

Free Discussion and Violence

The line which ought to be drawn in prosecutions for **sedition** is very clear. The crime is the use of force or the advocacy of force for the purpose of effecting a change of government or a change in the structure of society. There is no crime in proposing such changes and discussing them, and furthering them by political action within the law.

For instance, such a book as More's Utopia, while it pictured and sought to make attractive an entirely new kind of human society, would not be **seditions**. Nor are Mr. Lionel Curtis and his associates breaking the law when they propose a revolutionary change in the government of the British Empire and in Imperial relations. Utopia and Parliamentary federation of the British Empire may be impracticable, but they are not the products of criminal minds.

The structure of society does change from time to time, and so do forms of government. Steam produced an industrial revolution, not altogether beneficent, but it was not a matter for legal action. Extensions of the franchise beginning with the Reform bill of 1832 and ending with manhood suffrage produced a virtual revolution, and the same may be said of woman suffrage and of a law prohibiting the use of intoxicating liquors. The establishment of an industrial democracy would be a change of the same far-reaching character.

The liberty to discuss such changes is assailed in two ways—by the timid or reactionary who are in favor of suppressing freedom, and by the advocates of physical force and violence. These extremists, while one is diametrically opposed to the other, are really producing the same result. They are both enemies of freedom. Government and the social fabric cannot remain stationary. They are bound to change, and unless they are merely to drift there must be free and intelligent discussion, lending itself to orderly progress. Humanity needs growth, not explosion.