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*See listing of Lawrence lectures at
end of this booklet*

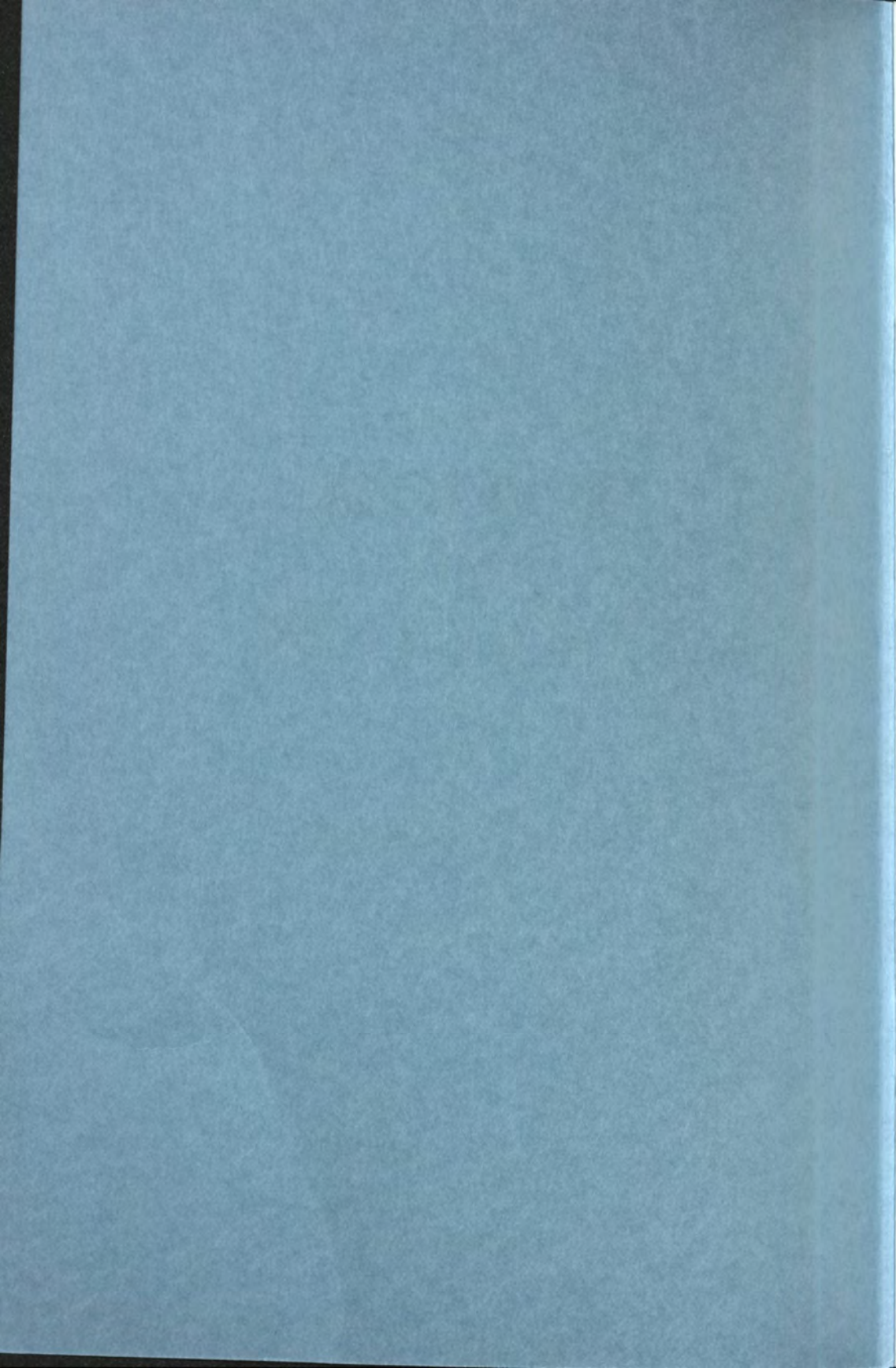
Published as
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FREEDOM AND REVOLUTION

by

Hannah Arendt

50th ANNIVERSARY CONVOCATION
NEW LONDON, CONNECTICUT
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New London Printing Co., Inc.
New London, Connecticut

INTRODUCTION

This address was delivered by Dr. Hannah Arendt at the Convocation of the Fiftieth Anniversary Celebration of Connecticut College at New London, Connecticut, September 21, 1961, under the sponsorship of the College and of the Henry Wells Lawrence and the Frederick Henry Sykes Memorial Lectureships. It is here published as the eighteenth Henry Wells Lawrence Memorial Lecture.

The Lawrence Lectureship was established in memory of the distinguished scholar who was Chairman of the Department of History and Government at Connecticut College from 1920 to 1942. It was founded and endowed by his former students, colleagues and friends in order "to bring to the campus annually a scholar in the broad field of history who will present his subject in the spirit of the liberal tradition to which Dr. Lawrence was devoted."

A list of previous Lawrence Lectures appears at the end of this publication. Dr. Arendt's address extends the scope of these studies, as her scholarly understanding and creative approach have frequently extended the political wisdom of our time.

Dr. Rosemary Park, President of Connecticut College, said in introducing Dr. Arendt, "She is known on both sides of the Atlantic for the breadth of her historical perspective, her acute analysis, and the richness and the scope of her ideas. As the author of *The Origins of Totalitarianism* and *The Human Condition* and, most recently, *Between Past and Future*, Dr. Arendt brings the wealth of her European background to the intellectual service of this new country."

Hannah Arendt was born in Hannover, Germany, and holds a doctorate from the University of Heidelberg. She has been an American citizen since 1950, and has taught at the universities of California, Chicago, Columbia and Princeton, and in 1961 was a fellow of the Center for Advanced Studies of Wesleyan University. She has been research director of the Conference on Jewish Relations, executive director of Jewish Cultural Reconstruction, New York City, and was chief editor of Schocken Books, Inc.

"Revolution and Freedom" is part of a larger work in preparation by Dr. Arendt, and may not be reproduced in whole or in part without the author's permission. Certain passages from the address appeared in a symposium entitled "The Cold War and the West" in *Partisan Review* Vol. XXIX, 1 (Winter, 1962).

REVOLUTION AND FREEDOM, A Lecture

I

I feel honored and I am very grateful for the privilege of addressing you on this happy occasion. I can only hope you will not take it amiss if I introduce into these festive proceedings a few reflections which may remind us of the troubled and perplexed state in which the public affairs of our country, and indeed of the world at large, find themselves at the present moment. My justification lies in the title I have given these reflections. For the words Revolution and Freedom seem to me to sum up about all we can see of an uncertain and flickering ray of hope in the otherwise rather dark and threatening prospects of the future.

Before we turn our attention to the uncertainties of hope, permit me to dwell for a few moments on the prospects of legitimate fear without forgetting, however, that these are by no means less uncertain. Immediately upon the close of the Second World War there has followed a period which we chose to call the time of "cold war," a term that I think was a misnomer. The fifteen years behind us were a time of uneasy "cold peace" in which the two great world powers have tried, more or less successfully, to define their spheres of interest and to jockey for position in the rapidly changing power structure of a world in turmoil. However, the very fact that we have been calling "cold war" what actually was "cold peace" testifies to our main preoccupation with the fear of war. That we have been far more preoccupied with this fear than with any other issue has been manifest in each of the major crises during this period—the Korean War, the Suez adventure, the Hungarian and the Cuban revolutions; in each of these instances, our conduct was primarily determined by fear of a major war that would be a war with nuclear weapons.

The recent and, let us hope, temporary resumption of atomic tests, on the other hand, may give us an indication of what a cold war actually may turn out to be. For these tests, unlike those that preceded them, have the ominous aspect of a new kind of maneuver in time of peace, involving in their exercise not the make-believe pair of enemies of ordinary troop maneuvers but the pair who, potentially at least, are the real enemies. The nuclear armament race has turned into some sort of tentative, hypothetical warfare in which the opponents demonstrate to each other the destructiveness of the weapons in their possession; and while it is always possible that this deadly game of ifs and whens may suddenly turn into the real thing, it is by no means

inconceivable that one day victory and defeat may end a war that never exploded into reality. Potentially, we were confronted with hypothetical warfare even at the end of the Second World War when many people thought it would have been much wiser, and not only more humane, to demonstrate the new atomic bomb to the Japanese on a deserted island instead of actually dropping it on Hiroshima; the demonstration itself would have forced the enemy into unconditional surrender. Obviously, this play with hypotheses presupposes a stage of technical development in which nearly all risks can be calculated so that there is hardly any room left for chance. It also presupposes an equality in knowledge and know-how among those who play the game. Thus a chess game between two equally experienced players will end with one of them conceding defeat or with both of them agreeing on a stalemate long before all the moves leading up to checkmate or stalemate have actually been made. I use this old comparison of war and chess not because I believe that it has been true in the past, but because it looks as though we were moving into a direction of mastery of the technical means of violence in which the old simile might unexpectedly acquire its measure of truth.

Cold war, then, is actually hypothetical war, and hypothetical war, like cold peace, is determined by our justified fear of real war. It sometimes looks as though our only hope lies in the substitution of hypothetical warfare for real war—at least until we arrive at a state of international affairs which rules out the use of the means of violence as a last resort of all policy. To be sure, such a development still lies in a distant future; there exists, however, even now an indication that we may indeed be on our way to it. The indication lies in the rather obvious, though frequently neglected, fact that war can no longer be justified on rational grounds or on the basis of power politics. Of course, this does not preclude the outbreak of war, but it rules out most, if not all, of its time-honored justifications. Neither the ancient wisdom of "better death than slavery" nor the nineteenth century definition of war as the "continuation of politics with other means" can possibly apply to the kind of wholesale destruction with which we may be confronted. The former, moreover, has its origin in the situation of prisoners in ancient warfare when the victor used to carry home the defeated enemy and sell him into slavery. "Better death than slavery" was meant as an individual decision, although it could involve a whole community if all the citizens individually agreed that they preferred to risk extermination rather than dispersion into servitude. This decision, however, was based on the ancient conviction that to become a slave meant to cease to be human. To be free and to be human once were identical notions; a person who was unable to exercise all his faculties, mental as well as physical, was no longer considered a man, and this regardless of whether some kind of necessity, such as poverty and disease, or some man-made violence, such as war and slavery, had deprived him of them.

Do those who today repeat the ancient formula still believe in this coincidence of freedom and humanity? Do people when they hear the slogan "better dead than red" really think of freedom? Don't they rather have in mind a way of life and a standard of living that are the result of abundance and can be enjoyed even in a state of deprivation of freedom? Finally, is it not obvious that it is a very different thing to risk one's own life for the life and freedom of one's country and one's posterity than to risk the very existence of the human species for the same purpose? Even less applicable to our present circumstance is Clausewitz's famous definition of war, because it proceeds from the actualities of war in the nineteenth century and hence does not take into account the possibility of complete annihilation. War is the continuation of politics with other means only in the kind of limited armed contests, conducted according to rules of the game, that we have known during a relatively brief period of our history. Perhaps this limited warfare can still survive in conflicts between small nations, although I doubt even this. It certainly is inconceivable in a war between the big powers.

In this as in other modern perplexities of a political nature, it seems we are not too well equipped to deal in terms of new thought with troubles that quantitatively as well as qualitatively are entirely new. Those who are ready to accept nuclear warfare as a last, albeit desperate, resort pretend that essentially nothing has changed, that the old justifications still hold, and they try to reassure themselves with the hope that "the losses may not be as great as some anticipate." Yet while we may be rightly alarmed at this optimism which probably is nothing but lack of imagination — the inability to at least face the inconceivable — the truth is that those who oppose nuclear warfare on principle have come up with nothing better for *their* justification than a reversal of the old wisdom when they tell us: better red than dead. Hence the whole discussion of the war question, moving within the closed circle of an obsolete alternative, is nearly always conducted with a mental reservation on both sides of the fence. Those who say: better dead than red, actually think: the losses will not be so great, our civilization will survive; while those who say: better red than dead, actually think: slavery will not be so bad, man will not change his nature, freedom will not vanish from the earth forever.

I am certainly not bold enough to darken your festive mood with reflections on the most dangerous of our predicaments. And even if I were, I am afraid I would not have much to contribute although the war question has been in the back of my mind, as probably in the back of yours, for many years. However that may be, the ray of hope, illuminating this dark background of our everyday worries, seems to be that nearly all concerned by now are agreed that war as such stands in need of justification and that its only possible justification is freedom. Thus the concept of freedom, which for a very long

time had somehow disappeared from political discussions in favor of the notion that the end of government is not freedom but the welfare of the people, the happiness of the greatest number, has now returned, though in a somewhat oblique fashion, into the center of statecraft. And freedom is not only one among the many phenomena of the political realm, such as justice, or power, or equality; freedom, though it can be the direct aim of political action only in times of crisis, of war or revolution, is actually the reason that men live together in political organization at all. The *raison d'être* of politics is freedom, and without it, political life would be meaningless.

This intrusion of the notion of freedom into discussions of war and of a justifiable use of the means of violence is of relatively recent date. To be sure, justifications of war, even on a theoretical level, are quite old, although, of course, not as old as organized warfare. An obvious prerequisite for such justifications is the conviction that political relations in their normal course do not fall under the sway of violence, and this conviction we find for the first time in Greek antiquity, insofar as the Greek *polis*, the constitution of the city-state, defined itself explicitly as a way of life that was based exclusively upon persuasion and not upon violence. That these were no empty words, spoken in self-deception, is shown by the Athenian custom of "persuading" those who had been condemned to death to commit suicide by drinking the hemlock cup, thus sparing the Athenian citizen under all circumstances the indignity of physical violation. However, since for the Greeks political life by definition did not extend beyond the walls of the *polis*, the use of violence seemed to them beyond the need for justification in the realm of what we today call foreign affairs or international relations, even though their foreign affairs, with the one exception of the Persian wars which saw all Hellas united, concerned hardly more than relations between Greek cities. Outside the walls of the *polis*, that is, outside the realm of politics in the Greek sense of the word, "the strong did what they could, and the weak suffered what they must," as Thucydides tells us. What caused the early downfall of Greece was precisely that their *polis*-organization did not find a way to introduce the non-violent means of politics into the relationships between the *poleis*, between the city-states.

Within the historical framework of Western civilization, we find the first justifications of war, together with the first notion that there are just and unjust wars, in Roman antiquity. Yet curiously enough, these distinctions and justifications are not concerned with freedom and draw no line between aggressive and defensive warfare. "Just is a war," said Livy, "to whom it is necessary, and hallowed are the arms where no hope exists but in them." (*Iustum enim est bellum quibus necessarium, et pia arma ubi nulla nisi in armis spes est.*) Necessity, since the time of Livy and through the centuries,

has meant many things that we today would find quite sufficient to dub a war unjust rather than just. Expansion, conquest, defense of vested interests, conservation of power in view of the rise of new and threatening powers, and support of a given power equilibrium—all these well-known realities of power politics have perhaps only the remotest connection with a nation's freedom; and yet they were not only actually the causes for the outbreaks of most wars in history, they were also recognized as "necessities," that is, as legitimate motives to invoke a decision of arms. The notion that aggression is a crime and that wars can be justified only if they ward off aggression or prevent it, has acquired its practical and even theoretical significance only after the First World War had demonstrated the horribly destructive potential of warfare under conditions of modern technology.

There is, however, another aspect of the war question in which freedom indeed plays the decisive part. From time immemorial, people have risen against the foreign invader, and while these warlike uprisings were never recognized, either in theory or in practice, as the only just wars, they always have been felt to be sacred. If war in our century is at all a justifiable act, then the only precedent to which its defenders might appeal would be such wars of rebellion and liberation. And this is not only a theoretical issue but a matter of recent recorded fact. The Second World War was in all its more important aspects no longer due to power politics in the old sense of the term. You may remember that it was considered by a sizable portion of public opinion to be a kind of civil war raging all over the earth. The extent to which this understanding was right was the extent to which the Spanish Civil War was indeed a kind of prelude to the ensuing World War. To be sure, the issues were confused; totalitarian Russia sided with republican Spain and sent the Spanish revolution together with the republic to their doom. Two years later, the same regime sided with totalitarianism in Germany, and it is certainly thanks to Hitler and not thanks to Stalin that Russia eventually had to fight a war of liberation and to side with those who fought not so much for freedom as against things which are considerably worse than slavery.

Yet no matter how confused and confusing the actual facts, one thing is undeniable, and that is the close interrelatedness of war and revolution; for better and worse, the relation has grown stronger ever since. And revolution, known to us for almost two hundred years, has been more closely identified with freedom than has any other political phenomenon or occurrence. "The word 'revolutionary,'" as Condorcet summed up what everybody knew in eighteenth-century France, "can be applied only to revolutions whose aim is freedom." If we view the sad political record of our age and if we consider how right Lenin was when he predicted, nearly fifty years ago, that the physiognomy of our century would be determined by wars and revolutions, our

consolation may well be that at least it has always been freedom which, in one way or another, sincerely or hypocritically, was at stake. Even the tyrants today are forced to speak of freedom.

We may pursue these reflections a few steps further. The interrelatedness of wars and revolutions is not a novel phenomenon; it is indeed as old as the revolutions themselves, which either were preceded and accompanied by a war of liberation like the American Revolution or which led into wars of defense and aggression like the French Revolution. Yet in these eighteenth-century instances, it was the revolutions that touched off the wars, whereas in our own century it has frequently been the other way round. It has been little noticed but is quite noteworthy that since the end of the First World War, we almost automatically expect no government, and no state or form of government, to be strong enough to survive a defeat in war. (This is not entirely unprecedented; both the Franco-Prussian War of 1870 and the Russo-Japanese War of 1905 were followed by short-lived revolts in the defeated countries. But though in France there was even a change of form of government — from the Second Empire to the Third Republic — still, these were mere premonitions.) A revolutionary change in government, either brought about by the people themselves, as after World War I, or enforced from the outside by the victorious powers with the demand of unconditional surrender and the establishment of War Trials, belongs today among the most certain consequences of defeat — short, of course, of total annihilation. Whether this state of affairs is due to a decisive weakening of government as such, to a loss of authority in the powers that be, or whether no state, no matter how well established and trusted by its citizens, could withstand the unparalleled terror of violence unleashed by modern warfare upon the whole population, is an open question that we shall not try to decide here. In our context, it must be enough to remember the indisputable fact that even prior to the horror of nuclear warfare, wars had become politically, though not yet biologically, a matter of life and death. Or, to put it another way: under conditions of modern warfare, that is, since the First World War, all governments have lived on borrowed time.

The close interrelatedness of war and revolution could be spun out further. Here these brief remarks are meant to suggest that our present topic, revolution and freedom, may somehow be connected with the as yet unanswerable war question, although it would be folly to expect an answer to the latter from a consideration of the former. We have come to a point of technical development where it really looks as though the only choice left to men with respect to war is to abolish it before wars abolish mankind, as Mr. Kennedy recently put it. Except that it is by no means sure that this will be the last word in the matter. It is quite conceivable that the next stage of technical advance

may bring us back to a kind of warfare which, though probably more horrible than the last wars, will not be suicidal and, perhaps, will not even spell complete biological annihilation to the defeated. What is inconceivable, however, is that war will ever again become the benign and limited armed contest whose outcome is not revolutionary because it leaves intact the political, though not the territorial, integrity of the defeated.

In other words, whatever the outcome of our present predicament may be, if we don't perish altogether (which I somehow think is unlikely despite all the evidence to the contrary), the problem of revolution is likely to stay with us at least into the foreseeable future. Even if we should succeed in changing the physiognomy of this century to the point where it would no longer be a century of wars, it most certainly will remain a century of revolutions. And since revolution has now spread to the four corners of the earth, any peaceful, non-violent contest between the great powers may well be decided by the simple question of which one understands better what is involved and what is at stake in a revolution.

II

In contrast to wars, which are as old as the recorded memory of mankind, revolutions are a relatively novel phenomenon. Prior to the two great revolutions at the end of the eighteenth century, the very word was absent from the vocabulary of political theory. Moreover, and this is perhaps of even greater relevance, the word received its modern revolutionary meaning only during the course of these two revolutions; the men who made the first revolutions had no previous notion of either the word or the nature of their enterprise. They were, in the words of John Adams, "called without expectation and compelled without previous inclination;" and what was true for America was equally true for France where, in the words of Tocqueville, "one might have believed the aim of the coming revolution was not the overthrow of the old regime but its restoration."

Restoration, in fact, which we associate with the very opposite of revolution, would be much closer to the original meaning of the word. Revolution, an astronomical term, was introduced into scientific language by Copernicus' *De revolutionibus caelestibus* ("On the revolutions of the celestial bodies"), and when the word first descended from the skies to describe metaphorically what happened on earth between mortal men, it carried the idea of an eternal, irresistible, ever-recurring motion in the haphazard movements, the ups and downs of human destiny, which have been likened to the rising and setting of sun, moon, and stars from time immemorial. It is true, we

find the word as a political term already in the seventeenth century; but it was then used in its strict metaphorical sense to describe a movement of revolving back to some pre-established point, and hence, politically, to indicate a motion of swinging back into some pre-ordained order. Thus, the word was first used not when what we call a revolution broke out in England and Cromwell rose to a kind of revolutionary dictatorship, but on the contrary, in 1660, after the overthrow of the Rump Parliament and at the occasion of the restoration of the monarchy. And even the Glorious Revolution, the event through which, rather paradoxically, the term found its definite place in political and historical language, was not thought of as a revolution at all, but as the restoration of monarchical power to its former righteousness and glory.

The fact that the word 'revolution' meant originally restoration is more than a mere oddity of semantics. You do not understand revolution unless you realize that the first revolutions broke out when restorations had been aimed at. We are liable to overlook this paradoxical fact because nothing in the course of the two great eighteenth century revolutions is more conspicuous and more striking than the emphatic stress on novelty, repeated over and over again by actors and spectators alike — their insistence that nothing comparable in significance and grandeur had ever happened before, that an entirely new story was about to unfold. Yet this entirely new story was initiated, on both sides of the Atlantic, by men who were firmly convinced that they were about to do no more than restore an old order of things that had been disturbed and violated by the existing powers; they pleaded in all sincerity that they desired to revolve back to old times when things had been as they ought to be. Nothing would have been more alien to their mind than eagerness for new things or the present-day conviction that novelty as such could be desirable. The enormous pathos of a new era, of the *novus ordo saeculorum*, which is still inscribed on our dollar bills, came to the fore only after the actors, much against their will, had come to a point of no return.

Before we try to ascertain the significance of this strange semantic change, and before we probe deeper into the causes that brought it about, we must turn our attention briefly to another aspect of revolution, which still corresponds to its old astronomical meaning and has not been discarded by modern usage, presumably because the experiences during the actual course of revolutions did not contradict it. As I already indicated, the astronomical term as well as its original metaphorical meaning implied very strongly the notion of irresistibility — the fact that the revolving motion of the stars follows a pre-ordained path and is removed from all influence of human power. We know, or we believe we know, the exact date when the word 'revolution' was used for the first time with an *exclusive* emphasis on irresistibility and without any connotation of a backward revolving movement; and so important has this emphasis

appeared to the historian's understanding of revolutions, that it has become common practice to date the new political significance of the astronomical term from this moment.

The date was the night of the 14th of July, 1789, in Paris, when Louis XVI heard from the Comte de Liancourt of the fall of the Bastille, the liberation of a few prisoners, and the defection of the royal troops before the massed populace. The famous dialogue that took place between the king and his messenger is very short and very revealing. The king, we are told, exclaimed: "C'est une révolte," and Liancourt corrected him: "Non, Sire, c'est une révolution!" Here we hear the word still, and politically for the last time, in the sense of the old metaphor which carries its meaning from the skies down to the earth; but here, for the first time, the emphasis has shifted from the lawfulness of a rotating, cyclical movement to its irresistibility. The motion is still seen in the image of the movements of the stars, but what is stressed now is that it is beyond human power to arrest it, that it is a law unto itself. The king, when he declared that the storm of the Bastille was a rebellion, asserted his power and the various means at his disposal to deal with conspiracy and defiance of authority; Liancourt replied that what had happened there was irrevocable and beyond the power of kings. It was irresistible.

This, as we know, the storming of the Bastille, was only the beginning. The notion of an irresistible movement, which the nineteenth century soon was to conceptualize into the idea of historical necessity, echoes from beginning to end through the pages of the French Revolution. Suddenly an entirely new imagery begins to cluster around the old metaphor, and when we think of revolution, we almost automatically begin to think in terms of this imagery born in the days of the French Revolution — in the days when Desmoulins saw the great "revolutionary torrent" on whose rushing waves the actors were borne and carried away until its undertow sucked them from the surface and they perished together with their foes, the agents of counter-revolution; when Robespierre could speak of the tempest and mighty current which, nourished by the crimes of tyranny on one side, by the progress of liberty on the other, increased constantly in rapidity and violence; when even the spectators believed they were watching a "majestic lava stream which spares nothing and which nobody can arrest," a spectacle that had fallen under the sign of Saturn: "the revolution devouring its own children."

The words I am reading to you here are not taken from later historical or reflective accounts of what was happening during those fateful years. They were all spoken by the actors themselves and they testify to things heard and seen and witnessed by them, not to things they had done or set out to do on purpose. To be sure, these phrases have by now degenerated into the cliché-ridden stock-in-trade of revolutionary oratory with a demagogic flavor; but

even in their degenerated state they point to something real, to something that had never happened before the French Revolution but has happened since at regular intervals, first only in Europe and now in nearly all parts of the earth. Hence it may well be worth our while to ask ourselves what it was that Liancourt was the first to catch a glimpse of? What it was that the actors and witnesses of revolution saw and heard, and that they thought was irresistible and irrevocable?

The answer, to begin with, seems simple. Behind these words, and expressed in an entirely new imagery, we still can see and hear the multitude on their march, how they burst onto the streets of Paris, which then still was not merely the capital of France but the capital of the entire civilized world. And this multitude, appearing for the first time in broad daylight, was actually the multitude of the poor and the downtrodden, whom every century before had hidden in darkness and shame. What from then on has been irrevocable, and what the agents and spectators of revolution immediately recognized as such, was that the public realm — reserved, as far as memory could reach, to those who *were* free, namely carefree of all the worries that are connected with life's necessity, with bodily needs — should from now on offer its space and its light to this immense majority who are not free because they are driven by daily needs. Mankind had always known that there existed two aspects of freedom, one negative, namely, to be free from constraint through others, the other positive, namely to be free in action, to actualize not so much the I-will as the I-can. What also always had been more or less understood was that these two were interconnected, that no one could be free to do who was not free from constraint. Hence to the men of the revolution who were still in full possession of the ancient wisdom, the road to freedom seemed to be divided into two stages, the negative stage of liberation from constraint (or tyranny, or whatever the word might have been), which then was to be followed by the positive stage of establishing freedom, or rather of building a space where freedom could appear in the words and deeds of free men. The first stage was characterized by violence; the violence of liberation had to be pitted against the violence of tyranny, the violation of human rights and potentialities. But the second stage was supposed to be free of violence. The establishment of a new government, even when it turned out that the recovery of ancient privileges could be secured only by transforming them into constitutional liberties and hence was bound to begin an entirely new story, seemed to be a matter of deliberation, of application of wisdom and prudence, rather than of violence.

However, this relatively simple scheme of revolutionary events — which in rough outline corresponds to the course of the American Revolution — was found to be entirely inapplicable the moment the French Revolution appeared on the scene of history. It had left out of account the existence of those who

never had been admitted to the public realm, whom antiquity had held in slavery, whom we find in a state of serfdom throughout the Middle Ages, and whom even the first centuries of the modern age had granted no more than the very precarious status of the "laboring poor." Hence freedom, it turned out now, had always been a privilege, the privilege of the few, and this not only in the positive sense that only the few were admitted to the public realm and the rights of citizenship, but in its negative aspect as well. Only the few were free to be free. For — and this is decisive — the negative sense of liberty was now seen as consisting of considerably more than of being free from constraint by others; it was not only, to use our present terminology, freedom from fear that was involved but most emphatically and even primarily freedom from want.

Freedom from fear is a privilege that even the few have enjoyed only in relatively short periods of history, but freedom from want has indeed been the great privilege by which an infinitely small percentage of men has been distinguished throughout the centuries. Perhaps, one is tempted to add, only those who know freedom from want are in a position to appreciate fully what it means to be also free from fear. What has seemed irrevocable then, ever since the French Revolution, was that those who were devoted to freedom could never again be reconciled to a state of affairs where freedom from want was a privilege of the few. Men who had started out to retrieve their own ancient privileges and liberties saw themselves all of a sudden confronted with the enormous task of liberating the people at large, who had never possessed them. In other words, in principle at least, freedom has been identified with complete equality ever since the revolutions of the eighteenth century; and although it is true that the political theory and practice of antiquity were very well aware of the fact that no one can be free who does not move among his equals, it is no less true that never before had this desire for equality comprehended the whole population of any country. This was the first, and perhaps still is the greatest and most far-reaching consequence of revolution. This is what Robespierre meant when he said the revolution had pitted the grandeur of man against the pettiness of the great, or what Hamilton had in mind when he spoke of the American Revolution having vindicated the honor of the human race, or what Kant finally, taught by Rousseau and the French Revolution, conceived of as the new "dignity of man."

However, as I mentioned before, the actors and spectators of the French Revolution were not only, and perhaps not even primarily, impressed by the irrevocability of what had been done when they had opened the doors to the masses of the poor, but by the irresistibility of the movement itself, the sense that the revolutionary tempest, though unleashed by men, could not be arrested again by human power. That this was the impression of the king and his

messenger may not be very surprising, for they certainly had played no role in bringing forth these events. It is, of course, different with the men of the revolution from whose immediate reactions with their telling imagery I quoted just now. Obviously, they knew they had started something whose consequences and inherent force they themselves had not foreseen and could not control; their action, though aiming at liberty, had liberated something which in its irresistibility they had not known and not seen before. It was only now, when the people of Paris came streaming into the streets, that the very word 'le peuple' acquired its revolutionary connotations and thus became the key term of revolutions. What they, as opposed to the king and his messenger, saw as being irresistible was the enormity as well as the pressing urgency of an 'unhappiness' that no one before had conceived of as a political factor of the first magnitude.

To illustrate this relationship between the men of the revolution and the multitudes in the street, let me quote Lord Acton's interpretative description of the famous women's march to Versailles, one of the turning-points in the French Revolution. The marchers "played the genuine part of mothers whose children were starving in squalid homes, and they thereby afforded to motives which they neither shared nor understood the aid of a diamond point that nothing could withstand." The motives neither shared nor understood by the multitude were those of the deputies as they originally arrived and assembled in Paris to represent the "nation" rather than the "people"; what they were concerned with — whether their name was Mirabeau or Robespierre, Danton or Saint-Just — was government, the reformation of monarchy or, somewhat later, the foundation of a republic. To put it another way, their original goal was freedom, either in the form of retrieval of ancient liberties or in the form of the *Constitutio libertatis*, the foundation and constitution of freedom. Paris, however, to their surprise taught them a lesson about the conditions and prerequisites of liberty which mankind has never forgotten since. The lesson, despite its elementary simplicity, was new and unexpected. It said: "Si vous voulez fonder une république, vous devez vous occuper de tirer le peuple d'un état de misère qui les corrompt. On n'a point de vertues politiques sans orgueil; on n'a point d'orgueil dans la détresse." (Saint-Just) Freedom, even freedom from constraint, was but an empty word for those who were not liberated from poverty; hence liberation, which must precede freedom, did not merely mean liberation from a tyrannical king or a tyrannical form of government, but meant liberation from want. Once they had been forced to look, and to look in public, upon the immense misery of those whom even Jefferson, this great lover of the people, could call "la canaille of the big cities", it was obvious that liberation had to mean first of all "dress and food and the reproduction of the species," as the Sansculottes began to distinguish their own rights from the lofty language of the proclamation of "the rights of man and

of the citizen." Liberation meant provision with life's necessities, the abolition of what then was called 'unhappiness,' in short, the solution of the social question. Compared to the urgency of these demands, all deliberations about the best form of government appeared irrelevant and futile. "La République?" Robespierre was soon to exclaim, "La Monarchie? Je ne connais que la question sociale." And Saint-Just, at the end of his short life — as though he had forgotten all his earlier enthusiasm for "republican institutions" and public freedom — concluded: "The freedom of the people is in its private life. Let government be only the force to protect this state of simplicity against force itself."

Let me return for a moment to the term 'unhappiness,' which, because of the altogether different experiences of the American Revolution, does not carry the same weight and the same connotations as the French words, *le malheur*, *les malheureux*. The unhappy ones, *les malheureux* — this word became in the course of the French Revolution what it never had been before; it became synonymous with the word *le peuple*, the people. "*Le peuple, les malheureux m'applaudissent*" — this was almost idiomatic in revolutionary oratory. And the point of the matter is that it was precisely this *malheur*, this misery and unhappiness that were felt to be irresistible, "the diamond point that nothing could withstand." What appeared here and was found to be irresistible was necessity, the necessity to which all mortals are bound by virtue of being subject to their bodies' daily needs and urges, hence a necessity which, prior to the modern age, had always been hidden, and protected against the public realm and its freedom, within the relative security of the home and the private life of the family. Once this necessity appeared in public, embodied in the sufferings of the immense majority of population, it was found that there was no greater force on earth. Hence, in the words of the French Revolution, *les malheureux sont la puissance de la terre*.

III

I have dwelt at some length on this lesson drawn from the pages of the French Revolution because the same facts and experiences have appeared in nearly every revolution ever since. It was the French and not the American Revolution that set the world on fire, and it was consequently from the course of the French Revolution, and not from the course of events in this country or from the acts of the Founding Fathers, that our present use of the word 'revolution' has received its connotations and overtones everywhere, this country not excluded. But if we wish to understand what is involved in revolution, we must not fail to remember that this first fight to give battle to poverty and to

deal politically with necessity was lost, and with it the original aim of revolution, the establishment and constitution of freedom.

What the course of the French Revolution established once and for all was that the conquest of poverty is a prerequisite for the foundation of freedom; yet what we can also learn from the same revolution is that poverty and necessity cannot be dealt with in the same way as violence, the violation of rights and liberties. Obviously, the tragic mistake of the men of the French Revolution was to pit violence against necessity; but they entered upon this foredoomed path only after they had used and misused necessity, the mighty force of want and misery and destitution, in their struggle against tyranny, when they hoped to add to their own efforts that "diamond point" that would make them irresistible. This "diamond point" then turned against them, until they perished in the same fashion as the old regime whose downfall they had been able to bring about. For, theoretically speaking, if violence pitted against violence leads to war, civil or foreign, violence pitted against necessity has always led to terror. Terror rather than mere violence, terror let loose after the old regime has been defeated and the new regime established, is what sends revolutions to their doom. The first indication of ruin comes when those newly risen to power begin to forget that the sole aim and end of revolution is freedom. Hence the beginning of the end of the French Revolution came when all participants, moved by the misery of the people, suddenly agreed: *Le but de la Révolution est le Bonheur du Peuple*.

I said that these facts and experiences have appeared in *nearly* every revolution, and the great exception I had in mind was, of course, the American Revolution. It may be an oversimplification to say that the American Revolution succeeded where all other revolutions failed, but such historical oversimplifications are justified and even needed when we try to understand in terms of thought and remembrance. However, if we may say the American Revolution succeeded because the men of the revolution became the Founding Fathers of the American Republic, we must add at once that this success was due almost entirely to the absence, on the American pre-revolutionary scene, of those factors of poverty, misery, unhappiness, and hence of necessity which then were present everywhere else, and which even today are still decisive factors in the greater part of the world. I must refrain here from quoting the evidence, extant in numerous travelers' reports from America throughout the eighteenth century and even reaching deep into the seventeenth. We have, moreover, the horror-struck accounts of American travelers to Europe, among them, as you know, some of the Founding Fathers themselves, which give witness to a veritable abyss separating social conditions in this country from those found abroad. America had been a country of prosperity and abundance long before it became, in the eyes of the world at large, the land of the free. And prosperity and

abundance, which some of us today believe they owe to a system of free enterprise and to the political institutions of liberty, were of course chiefly due to entirely natural causes, to the immensity of the continent and the enormous wealth of its resources.

Hence, when I said the American Revolution succeeded where all others failed, I did not mean to say that it succeeded in solving the social question, that is, that it found political ways and means to cure a country from the curse of poverty. This is not to deny the enormous and enormously revolutionizing influence of the New World's prosperity upon the events and the hopes in the Old World. On the contrary, it is perfectly true that here, for the first time, men began to see and to believe that misery and want do not have to be part and parcel of the human condition on earth. John Adams said: "I always consider the settlement of America as the opening of a grand scheme and design in Providence for the illumination of the ignorant and the emancipation of the slavish part of mankind all over the earth." But he wrote these words ten years before the outbreak of revolution, in a state of perfect unawareness of such a possibility. In other words, the social question could not very well be solved by revolution in America for the simple reason that at that moment no such solution was required — if we leave out of account, as we must here, the predicament of Negro slavery and the altogether different problem it posed. Therefore, undisturbed by any outside factors the revolution could accomplish its original aim: the establishment of institutions which guarantee liberty for all, and the foundation of a new public realm, called a republic as opposed to a monarchy, where everybody, in the words of Jefferson, could become a "participator in government."

Before I try to sum up and to draw a few conclusions, permit me to indicate to you as briefly as I can a few of the things which were involved in this *constitutio libertatis*, in the foundation of freedom. First of all, it was a question of political freedom and not of civil rights and liberties that could have been obtained through the establishment of a constitutional monarchy — a possibility indeed that was reflected upon and then decided against precisely because it would not have permitted the citizenry to participate in public business. For the absence of freedom under the rule of enlightened absolutism in the eighteenth century did not consist so much in the denial of personal liberties, certainly not for the members of the upper classes, as in the fact that, in the words of Tocqueville, "the world of public affairs was not only hardly known but was invisible" to anybody outside the king's entourage. What those who made the revolution shared with the poor—quite apart from and also prior to the role these poor were then to play — was obscurity, namely that the public realm was invisible to them and that, by the same token, they lacked the public space where they themselves could become visible and be of significance.

Hence, love of freedom, for the men of the revolutions on both sides of the Atlantic, comprehended those passions for distinction, emulation, significance, and being seen in action (*spectemur agendo*) whose political, and not psychological, significance John Adams discovered and analyzed in nearly all his political writings. These passions — which he then summed up in one sentence: "It is in action and not in rest that we find our pleasure" — have been among the decisive and, unfortunately, rather neglected motives in those who became revolutionists in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It is indeed for the sake of action and for the sake of thought that freedom as a political reality is required. This political freedom must be distinguished from civil rights and liberties that in all constitutional countries restrain the power of government and protect the individual in his legitimate private and social pursuits. Such rights and liberties are guaranteed by the body politic, but the life and the activities they protect are not strictly political. Hence, seen from the viewpoint of the political realm, they are negative freedoms, they spell out the limitations not only of government but of the public realm as such. The chief political freedoms, or the chief positive freedoms, are freedom of speech and freedom of assembly. By freedom of speech I understand here not merely the right to speak out freely in private without the government listening in on what I say (which, as you know, is the rule now in all countries under communist domination); this right belongs among the negative freedoms of being properly protected from public power. Freedom of speech means the right to speak and to be heard in public, and so long as man's reason is not infallible, this freedom will remain the prerequisite for freedom of thought. Freedom of thought without freedom of speech is an illusion. Freedom of assembly, furthermore, is the prerequisite for freedom of action insofar as no man can act alone.

Before we entered into these considerations, I said that the conflict that divides the world today — if it is not to be decided by the means of violence and not to end in total annihilation — may well be determined by the extent of our understanding of what is at stake in revolution. There are, to sum up, chiefly two things involved: the liberation of the poor and of the oppressed, that is, the solution of the social question and the abolition of colonialism, *and* the foundation of freedom, the establishment of a new body politic. It seems to me that we do not understand liberation very well, perhaps by virtue of our own history, and that we are not very well equipped to deal with it; what we lack is experience. I mentioned the absence of poverty from the American scene prior to the Revolution, and I may add that the War of Independence was not fought against a colonial power in the later imperialist sense of the word. With the foundation of freedom, the constitution of a new political entity, it is altogether different. In this respect, we should be able to set an example to the whole world, and more particularly to those new ethnic groups

and peoples who in rapid succession are rising to nationhood. I am afraid we have been found wanting even in this, and the reason for our failing lies, of course, in that we deal here with colored people and that we have been unable to solve the race question in our own country. The present non-violent fight of our Negro fellow-citizens for political and civil equality could teach us some elementary lessons about this aspect of revolution and thus become one of our greatest assets in the future instead of remaining the greatest liability of our foreign policy.

However that may be, let us not forget that every revolution must go through two stages, the stage of liberation — from poverty or from foreign domination — and the stage of foundation of freedom. In terms of a political process, these two belong together, and yet as political phenomena they are entirely different and must be kept distinct. What we must try to understand is not simply the theoretical truism that liberation is the prerequisite for freedom, but the practical truth that liberation from necessity, because of its urgency, always takes precedence over the building of freedom. Even more important is to keep in mind that poverty cannot be defeated by political means, that the whole record of past revolutions — if we only knew how to read it — demonstrates beyond doubt that every attempt to solve the social question with political means leads into terror, and that it is terror which sends revolutions to their doom. If we were still living under conditions where scarcity and abundance were entirely natural phenomena, there would indeed be no hope that revolution could ever succeed in the world at large. The great original American experience of foundation on which the republic of the United States rests would remain what it has been for so long, an exception from an iron rule and an incident of hardly more than local significance. But this is no longer the case. Even though the difficulties standing in the way of a solution to the predicament of mass poverty are still enormous, there exists today the very legitimate hope that the advancement of the natural sciences and their technology will open, in a not too distant future, possibilities of dealing with these economic matters on technical and scientific grounds, outside all political considerations. To be sure, the solution of the social question that technology, and nothing else, holds in store by no means guarantees the eventual establishment of freedom, it would only remove the most obvious obstacle; but even the mere prospect of this solution should once and for all preclude the terrible and terribly dangerous usage of "the diamond point" of necessity for the purpose of ushering in freedom. For technical means in the fight against poverty could be handled in complete political neutrality; they would not interfere with political developments one way or the other. The wreckage of freedom on the rock of necessity, which we have witnessed over and over again since Robespierre introduced his 'despotism of liberty,' is no longer unavoidable.

In conclusion, let me point to the last two major revolutions — the

Hungarian Revolution, which so quickly and so brutally was crushed by foreign domination, and the Cuban Revolution, which has not yet come to its end. The Hungarian Revolution was the only revolution I know of since the American Revolution in which the question of bread, of poverty, of the order of society, played no role whatsoever, which was entirely political in the sense that the people fought for nothing but freedom — freedom of thought and action, of speech and assembly — and that their chief concern was the form their new government was to assume. Whereby it is important to remember that none of the participants — and they constituted for all practical purposes the entire population — ever thought of undoing the profound social change which the Communist regime had effected in the country. It was precisely the social conditions they took for granted — just as, under vastly different circumstances, the men of the American Revolution took for granted the social and economic conditions of their people. The Cuban Revolution, unfortunately, offers the opposite example for very obvious reasons; up to now, it has run true to the course of the French Revolution. And while our attitude during the Hungarian crisis, right or wrong, was not based on a failure to understand what was involved in that revolution, I think the same cannot be said with respect to the Cuban Revolution, which only geographically is so much closer to the American sphere of interest and comprehension. While our failure in the case of the Hungarian Revolution can be traced to power politics, our failure in the case of the Cuban Revolution includes a failure to understand what it means when a poverty-stricken people in a backward country, with corruption having been rampant for a very long time, is suddenly released from the obscurity of their farms and houses, when they are brought out into the street of a capital they never had even seen before, and are told: All this is yours, these are your streets, and your buildings, and your possessions, and hence your pride! Since these people passionately aspire to walk in dignity, without yet knowing what it might mean to act in freedom, it will take them a considerably longer time than it may take us or our so-called experts — those, that is, who know everything and can imagine nothing — to realize that they may be deceived and pushed onto the road which leads to the hell of a totalitarian dictatorship.

We have the great privilege of living under conditions that permit us to walk in dignity and to act in freedom. It would be good for us to remember from time to time that such conditions are the conditions of an island in a very troubled sea. In the long run, it may be even more important to remember that the foundations for our freedom were laid in a revolution made by men who valued their *public* happiness and their *public* freedom at least as much if not more than they valued their private well-being and their civil rights.

LAWRENCE LECTURES

- 1945 Charles Seymour, "The Problem of International Security: Historical Backgrounds"
- 1945 Arthur Meier Schlesinger, Jr., "The Pattern of Democratic Change in the United States: Andrew Jackson and Franklin Delano Roosevelt"
- 1946 Carl J. Friedrich, "The Problem of the Democratization of Germany"
- 1947 Alpheus Thomas Mason, "Variations on the Liberal Theme"
- 1948 Perry Miller, "Illiberal Liberals of the Great Awakening"
- 1949 Conyers Read, "Problems of Present-Day Britain"
- 1950 Hajo Holborn, "The Reasons for the Failure of the Paris Peace Settlement"
- 1951 Paul Wallace Gates, "From Individualism to Collectivism in American Land Policy"
- 1952 Helen Maud Cam, "Representative Institutions in England and Europe in the Fifteenth Century in Relation to Later Developments"
- 1953 Bernhard Knollenberg, "Causes and Growth of the American Revolution"
- 1954 John K. Fairbank, "Rebuilding an American Policy Toward China"
- 1955 Franklin L. Baumer, "Religion and the Sceptical Tradition"
- 1956 Eric Goldman, "The Third American Revolution: An Interpretation of Recent Decades"
- 1957 Myron P. Gilmore, "Erasmus: The Scholar and the World"
- 1958 Henry Steele Commager, "The Search for a Usable Past"
- 1959 Marjorie Dilley, "An Academic Year in East Africa"
- 1960 Gordon A. Craig, "The Role of Diplomacy in the East-West Struggle"

