

Democratic Times

(Views and Comments)

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It will be quite clear to many persons if we point the sequence out to them, why in these democratic times an indiscretion is more discreditable to a man and more embarrassing to his party than the most staggering of "crimes." In a household where correct conduct is "not to scandalise these my little ones," the little ones being children, pious women and men with idealised minds, it would be the role of the devil himself to speak as the plain blunt person, without regard to the "doctrine." With his entrance in that household life would thereafter and for ever be different. Sin would have entered: the frank innocence would be gone: and the shifty eyes which know evil from good left behind. And this is exactly what happens in the democratic community when a governor is indiscreet, His indiscretion undermines his creed, because it undermines his creed's Assumptions—the pillars upon which the fabric of democratic society rests.

It is not the custom to discuss politicians in *The Egoist*, or in the accepted way, their works. Our present unusual course in discussing Colonel Seely's recent political exploits must be explained by the fact that Colonel Seely's conduct was just now politically irregular: and concerning a politician it is not possible to make a more serious allegation than that. To be regular is the first and last word of a politician's creed; he may traverse no least convention without custom's warrant: nor raise the least whisper of inquiry into current and popular dicta. To act otherwise is, politically, to reach the giddiest pinnacle of the immoral at a bound. Therefore Colonel Seely, politically speaking, at this moment commands the fascinating regard an ordinary person would turn upon a Dr. Crippen or a Jack-the-Ripper.

He has questioned a democratic Assumption, and this being a democratic age a democratic Assumption is Sacred. That his conduct has serious consequences from the point of view of democrats, all—his friends and foes alike—will readily allow. They agree that democratic stability is threatened, that the democratic basis of society is being undermined. Naturally enough and obviously to be expected. If there be removed only one prop of a four-legged bench there can

be no surprise if the board lists in the direction of the missing leg. How much more then if two legs; and so forth. No wonder that when a democratic government attacks two democratic assumptions in the course of ten days or so, the democrats—the eloquent women, idealistic men, the labour party and the poor, all these little ones should be scandalised. They are in fact in imminent danger of falling off their democratic basis, platform, what-not, and of being shot on to their own feet. Even if their platform admits of being propped up by some adventitious stump and they are able to maintain the lofty and erect attitude, it will never be quite the same after so undignified a scramble. Never the same sense of security, unquestioned stability, after so nasty a shock. "Doubt, hesitation and pain, forced praise on our part—the glimmer of twilight, Never glad, confident morning again."

The two legs of the democratic platform which have just become rickety with too much unregarding inquiry have both to do with the Army only in the first instance. In their consequence they involve the entire democratic community. The first concerns the purely mechanical admixture of units whose covering label would suggest that it is a single unitary compound: the Army; the second concerns the recognition of a difference between the "People" and the "Army": both questions which would never be raised by an Authority which knew its strong card to be Assumption.

Now the correct democratic assumption is first that the Army is an abstraction. It is the ultimate instrument for the expression of "The People's" will. It is highly improper to regard it as a collection of individuals whether high or low, greater simple. It is the "Means of Coercion": automatic sequence of the willed intention of the Representatives of The People, carrying it into effect involuntarily and of necessity as the nerves and muscles of a healthy person put into effect their owner's will. It is a "Service": its function is to serve: "It's not to reason why, but to do—and die" if need be. That is the "correct" attitude of the Army in the democratic polity: the "Fighting Arm of the Body politic." Colonel Seely questioning members of this force whether they are willing to serve and if not willing bidding them resign, is from the democratic point of view as much in order as a navy would be who before scooping up his spadeful puts it to his elbow-joint whether it means to work or not, and if not, giving it orders to resign. A highly improper proceeding. If the shovelling is to be done the elbow-joint has got to work: the navy does not propose scooping up the shingle with his brain-pan: and the six hundred gentlemen who "govern" us do not personally undertake the task of coercing any reluctant obedience. The annex of a coercing Arm must be attached to the governing office and must work automatically, so that if three hundred odd gentlemen of the brand of Mr. Thomas, Mr. John Ward, Mr. Henderson, Mr. Macdonald and others take their seats in the People's House, they need merely say to the Wellingtons, Nelsons, Kitcheners, Goughs, and all the men under these: "Go," and they go; "Come," and they come.

As we have said, this is the first democratic assumption, and it should never have been put in a position to be riddled: its place is among the sacred. A veritable scourge for the democratic back is Colonel Seely.

Intoxicated by the rashness of his betters no doubt, Mr. John Ward, one of the Labour Little Ones, hacks into a second leg: another Assumption upon which the democratic plank rests. He sacrilegiously raises an issue "The Army versus the People." For the maintenance of the democratic argument, Mr. Ward must assume that Army and People are One: they are an Organic Whole, to give the correct phrase. It is highly improper, irregular, immoral for a democrat to assume that they are other; he wars against his own household in allowing even for a moment that they are two entities capable of existing outside each other as opposing forces: as the claims of the cart might be pitted against those of the horse. A true democratic governor must manage to remain on completely harmonious terms with the Army if he cares for the health of his system. To raise an issue with it is like raising an issue between the blood and the blood corpuscles. The one only postulates the other. For consider what would happen if an issue such as this short-sighted democrat dream of, could be raised: what would it mean? For the "people" to deal with the "Army" it would be compelled merely to secrete from itself another—Army. It is impossible for a "People" to quarrel with an "Army." Only an Army can quarrel with an Army. The "people" will be unduly flattering themselves if they imagine they can quarrel with the "Army." A rabble headed by a Parliament cannot have a quarrel: their limits outside "bounce" are talking and making crosses on paper, added to a little surreptitious "ragging" practised on the non-comprehending. The fact is that when the shattering of the Unity of the People of which these democrats made a beginning when they agreed to recognise a distinction among the People by opposing to it the Army moves on to completion, both the Army and People will be pulverised into units—a consummation of affairs which Democracy of all forms of Authority will be the most loth to recognise. There will be no entity—"The People": only people; no Army—only soldiers, and quarrels will continue to be settled just as the soldiers—the fighters—care to settle them. Above all forms of government Democracy has been contemptible because its exponents have endeavoured to instil a belief that those of the "people" who are not soldiers can remain non-fighters and retain regard. It has worked on the credulous silliness and faint-heartedness of the "people" to persuade them they are "governed" but only with their own consent: it knows their stupidity goes to such lengths that it would be intelligence's labour lost to explain to them the little omission whereby the obtaining of their consent is overlooked. The lot of them are asked to pick between certain Joneses and Browns, certain Smiths and Robinsons, who ostensibly are to govern them willy-nilly, though in reality these governors when chosen could scarcely present a creditable battalion amongst them: these governors of the governed are in turn governed by those who have the power to resist and coerce them.

When the so-called governors are faced with such a resistance, government of the people, by the people, for the people, reveals itself in a jingling incantation, serviceable only to put the already too, too small intelligence of the people under arrest. They are told they are governed "democratically": for some strange reason, to put it like that flatters them: presumably and ludicrously enough it gives them an impression of equality with their superiors. The pride which recognises its own limits and the intelligence which knows itself governed by these is beyond them. They try to claim in a clasp of equality the hand which obviously to any not hypnotised by flattery stretches out towards them to cuff them into doing its bidding. They flatter themselves "they submit to 'law' which is equal for all and which is voluntarily made and voluntarily accepted." That the so-called laws which their elected mannikins put into currency, are, according to the measure of their competence, a restraint, a burden or a command; a bagatelle, an irrelevance, something to mock at, break, or ignore according to their power, is beyond their

comprehension. Democrats tell them "All are equal before the law" and they are a democrat, therefore things must be so and in spite of evidence.

It is this oppressed, powerless, yet credulous host "The People" which in the name of democracy flatters itself it is going to govern. Colonel Seely, inadvertently no doubt, has just been the means of producing some exquisite fun out of the indignation of the democrats which rage in the name of People and Parliament. Mr. Ward and other stalwarts of the People sound for all the world like the frog in the fable whom misleading flatterers had led to believe she was the Queen of Song. "Shall not 'The People' remain paramount?" How "shall" they "remain" what they have never been? If in order to trade upon the fact that the people are gullible it has served many persons' purposes, to tell them so, their misinformation does not alter the actual relation one iota: comfortable, shiftless, timid, the "People," the "Masses" remain what they have always been—the servants of those who are, or who are connected with those, sufficiently acute to understand their points. That there is one law for the rich and another law for the poor is a very inadequate way of putting the matter: there is a law for each man individually, be he rich or poor, which is the resultant of all his powers: his strength, charm, skill, intelligence, daring: the sum of his total worth and what it secures is a man's just dues.

If then democrats are rash enough to drag into the arena of discussion the mixed bundles labelled Army and People, scrutiny of their contents is likely to reveal what their credulity least expects. Consider the Army bundle for a first instance. Unfortunately for democracy, its main structure is built up of men: not screws and pulleys which the working of a lever will set in motion. Second, being so, it is composed of men having different qualities: men who are "soldiers" and men who are "people": men who can fight and who dare to fight and relish it: and men of the people who have so little fight in them that having failed to hold their own among the civilians outside its ranks have drifted into the Army in preference to the workhouse and prison. The Army comprises the cream of an order which is very well able to fight for itself and the dregs of an order which long ago has become so removed from reality that it has ceased to understand the necessity for competent self-defence. At a juncture of importance they are likely to act after their kind: the acknowledgment that they were so likely was Colonel Seely's indiscretion: he should have remembered that the democrats' strong card is assumption: he should have assumed that officers would act like democrats: that they would behave as the "ranks" can safely be relied upon to behave: as automata: obeying promptly as by the reflex action of an involuntary nerve. The democrat Mr. Ward with a sob in his throat pointed out how the ranks, noble and heroic, would shoot down Boers with whom they were in complete sympathy merely at the word of command: how they would turn their rifles on their whilom pals: workers in distress. Of course they would: having no judgment of their own they would shoot down their own mothers if the nod were given them. It is the difference, Mr. Ward, between a democrat and the other thing.

And Mr. Thomas, the secretary of the Railway Servants' Union, was so stirred out of the democratic assumption by the spectacle of failure in the automatic obedience of officers to the orders of the House of Talk as to broach the possibility of suggesting to his union that they should spend the half million they have saved up, not on a week's holiday called a "Strike," but—credible and horrible to a democrat—on rifles. Of course he won't. He would swoon at the image of a respectable working-man holding a rifle: but his own small and private assumption—

that to carry his suggestion into effect would be objectionable to the people whom his wild words were meant to affect, is worth noting. Mr. Ward imagines that he and his like would be more offensive as rivals in a position to command respect than they are at present in their position of smug ineffectualness, arrogant yet impotent, heads addled and swollen with demagogues' flattery, hands innocent of all evidence of substantiation. We believe he makes a mistake. It is not the prospect that they may be the means of increased might to the feeble which makes the demagogues detestable: it is the offensive mixture of oil and bounce which endeavours by scoring a verbal advantage in the terms of current piety to effect a readjustment of powers which they would never dream of putting to the test of genuine comparison.

It is the making Claim by Right to that which they are incapable of securing by Might: the attempt to carry through the exchange by shouting and pious incantation which makes the democratic advocacy offensive. The democrats are *sweedlers*: from no point of view to be recognised as on a level of estimable equality with highway robbers who are gentlemen by comparison.

Supposing then for the moment that through a misunderstanding the Ward-Thomases of the community should slide into the position of the intelligent, and advise the "arming" of their invertebrate unions. What then? Anarchy and the subversion of Society? Pas du tout, messieurs. The structure which threatens to come rattling down about their ears is not "Society" but a particular Conception of Society. We are in sight of the break-up of a Verbal System—not of the loosening of the ties of affection and common-sense as between men and men. Society itself is not based on any Conception whatsoever, it is based on the inborn predilections and instincts of individuals. When these instincts break through the overlying Verbiage and reveal themselves for what they are the "Stability of Society" is unaffected. For whatever these instincts are Society is and will be. That their character confounds the authenticity of some wordy interpretation of these instincts affects the stability of Society as little as an accidental error in the set of the angle of the axis in a pedagogue's globe would affect the sequence of the seasons. Summer will follow Spring although his little model make the poles lie on the equator. And human nature will get on as well when the blight of obedience has been chased from the miners' and railwaymen's unions and the rank-and-file of the Army, as well as from the sensitive ranks of the officers: even let us hope—a jolly sight better. When the assumption that we all obey is shattered, the sense of responsibility for self-defence returns, and a nerveless "People" will be galvanised into an Army, a consummation greatly to be desired by all save doctrinaire non-combatants, and even these suspicious-looking gentry would be forced into a position which would enable them to clear themselves of the charge of cant. To be non-combatants in a community which claims to have its combats waged by an arm worked by an involuntary nerve can be called a stoicism only by supererogation: its virtue is after the event: though doubtless in a military community they would be tolerated in a protected area as a luxury. Their desire not to fight would be defended by others fighting to make its fulfilment possible: even as at present: only their smug aspect might be removed.

The democratic armoury is of course not exhausted when "Society in Danger" fails to set things in a blaze. There is still "The horror of Civil War." Yet there is much to be said in favour of a

gala-performance of 'Civil War. A depressing Civil War is always with us, with its depressing effect due to its drab, furtive, hugger-mugger manner. No guns, no bands, no uniforms, swords, excitements, adventures, or thrilling bravery. Just a sordid, mean pressure: hunger, monotony, dreariness, squalor, filth, bailiffs, policemen, judges, jailors and hangsmen. Just for the tinsel on it there is much to be said for Civil War. Moreover Civil War would tend to put all questions to a trial of strength, and when such a test rises uppermost, even the feeblest must look to his resources. Moreover if existent moral conduct has done its hypnotic work: men of the poorer sort are dazed by the constant keeping in tune with the existent moral incantations. "Thou shalt not steal," good enough on the lips of rich men, makes tragedy on those of the poor. Civil War, with its different and far healthier proprietary "morality," would trouble the orderly waters, and to fish in them would come easier for a mechanised people than "fishing" is in face of an order malignant but nevertheless mesmeric. Civil War Would furnish a springing board for the "poor" to open up new "lines" of "order." There are indeed more things to be made out in favour of Civil War than for the bastard variety which is being waged now. It would break lightly into the established order of things, which has too thoroughly in the minds of those who submit to it, assumed the immutable character of the progression of the sun and the stars.

This Carson campaign capped by the Seely incident and the dissolution of assumptions which this last puts into the melting-pot is going to prove the high-water mark of modern democracy. In England since Disraeli's time, the dominant classes have allowed the anti-democratic argument to go by default: no doubt because they lacked the brains to establish it. Since, with one name or another—Tory-democrats, Conservative Working-men — innocuous flirtations with popular democracy have been going on; it has been necessary for the 'classes' to wait until opportunity made it possible for their instinct to instruct their intellect. Truculent temper is now explaining to a dilatory intellect why democracy won't wash. It will not now take long for them to get the hang of the argument: to see through the windy wordy business: this latter-day Cult of Humanity, the Rights of Man and all that is made to go with them. By challenging the conception of the Unity of the People—or rather by egging the government on to make the challenge—the supporters of Ulster resistance have snipped the one verbal thread which, broken, lets the entire democratic creed run down like a broken chain-stitch. In this common Unity, the people are One and Equal: rendering an equal obedience and receiving equal rights. Split the Unity, question the obedience and you disperse the Equality. With "Unity" questioned the criterion vanishes: the supreme dispenser of favours is confronted with a rival: the seat of Authority is confused and Rights are the vainest of things when Authority is called in question, Rights, Equality, Obedience, Unity, these four are the pillars of democracy. They are bound up in this last Unity; and who now seriously discusses Unity? Who seriously discusses Democracy? None. It is a dead issue. A little picturesque "strongman" play will doubtless be enough to divert the vagrant attention of the mob and so save the government and the politicians' salaries: but for democracy itself a quiet conversational scrutiny—far removed from oratory—will already have been begun: and before it has gone far modern democracy will have found its place in the list of Forgotten Causes.

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