

EPISODE 66

SO YOU SAY YOU WANT A REVOLUTION? WELL, STOP FIGHTING THE LAST ONE

Hi there. Welcome to the beginning of the world. My name is Michael Folz. And this is Episode number 66 of my podcast Dial It Back Or Die. Now the last episode ended with me outlining the four basic parameters which our new society is going to have to implement if it has a ghost of a chance of moving forward. And I sort of promised that I would start explaining them more fully in this episode.

But something has come up. A friend who has been following all along, and who is in general agreement, remarked that my (quote) ‘conservative, theistic’ approach is, unfortunately, not going to be very popular these days. Well, I’ve known that little fact all along. And I’ve also been emphasizing from the beginning that I am neither a political Conservative nor am I a believer in any sort of old time religion. Instead—and for the umpteenth time—my conclusions are based upon my knowledge of both history and science, and what they both point to as to the nature of man. And woman. I mean, if you can’t trust or believe in the results of science, then you’re no better than any of the other crazy ideologues who have been mucking up civilization for the past century or so.

And that’s why I’ve taken so long in going over all of the history and science. Just to make sure that you can follow along, and then see for yourself how my conclusions logically follow the evidence. And that they therefore have absolutely nothing to do with *my* particular belief system.

But now that we’ve reached the ‘closing argument’ stage of this podcast, I’m remembering the finding that trial lawyers who recite lists of facts at the end of a trial do a lot worse than those who can tell an engaging story which supports their side.

So here goes, sort of. Because right now I’m going to tell you a couple of stories. And the first one has a strange connection to the small city in Pennsylvania where I grew up. Namely, Allentown.

Now me and Allentown didn't get along all that well back then. And it was one of those deals where, as soon as I was out of high school, I was out of there. And never looked back. I mean, the place was so dead end. Nobody of any stature or fame, or who ever accomplished anything that was worth accomplishing, ever came out of there, right?

Years later, however, I found out that someone substantive had indeed come from Allentown. In fact he had still lived there up until his death in 1961, and his house was actually just a few blocks from where I had grown up. Not that I had ever heard about him as a kid. And not that I'd expect that you would have ever heard about him, either. But for a brief period in the 1920's and 1930's he was pretty well known. And some pretty influential people back then even thought that he might have come upon a prescription for world peace.

The man's name was Frank Buchman. He was born in 1878, and ordained a Lutheran minister in 1902. Now you'll recall from a previous episode that the turn of the 20th Century in America was kind of the high point in the Progressive Movement. And you'll also recall that back then the term 'progressive' was associated much more with Republicans than it was with left wing views. And that what these Progressive Republicans were seeking to do was to cement the highest moral and ethical practices into both business and politics. Laws were passed legislating for food purity, for humane working conditions, for the outlawing of prostitution and gambling, and, in what might be termed Progressivism's noblest achievement, a renewed commitment to sobriety and mental health, not to mention an end to political and moral corruption, by the passage of the Prohibition Amendment.

(By the way, as I noted back then, the Progressive idealism shown by the (primarily) ladies who worked to pass Prohibition would hardly be imaginable today. After all, at the time the Federal Government made at least half of its revenue from taxes on alcohol. So that, by getting (mostly) men to voluntarily give up their booze, the Prohibitionists were also demanding that the government voluntarily also give up this giant source of revenue. And what government ever does that?

As a side note, though, and since Prohibition is always presented as such a failure it is important to know that the reality was quite different. Even with all of the speakeasies, etc., total alcohol consumption was down by over a half, along with all of the attendant misery, early death, absenteeism, and spousal abuse. And if today we had a public health program which achieved the same results with, say, opioid abuse, we would all be praising it to high heavens. And keep in mind that in 1928 the Democratic Presidential candidate, Al Smith, had repeal of Prohibition as the centerpiece in his party platform. And he lost in a landslide.

So why did Prohibition really end? Well, it turns out that one of the DuPonts, along with a few of his millionaire friends, became convinced that if alcohol were ever legal again, then the Federal Government would once more get all of the money it needed off of alcohol taxes. And that then the hated Federal Income Tax, which at the time basically only millionaires had to pay, would go away. So DuPont and friends proceeded not only to fund an expensive advertising campaign, but to also fund the political campaign of FDR.

But that's now what any of us were taught growing up. Somehow an amendment which had been passed by 46 out of 48 state legislatures, and by supermajorities both in the House and the Senate, and had led to huge majorities for the Republicans throughout the Twenties, was just one of those weird historical flukes, and had never really been popular with the American people.

And the final irony in this is that, what with all of the new spending that the Great Depression necessitated, the Feds did indeed rake in all of those new old alcohol taxes. But Dupont and his friends never did get their income tax break. Which had been their only motivation all along.)

However, back to our story about Frank Buchman. Because it is also difficult to separate the Progressive impulse around the turn of the 20th Century from, for lack of a better phrase, the impulse to both spiritually and otherwise purify the entire country. After all, we might think of that era as a time of high waisted dresses and men in proper suits and hats. But at the time, and for varying reasons, many people were concluding that the 19th Century ideal of moderation and personal probity was slipping away. And there were therefore many efforts, usually within at least the notional framework of Christianity, to try to, in one way or another, re-invigorate the cause, as it were. Thus, as the century turned, you had movements as disparate as Christian Science, which was sort of a precursor to New Age ideas of the almost magical power of positive thinking, to the Salvation Army, which was an attempt to use military discipline and efficiency in the distribution of Christian charity.

Frank Buchman, however, was a Lutheran, which at the time was about as mainstream and middle of the road a sect as there was. So, as with the YMCA movement, Buchman's goal was to bring a renewed sense of Christian commitment to, well, the middle of the road. And by the mid 1920's the particular fellowship movement which he started was dubbed the Oxford Group, after the large number of undergraduates at Oxford University in England who were enthusiastic participants.

The basic idea was simple: The world itself would never get better until all of the individuals within it got better. Or, to put it in even simpler terms, if you want to make the world a better place, then start with yourself. And the methods which Buchman developed to help implement this vision,

such as small group meetings, intense personal confession, and commitment to improving oneself one day at a time, were the direct antecedents of both Alcoholics Anonymous and modern 12 Step programs. What's more, although the group was clearly Christian in nature, its emphasis on living a righteous life, as opposed to preaching about being righteous to others, made it both ecumenical and receptive to the truths of other religious and ethical traditions.

The international nature of the movement also made its members especially committed to the cause of World Peace. After all, the particular form of a country's government didn't matter nearly as much as whether or not the country's leaders were committed to being goodly and Godly. In theory, even a National Socialist government would be acceptable if it made ethics and morality central to its mission.

Now in the 1930s, when forms of government were splintering off in every radical direction, such an idea was almost frighteningly revolutionary. And of course Frank Buchman never got a chance to try to personally convince Adolf Hitler to see the light. But the idea also had a certain inherent plausibility about it. And in 1938, when Buchman looked around and saw all of the military re-armament which was going on, and noted that what the world really needed at the moment was Moral Re-Armament, his movement now not only had a catchy new name, but an almost instant appeal. A British tennis star published a book titled 'Moral Re-Armament' which immediately sold a half a million copies. Buchman toured the world, speaking to thousands at a time. The mayor of New York City declared the week of May 7, 1939, to be MRA Week, and 14,000 people filled Madison Square Gardens for the first official Moral ReArmament meeting. Later, in July, 39,000 people filled the Hollywood Bowl for a similar event.

As I might have already mentioned, one of the greater curiosities of the 20th Century, and one which is almost never covered in our general histories, is, on the one hand, how genuinely excited and enthusiastic everyone was at the outbreak of World War I, and, on the other, how much everyone, even citizens of the Third Reich, dreaded and was genuinely against the outbreak of World War II. The whole Moral Re-Armament cause was of course part of this broadly held wish for pacifism. But once the war started its members distinguished themselves by working to both boost morale and to also increase efficiency in distributing resources. And after the war Moral Re-Armament continued its international work towards peace, and was one of the influential forces involved in the creation of the United Nations.

So now let's fast forward a bit to July of 1966, at around five on a Sunday morning on a completely quiet and empty street full of small stores in Cambridge, MA. My friend and I had been up all night somewhat stoned on acid. For, as I pointed out in Episode 55, LSD can certainly take you to whack a doodle land. But if the dose is right and you are used to the energy, it can also help in the facilitation of clear and/or cosmic thoughts. And this night the 'vibe' had been right, and we had wandered around for hours, very conscious but also very sad, contemplating the wide gulf in America between the higher consciousness which might have been possible and the grubby worldly attachments which were going on instead.

Anyway, we stopped at the display window of a small record store. And there, next to the Beatles and Stones albums, was a new album which looked absurdly out of place in 1966, but which would have probably looked perfectly normal just five years earlier. On its cover was the picture of a chorus of about fifty young men and young women, in suits and dresses, all made up and coifed like a parody of a clean cut look from ten years earlier. And next to that large picture were little blurbs by the likes of John Wayne, Walt Disney, and other contemporary right wing icons, all saying things like, 'This is the happiest, most hard hitting way I've ever seen or heard to say what this country is all about'!

The album and the group were both titled 'Up With People!' And, wouldn't you know it, but a few months later the whole thing, with peppy songs such as 'Up, up with people, you meet them wherever you go' became a bizarre counter-counter-culture best selling phenomenon. But as my friend and I were standing there on that empty Sunday morning with the dawn just breaking, it all only served to amplify that sad disconnect between possibility and reality. I mean, how could anyone in 1966 seriously think that this sort of superficial schmaltz was the answer to anything?

Except that it would also turn out that 'Up With People!' had been created, bought, and paid for by—you guessed it—the good folks at Moral Re-Armament. The same movement that less than thirty years earlier had been on the cutting edge in the drive for World Peace.

So that's one story. Here's another.

In 2005 I took one of my deliberate trips to nowhere. This time I drove all the way up to Thompson, Manitoba, and then took an overnight train to the small town of Churchill up on Hudson Bay. On my way home I drove through the Dakotas. And, since I do like nowhere so much, I thought

that I'd check out one of the few places in America that I had never seen, namely the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, home to the famous Wounded Knee Massacre of 1890, not to mention one of the most notorious pockets of poverty in the country.

So at the end of the drive that goes through Badlands National Park I turned left on a small county road and in a number of miles entered the reservation. And although one wouldn't expect this in a drab little corner of South Dakota, on a clear autumn afternoon the land was surprisingly hilly and beautiful. But in the midst of this beauty most of the dwellings which I passed were either run down single wides or tar paper shacks.

Anyway, after a while I came to a larger cluster of houses, plus a marker pointing to a little roadside memorial to the massacre. And when I got out to stretch my legs and read the plaque there, a kid of around fourteen came up and shyly asked me if I wanted a tour of the site. I walked up a small hill, which was mostly covered by a graveyard, complete with crosses and headstones and flowers and all, of some of the 300 people, mostly women and children, who were killed for basically no reason by the U.S. Cavalry. We walked back down the hill, and the kid stood there without saying anything. When I gave him a few dollars for his 'tour' there was genuine gratitude on his face.

The whole tableau, which could well have been in one of the poorer parts of Mexico, as opposed to the richest country in the world, was bad enough. But when I continued my drive for a few miles and got to the town of Pine Ridge, it got even more worse. Now there are around 4,000 people in the town, and up to around 25,000 on the res. But the level of commercial and economic activity which was going was about one-tenth of what you would expect to see for a population that size. The few cars driving around were all junkers. None of the people walking around looked all that energetic. The one 'supermarket' in town was dark and dingy, with random tins of no named canned goods on tall, thick wooden shelves, which looked for all the world like antique shelves on a small town store from a hundred years ago. Outside on the main street there were no restaurants, and just one tacky fast food place called Taco John's.

Everything was beyond depressing. And the thought occurred to me: All these do gooder types are always talking about the plight of the Native American, etc. But why doesn't anyone ever put their money where their mouth is? Why doesn't one of these Silicon Valley or other billionaires use their pocket change and just put up some kind of widget factory? And then, even if they lost money on their widgets, at least all the folks on the res would have something useful they could do. Wouldn't that work a lot better than useless hand wringing?

Well, the sun was sinking fast, and it was back to my car. But Pine Ridge town is only two miles north of the Nebraska border, which is where the reservation ends. And there, right across the state line, otherwise in the middle of absolute nowhere, were four bright and shiny new liquor stores, all lit up and with their parking lots full.

So I researched the situation later. And it turns out that Pine Ridge itself is emphatically dry. And as far back as 1882 a 50 square mile strip in Nebraska had been added to the reservation specifically so that no one could sell liquor there. But by the early 1900's traders had moved in anyway. And ever since then the Sioux elders had tried everything to shut them down, and the state and federal governments had done nothing. With a total population of 14, the 'town' of Whiteclay, Nebraska, typically sold 5 million cans of beer a year. Tribal police would typically write up around 1,000 DUIs a year on the two mile stretch north to South Dakota. 90% of all criminal cases in the tribal court system were alcohol related.

But, hey, isn't Freedom what America is all about?

Now generals are often accused of trying to fight the last war. And, really, why should that surprise you? The last war is usually the one that they fought in while young. The tactics and strategy of the last war is what they know. When World War II started the generals fully expected a repeat of World War I, and didn't really have a clue about how important air power would be. In Vietnam they therefore thought that complete control of the air would lead to victory, and then weren't prepared for guerrilla or jungle warfare. In Iraq there was no jungle, so it was back to the idea of a quick blitzkrieg, and of course no one was prepared for IEDs and the like after the fact.

And in a similar way people always seem to expect to stage the last revolution, whether that revolution is political, cultural, or, for lack of a better word, spiritual. Since conditions always change over time, though, then the approach which will be needed to sweep away the old and replace it with the new will almost always have to be different.

Thus in 1920 19th Century attitudes about self improvement were still so prevalent that it was relatively easy for Frank Buchman to convince the intellectually and socioeconomically elite students at Oxford to commit themselves to a Christian life. By 1939 students were way too worldly and Thirties hipster for that. But ethical concerns were still so ingrained in the general population that Moral Re-Armament's call for simple righteousness in the face of looming war found instant acceptance. But by 1966 the problem was no longer simply right versus wrong, of the civilized world

against the Nazis. Rather it was that the postwar world had so quickly become so (for the times) conformist and consumerist that getting a bunch of cleaned and scrubbed kids to earnestly sing ‘Up With People’ was laughably beside the point.

I mean, I was there, taking part in the cultural/spiritual revolution back then. And although I probably wouldn’t have put it this way, it was intuitively obvious that an appeal which would have been effective in 1939, or even 1959, wasn’t even beginning to cut it in 1966.

Well, for oh so many reasons, right here right now isn’t anything like 1966, either. And I would highly suggest, especially if it isn’t fresh in your mind, that you go back and listen to the discussion about Co-optation in Episode 9. Better yet, go to the website and read it. Because—especially if you are a Millennial or younger—you have been awash in co-optation, drenched in it in fact, pretty much since the day you were born. War is Peace, Lies are Truth, Fake is Real, the whole Orwellian nine yards. And I truly mean no offense, but you really don’t know what to believe any more. The old saw is that the unexamined life is not worth living. But your senses have been so overloaded, again pretty much since the day you were born, and those corporations and other neoliberal institutions have gotten you so addicted to that dopamine rush, first through the internet, and then through smartphones, that even if you wanted to examine your life you wouldn’t know where to begin. Anyway, before you could even get started trying to figure that out, your phone would ding and you would just have to check to see who the text was from.

Even worse, as I’ve gone over, the entire thrust of postmodern co-optation has been to convince you, again from Day One, that instead of being the passive lab rat that you are, spending your time either obsessively pushing the lever that gives you your next dopamine rush, or going down whatever chute they decide to send you down next, that, no, you are strong, independent, creative, a truly unique individual more than worthy to collect all of those trophies just for showing up. Your entire life is pretty much like all of those ads that in effect say, ‘No one tells *you* what to do. That’s why you drive whatever car, drink whatever beer, or use whatever toothpaste we’re telling you to in this ad.’

And as for my generation, the Boomers? Well, back in the day everyone was worked up by what they called The Establishment. You know, those faceless guys in the suits who didn’t want anyone to have any fun. But here’s something that’s been true about ruling classes throughout history.

Because every ruling class has some narrative that they tell themselves in order to justify their existence. Back in the days of kings it was something like, ‘Well, if I’m king, then it must be because God wanted me to be king.’ Then in the days when most wealth was inherited it was something like,

‘You can tell from our lineage that the Van Snottenburgs have always been just naturally superior.’ But with my generation most of us who got into Yale and Harvard and the like came from high schools from Anywhere, U.S.A. So it was more than easy for us to convince ourselves that our success was solely due to our meritocratic excellence.

And now we are The Establishment.

But here’s the other thing about ruling classes. Not only can’t they stand anyone questioning the central point of their self-justifying narrative, they can’t stand anything or anyone who even dares to rock their little gravy boat. So I really don’t expect anything even evolutionary, let alone revolutionary, to come out of my little cohort. Anyway, we’re all out of here in a few short years anyway.

So that if there is any hope for the future of the humanity which inhabits this planet—and, again, I’m not saying that there is—then it is going to take revolutionary action from some of the folks who are much, much younger than I. Which means that I am addressing the rest of this to any of you guys who may be listening.

But *please!* Don’t think for a moment that it is progressive, let alone revolutionary, for you to go along with all of the performative behaviors that They and Their woke corporations have spent your entire lifetime brainwashing you into believing have something to do with individuality or freedom. After all, They can only exist insofar as you are weak and stupid and docile.

No, the truly revolutionary thing would be for you to turn off your smartphone. To cancel all of your social media accounts. To try to break your addiction to porn. And violence. And violent porn. Now wouldn’t those be actions which were truly individualistic and creative and evocative of Freedom?

Because—and for one more time—the parameters which I am now pushing have absolutely nothing to do with fuddy duddy backwardness. Instead they are, and I say this without any doubt in my mind, the only plausible way forward.

And if you still don’t believe me, let’s briefly consider just two of the desperately needed fixes for the world and its culture which nearly everyone in the world agrees are desperately needed fixes.

For instance, let’s say that you are worried about climate change. I know I am. But as I pointed out a few episodes ago, if people were actually really serious about doing something about this, then

twenty years ago they would have picked out one of the several medium sized Fourth Generation nuclear power plant designs which have been already vetted by the experts and shown to be absolutely safe, mass produced the hell out of the design so that the plants would be cheap, and then constructed them all over the world. The result would have been that today there would be no climate crisis.

I mean, you can't say that you believe in the rationality of science, and then say that you're not going to use nuclear because you have an irrational fear of it. Because even if the other side can't articulate why, the absurdity of the whole thing is immediately apparent.

So now you have to ask yourself why serious, intelligent people would honestly have their hair on fire about climactic catastrophe, yet would offer 'solutions' which either demand that millions of other people drastically change their behavior patterns (which is almost impossible to achieve) and/or rely on technological advances that will only happen decades in the future.

Well, let me answer that one for you. Because this way they can have it both ways. On the one hand they can tear their clothing and gnash their teeth and show everyone how moral and horribly concerned they are. And then on the other hand they don't have to face the real issue that would have to be addressed if carbon dioxide and other pollution were to be eliminated.

And what is that issue? It's that those other people are never going to constrain their consumption of anything until you and yours also constrain your consumption. Of everything. And it starts with those celebrities who have 8,000 square foot houses which need year round air conditioning. But it goes much further than that. Because it also means that if you want that guy to give up his gas guzzling Hummer, then you've got to give up your wild sex parties.

'Now wait a minute,' you might say. 'That's just crazy talk. How in the world are my wild sex parties adding to pollution?'

But think about it for a minute. We humans are born with a predisposition towards sharing and equality. However, that predisposition only kicks in if everyone else in the tribe shares and observes the same social norms. And now that we are hypersocial, the 'tribe' has become pretty much the entire world.

And to take it further: How do you expect to be living your fancy Western lifestyle, and at the same time have all of those billions of people living in Africa and the like *not* cut down their rain forests and burn their cheap coal? After all, that's what your countrymen did in order to create your fancy Western lifestyle. More to the point, they see you and your wild sex parties as pathetically degenerate. So why would they take any advice from a degenerate?

I mean, they might listen to somebody like Gandhi, who obviously lived a life of actual simplicity. But a Hollywood celebrity? Give me a break.

Okay, the first example leads into the second. Because, putting aside all thoughts about the environment, how in the world are we ever going to integrate all seven billion of us (and counting) into any kind of world order? For although you certainly can't blame any individual for having been born into poverty and despair, you can actually blame their culture. After all, we in the West—and our relative ability to govern ourselves and to delay gratification and all—are the result of literally centuries of those boring middle class values and behaviors.

But those poor Sioux sitting in the middle of nowhere at the end of the road in South Dakota have become (granted, mostly due to us) atomized, de-cultured, and with nothing useful to do. And you, with your middle class upbringing, might well be able to have a few drinks on the weekend, and then get up Monday morning and go to work. But if a string of liquor stores is put right at the border of the res, what do you think is going to happen?

And I've been to places in this world which are so poor that people would give anything just to have their standard of living as high as that of Pine Ridge. But the only possibility of them getting that far is if they've successfully learned those boring middle class values. And the situation was bad enough fifty years ago, when folks like that didn't have a clue as to how folks like us live. The reality today, though, is that every teeny tiny corner of this world—whether it is through a communal village television or a friend's smart phone—has access to videos of us and our wild sex parties.

I mean, think about what it would have been like if your grandparents or your great grandparents had suddenly seen a present day R rated movie back in 1930 or 1890. They would have beyond freaked. But they would have been far more prepared for it than are poor, illiterate people in the Third or Fourth World. And if the Sioux in Pine Ridge can't handle their liquor, how do you think those people are going to handle such violent and sexual imagery and thoughts? And, as a matter of reality today, how do you think that they are handling them?

So that if you really do care about the environment, and/or alleviating world poverty, and you're not just full of self-justifying B.S., then shut up and step up. And if you want to do something revolutionary, then how about curbing your appetites? All of them.

And I know that for almost all of us, since almost all of us do have selfish appetites, it means not just taking one for the team, but maybe several ones. For the clear truth is that if you really do consider yourself part of humanity, then ultimately that's what you and I and everyone else is going to have to do.

Because, given our hypersocial nature, given that there's seven billion of us (and counting) on an increasingly smaller and more interconnected planet... Seriously, you got a better plan???

Anyway, once again I've run out of time. And, once again, I'd like to thank you once again. You know, for so far having listened.