

Symbols and Substance

BY J. HARRINGTON

WELL, as I was trying to show when interrupted (first by the exigencies of space and later by static in the loud speaker, and other matters necessary to and contingent upon life), the troublous times in which we live are not to be charged to any deeds of ours, or misdeeds either. Nothing can be more illogical than the logicians, except the facts they juggle with. Whether they think so or not most of them act on the assumption that the world is a piece of well-contrived mechanism which ought to function in a specific manner, and if it does not then some one has removed a pin, loosened a screw, opened a valve or put emery dust into the cylinder. Our ancestors of pre-machine days peopled the world with genii and gnomes, upon whom they could heap convenient blame, with more reason than we can furnish for loading our scapegoats with our sins. The starving Leningrad workers, weaponless and abject, march to plead with the Little Father for bread; the wise men gaze in despair at such folly, and almost instantaneously we have the first working class Republic in all history. The German navy, fully armed and powerfully efficient, revolts; all the wise men hail the event as the harbinger of the Social Revolution; almost instantaneously we have the most thorough dictatorship ever established over working class humanity. Lenin and Trotsky gave us our victory; Schiedeman and Eberts engineered our defeat; Ramsay MacDonald, by a freak move in Imperial politics finds himself head of the British Empire, and because he does not forthwith institute all his preceding preachments he is a traitor, though he is unceremoniously kicked down stairs because he squashed an indictment for treason against an obscure editor of a communist paper. For my part I have no desire to defend him; he is possessed of the God of barbarous Jewry, a sufficient handicap, and never was a Marxian, a sufficient indictment. So beneath J. A. McD's retributory cudgel my head is bowed but unbloody.

Nor can I see why any one who could write down

such a sentence as—"The change from Lords Clarendon, Bute and North to a Lloyd George is as great a departure as from the latter to a Ramsay MacDonald" should worry his head about debating the worthiness of MacDonald and his associates North and Bute both preceded the machine age and were the last advocates of absolute monarchy to head the British Empire. Bute was the first of that aggregation of weaklings which George III chose to lead his government in order that he could assume that absolute control which had slipped from the monarchy during the reigns of his German speaking, German thinking grand-father and great grand-father, and significantly enough was called to power just twenty years after George II. dismissed Walpole, who had been called in derision the Prime Minister. Clarendon, if it is he of the 19th century, has no place in the picture; Palmerston was the man who did as he pleased and when Victoria the Good severely reprimanded him expressed surprise that he had done wrong, promised never to err again, and did as he pleased. He, with Peel, Disraeli, Gladstone, etc., down to Lloyd George were Prime Ministers in fact. But if the change from Bute and North (antedating the American and French Revolution and the steam engine, mark you) to Lloyd George is as great a departure as from Lloyd George to Ramsay MacDonald, then it is great enough to forget Ramsay MacDonald and rejoice in the Revolution. However, I would not myself go as far as J. A. McD. in this matter. The departure is not by any means as great, but it is great enough to ignore the symbols and examine the substance.

Away back in August I tried to set our position down. I said, "In the matter of reforms there is no change. There are still a few, as there have always been, who think that reforms are not only useless but harmful, but the Party as a whole so far as I can judge, still holds to the position that reforms can only be granted and enforced by a permanent majority." And it is some satisfaction to hear

Labor men after a year or two in office explain to their supporters their reasons for being unable to do anything for them. However, I don't suppose anyone read what I said then, nor do I have much hope that they will read it now. However, in case they do, I have this to say. The straight issue is maintained just as much as it ever was. And, concerning reforms, we now have the word of the reformers themselves who have freely admitted since coming home from Parliament that it is impossible to get reforms enacted. Education is still our standard, but "one glimpse within the tavern caught, Better than in the temple lost outright." We are just as crazy for debate as ever but we have no debaters. In days of change and decay such as we live in thirty or forty dollars a week makes a mighty sure anchor, and men have no money. But take it all in all, the bumptiousness, the holier than thou, the crude attempts at sarcasm, the wilful misrepresentation, the words, and words again, and yet again more words.—Ain't we got fun?

As for Winnipeg. Peace, perturbed spirits. I had no intention of using that famous town as an irate schoolmaster does the unfortunate scholar in a refractory class who first catches his eye, visiting upon him the wrath he is unable to distribute where it rightly belongs. As might well be seen by reading what I said, Winnipeg was introduced to show that logic or weighing the facts has nothing to do with the turmoil in labor circles. Frisco would have served the same purpose. The handful of revolutionist who keep alive the spirit of revolt on this continent could very well devote what energy they have to the purpose they profess. But there you are, this is a perverse world, and however cunningly we may be able to contrive an engine or calculate a balance, when it comes to a Social Revolution the powers which served us so well in the mechanical task seem smitten with palsy. And each tenth thinks the other nine-tenths are hopeless idiots. And, looking upon the advanced Labor Group today it is quite possible that they are right.

That Senseless Animal

A World Beyond Our Ken

BY G. G. DESMOND

AT Cambridge long ago, we remember a don who was said to be prodigiously learned. He was blind to almost everything except books, which he read about an inch away from his face, deaf to the sounds of Nature, the laughter of other dons as a connoisseur of wine, but perhaps not more blind of nose or finger-tip than the average civilized man. We young bigots summed him up by saying that he had taken five firsts and had forfeited a sense for each of them.

But after all what did even we young, healthy, white savages know of any of the senses in comparison with the best practitioner in each of them among wild things? The brain behind our blunt senses does wonders with them, as a man might do wonders against a baby's rifle with bow and arrow. In a way, we manage to get along without senses at all, as we get along without legs by the invention of wheels, and without hands by the use of machinery. What perceptions we have left are just enough to stand by us in time of great need, by dint of tense brain and will power. They are not so automatic as senses were once, and if we disuse them a little more, we may never be able to call upon them when nothing else may save us.

The wonderful sense-extension instruments invented by man enable him to imagine how senses could conceivably be trained or developed. Is it

sible that the eagle can see with the naked eye as far and as well as man with a medium telescope? Can some creatures see as minutely as we do with a low power microscope? It is thought that bees can appreciate the tiny spot on a bee's egg (not quite within the power of a pocket lens), where the sperm of fertilisation enters, so as to judge whether the egg is destined to become worker or drone. The hunter wasp can find by means of the touch-organs near its sting the microscopic spot where it can wound a caterpillar so as to paralyse and not kill it. The sense organs in an insect's antenna or horn number scores of thousands and are of four or five different kinds, each with its own function about which we are almost completely in the dark. Is it by hearing or smelling or tasting or by the tapping of ether waves that they find flowers or lovers miles away and know how to fly straight to them?

It is not as though the thing we wanted to find was crying, scenting, blazing alone in a silent in-odorous, uncoloured world. We have to single it out from a clamour of other sights and sounds and scents. To a great many of them we are at all times blind and deaf. Sounds above and below certain pitches no man can hear. They are addressed to other ears that can hear them. To get rid of the others, we have to gain the faculty of shutting them out for the time being. Some people by practice can stand in the street and pick out the voice of one person standing far away and talking quietly, in spite of many distracting noises, including voices, far

nearer and louder. For most of us the nearer noise overlays all the others, very much as a near object blots out the middle distance. Our great instrument, the wireless, shuts out, more or less effectively, all noises between here and America, so that a person on that continent whispers into the ear of us in Europe. It is done, as we all know now, by keying the receiving instrument to the wave-length of the sending-out instrument. It may be that the moth's antenna is in key by wave-length to one tremor only, that given off by its spouse's body, and that is how he finds her miles away, through a thousand rival odours or vibrations that are the messages of other people with which the moth has nothing to do.

The inverse relation between sense and brain, between instrument and the power to get along with poor instruments is brought home to us as the senses deaden with age. First, the baby hearkens with difficulty; then the youth hears everything easily, though often with comparatively perfect apparatus he makes ludicrous mistakes; then the old man, hearing only half as much must, by means of logic, make that half tell him as much as the whole used to tell him. He hears by circumstantial evidence. The totally deaf man, by extra use of his eyes can sometimes "hear" as much as a very careless man does with all his faculties.

Speech, of course, is the hardest thing to hear, the modifications of sound are so many and so slight

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