrepute. The only proud and vociferous liberals of today are the new converts--men who would never be suspected of dandruff on the coat collar; men who perhaps would be afraid to call themselves conservatives in these times, but who very possibly are sincerely convinced that they are not conservative but liberal. Only, their idea of liberalism is to secure the freedom of the rich; make sure of that, and all things else shall be added unto you.

IV

I do not know that it is worth while to offer any defense of that sort of liberalism. Nor perhaps is it of any use to defend liberalism of a more traditional type, the liberalism of Wilson and of Asquith. It had its day, but met a new day to which it proved inadequate. The attempt to secure progress with order led either (as in Russia) to progress with disorder or (as in England, the United States, and just the other day in Spain) to a

reaction which established order by stopping all progress. Anybody can, and everybody does, jeer at liberalism nowadays; especially the Communist and the Fascist, each regarding himself as the heir of all the ages and the predestined lord of the future. The liberal, says the Communist writer Ehrenbourg in commenting on the Spaniard Unamuno, sits in a literary café between the trenches; and the recent grinding of Spanish liberalism between the upper and nether millstones gives his remark some point.

So far as political and economic theory goes, I think there is a good deal of truth in this. I believe that much more thorough-going reforms are needed in this country (and in most other countries as well) than are contemplated in any merely liberal program. And there often merit, too, in the traditional criticism of liberal tactics--the reluctance to face inconvenient and disheartening realities, the temporizing and palliating and refusal to be ruthless. By such peaceful tactics, by the endeavor to maintain order while still getting a little progress, the liberals and Socialists of Germany and Italy paved the way for their own suppression, the Socialists of Austria for their own massacre.

Purely as a criticism of procedure, there is point in this. But in the longer view I am not so sure. The other day I was talking to a liberal, Mr. Chenery of Collier's, who has been working at it for twenty years and is not ashamed to admit that he is a liberal still. And when I asked him what he thought liberalism had to offer the world, he said "tolerance". The same viewpoint has been expressed by Henry Seidel Canby in his editorials in the Saturday Review, and by J. Donald Adams in an article published in the same magazine last spring, which was perhaps the best expression I have seen of the case for intellectual and spiritual liberalism. Adams' article was

primarily an attack on the Communist critics who judge the merit of any book by its conformity with orthodox Communist doctrine; but its implications went much farther.

Liberals, their eyes fixed on a desirable end, have often been dislodged from power because they were too slow to see, or too squeamish to seize, the means to that end. But Communists and Fascists, also aiming at a worthy end, are apt to use the sort of means that destroy the very end they aim at. The essential thing in liberalism, it seems to me, is the belief that nobody can be so sure he is right that he is justified in turning loose machine guns on everybody who disagrees with him. This often makes for delay and inefficiency--stand the opposition up against a wall and shoot it, and you can get your way without further argument. But to take the short cut of persuasion by massacre means destroying some of the essential values of that good life, at which all political systems profess to aim. It is possible that this last survival of true liberalism--the preference for peaceful settlements, for persuasion by argument rather than by force, even if it means a slower and perhaps less thorough settlement--it is possible that even this is out of date, that the times have moved beyond it. If that is so, the civilization that may be created by the eventually successful dictatorships will be no true civilization at all; it will be lacking in something that may need centuries to restore.

The Communist and the Fascist would deny this, of course. Making a major premise out of an incidental necessity, or supposed necessity, of tactics, they deny any place to tolerance, persuasion, or recognition that there may be more than one side to any subject. Like Sherlock Holmes, they never speak of the softer emotions save with a gibe or a sneer. They may be right, of course;

but their doctrine is open to one serious objection on purely practical grounds. If you appeal to force you start a game at which two can play; you abandon any reliance on the merit of your cause; when you say that there is no argument but the machine gun you expose yourself to cogent refutation, by somebody who has more machine guns than you have. A case in point is the late Mr. Engelbert Dollfuss. The conservative press of America, England, and France was horrified by his murder. But the government of which Mr. Dollfuss was the head had, a few months earlier, turned six-inch howitzers on inhabited apartment houses, and murdered several hundred other people whose only crime was that they clung to those civic liberties which Mr. Hoover so admires, and insisted on their right to go on being citizens with the same privileges as other citizens. It was remarked long ago that they that take the sword shall perish by the sword. It does not always happen, but there is always the possibility. Dollfuss got exactly what he had asked for, and my only regret is that others whose guilt was even greater than his did not get it too.

Sometimes, of course, the resort to violence works. I think it probable that the present Russian government has the support of the majority of whatever public opinion there is in Russia (or rather private opinion, since nobody can say what might displease the government). But it attained this happy situation by killing or driving into exile everybody who seriously disagreed with it. The Russian populace has been taught that the only sane and modern form of political expression is the machine gun and the firing squad; and that is a lesson which a prudent ruler might prefer not to teach his people. Marxian doctrine attempts to veil the fact that the appeal to force is in some degree an appeal to chance, by covering everything with the materialistic conception of history; the victory of the proletariat (or rather of the bourgeois intellectuals,

who regard themselves as trustees for the proletariat) is predestined. But this can be maintained as scientific truth only by reading history with a highly selective eye. There was a class struggle in the Greek cities of the third century B. C.--a genuine class struggle, the proletariat against the rich. Only in one state, Sparta, did the proletariat win a real triumph; and there a military dictator was trustee for the proletariat, a dictator who soon became involved in foreign adventures that brought him and his proletariat to ruin. Elsewhere the Romans, when they came in, sided with the rich; the class struggle was ended by the legions, and the proletariat went on having nothing to lose but its chains. That is quite a while to wait; and I see no particular reason for concluding, even now, that 'tis the final conflict. Another case in point is that of the Spanish Socialist party. Taught by what had happened to German and Austrian Socialists, the Spanish Socialists decided to start a fight at the first symptom of Fascism, instead of waiting till reaction got too strong. But the major premise of starting a fight, when you still have any choice as to whether you start it or let things go, is that you think you can win it. The Spanish Socialists, it turned out, had misjudged their strength; they did not win, and nothing much worse could have happened if they had waited than is going to happen to them now.

This spirit of accommodation, of tolerance, of persuasion that is the flower of liberalism; this willingness to admit that perhaps you are wrong, and that anyway you cannot be sure enough you are right to shoot everybody who disagrees with you--it may seem a tender plant, unfit to survive the rough weather that may be expected in Europe, and possibly in this country too. In theory, it can be upheld only by a flat denial of the authoritarian and totalitarian

creeds, that are now so attractive to those who are spiritually too weak to stand on their own feet. Even as a purely tactical consideration, it will hardly appeal to anybody who thinks he has more machine guns than the other fellow, or at any rate that he can start shooting first. Yet without it no civilization really deserves the name; and one may hope that perhaps it is still strong enough, in some nations, to save the human race from having to put up, for some centuries to come, with inadequate substitutes for civilization.