

End as a Pawn ?

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is in the doldrums, and the achievements of the other can be passed over by critics as purely material and hence the product of special economic advantage. Under its present half-hearted acceptance, democracy has not much that is positive to offer in competition with other social philosophies or managerial schemes for society. In countries with democratic forms the emphasis falls almost entirely upon rights and freedoms. We are inclined to give a man the right to talk as much as he pleases and call the result democracy. Missing from our calculation is the view that regards democracy as a process by which all the people participate in deciding major issues that concern them.

It is in this respect that the little democracy we enjoy now is a dangerous thing. It gives us the illusion of reality. By calling ourselves democratic (instead of relatively democratic) we are led to suppose that we have perfected the process. We are thus put in the untenable position of defending the fraction for the whole, the name for the fact.

Our present adulterated democracies continue to leave all important decisions to policy makers and bigwigs. This practice of acting always from the top prevails not merely in government but in industry, education, charity, journalism—through the whole course of what we call democratic society. The result is bound to be a progressive decay of function among citizens, an oppressive conviction of use-

lessness. As Toynbee puts it in speaking of the industrial proletariat, men are *in* society but not *of* it.

Newspapers and magazines and books whirl before us a kaleidoscopic array of brightly colored issues. Our minds ricochet from the race problem to the housing problem, from the problem of foreign trade to the problem of displaced persons, from the British problem to the Russian problem to the Palestine problem to the problem of free enterprise.

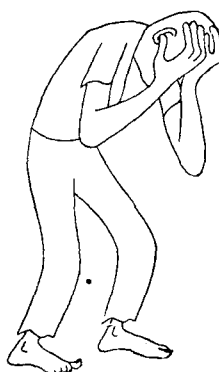
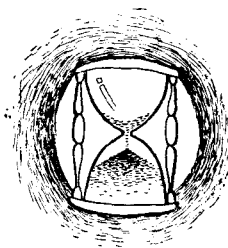
In spite of all the news that is forced upon us, however, it would seem that the more we know the less we can do. We become victims of a kind of political somnambulism, moving vaguely about at the mercy of events. Our consciousness often seems to be a consciousness of images rather than realities. Cut off as we are, our view largely a stereopticon view, nonetheless we are beginning to see that there is really no such thing as "the world." What is happening before our eyes is only a dramatization of what is happening to *us*. Slowly but certainly we are beginning to perceive that the happenings of our day are not distant

pantomime but real experiences in our own lives. It is as if a person injured by a machine and blotto from shock should suddenly notice that a hand has been cut off, only to recognize with a sickening return of consciousness that it is his own.

It no longer means anything to us when we hear it said America must do this, Russia must do that, Britain must do the other. We know inwardly that America and Russia and Britain do not exist as entities apart from their citizens. The old Churchillian flummery is dead and the abstractions of the history books need to be reduced to facts. There are no longer powerful nations and immense forces. There are today only peoples and persons and these peoples and persons have suddenly been brought together by the amazing applications of science. There is in consequence only one problem and that is the creation of a world society under law.

THIS leads to the most urgent reason for full-scale democracy: the changes necessary to meet the problems presented by an interdependent world are so profound that they will have to be authorized by peoples acting in concert. These changes will never be made by heads of state, who will always err on the side of caution. Present political leaders hold office on sufferance, and they can always plead the dumbness and conservatism of the people to cover up their own shortcomings and timidity. Nothing can be done to remedy this sluggishness until provision is made whereby the electorates of the several countries can declare their views on issues instead of candidates.

At present the most obvious and drastic change needed is the curtailment of the sovereignty of nations. Nations must be modified and their powers of independent action sharply delimited both for the purpose of reducing the possibility of war and for purposes of permitting a free movement of goods and peoples from one



—Illustrations from "Nations and Peace."

part of the world to another. The pomp of nations that pretend to be sovereign, with their custom duties, tariffs, separate currencies, leads not only to conflict but to absurdities in a world that has been unified by science and communication. Yet the establishment of a federation of nations—of whatever membership or dimensions—can only come about as the by-product of wide democratic action. A republic of nations with each nation a member state under a new sovereignty could not be imposed by diplomacy, even if diplomats were willing.

Under our present republican form of government, whatever may be said for it when it is compared with dictatorial governments, there exists no effective way of letting the voice of the people be heard. Opinion must be registered indirectly, obliquely, and through layers of resistance. Republicanism offers plenty of opportunity for making noise, but it is not wired for sound. The result is that members of both the administrative and legislative branches of the government must conduct their affairs in a state of uncertainty if not ignorance about what the mass of the electorate thinks.

Many will urge, of course, that this is a free country, that a man can write his Congressman, indite a letter to the editor, stand up on the street corner or in a public meeting and say whatever he pleases. Such elementary privileges are to be guarded, it is true, and there is no disposition here to make light of the indulgences which we enjoy under the democratic heritage. But the fact remains that with all their privileges the people are still crying in the wilderness; there is no system of direct communication between them and the major decisions of their national government.

Some slight attention, it is true, has been given to the matter of making proper arrangements for a dignified expression of public opinion. Fitful starts have been made here and there, but for the most part the efforts to date have been looked upon as incidental, a supplementary feature to government as is. Canada, one of the most advanced nations in the field of political education, has over a thousand listening groups which take up issues raised in programs of the Canadian Broadcasting Company. These groups are spread all over Canada. They range in size from small groups in Saskatchewan to large groups in cities like Montreal. After a broadcast on a public issue, the groups take over and, through the give and take of discussion, arrive at their own views.

The genius of the Canadian system is that each group has a recording



secretary. The questions raised by the broadcast are threshed out by the people and then put to a vote. The declared opinions of the group are sent to Ottawa. Experience with these groups has been instructive in many ways. It has shown, for example, that there is not as much division of opinion as one would suppose between town and country, East and West, Catholic and Protestant, agricultural and industrial interests, when citizens have a chance to talk problems over in their own circle and say what they think.

But the immediate extension of the democratic experiment requires a fuller recognition of the voice of the people. This can come about only through an intelligent use of the referendum. The referendum is the device which, even under present political arrangements, will serve to put public opinion officially on record.

Up to now the referendum has been employed with varying degrees of satisfaction in the several states, but chiefly upon issues of local or limited interest. As a footnote to ballots concerned with candidates and party warfare the people have been confronted with questions touching tax legislation, new highways, veterans' bonuses, the increase of the state's bonded debt. The response in many cases has been spotty, since the issues presented are lost in the election hurrah. The multiplicity of incidentals offered tends to bring the referendum into neglect if not contempt.

IT is time, though, that the referendum be rescued and put to work in assembling public opinion on world issues. It offers in simplest form the democratic idea, asking the people a straight question and giving them a chance to say, through the exercise of the franchise, what they think.

One state, Massachusetts, has already used it to give the voter some sense of actual participation in deciding the kind of issue that will determine the future. Massachusetts has a provision whereby if 1,200 voters in any state Senatorial district or 200 voters in any representative district ask that a matter of public interest be

submitted to the voters of that district, the question can be placed on the ballot.

In the fall of 1942 these requirements were fulfilled in forty-two out of 164 election districts. On the ballot appeared the following questions:

Shall the representatives in the General Court from the following named districts be instructed to vote to request the President and the Congress to call at the earliest possible moment a convention of all free peoples, to form a Federal Constitution, under which they may unite in a Democratic World Government?

The affirmative vote in the election of 1942 totaled 205,308 to 67,205. Thus the voters who expressed themselves on this issue three years before the San Francisco Conference showed their willingness to accept, not an alliance of sovereign powers such as resulted in the United Nations, but a world government based on the federation of nations with the transfer of sovereignty to a higher authority.

In the spring of 1946 petitions asking for a further referendum on world government were circulated in a cross-section of communities by some 600 volunteers acting for the Massachusetts Committee for World Federation. These volunteers obtained more than 33,000 signatures, enough to get the question on the ballot in half the election districts. The districts contained more than half the registered voters of the state and covered rural as well as urban communities.

On November 5, 1946, the voters of these districts faced the following question:

Shall the Senator in the General Court from this district be instructed to vote to request the President and the Congress of the United States to direct our delegates to the United Nations to propose and support amendments to its charter which will strengthen the United Nations and make it a World Federal Government able to prevent war?

Official returns in 255 cities and towns found 586,093 (90.2 per cent) in favor and 63,624 (9.8 per cent) opposed. The overall majority in the state was nine to one. And in some districts the vote in favor of the proposal ran as high as fifteen to one. A further important feature of the returns lay in the fact that the sentiment favoring federal world government was as high in rural areas as it was in the cities.

It should also be noted that the issue was made quite clear to the people. Some 500,000 pamphlets explaining the difference between the present United Nations and an effective world

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Fiction. By coincidence, three of the books reviewed this week—all second novels—either illuminate or darken three teeming sections of the City of New York. As might be expected after “A Tree Grows in Brooklyn,” Betty Smith’s “Tomorrow Will Be Better” emerges from a slum street in Brooklyn. Herman Wouk, author of the bestseller “Aurora Dawn,” has chosen The Bronx for his story of normal city boyhood. Charles Gorham has set his terrifying story of the development of a conscienceless and monstrous gangster in Yorkville, a short ride from central Manhattan’s luxurious publishing center, which was the scene of his “The Gilded Hearse.” All three take a dismal view of the pleasures of life in the world’s richest and greatest city. Aldous Huxley’s oddly titled “Ape and Essence” belongs to another world than these urban revelations. It is a grim satire of what will be left of mankind after an atomic war.

Depraved New World

APE AND ESSENCE. By Aldous Huxley. New York: Harper & Bro. 1948. 205 pp. \$2.50.

Reviewed by JOHN WOODBURN

IN 1932, when we had nothing to fear but fear itself, Aldous Huxley threw a book at our heads. A bleakly brilliant, savagely witty satire on a society which had permitted itself to be engulfed by science, “Brave New World” was perfectly keyed to the thin, sour laughter of those depression days. Nearly everybody read it, along with “The Fountain,” and was shocked, irritated, or delighted with it, according to the kind of person he was. It was a diverting, preposterous fantasy, a brilliant bit of *blague*, and all the more welcome if it helped take our minds off the incredible calamity that had befallen us when we had suddenly become Americans without money. That was 1932, a time which now seems very long ago, and which it is possible to recall with a certain wry nostalgia. For those of you who still think of it as a locust year I would remind you that sixteen years ago the only scientist to be found in Oak Ridge, Tennessee, was presumably the local doctor; that you could buy a good, reasonably-priced eating apple on Fifth Avenue for a nickel, if you had the nickel; that at that time the only people afraid of physicists were students flunking the course, and that the word “radioactive,” if anyone ever used it, was spelled with a hyphen and probably referred to someone like Graham MacNamee or Jessica Dragonette. • Now, in 1948, it would appear that the ensuing years have robbed Mr. Huxley’s book of much of its fantasy and a great deal of its laughter. There are things in it which no longer seem seen through a powerful telescope,

things which can be discerned by merely shading the eyes with the hand. We are closer to Mr. Huxley’s brave new world by many generations than we were when it was the most amusing book of the year.

I do not mean to imply that “Brave New World” still presents even a reasonable facsimile of the shape of things to come, however much of a preview it might once have offered. The atom bomb above Hiroshima, which in the split second of its ex-

plosion brutalized all men and elevated all animals, has inevitably altered that. In fact, the way it has been altered is the theme of “Ape and Essence,” in which Aldous Huxley articulates some of the profound horror and despair which he and all other thoughtful men have felt since our scientists hit upon the new, time-saving, presto-type, short cut to victory in war.

The narrative, which is dichotomous, begins on the day of Gandhi’s assassination. Mr. Huxley, represented by the perpendicular pronoun, is in Hollywood, represented by a movie-lot. A friend, Bob Briggs, who writes for the movies, has been boring him with the details of his occupational neurosis. A truck passes them, bound for the incinerator with a load of rejected scripts. Two or three spill off into the street, and they pick them up and idly scan them. One of them, oddly enough entitled “Ape and Essence,” challenges their interest by its angry, misanthropic prose and unconventional treatment. They decide upon a pilgrimage to its author, a Mr. William Tallis, and drive through miles of Goya-like desert to a lonely ranch, only to discover that William Tallis has died six weeks before, his life a mystery interred with his bones. At this point, page 32, Mr. Huxley decides to give us the text of “Ape
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THE AUTHOR: If keratitis hadn’t all but blinded Aldous Huxley at seventeen, he might have ended up “a complete public-school English gentleman,” not to say famous doctor, for which he had begun training. But he might not have developed the insight and farsight that have characterized his prolific works of fiction, poetry, and belles-lettres. Nor his well-known mysticism. The fact that for the past several years he has been successfully improving his vision in Southern California by the Bates method is of profound significance to him, “demonstrating in one particular sphere the possibility of becoming the master of one’s circumstances in-

stead of their slave. Similar techniques for controlling unfavorable circumstances in other isolated fields have been independently developed and are available for anyone who cares to learn them. All, however, are secondary to a great central technique . . . which teaches the art of obtaining freedom from the fundamental human disability of egotism.” After Oxford and limited World War I service, he published his first poetry books and taught. In 1919, he joined the staff of *Athenaeum*, the next year the *London House and Garden*—journalistic experiences of suicidal intensity, spliced as they were with “Limbo,” “Chrome Yellow,” and “Mortal Coils,” all prose. The skeptical “Antic Hay” coincided with his move in 1923 to Italy, where for most of seven years he lived and wrote, among others, “Those Barren Leaves” and “Point Counter Point.” “Brave New World” appeared in 1932, “Eyeless in Gaza” in 1936, “After Many a Summer Dies the Swan” in 1940, “Time Must Have a Stop” in 1944—works lathered with acerbity and erudition. But, says Mr. Huxley, “it is ludicrous to live in the twentieth century equipped with an elegant literary training suitable for the seventeenth. . . . It is with personal, psychological freedom I find myself predominantly concerned.” —R. G.