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Ourselves and Parliament

By J. D. Harrington

ARISTOTLE, the greatest of the ancients, has defined man as the political animal; though we might with greater accuracy call him the voting animal. It is possible to find other forms of life which might be understood, in a broad sense, to be organized politically, but no other form has ever manifested the slightest evidence of submitting the regulation of its conduct to a vote.

Within certain limits, and excepting certain periodic lapses, mankind does submit its life, and much of its activity to the uncertain hazard of a collective poll. The result may be of the gravest consequence, but the seal of a voting majority having been announced, all and sundry shape their course accordingly. This is so, whether it involves dispensing with booze, or endorsing a war.

The reasons are obvious and need not be labored, the foremost being—that society could not be maintained, even on the lowest conceivable plain, where every difference had to be decided by cutting throats or bruising bones. There is, however, another factor which is often entirely overlooked, i.e., a proneness to follow where the race has trod, an extreme conservatism which prompts man to endure great evils rather than, by a greater or less increase of discomfort, finally abolish them. He will vote against them in a feeble attempt to diminish or remove them, but if his other conditions are such that he can live and hope to prolong life, he will not readily "take up arms against a sea of troubles, and by opposing end them." So that even after having by a large majority set the seal of his approval upon a certain course of action, he is likely to do little more than curse if his august commands are set at naught by those who are pleased to call themselves his servants. Thus tyrannies have been imposed upon free democracies time and time again with singular ease. Indeed, the blood and suffering accompanying all efforts to overthrow tyrannies is in amazing contrast to the facility and perfectly peaceful manner with which they are imposed. I think a very limited range of historical reading would furnish many examples of this social anomaly.

The great voting jag however is when we are called upon to select a government. This is a periodic affair in all well regulated democracies, and notwithstanding the tinsel and the trumpets, the corn broom torches and the band wagon, or the dawning of the morning after, our fellows in misery pursue the even tenor of their way, ploughing and reaping, spinning and weaving leaving to their elected representatives the task of governing them. The fact that these representatives rarely concern themselves about the voters' worries, or their own election promises, has engendered an abiding contempt for parliament and all its works. However whether Bruno said so or not the world does move, and so do the people of it. Then comes a burst of energy, a contempt for death, and unquenchable demand for change, and—

"The moving finger writes, and having writ
Moves on. Nor all your piety, or wit,
Can lure it back to cancel half a line:
Nor all your tears wipe out a word of it."
Naturally we conclude that revolution is the stuff. What's the use of voting when we can get what we want by fighting. Of course, but softly: who did the voting and who the fighting? We are still in the same world, and are still moved by the same senses, affections, passions; but in a different fashion, I fancy. What changed these hurt-fearing death dreading humble conservatives, into revolu-

tionists, welcoming suffering and glorifying death? Whatever the cause, we may be sure their ideas had "suffered a sea change into something rich and rare."

The Irishman of 1913, for instance, might have had a wish to enjoy all that a 1921 Irishman desires, but with this difference; in 1913 it was a wish, not worth the loss of a meal, except to a comparative few, while in 1921 it becomes a consuming and imperative necessity, cheap if purchased with the last pang of physical endurance, animating all except a comparative few. The compunction to fight arose from the fact that a power existed which could set their vote aside. But no power existed in Ireland itself which would have embarked upon so desperate an adventure. Parliament as we knew it a decade ago has changed. Today it appears as a formal body giving legality to the will of a select committee known as the Cabinet. Members of parliament have repeatedly deplored the subordinate, if not obsequious nature of their office. But even so, we cannot view the financial and social standing of these mighty ministers of the Cabinet without remarking that they too are subordinate, and very obsequious to some other power. We see a French President lodged in an asylum, an American President next door to it, and we read of Lloyd George tottering to a fall, of Orlando and Clemenceau banished to the limbo of political lost souls. Evidently there is a power to which the mighty must render an account.

There is no mystery about this to anyone who has had some acquaintance with the Marxian school of thought. We know that governments are dominated by the powerful commercial and industrial interests, and we know that parliaments are and must be the tools of those interests. In spite of this we constantly hear that parliaments have ceased to function. This is correct if we view the institution as functioning in the interest of all. But to those who adhere to the class nature of society it is merely confusion worse confounded. True, as we have remarked, parliament no longer decides, or even debates to any appreciable degree the issues of national, or international policy, but they do stamp this policy with the print, image, and superscription of the nation and if it is not entirely opposed to the immediate and perceptible welfare of the nation no question is made of it.

So that all matters of public policy are subjected to an extensive and intensive measure of propaganda. Whatever the needs of the dominating powers might be, they are always very careful to color those needs in idealistic and patriotic garb, to the end that the dear people might, in their folly, find solace in misery. This is done by methods that have long proven their efficacy. Catch phrases such as free trade serve to delude the voters. If we realize this, we can also estimate the folly of those who denounce participation in parliamentary elections.

The Socialist Party of Canada has entered all such contests with the prime motive of giving the workers an understanding of the world in which they live; they have always subordinated the chances of electing a candidate to that of making Socialists. Whatever the conduct of our elected members has been in Parliament, or will be, we have always held it as of little importance. It is what they did outside the House which gave us reason to applaud or condemn. And we have had reasons to do both.

We are under no delusions as to ever being able

to revolutionize society by an Act of Parliament alone; not that parliament is in itself not so constituted as to effect such a desirable consummation, but because a master class, entrenched for centuries in all that makes for wealth and privilege, would not submit, if there was any chance of procuring workers foolish enough to fight their battles.

It might interest those who decry the contesting of parliamentary seats, to recall that history records not one successful revolution which did not first manifest itself as a victory or near victory at the polls. And so far as that goes few unsuccessful ones, where the revolutionists had an opportunity to so express themselves. And this is true of today more than at any other period in the world's history; owing to the intricacy of the death dealing machinery, not to mention the intense specialization of national production. The master class always ignited the revolutionary spark, even when they did not actually start and feed the conflagration. So too we have never been deluded enough to suppose that a people too mentally confused to vote for something would ever fight for it, while in that state of mind. And if they should develop the temper requisite to a great enterprise, I think, in time of peace at least they would register that temper in ways that those who run might read, and those who read might run, in case they were not like minded.

Parliaments, and cabinet ministers are the tools of a certain dominant social class who, by virtue of this domination control all the public forces of a nation. If we, the workers, could control these forces we would be masters, if we cannot we will remain slaves. This control is supposed to be vested in parliament, and for all practical purposes is, but only when parliament conforms to the historical transports of delight. The national anthem is bawled with vigor by hungry slaves. Thousands of weary toilers rush through thronged streets and stand for hours to catch a sight of a prince. Anyone who expects revolutions from a people so minded has broken with the real world, has fashioned an ideal world of his own, and is in the same mental latitude as the school girl who hopes one day to displace Mary Pickford, or the school boy who has decided to lick Jack Dempsey.

To those who still see the world as it is, there appears a task of giant proportions, a task almost beyond their strength, and that is the removal of all sentiment and ideology of master class character from the minds of the workers, and the introduction of working class needs, and knowledge. To that end alone is our aim devoted, and to that end do we contest political elections. If we should elect a member, we see a member of our class endowed with leisure and funds to instruct himself, and others. And if he does this, let the votes fall where they may.

The Third Congress of the Communist International.

Moscow, June 16.—The third congress of the Communist International will not be opened before June 18th. The reason is that numerous delegates have not yet arrived. In the meantime five commissions are working upon the most important questions which shall come before the congress. These include the questions of the tactical situation, organization, trade unions, report of the executive. —"Rosta Wein."