

# A Digest of Things Political

by A. HAROLD WALKER

I AM ABOUT to air my opinion of the average person's outlook on politics at the present time, I say "my" — I don't mean "my". The views expressed are formed from books read or lectures attended during the past five years. The only reason for bringing in "my" is that I have "absorbed or discarded" to the best of a limited ability. I am not a student of political economy. I am an engineer. The greatest point in favour of my opinion is that it owes nothing to the press; which brings me comfortably to my first point:—

No one will deny that the majority of the newspapers are owned by capitalists. e. g. Rothermere and Beaverbrook of England, and Hearst of the United States). Naturally, it is absurd to believe that they would express opinions detrimental to capitalism. If you owned a newspaper, you would not be very eager to allow it to publish articles that might injure you. The newspapers play a tremendous part in influencing public opinion. It is my contention that the average person's outlook on politics is largely governed by them. Many times in arguments have I heard people express opinions that appeared in the editorial or news-section of the "STAR" the night before. They read them. They say to themselves, "Now that seems logical"—and until it is supplanted by an editorial in the "HERALD", they are strongly influenced by them. You will concede then, from experience, that this is generally, though not universally true? Newspapers give them the basis of their politics. Newspapers are prejudiced (an axiom). Therefore, I say that their outlook is prejudiced.

Now that is only one class of people. There are vast herds that never read editorials at all, and who are unable also to make the correct inferences from political reports, mainly because of laziness and lack of interest. Of these I speak in my next paragraph. They too, are strongly influenced by the "press", only in a more general way.

This universal control of popular opinion by the newspapers

## The Author



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naturally effect the policies of governments. It is my contention that long ago Roosevelt realized that Great Britain would never be able to pay the war debt. That it would be infinitely better for all concerned if the debt was cancelled. Yet he does not cancel it! Why? Simply because of public opinion—which is never logical, for the public, having neither the time nor the knowledge to think individually for themselves, feel safe in thinking with the majority. Roosevelt dare not cancel the debt because of the average person, who says:—"They incurred the debt, now they

must pay!" This average person then turns to his wife, who nods admiringly and replies, "That's fair enough!" Neither of them know what they are talking about. But for all that, it is those people who control our government's policies. Their vote must be kept. They must be kept satisfied—or the government is thrown out. A dismal outlook, but a very real one. This is not universally true, but you won't deny that it is again generally true. Switzerland — a tiny country — the people have a personal knowledge of their prominent politicians, which relegates the newspapers to a secondary position (Lord Bryce). In the Soviet Republic, the press is controlled by the Communists, and the people hear no ill of Communism—as in Italy they hear no ill of Fascism. To bring this point nearer home—Will you concede that if the United States owned Canada a tremendous "unpayable" debt, the Canadian public would clamour just as vigorously for payment? And Bennett would gnash his teeth, but dare not cancel the debt. And the public clamours not because it has sat down and attempted to study the situation, but because, on a superficial inspection, it seems logical to demand payment. That's true, isn't it?

And this brings me to a difficult question:—"Why haven't the newspapers endeavoured to influence the public in such a way that they can see those debts are unpayable, and merely millstones around both the creditor's and the debtor's necks?" And that is extremely difficult to answer within the limitations of this article. However, some of them have: e. g. That magnificent paper "THE MANCHESTER GUARDIAN" and on this side "THE CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR". But theirs is a very limited field. The others, purely from self-interest, do not attempt to do anything about it. You will concede from the statements in "CRY HAVOC" (Beverly Nicholls) that a newspaper that will agitate for war (purely because it is controlled by a capitalistic armament firm) will do almost anything. The interests of our press are so wide that the advantages of educating the public along these lines are outnumbered by the disadvantages to themselves. Newspapers are a business, just the same as Eaton's and Morgan's. The interests of the advertisers have to be considered, the interests of the "party" have to be considered—and the interests of the "party" are formed by an unthinking public. Self-interest wherever you look.

This brings me to my next point. Is it sheer ignorance on the part of the average person, when he makes himself ridiculous crying out: "Germany must pay!" "England must pay!" and so on. No, it definitely is not! It is a failure to apply to our politics knowledge which is of practically universal possession, quite often evident in the facts of daily life and experience, and to derive from that already available knowledge — the important truth. "We disregard knowledge that we possess, though we are unaware of that disregard." (Sir Norman Angell).

I have been assuming so far that there is no need for me to prove that Germany could never have paid her war debt, or that England will never be able to pay hers. Logical reasons have been set down in a dozen text books and spouted at a hundred lectures. If to gain my points I must prove it, I shall be glad to do so. I believe it to be an acknowledged fact.

Why are peace and prosperity destroyed by errors which are very nearly self-evident (It took the Allies twelve years to realize that they had made fools of themselves at the Treaty of Versailles. The greatest economists of England pointed out their stupidity—J. M. Keynes particularly — but they would not listen). The fault possibly lies in our educational system, and certainly in our reluctance to think in any other way than as a crowd.

The outlook of the average person on tariffs I have found to be distinctly hazy. I advance the fol-

lowing argument not because I am a free trader—I am not! But because very few people with whom I have talked (mostly students) appear to realize that there is anything more to be considered in tariffs than just the "stimulation of home industries". How many times have you heard statements such as this, in one form or another: "Denmark exports to England goods to four times the value that England exports to Denmark". "Isn't that terrible!" they cry, "dear old Rothermere! That's the stuff—raise the tariffs on Danish goods. We must look after our industries!" But what is terrible about it? The money paid to Denmark for dairy products (say) is transferred to Australia in exchange for wool, which is again transferred to the United States for tobacco, which state returns it to us in exchange for whiskey. No country can have wealth unless it spends it. A paradox, you say, but a very easy one to see through. It all boils down to the elementary fact—if you don't sow, you cannot reap.

Now let's turn to the U. S. S. R. Can't you hear our average man cry out:—"Russia—a country gone mad! Revolutions, enforced labour, communism — isn't it ghastly?" Again I point an accusing finger at the capitalistic press — naturally they haven't a good word to say for a semi-communistic state. But there are plenty of good words to be said for the U. S. S. R. They have built up a tremendous "esprit de corps". Now they are working, as did England in the latter half of the last century, for the good of the country. Industries are springing up, and as a natural result, their educational system is a thousand times better. These statements cannot be contradicted. It is state-controlled production. It is impossible for an individual or a company to establish a monopoly. It is impossible, under such circumstances, to throw away hundreds of gallons of milk in order to raise prices, while hundreds starve, as happened in the United States several years ago. Or to burn wheat for the same purpose, as has happened in Canada more than once. Another example — the Hoover Investigation Committee pointed out that no less than 70% of the Service Stations in the United States were superfluous. They were built only because of tremendous competition between huge capitalistic combines. Such a thing could not happen in the U. S. S. R. "Thus, even in the Soviet Union to-day, which lays no claim to being a communist community, the maximum "spread" of the variations of incomes seems to be from 50 roubles a month to 1000 roubles a month. In great Britain, the maximum spread must be from less than £4 a month to say £120,000 a month. In the U. S. S. R. then, the variation is as 1 to 20, in Britain as 1 to 30,000." (John Strachey).

There is a lot to be said for the U. S. S. R., but the press doesn't say it, so the average person doesn't know it. You remember how the sympathies of the public were all with the six captive English engineers. Why? Not because they deserved it, for they were evidently guilty of espionage and sabotage. (Authorities maintain that they attempted to ruin hydro-electric development schemes by bad workmanship and general hindrances in order to discourage the people), and bribery (bribing Russian labourers to do their dirty work). Those men did not deserve sympathy and their employers should now be in gaol. But all the same, sympathy ran very high for them. Such is the power of the press!

Before going any further, let me state here and now that I am not a communist. I am pointing out their good points or a few of them, only for your consideration.

And now for Italy, the first thing we think of—"a great man this Mussolini!" But is he? Italy has not even a free press, and the Italian newspapers sing the praises of Mussolini. Why? Not because Mussolini necessarily deserves to be praised — but because Mussol-

ini is the Editor-in-Chief of them all. We must not be too ready to commend him. Are the people happier under him? That is the great thing, in fact, fundamentally, that's all that counts. I leave the decision to you.

My next point deals with elections, and the manner in which the average man casts his vote. Here follows an authentic story of one of England's most ignorant M. P.'s, (narrated by Sir Norman Angell at a recent lecture). He always sat for the same constituency, a town of some 60,000 inhabitants and regularly at every election they sent him to Westminster to represent them. Far more able men opposed him, but invariably he was re-elected. The reason was not difficult to discover. This M. P. had married "Trixie" — a local girl whose success on the musical comedy stage in London was the talk of the town. He was one of those quiet Englishmen (that you read about) but fortunately for him his wife made a point of appearing with him at his election speeches. She always drew a big crowd, and she did not hesitate to tell them how her husband had killed no less than seven Germans with his own bayonet. They liked that, especially coming from "their Trixie". And then, one day this quiet Englishman, who was no mean football player, turned out for the local team in a championship game and succeeded in scoring no less than three goals—After that there was never any doubt. There was no more popular man in the town, at least among the working classes (the great majority, don't forget). Yet that man has no right to be in the House of Commons and he is only there because:— (1) Married to a popular musical comedy star; (2) Killed seven Germans; (3) Scored three goals.

This is not typical—yet you will agree that such factors have a tremendous influence on the casting of votes. If an Englishman put up for Mayor of Montreal, a great number of people would vote for him purely because he was an Englishman, and a greater number would vote against him for exactly the same reason. Policy would scarcely enter into it at all.

Summing up it seems to me that the "average person" falls into one of two classes:—

(1) Either he is "conservative" because his father is conservative and his grandfather before him, or the other extreme.

(2) Of the type that when a new party comes along, with a few catch phrases, a waving of banners, an appeal to the emotions, and a statement that he couldn't be any worse off than he is now—in he goes!

Both are useless. We must use the brains God gave us. We must apply what knowledge we possess if we are to clear up this mess. But we will never get anywhere by lack of interest or by giving our famous imitation of a flock of sheep.

## TO A MOUSE

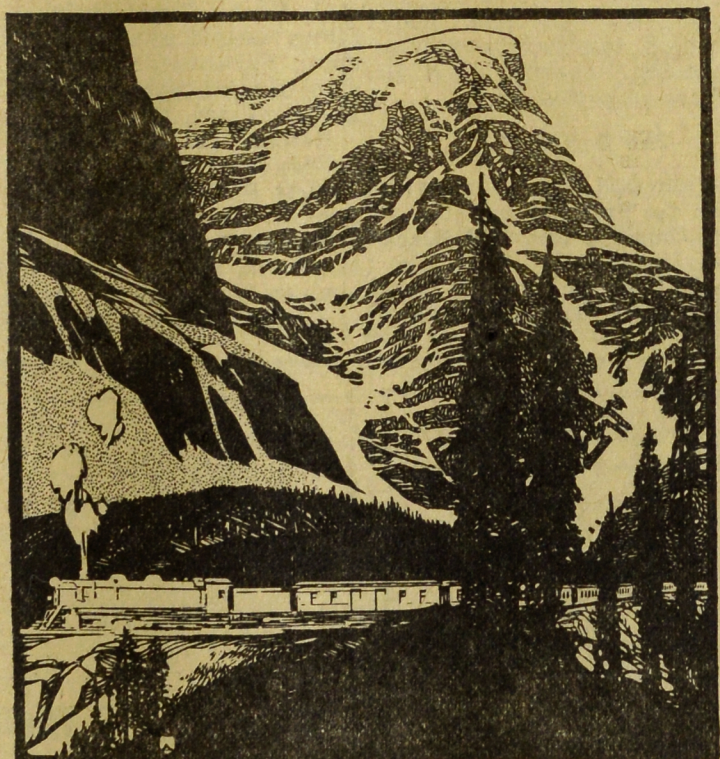
I dedicate this poem to a particular stag who has aroused my ire. I think Robbie Burns will not be displeased that I have snatched his title and applied it so aptly.

My head does throb as from boot-leg gin,  
The Ballrooms echo the raucous din  
Of saxophones gone mad—  
Worse than the fence to my cultured ear  
Is the fiendish phrase I'm forced to hear  
You, too, have heard it—gad,  
My blood does boil; O primitive urge!  
With the polished floor I long to merge  
The countenance of the lad  
Who causes me to unwrap my fin  
And grin a sickly, ghastly grin  
When he commits the devilish sin  
By leeringly lisping: "May I cut in?"—

—SirWotta Sott

"We need enthusiasm, imagination and ability to face facts, even unpleasant ones, bravely."

—Franklin D. Roosevelt.



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