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# The Mob Mind vs. Civil Liberty

By *Everett Dean Martin*

(Director of the Cooper Union Forum of the People's Institute, New York City)

This pamphlet consists of extracts from Mr. Martin's "Behavior of Crowds" (Harper's, 1920). The book is the most striking and stimulating study yet published on the crowd-mind in all its practical aspects and in its psychological origin.

It sheds so much light on mob violence, the problem of free speech, the functions of minorities and individuals, and the creation of a "free" social order, that we reprint significant portions with the permission of the author and the publishers.

We omit most of the material on the psychological origin of the crowd-mind because it does not lend itself to extracts. We have included the leading arguments, a few illustrations which hit home to Americans today, and Mr. Martin's personal conclusions. The wealth of illustration which enlivens the study, we have been obliged, of course, to omit.

In the pandemonium of propaganda in which we are living this picture of our thinking should serve the cause of tolerance. We commend the point-of-view equally to radicals, conservatives and liberals.

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## 1. THIS CROWD WORLD

In this discussion the word "crowd" must be understood to mean the peculiar mental condition which sometimes occurs when people think and act together, either immediately where the members of the group are present and in close contact, or remotely, as when they affect one another in a certain way through the medium of an organization, a party or sect, or the press.

Both the individual and society suffer, as we shall see, from crowd-behavior. I know of nothing which today so menaces not only the values of civilization, but also—it is the same thing in other words, perhaps—the achievement of personality and true knowledge of self, as the growing habit of behaving as crowds.

Our society is becoming a veritable babel of gibbering crowds. Not only are mob outbreaks and riots increasing in number, but every interest, patriotic, religious, ethical, political, economic, easily degenerates into a confusion of propagandist tongues, into extravagant partisanship, and intemperance. Whatever be the ideal to which we would attain, we find the path of self-culture too slow; we must become army worms, eating our way to the goal by sheer force of numbers. The councils of democracy are conducted on about the psychological level of commercial advertising and with about the same degree of sincerity. While it cannot be said that the habit of crowd-making is peculiar to our times—other ages, too, have indulged in it—it does seem that the tendency to crowd-mindedness has greatly increased in recent years.

Whether it is temperance, or justice, or greater freedom, moral excellence or national glory, that we desire,—whether we happen to be conservatives or radicals, reformers or liberals, we must become a cult, write our philosophy of life in flaming headlines, and sell our cause in the market. No matter if we meanwhile surrender every value for which we must strive to cajole the majority into imagining itself on our side, for only with the majority with us, whoever we are,

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Prof 2. Chaplin, Jr.

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can we live. It is numbers, not values, that count—quantity not quality. Everybody must “moral-crusade,” “agitate,” “press-agent,” play politics. Everyone is forced to speak as the crowd, think as the crowd, understand as the crowd. The tendency is to smother all that is unique, rare, delicate, secret. If you are to get anywhere in this progressive age you must be vulgar, you must add to your vulgarity unction. You must take sides upon dilemmas which are but half true, change the tempo of your music to ragtime, eat your spiritual food with a knife, drape yourself in the flag of the dominant party. In other words, you must be “one hundred per cent.” crowd man.

The effect of all this upon the individual is that he is permitted neither to know nor to belong to himself. He becomes a mere banner toter. He must hold himself ever in readiness to wiggle-waggle in the perpetual Simon-says-thumbs-up game which his crowd is playing. He spends his days playing a part which others have written for him; loses much of his genuineness and courage, and pampers himself with imitation virtues and second-hand truths.

Upon the social peace the effect is equally bad. Unnecessary and meaningless strife is engendered. An idolatry of phrases is enthroned. A silly game of bullying and deception is carried on among contending crowds, national, religious, moral, social. The great truths of patriotism, morality, and religion become hardly more than caricatures—mere instruments of crowds for putting their rivals on the defensive, and securing obeisance from the members of the crowd itself, easily repudiated in the hour of the crowd's victory.

## 2. HOW CROWDS ARE FORMED

*The crowd is a state of mind.* A peculiar psychic change must happen to a group of people before they become a crowd. And as this change is not merely a release of emotion, neither is it the creation of a collective mind by means of imitation and suggestion. My thesis is that *the crowd-mind is a phenomenon which should best be classed with dreams, delusions, and the various forms of automatic behavior.* The controlling ideas of the crowd are the result neither of reflection nor of "suggestion," but are akin to what the psychoanalysts term "complexes." Crowd ideas are "fixations"; they are always symbolic; they are always related to something repressed in the unconscious.

### PUBLIC MEETINGS

Let us notice what happens in a public meeting as it develops into a crowd, and see if we can trace some of the steps of the process. Picture a large meeting-hall, fairly well filled with people. Notice first of all what sort of interest it is which as a rule will most easily bring an assemblage of people together. It need not necessarily be a matter of great importance, but it must be something which catches and challenges attention without great effort. It is most commonly, therefore, an *issue* of some sort.

If the matter to be considered is one about which there is keen partisan feeling and popular resentment—if it lends itself to the spectacular personal achievement of one whose name is known, especially in the face of opposition or difficulties—or if the occasion permits of resolutions of protest, of the airing of wrongs, of denouncing abuse of some kind, or of casting statements of external principles in the teeth of "enemies of humanity," then, however trivial the occasion, we may count on it that our assembly will be well attended.

The next thing in importance is the speaker. Preferably he should be an "old war horse," a victor in many battles, and this for a psychological reason which we shall soon examine. Whoever he is, every speaker with any skill knows just when this state of mind which we call "crowd" begins to appear.



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When the spirit of the crowd begins to manifest itself—and one can always detect its beginnings before the audience is consciously aware of it—I have noticed that discussion instantly ceases and people begin merely to repeat their creeds and hurl cant phrases at one another. All then is changed, though subtly. There may be laughter as at first; but it is different. Before, it was humorous and playful, now there is a note of hostility in it. It is laughter *at* some one or something. Even the applause is changed. It is more frequent. It is more vigorous, and instead of showing mere approval of some sentiment, it becomes a means of showing the numerical strength of a group of believers of some sort.

The best laboratory for the study of such a phenomenon is the political party convention, the mass meeting, or the religious revival. The orators who commonly hold forth at such gatherings know intuitively the functional value of bathos, ridicule, and platitude, and it is upon such knowledge that they base the success of their careers in “getting the crowd.”

True crowd-behavior requires an element of spontaneity—at least on the part of the crowd. And we have abundant examples of this in public meetings of all sorts. As the audience becomes crowd, the speaker’s cadence becomes more marked, his voice more oracular, his gestures more emphatic. His message becomes a recital of great abstract “principles.” The purely obvious is held up as transcendental. Interest is kept upon just those aspects of things which can be grasped with least effort by all. Emphasis is laid upon those thought processes in which there is greatest natural uniformity. The general, abstract, and superficial come to be exalted at the expense of that which is unique and personal. Forms of thought are made to stand as objects of thinking.

People are translated to a different world—that is, a different sense of the real. The speaker is transfigured to their vision. His words take on a mysterious importance; something tremendous, eternal, superhuman is at stake. Commonplace jokes become irresistibly amusing. Ordinary truths are wildly applauded. Dilemmas stand clear

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with all middle ground brushed away. No statement now needs qualification. All thought of compromise is abhorrent.

Normally our acts and ideas are corrected by our social environment. But in a crowd our test of the real fails us, because, since the attention of all near us is directed in the same way as our own, the social environment for the time fails to check us.

*In other words, a crowd is a device for indulging ourselves in a kind of temporary insanity by all going crazy together.*

### MOB VIOLENCE AND STREET CROWDS

Of the several kinds of crowds, I have selected for our discussion the mass meeting, because we are primarily interested in the ideas which dominate the crowd. The same essential psychological elements are also found in the street crowd or mob. Serious mob outbreaks seldom occur without mass meetings, oratory, and propaganda. Sometimes, as in the case of the French Revolution and of the rise of the Soviets in Russia, the mass meetings are held in streets and public places. Sometimes a long period of deliberate cultivation of such crowd-ideas as happen to be advantageous to the state precedes,—as, for instance, the crowds in Berlin when Germany precipitated the World War.

*All that is then required is an occasion, some casual incident which will so direct the attention of a number of these persons that they provide one another temporarily with a congenial social environment. In the South this mob complex is doubtless formed out of race pride, a certain unconscious eroticism, and will to power, which unfortunately has too abundant opportunity to justify itself as moral indignation.*

*Given a psychic situation of this nature, the steps by which it leads to mob violence are much alike in all cases. All together they simply amount to a process of like direction of the attention of a sufficient number of persons so affected as to produce a temporary social environment in which the unconscious impulses may be released with mutual approval. The presence of the disliked object or person gains general*

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attention. At first there is only curiosity; then amusement; there is a bantering of crude witticisms; then ridicule. Soon the joking turns to insults. There are angry exclamations. A blow is struck. There is a sudden rush. The blow, being the act which the members of the crowd each unconsciously wished to do, gains general approval, "it is a blow for righteousness"; a "cause" appears. Casually associated persons at once become a group, brought together, of course, by their interest in vindicating the principles at stake. The mob finds itself suddenly doing things which its members did not know they had ever dreamed of.

### "CLASS" CROWDS

In addition to this, society is filled with what might be called "struggle groups" organized for the survival and dominance of similarly constituted or situated people. Each group has its peculiar interests, economic, spiritual, racial, etc., and each such interest is a mixture of conscious and unconscious purposes. These groups become sects, cults, partisan movements, class struggles. They develop propaganda, ritual, orthodoxies, dogma, all of which are hardly anything more than stereotyped systems of crowd-ideas. The primary aim of every such crowd is to keep itself together as a crowd. Hardly less important is the desire of its members to dominate over all outsiders. The professed purpose is to serve some cause or principle of universal import. Thus the crowd idealizes itself as an end, makes sanctities of its own survival values, and holds up its ideals to all men, demanding that every knee shall bow and every tongue confess—which is to say, that the crowd believes in its own future supremacy, the members of the group knowing that such a belief has survival value.

The modern man has in the printing press a wonderfully effective means for perpetuating crowd-movements and keeping great masses of people constantly under the sway of certain crowd-ideas. Every crowd-group has its magazines, press agents, and special "literature" with which it continually harangues its members and possible converts.

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### THE NEWSPAPERS

But the leader in crowd-thinking par excellence is the daily newspaper. With few exceptions our journals emit hardly anything but crowd-ideas. These great "molders of public opinion," reveal every characteristic of the vulgar mob orator. The character of the writing commonly has the standards and prejudices of the "man in the street." And lest this man's ego consciousness be offended by the sight of anything "highbrow"—that is, anything indicating that there may be a superior intelligence or finer appreciation than his own—newspaper-democracy demands that everything more exalted than the level of the lowest cranial altitude be left out.

The average result is a deluge of sensational scandal, class prejudice, and special pleading clumsily disguised with a saccharine smear of the cheapest moral platitude. Consequently, the thinking of most of us is carried on chiefly in the form of crowd-ideas. A sort of public-meeting self is developed in the consciousness of the individual which dominates the personality of all but the reflective few. We editorialize and press-agent ourselves in our inmost musings. Public opinion is manufactured just as bricks are made. Possibly a slightly better knowledge of mechanical engineering is required for making public opinion, but the process is the same. Both can be stamped out in the quantity required, and delivered anywhere to order. *Our thinking on most important subjects today is as little original as the mental processes of the men who write and the machines which print the pages we read and repeat as our own opinions.*

### 3. HOW CROWDS UNCONSCIOUSLY BEHAVE

There are certain traits, tendencies, ways of thinking which crowds so uniformly display that one is justified, in want of other explanation, in assuming them to be unconsciously determined. The remarkable blindness of organized crowds to the most obvious of their own performances is so common as to be the regularly expected thing—that is, of crowds other than our own. Loud and extensive operations may be carried on for years by crowds whose members repeatedly declare that such things are not being done. The way in which a nation will carefully prepare for war, gradually organizing its whole life on a military basis with tremendous cost and effort, all the while declaring that it is interested only in peace, denying its warlike intentions, and even in the moment of picking a quarrel with its neighbors declare to all the world that it had been wantonly and unexpectedly attacked, is all a matter of general comment.

Certain crowd-movements in America today give marked evidence of this unconscious motivation. Notice how both the radical and reactionary elements behave when, as is frequently the case with both, the crowd-spirit comes over them. Certain radicals, who are fascinated with the idea of the Russian Revolution, are still proclaiming sentiments of human brotherhood, peace, and freedom, while unconsciously they are doing just what their enemies accuse them of—playing with the welcome ideas of violence, class war, and proletarian dictatorship. And conservative crowds, while ostensibly defending American traditions and ideals against destructive foreign influence, are with their own hands daily desecrating many of the finest things which America has given to the world in its struggle of more than a century for freedom and justice. Members of each crowd, while blissfully unaware of the incompatibility of their own motives and professions, have no illusions about those of the counter-crowd. Each crowd sees in the professions of its antagonist convincing proof of the insincerity and hypocrisy of the other side. To the student of social philosophy both are right and both wrong. *All propaganda is lies, and every crowd is a deceiver, but its first and worst deception is that of itself.*

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That the crowd always insists on being flattered is a fact known intuitively by every orator and editor. As a member of a crowd the individual becomes part of a public. The worship with which men regard "The Public," simply means that the personal self falls at the feet of the same self regarded as public, and likewise demands that obeisance from all. *Vox populi est vox Dei* is obviously the apotheosis of one's own voice while speaking as crowd-man. Every crowd "boasts for" itself, lauds itself, gives itself airs, speaks with oracular finality, regards itself as morally superior, and will, so far as it has the power, lord it over everyone.

Notice how each group and section in society, so far as it permits itself to think as crowd, claims to be "the people." To the working-class agitator, "the cause of labor is the cause of humanity," workers are always "innocent exploited victims kept down by the master class whose lust for gain has made them enemies of Humanity and Justice." "Workers should rule because they are the only useful people, the sole creators of wealth; their dominance would mean the end of social wrong, the coming of the millennium of peace and brotherhood, the Kingdom of Heaven on the Earth, the final triumph of Humanity!"

On the other hand, the wealthy and educated classes speak of themselves as "the best people"; they *are* "society." It is they who "bear the burdens of civilization, and maintain Law and Order and Decency." Racial and national crowds show the same megalomania.

Every organized crowd is jealous of its dignity and honor and is bent upon keeping up appearances. Nothing is more fatal to it than a successful assault upon its prestige. Every crowd, even the casual street mob, clothes the egoistic desires of its members or participants in terms of the loftiest moral motive. No crowd can afford to be laughed at. Crowd men have little sense of humor, certainly none concerning themselves and their crowd-ideas. Any laughter they indulge in is more likely to be directed at those who do not believe with them. The crowd-man resents any suspicion of irreverence or criticism of his professions, because to question them is to weaken the claim of his crowd

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upon the people, and to destroy in those professed ideals their function of directing his own attention away from the successful compromise of his unconscious conflicts which the crowd had enabled him to make. The crowd would perish if it lost its "ideals."

The fanatic is the crowd-man pure and simple. He is the type which it ever strives to produce. His excess of devotion, and willingness to sacrifice both himself and everyone else for the crowd's cause, always wins the admiration of his fellow crowd-members. He had given all for the crowd, is wholly swallowed by it, is "determined not to know anything save" his crowd and its propaganda. He is the martyr, the true believer, "the red-blooded loyal American" with "my country right or wrong." He is the uncompromising radical whose prison record puts to shame the less enthusiastic members of his group. He is the militant pacifist, the ever-watchful prohibitionist, and keeper of his neighbors' consciences, the belligerent moral purist, who is scandalized even at the display of lingerie in the store windows, the professional reformer who in every community succeeds in making his goodness both indispensable and unendurable.

#### **4. THE CROWD A CREATURE OF HATE**

We have already seen that the crowd in most cases identifies itself with "the people," "humanity," "society," etc. Listen to the crowd-orator and you will also learn that there are all sorts of abominable "conspiracies" against "the people." "The nation is full of traitors." The Church is being "undermined by cunning heretics." "The Bolsheviks are in secret league with the Germans to destroy civilization." "Socialists are planning to corrupt the morals of our youth and undermine the sacredness of the home." "The politicians' gang intends to loot the community." "Wall Street is conspiring to rob the people of their liberties." "England plans to reduce America to a British colony again." And so on and so forth, wherever any crowd can get a hearing for its propaganda. Always the public welfare is at stake; society is threatened.

It cannot be denied that our present social order is characterized by deep and fundamental social injustices, nor that bitter struggles between the various groups in society are inevitable. But the crowd forever ignores its own share in the responsibility for human ills, and each crowd persists in making a caricature of its enemies, real and imagined, nourishing itself in a delusion of persecution which is like nothing so much as the characteristic obsessions of the paranoiac. The suspiciousness, this habit of misrepresentation and exaggeration of every conceivable wrong, is not only a great hindrance to the conflicting groups in adjusting their differences, but it makes impossible, by misrepresenting the real issue at stake, any effective struggle for ideals. As the history of all crowd movements bears witness, the real source of conflict is forgotten, the issue becomes confused with the spectacular, the unimportant, and imaginary. Energy is wasted on side issues, and the settlement finally reached, even by a clearly victorious crowd, is seldom that of the original matter in dispute.

Every crowd is potentially if not actually homicidal in its tendencies. The crowd's delusion of persecution, conspiracy, or oppression is thus a defense mechanism. The projection of this hatred on those



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outside the crowd serves not so much to shield the subject from the consciousness of his own hatred, as to provide him with a pretext for exercising it. Given such a pretext, most crowds will display their homicidal tendencies quite openly.

Ordinary mobs or riots would seem to need very little justification of this sort. But even these directly homicidal crowds invariably represent themselves as motivated by moral idealism and righteous indignation. Negroes are lynched in order to protect the white womanhood of the South, also because, once accused, the negro happens to be helpless. If the colored people were in the ascendancy and the whites helpless we should doubtless see the reverse of this situation. A community rationally convinced of the culprit's guilt could well afford to trust the safety of womanhood to the justice meted out by the courts, but it is obvious that these "moral" crowds are less interested in seeing that justice is done than in running no risk of losing their victim, once he is in their power. A recent development of this spirit is the lynching in a Southern town of a juror who voted for the acquittal of a black man accused of a crime.

It may be taken as a general law of crowd-psychology that the "morality" of the crowd always demands a victim. Is it likely that one of these mobs would "call off" an interesting lynching party if at the last minute it were demonstrated that the accused was innocent? The practice of lynching has been extended, from those cases where the offense with which the accused is charged is so revolting as justly to arouse extreme indignation, to offenses which are so trivial that they merely serve as a pretext for torture and killing.

*The homicidal tendencies of the crowd-mind always reveal themselves the minute the crowd becomes sufficiently developed and powerful to relax for the time being the usual social controls.*

### WAR

The classic example of the killing crowd is, of course, a nation at war. There are, to be sure, wars of national self-defense which are

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due to political necessity rather than to crowd-thinking, but even in such cases the phenomena of the crowd are likely to appear to the detriment of the cause. At such times not only the army but the whole nation becomes a homicidal crowd. The army, at least while the soldiers are in service, probably shows the crowd-spirit in a less degree than does the civilian population. The mental processes of an entire people are transformed. Every interest—profit-seeking excepted—is subordinated to the one passion to crush the enemy. The moment when war is declared is usually hailed with tremendous popular enthusiasm and joy. There is a general lifting of spirits. There is a sense of release, a nation-wide exultation, a sigh of relief as we feel the deadening hand of social control taken from our throats. The homicidal wish-fancy, which in peace times and in less sovereign crowds exists only as an hypothesis, can now become a reality. And though it is doubtful if more than one person in a million can ever give a rational account of just what issue is really at stake in any war, the conviction is practically unanimous that an occasion has been found which justifies, even demands, the release of all the repressed hostility in our natures.

A nation becomes warlike to precisely the extent that its people may be made to think and behave as a crowd. Once a crowd, it is always "in the right" however aggressive and ruthless its behavior. Every act or proposal which is calculated to involve the nation-crowd in a controversy, which gains some advantage over neighboring peoples, or intensifies hatred once it is released, is wildly applauded. Any dissent from the opinions of our particular party or group is trampled down. He who fails at such a time to be a crowd-man and our own sort of a crowd-man is a "slacker." Everyone's patriotism is put under suspicion, political heresy-hunting is the rule, any personal advantage which can be gained by denouncing as "enemy sympathizers" rival persons or groups within the nation is sure to be snatched up by some one. The crowd-mind, even in times of peace, distorts patriotism so that it is little more than a compulsive expression and justification of repressed hostility.

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### HERETICS

The intensest hatred of the crowd is that directed toward the heretic, the nonconformist, the "traitor." I have sometimes thought that to the crowd-mind, there is only one sin, heresy. Every sort of crowd, political, religious, moral, has an ax ready for the person who in renouncing its ideas and leaving it threatens to break it up. The bitter partisan hatred of crowds is nothing compared to their hatred for the renegade. To the crowd of true believers, the heretic or schismatic is "worse than the infidel." The moral crowd will "bear with" the worst *roué* if only he strives to keep up appearances, has a guilty conscience, asks forgiveness, and professes firm belief in the conventions against which he offends; one may be forgiven his inability to "live up to his principles" if only his professed principles are the same as the crowd's. But let a Nietzsche, though his life be that of an ascetic, openly challenge and repudiate the values of popular morality, and his name is anathema.

A crowd is like an unsound banking institution. People are induced to carry their deposits of faith in it, and so long as there is no unusual withdrawing of accounts the insolvent condition may be covered up. Many uneasy depositors would like to get their money out if they could do so secretly, or without incurring the displeasure of the others. Meanwhile all insist that the bank is perfectly safe and each does all he can to compel the others to stay in. The thing they all most fear is that some one will "start a run on the bank," force it to liquidate, and everyone will lose. So the crowd functions in its way just so long as its members may be cajoled into an appearance of continued confidence in its ideals and values. The spiritual capital of each depends on the confidence of the others. As a consequence they all spend most of their time exhorting one another to be good crowd-men, fearing and hating no one so much as the person who dares raise the question whether the crowd could really meet its obligations.

## 5. THE CROWD IS UNCOMPROMISING

To the crowd-mind a principle appears as an end in itself. It must be vindicated at all costs. To offend against it in one point is to be guilty of breaking the whole law. Crowds are always uncompromising about their principles. They must apply to all alike. Crowds are no respecters of persons.

As crowd-men we never appear without some set of principles or some cause over our heads. Crowds crawl under their principles like worms under stones. They cover up the wriggings of the unconscious, and protect it from attack. Every crowd uses its principles as universal demands. In this way it gets unction upon other crowds, puts them in the wrong, makes them give assent to the crowd's real purpose by challenging them to deny the righteousness of the professed justifications of that purpose.

It is said that the Sioux Indians, some years ago, used to put their women and children in front of their firing line. The braves could then crouch behind these innocent ones and shoot at white men, knowing that it would be a violation of the principles of humanity for the white soldiers to shoot back and risk killing women and children. Crowds frequently make just such use of their principles. About each crowd, like the circle of fire which the gods placed about the sleeping Brunhilde, there is a flaming hedge of logical abstractions, sanctions, taboos, which none but the intellectually courageous few dare cross. In this way the slumbering critical faculties of the crowd-mind are protected against the intrusion of realities from outside the cult. The intellectual curiosity of the members of the group is kept within proper bounds. Hostile persons or groups dare not resist us, for in so doing they make themselves enemies of Truth, of Morality, of Liberty, etc. Both political parties, by a common impulse, "drape themselves in the Flag."

It is an interesting fact that the most antagonistic crowds profess much the same set of principles. The "secondary rationalization" of crowds, both Northern and Southern, at the time of the Civil War, made use of our traditional principles of American Liberty and Chris-

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tian Morality. We have seen both pacifist and militarist crowds setting forth their manifestoes in terms of New Testament teaching. Each religious sect exists only to teach "the one system of doctrine logically deduced from Scripture."

*The greatest enemy of personality is the crowd.* The crowd does not want valuable men; it wants only useful men. Everyone must justify his existence by appealing to the not-self. One may do nothing for his own sake. He may not even strive for spiritual excellence for such a reason. He must live for "principle," for "the greatest cause," for impersonal abstractions—which is to say, he must live for his crowd, and so make it easier for the other members to do the same with a good face.

## 6. REVOLUTIONARY CROWDS

The crowd-mind is seen at its best and at its worst in revolution. To many minds, revolution is so essentially a crowd phenomenon that the terms revolution and crowd-rule are almost synonymous. "Hurrah, the mob rules Russia," cried certain radicals in the spring of 1917—"Let the people rule everywhere." Others, more conservative, saw in every extravagant deed and atrocity alleged to have happened in Russia only the thing logically to be expected where the mob rules. The idea of revolution is itself so commonly a crowd-idea that the thinking—if thinking it may be called—of most people on this subject depends principally upon which crowd we happen to belong to, the crowd which sustains the ego-feeling of its members by the hope of revolution, or the crowd which, for similar reason, brands everything which opposes its interests, real or imaginary, as "anarchy" and "Bolshevism."

If the word "revolution" be taken to mean fundamental change in men's habits of thought, and life, and the forms of their relations to one another, then it may be said that great "revolutions may be and have been achieved with a relatively small degree of crowd-thinking and mob violence." Much of the normal development of civilization, for instance, the great scientific advance of the nineteenth century, the spread of culture, the creation of artistic values, the rise in the standard of living, is change of this sort. Such change is, however, gradual. It is brought about by countless concrete adaptations, by thinking always toward realizable ends. New and often unforeseeable results are thus reached. But they are reached, as in all organic growth and in all sound thinking, by a series of successful adjustments within the real. True progress is doubtless made up of changes of this sort. But for the course of progress to run on uninterrupted and undefeated we should have to be, both in our individual and social behavior, the reasonable beings which certain nineteenth-century utilitarians mistook us for.

It is the fool thing, the insincere thing, that more commonly happens in matters social and political. The adjustment reached is not

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often a solution of a social problem worked out deliberately on the "greatest-happiness" principle. It is commonly a *status quo*, or balance of power among contending crowds, each inspired by the fiction of its own importance, by self-idealization, and desire to rule. It is an unstable equilibrium usually held in place for the time by a dominant crowd. This dominant crowd may itself be composed of quarreling factions, but these parties, so long as they share enough of the supremacy to keep up their self-feeling, so long, in fact, as their members may even be able to make themselves believe that they, too, are in the upper set, or so long as they continue to hope for success in the social game as now played, unite in repeating the catch-words which justify their crowd in its supremacy. The dominant group identifies its own interests with the general welfare. And in the sense that some sort of order, or any at all, is to be preferred to social chaos, there is an element of truth in this identification.

### THE DOMINANT CROWD

The fact remains, however, that the dominant crowd possesses always much of the crowd-spirit which originally secured for it its enviable position. Its ideas, like those of all crowds, are devices for sustaining the self-feeling of its members, for protecting itself, for keeping the group together, for justification. They are only secondarily, if at all, instruments for dealing with new and perplexing social situations.

I would not attempt to minimize the extent of the social injustice and economic slavery which a dominant crowd, whether ecclesiastical, feudal, or capitalistic, is guilty of in its dealings with its subjects. But every dominant crowd, certain sections of the "proletariat" as quickly as any other, will resort to such practices, and will alike justify them by moral catchwords the minute its supremacy over other crowds gives it opportunity. Therefore there is a certain amount of tautology in denouncing the "master class" for its monstrous abuses.

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### THE TRADER-CROWD

One commonly hears it said today, by those who have made the catchwords of democracy their crowd cult, that the issue in modern society is between democracy and capitalism. In a sense this may be true, but only in a superficial sense; the real issue is between the personal self as a social entity and the crowd. Capitalism is, to my mind, the logical first fruit of so-called democracy. Capitalism is simply the social supremacy of the trader-man crowd. For a hundred years and more commercial ability—that of organizing industry and selling goods—has been rewarded out of all proportion to any other kind of ability, because, in the first place, it leads to the kind of success which the ordinary man most readily recognizes and envies—large houses, fine clothes, automobiles, exclusive clubs, etc.

Moreover, commercial ability is the sort which the average man most commonly thinks he possesses in some degree. While, therefore, he grumbles at the unjust inequalities in wealth which exist in modern society, and denounces the successful businessman as an exploiter and fears his power, the average man will nevertheless endure all this, much in the same spirit that a student being initiated into a fraternity will take the drubbing, knowing well that his own turn at the fun will come later. It is not until the members of the under crowd begin to suspect that their own dreams of “aping the rich” may never come true that they begin to entertain revolutionary ideas. In other words, forced to abandon the hope of joining the present dominating crowd, they begin to dream of supplanting and so dispossessing this crowd by their own crowd.

### REVOLUTION A NEW DICTATORSHIP

It is generally assumed that a revolution is a sudden and violent change in the form of government. From what has been said it will be seen that this definition is too narrow. History will bear me out in this. The Protestant Reformation was certainly a revolution but it affected more than the government or even the organization of the



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Church. The French Revolution changed the form of government in France several times before it was done, passing through a period of imperial rule and even a restoration of the monarchy. But the revolution as such survived. Even though later a Bourbon or a prince of the House of Orleans sat on the throne of France, the restored king or his successor was hardly more than a figurehead. A new class, the Third Estate, remained in fact master of France. There had been a change in the ownership of the land; power through the control of vested property rested with the group which in 1789 began its revolt under the leadership of Mirabeau. A new dictatorship had succeeded the old. And this is what a revolution is—the *dictatorship of a new crowd*. The Russian revolutionists now candidly admit this fact in their use of the phrase “the dictatorship of the proletariat.” Of course it is claimed that this dictatorship is really the dictatorship of “all the people.” But this is simply the old fiction with which every dominant crowd disguises seizure of power. Capitalist republicanism is also the rule of all the people, and the pope and the king, deriving their authority from God, are really but “the servants of all.”

As we have seen, the crowd mind as such wills to dominate. Society is made up of struggle groups, or organized crowds, each seeking the opportunity to make its catchwords realities and to establish itself in the position of social control. The social order is always held intact by some particular crowd which happens to be dominant. A revolution occurs when a new crowd pushes the old one out and itself climbs into the saddle. When the new crowd is only another faction within the existing dominant crowd, like one of our established political parties, the succession will be accomplished without resort to violence, since both elements of the ruling crowd recognize the rules of the game. It will also not result in far-reaching social changes for the same reason. A true revolution occurs when the difference between the dominant crowd and the one which supplants it is so great as to produce a general social upheaval. The Reformation, the French Revolution, and the “Bolshevist” *coup d'état* in Russia, all were of this nature. A new social leadership was established and secured by a change in each

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case in the personnel of the ownership of such property as would give the owners the desired control. In the first case there was a transfer of property in the church estates, either to the local congregations, or the state, or the denomination. In the second case the property transferred was property in land, and with the Russian revolutionists it would appear that landed property was given to the peasants and vested capital turned over to the control of industrial workers.

Those who lay all emphasis on this transfer of property naturally see only economic causes in revolutionary movements. Economics, however, is not a science of impersonal things. It treats rather of men's relations to things, and hence to one another. It has to do with valuations and principles of exchange and ownership, all of which need psychological restatement. The transfer of the ownership of property in times of revolution to a new class is not an end, it is a means to a new crowd's social dominance. The doctrines, ideals, and principles believed by the revolutionary crowds also serve this end of securing its dominance, as do the social changes which it effects, once in power.

In most cases the abuses, the existence of which a revolutionary crowd uses for propaganda purposes, are in turn repeated in new form by itself after it becomes dominant. The Reformers in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries resorted to much the same kind of persecution from which they had themselves earlier suffered. The Constituent Assembly, though it had demanded liberty, soon set up a more outrageous tyranny through its own committees than any that the Louies had dreamed of. Bolshevists in capitalist countries are the greatest advocates of free speech; in Russia they are the authors of a very effective press-censorship.

### THE CAUSE OF REVOLUTIONS

No, it is hardly the abuses which men suffer from their ruling crowds which cause insurrection. People have borne the most terrible outrages and suffered in silence for centuries. Russia itself is a good example of this.

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*A revolution occurs when the dominant crowd begins to weaken. I think we find proof of this in the psychology of revolutionary propaganda. A general revolution is not made in a day, each such cataclysm is preceded by a long period of unrest and propaganda of opposition to the existing order and its beneficiaries.*

If a considerable number of people of all classes, those who desire change as well as those who oppose it, could free their thinking from the mechanisms of the crowd-mind, it might be possible to find the working solution of some of our pressing social problems and save our communities from the dreadful experience of another revolution. Our hope lies in the socially minded person who is sufficiently in touch with reality to be also a non-crowd man.

*Crowd-thinking, as I have said does not solve problems. Conservative crowd-behavior has always done quite as much as anything else to precipitate a revolutionary outbreak. Radical crowd-behavior does not resolve the situation, it only inverts it. Any real solution lies wholly outside present crowd-dilemmas. What the social situation demands most is a defiant kind of thinking, a new education, an increasing number of people who understand themselves and are intellectually and morally independent of the tyranny of crowd-ideas.*

### THE ATTITUDE OF THE CROWD IN POWER

There is always a tendency among conservative crowds to hasten their own downfall by the manner in which they deal with revolutionary propaganda. The seriousness of the new issue is denied; the crowd seeks to draw attention back to the old issue which it fought and won years ago in the hour of its ascendancy. The fact that the old charms and shibboleths no longer work, that they do not now apply, that the growing counter-crowd is able to psychoanalyse them, discover the hidden motives which they disguise, and laugh at them, is stoutly denied. The fiction is maintained to the effect that present unrest is wholly uncalled-for, that everything is all right, and the agitators who "make people discontented" are alien and foreign and need only be

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silenced with a time-worn phrase, or, that failing, shut up by force or deported, and all will be well.

The crowd-group contains in itself, in the very nature of crowd-thinking, the germs which sooner or later lay it low. When a crowd first becomes dominant, it carries into a place of power a number of heterogeneous elements which have, up to this time, been united in a great counter-crowd because of their common dissatisfaction with the old order. Gradually the special interests of these several groups become separated. The struggle for place is continued as a factional fight within the newly ruling crowd. This factional struggle greatly complicates every revolutionary movement.

This reaction may also be made possible by a refusal of one faction to recognize the others as integral parts of the newly triumphant crowd. If the new crowd after its victory can hold itself together, the revolution is established. It then becomes a task of the leading faction in the newly dominant crowd to grab the lion's share of the spoils for itself, give the other factions only so much prestige as will keep alive in their minds the belief that they, too, share in the new victory for "humanity" and hold the new social order together, while at the same time justifying its own leadership by the compulsive power of the idea which they all alike believe. This belief, as we have seen, is the *sine qua non* of the continued existence of any crowd. A dominant crowd survives so long as its belief is held uncritically and repeated and acted upon automatically both by the members of the crowd and its victims. When the factions which have been put at a disadvantage by the leading faction renounce the belief, or awake to the fact that they "have been cheated," disintegration begins.

It is a significant fact that a crowd's rule is generally challenged in the name of the very abstract ideas of which it has long posed as the champion.

For instance, there is liberty. Every crowd demands it when it is seeking power; no crowd permits it when it is in power. A crowd which is struggling for supremacy is really trying to free itself and as

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many people as possible from the control of another crowd. Naturally, the struggle for power appears to consciousness as a struggle for liberty as such. The controlling crowd is correctly seen to be a tyrant and oppressor. What the opposition crowd does not recognize is its own wish to oppress, hidden under its struggle for power. We have had occasion to note the intolerance of the crowd-mind as such. A revolutionary crowd, with all its lofty idealism about liberty, is commonly just as intolerant as a reactionary crowd. It must be so in order to remain a crowd. Once it is triumphant it may exert its pressure in a different direction, but the pinch is there just the same. Like its predecessor, it must resort to measures of restraint, possibly even a "reign of terror," in order that the new-won "liberty"—which is to say, its own place at the head of the procession—may be preserved. The denial of freedom appears therefore as its triumph, and for a time people are deceived. They think they are free because everyone is talking about liberty.

Eventually some one makes the discovery that people do not become free just by repeating the magic word "liberty." A disappointed faction of the newly emancipated humanity begins to demand its "rights." The crowd hears its own catchwords quoted against itself. It proceeds to prove that freedom exists by denouncing the disturbers and silencing them, if necessary, by force. The once radical crowd has now become reactionary. Its dream of world emancipation is seen to be a hoax. Lovers of freedom now yoke themselves in a new rebel crowd so that oppressed humanity may be liberated from the liberators. Again, the will to power is clothed in the dream symbols of an emancipated society, and so on around and around the circle, *until people learn that with crowds freedom is impossible*. For men to attain to mastery of themselves is as abhorrent to one crowd as to another. The crowd merely wants freedom to be a crowd—that is, to set up its own tyranny in the place of that which offends the self-feeling of its members.

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### THE EFFECTS OF REVOLUTIONS

Aside from the results mentioned, I think the deposit of revolutionary movements in history has been very small. It may be that, in the general shake-up of such a period, a few vigorous spirits are tossed into a place where their genius has an opportunity which it would otherwise have failed to get. *But it would seem that on the whole the idea that revolutions help the progress of the race is a hoax. Where advancement has been achieved in freedom, in intelligence, in ethical values, in art or science, in consideration for humanity, in legislation, it has in each instance been achieved by unique individuals, and has spread chiefly by personal influence, never gaining assent except among those who have power to recreate the new values won in their own experience.*

## 7. FREEDOM AND CROWD GOVERNMENT

The whole philosophy of politics comes down at last to a question of four words. *Who is to govern?* Compared with this question the problem of the form of government is relatively unimportant. Crowdmen, whatever political faith they profess, behave much the same when they are in power. The particular forms of political organization through which their power is exerted are mere incidentals. There is the same self-laudation, the same tawdry array of abstract principles, the same exploitation of under crowds, the same cunning in keeping up appearances, the same preference of the charlatan for positions of leadership and authority.

In general, then, it may be said that *where the crowd is, there is tyranny*. Tyranny may be exercised through one agent or through many, but it nearly always comes from the same source—the crowd. Crowd-rule may exist in a monarchical form of government, or in a republic. The personnel of the dominant crowd will vary with a change in the form of the state, but the spirit will be much the same.

It is possible to conceive of a society in which a high degree of social democracy, even communism, might exist along with a maximum of freedom and practical achievement. But we should first have to get over our crowd-ways of thinking and acting. People would have to regard the state as a purely administrative affair. They would have to organize for definite practical ends, and select their leaders and administrators very much as certain corporations now do, strictly on the basis of their competency. Political institutions would have to be made such that they could not be seized by special groups to enhance themselves at the expense of the rest. Partisanship would have to cease. Every effort would have to be made to loosen the social control over the individual's personal habits. The kind of people who have an inner gnawing to regulate their neighbors, would have to be content to mind their own business. Police power would have to be reduced to the minimum necessary to protect life and keep the industries running. People would have to become much more capable of self-direction as well as of voluntary co-operation than they are now.

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They would have to be more resentful of petty official tyranny, more independent in their judgments and at the same time more willing to accept the advice and authority of experts. They would have to place the control of affairs in the hands of the type of man against whose dominance the weaker brethren have in all ages waged war—that is, the free spirits and natural masters of men. All pet dogmas and cult ideas that clashed with practical considerations would have to be swept away.

Such a conception of society is, of course, wholly utopian. It could not possibly be realized by people behaving and thinking as crowds. With our present crowd-making habits, the process of greater socialization of industry means only increased opportunities for crowd-tyranny.

In comparing democracy with more autocratic forms of government, this extent or range of crowd-control over the individual is important. Of course, human beings will never permit to one another a very large degree of personal freedom. It is to the advantage of everyone in the struggle for existence to reduce his neighbors as much as possible to automatons. In this way one's own adjustment to the behavior of others is made easier. If we can induce or compel all about us to confine their actions to perfect routine, then we may predict with a fair degree of accuracy their future behavior, and be prepared in advance to meet it. We all dread the element of the unexpected, and nowhere so much as in the conduct of our neighbors. If we could only get rid of the humanly unexpected, society would be almost fool-proof. Hence the resistance to new truths, social change, progress, nonconformity of any sort; hence our orthodoxies and conventions; hence our incessant preaching to our neighbors to "be good"; hence the fanaticism with which every crowd strives to keep its believers in line. Much of this insistence on regularity is positively necessary. Without it there could be no social or moral order at all.

### GOVERNMENT AND THE INDIVIDUAL

True democrats will be very jealous of government. Necessary as it is, there is no magic about government, no saving grace. Govern-



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ment cannot redeem us from our sins; it will always require all the decency we possess to redeem the government. Government always represents the moral dilemmas of the worst people, not the best. It cannot give us freedom; it can give or grant us nothing but what it first takes from us. It is we who grant to the government certain powers and privileges necessary for its proper functioning. We do not exist for the government; it exists for us.

As a matter of fact it is not so much government itself against which the democrat must be on guard, but the various crowds which are always seeking to make use of the machinery of government in order to impose their peculiar tyranny upon all and invade the privacy of everyone. By widening the radius of governmental control, the crowd thus pinches down the individuality of everyone with the same restrictions as are imposed by the crowd upon its own members.

It would seem that in our democracy freedom consists first of freedom to vote; second, of freedom to make commercial profit; third, of freedom to make propaganda; fourth, of freedom from intellectual and moral responsibility. Each of these "liberties" is little more than a characteristic form of crowd-behavior. The vote, our most highly prized modern right, is nearly always so determined by crowd-thinking that as an exercise of individual choice it is a joke. Men are herded in droves and delivered by counties in almost solid blocks by professional traders of political influence.

### CIVIL LIBERTY

The "freedom of speech" which is everywhere demanded in the name of democracy is not at all freedom in the expression of individual opinion. It is only the demand for advertising space on the part of various crowds for the publication of their shibboleths and propaganda. Each crowd, while demanding this freedom for itself, seeks to deny it to other crowds, and all unite in denying it to the non-crowd man wherever possible. The Puritan's "right to worship according to the dictates of a man's own conscience" did not apply to Quakers, Deists, or Catholics. When Republicans were "black abolitionists" they would have regarded any attempt to suppress *The Liberator*, as edited by

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William Lloyd Garrison, as an assault upon the constitutional liberties of the whole nation. But they are not now particularly interested in preserving the constitutional liberties of the nation as represented in the right of circulation of *The Liberator*, edited by Max Eastman. In Jefferson's time, when Democrats were accused of "Jacobinism," they invoked the "spirit of 1776" in opposition to the alien and sedition laws under which their partisan propaganda suffered limitation. Today, when they are striving to outdo the Republicans in "Americanization propaganda," they actually stand sponsor for an espionage law which would have made Jefferson or Andrew Jackson froth at the mouth.

### THE ISSUE BEFORE US

In this discussion of the government of crowds I have ignored consideration of the mechanisms of political and social organizations which usually characterize the treatment of this subject. It is not that I wish to divert attention from the necessity of more practical and just social arrangements and political forms of organizations. These we must achieve. But the facts which ultimately make for our freedom or slavery are of the mind. The statement that we cannot be politically or economically a free people until we attain mental freedom is a platitude, but it is one which needs special emphasis in this day when all attention is directed to the external form of organization.

No tyranny was ever for long maintained by force. All tyrannies begin and end in the tyranny of ideas uncritically accepted. It is of just such ideas that the conscious thinking of the crowd consists, and it is ultimately from the crowd as a psychological mechanism that tyranny as such proceeds. Democracy in America fails of freedom, not because of our political constitution, though that would doubtless be modified by a people who were more free at heart; it fails because freedom of opinion, intellectual alertness, critical thinking about fundamentals, is not encouraged. There is, moreover, little promise of greater freedom in the various revolutionary crowds who today want freedom only to add to the number of crowds which pester us. And for this we have, whether we are radicals or reactionaries or simply indifferent, no one to blame but ourselves and our own crowd-thinking.





