

THE HARRIS REVOLUTION IN CONTEXT

By

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You say you want a revolution,
Well, you know,
We all want to change the world....

"Revolution", Lennon & McCartney (1968)

As a CELA lawyer, I rarely have the opportunity to apply the knowledge acquired during my undergraduate days as a history major. However, as environmentalists attempt to cope with the impacts of the Common Sense Revolution in Ontario, I find myself pondering how this "revolution" compares with other great historical revolts: the American Revolution, the French Revolution, the Bolshevik Revolution, and the Chinese Revolution.

The causes of revolution are frequently diverse and difficult to pin down with precision. However, the world's modern revolutions appear to share several common traits that may be used as benchmarks to assess the Harris Revolution.

1. Revolutions are generally driven by fundamental ideological principles.

Revolutionaries strive to achieve fundamental reform or to secure basic human rights. For example, the American Revolution was driven by a desire for independence from Britain; French revolutionaries wanted to overthrow the monarchy and establish a republic; and Bolsheviks and Chinese Marxists advocated communism in various forms. Similarly, the Harris Revolution appears to be driven by one of the most important and compelling objectives in human history: income tax breaks for the upper class.

2. Revolutions are often characterized by memorable events or acts that become the visual images of revolutionary zeal.

Paul Revere's ride to Beacon Hill; the storming of Bastille Prison; the Petrograd insurrection; the Long March under Mao Tse-Tung -- these are the key defining moments of modern revolution. The visual images of the Harris Revolution are equally awe-inspiring: dented tuna cans and Al Palladini's government limousine (with cell phone, of course).

3. Revolutions make frequent use of key words and phrases that unite revolutionaries and their supporters.

The "Declaration of Independence" was the rallying point for American revolutionaries; the French citizenry was inspired by "liberte, egalite, fraternite"; and revolutionaries in Russia and China were emboldened by the communist manifesto: "Workers of the world -- unite!" Harris revolutionaries appear united by equally high-sounding phrases: "restructuring", "downsizing", and the two

most chilling words in the English language: "deficit reduction".

4. Revolutions are often spearheaded by visionary or charismatic leadership.

George Washington, Maximilien Robespierre, Vladimir Lenin, Mao Tse-Tung -- these revolutionary heroes are often credited with the initial success of their respective revolts. The Harris Revolution also includes a pantheon of revolutionary demi-gods: Premier Mike (I'm still working on my slice) Harris; the Honourable John (Let's create an educational crisis) Snobelen; and the Honourable Dave (Let'em eat bologna) Tsubouchi.

5. Revolutions often devour their young.

Revolutionaries quickly learn that it is easier to rebel than to govern, and leaders of modern revolutions are often repudiated by their erstwhile followers. Compatriots who fought the American Revolution quickly fell into bitterly opposed political parties, while key figures of the French Revolution experienced the guillotine first-hand during the self-destructive Reign of Terror. Similarly, Lenin, Trotsky, Stalin, and Mao Tse-Tung eventually experienced varying degrees of public disfavour and political disavowal. A similar political backlash against the Harris Revolution appears equally inevitable.

For disenchanted environmentalists, this last historical lesson provides the most comfort and inspiration: we will outlast the Harris Revolution. However, the rise and fall of the Harris Revolution will not occur without considerable impact upon Ontario society and the environment at large. We will persevere, but at what social and environmental cost?

On this point, it is helpful to recall the middle verse of of the Beatles' "Revolution":

You say you got a real solution,
Well, you know,
We'd all love to see the plan.
You ask me for a contribution,
Well, you know,
We are doing what we can.
But if you want money for people with minds that
hate,
All I can tell you is, brother, you have to wait.

Don't you know it's gonna be all right,
All right All right?

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