

Manifesto for the Quiet Revolution

☒ Manifesto for the Quiet Revolution

Many thanks to Keith Taplin for providing this Archival Article, which was written by the late Horace Dammers, who founded the Lifestyle Movement in 1972.

AIMS

The aim of the Quiet Revolution is defined in terms offered to the world by the World Council of Churches: the creation of a just, sustainable and participatory society and the attainment of justice, peace and the integrity of creation.

Gandhi said that there is enough in the world for everyone's need, but not enough for everyone's greed. Everyone's basic need may be defined in the following terms:

- sufficient clean water
- sufficient nutritious and regular food
- a weatherproof home
- basic healthcare
- basic education
- sufficient leisure
- participation in the decisions which affect the individual or the community
- adequately paid work for all who can do it. Support for those who can't
- freedom to practise and propagate religious faith and

- political and other opinions
- the rule of law
- freedom from inordinate debt
- freedom from violence
- parity between women and men and protection for minorities

The definition has to be provisional. For participation means that the poor, themselves, must set the agenda of basic need. Essential to the Quiet Revolution is the development of a necessarily complex system of global democracy, whereby the power of decision-making is shared among the whole human family.

Sustainability is the extension of justice, not only to future generations of the human family, but also to other living creatures, animal and vegetable alike. Sustainability is the required means to the integrity of creation, the survival and development of all life.

THE POWER OF WITHHOLDING

To achieve the aims of global justice – sustainable lifestyle, universal participation in the good things of life and decision-making, genuine peace of mind and body, and the integrity of creation – nothing less than a revolution, corporate and individual, is required. Revolutionary transfers of power are brought about by the combination of previously powerless individuals and groups to withhold (or threaten to withhold) their contribution to the *status quo*, and thereby bring about radical change.

In England, for example, as in other lands, political and economic power was concentrated in the hands of the king. The land-owning nobles, however, combined to withhold their support of King John and compelled him to sign Magna Carta and so share the power with them – and almost incidentally safeguard certain more widely applicable human rights. In

Tudor and Stuart times, the landowners' feudal powers were challenged by the rising merchant and capitalist class. The latter combined to withhold essential finance from the King and his cavaliers, and defeated them the consequent civil war. In the 19th century, following the development of the Industrial Revolution, the workers in turn began to learn the trick of combining to withhold (or at least threaten to withhold) their essential contribution to the common wealth. By means of the right to strike, they have achieved considerable economic gains in many countries, and varying degrees of political power.

The power conflict between capital and labour continues to rage. But it is also in process of replaced by a new combination at the expense of the universal consumer of its products. Capitalists and workers combine to increase the costs of goods and services. The consequence of this continual raising of prices by those who have the power to do so is called inflation. The consumers of essential goods and services who are hardest hit by this process are neither capitalists nor wage earners. They include the old, the children, the unemployed, and a disproportionate of women worldwide.

The landowners, the capitalists and the workers have successfully combined among themselves to withhold their essential contributions to the *status quo* and so have effected their revolutions. What combination of consumers is now required in order to move towards a just, sustainable and participatory society?

The Beatitudes, which Jesus of Nazareth is reported to have begun his Sermon on the Mount, are widely recognized as having a sublime and universal application, far beyond his conscious followers. The first beatitude comes to us in two forms: "Blessed are ye poor" and "Blessed are the poor in spirit". Both these categories have been subjected to endless

commentary. But both can bear a plain meaning. "The poor" are those who are deprived of their basic needs. "The poor in spirit" are those who, to a greater or less extent, identify with the poor and live in some kind of solidarity with them.

The Quiet Revolution depends on the combination of the *poor* and in the *poor in spirit* to ensure that the producers of goods and services concentrate their energies on the fulfilment of the needs of the *poor*, in Earth-friendly forms which serve the integrity of creation. The role of the *poor* is to work to fulfil those basic needs. The role of the *poor in spirit* is to withhold their purchasing power from the purchase of those goods and services which are contrary to that fulfilment, in terms of the pre-emption of resources, the destruction of the environment or the exploitation of the *poor*.

The inevitable – though doubtless painful and probably protracted – consequence of such withholding of purchasing power, if massive enough, is that capital and labour will shift their production from socially harmful or useless goods and services to those which serve the true needs of humanity. Moreover, they will take the necessary steps to ensure that the poor have the means to pay for these products. As Adam Smith, the doyen of market economists, observed: "The consumer is king."

GLOBAL JUSTICE AND PEACE

Global justice will therefore be served by the Quiet Revolution. In order to discover accurately the basic needs of the human family are, the producers will have to mount a massive program of market research and thereby invite the active participation of the *poor* in the decisions about what is produced. Since sustainability is an extension of justice and Earth-friendliness a condition of survival these values too will be served by the Quiet Revolution. It can be observed that, more often than not, violence occurs where there is a

juxtaposition of two readily identifiable groups, one of which is demonstrably poorer than the other. We have seen this, for example, in southern Africa, central America and Israel. Peace is promoted as and when injustice is removed.

This revolution, which could be the ultimate revolution (though there is no guarantee of that), is to be known as the "Quiet Revolution" for two reasons. The first is that, unlike most if not all revolutions in the past, it need involve no violence. The producers, capital and labour, will hardly be able to use violence to compel the *poor in spirit* buy that, which they neither need nor want. The *poor*, if supported massively enough by the *poor in spirit*, will have less motivation to resort to violence to secure a greater justice.

The second reason is that the Quiet Revolution is beginning and will continue, in the hearts and individual lifestyles of women and men. The parity of women and men is essential to the revolution, both for reasons of justice and also because in most, if not all, cultures women play the major part in the domestic provision: shopping, homemaking, and the preparation of food. Public revolution feeds on the increasing number of private re-orientation or repentances. The beginning of the revolution is lodged with small groups of powerless people who know that, to achieve the aims of justice, peace and the integrity of creation – of a just, sustainable and participatory society – we must start with ourselves and our own households.

FIRST STEPS

There are already very many – far too many – of the *poor* who may participate in the Quiet Revolution. To enlist the large numbers of the *poor in spirit*, however, who are necessary to make the revolution effective, we dare not set too high a standard of poverty of spirit. We therefore propose that those whose net income, after the payment of rates and taxes, exceeds the per capita income of their nation, should

undertake not to spend more on consumption annually than the said per capita income. They may use the surplus saved either to give away; or to save for the provision of dependants; or to pay off the capital of any debts; or a combination of all three. Later, they may wish to identify more closely with the *poor* by reducing their expenditure further to some selected level of poverty. In addition, they will direct their expenditure to Earth-friendly goods and services.

But what chance is there in practise of the massive change of heart that alone will enable the Quiet Revolution to take place? Strictly speaking, this question need not be addressed in a Manifesto. It may, however, be the first question to arise in the mind of a sympathetic reader.

The course of a revolution cannot be readily predicted. A necessary prerequisite of the Quiet Revolution is a greatly expanded understanding, both at the expert and the popular level, of the fragility of the environment on the one hand, and the interdependence of the whole human family on the other. This is happening at a great rate. At a different level, we have seen in eastern Europe that when the time is ripe, massive popular revolutions can take place with very little violence. So there is hope. Indeed, hope is essential. Without hope we do nothing.

Written in May 1991

Horace Dammers was Dean of Bristol and the founder of the Lifestyle Movement