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Catch-Words and Phrases

Many meaningless words and phrases are coined quite by accident. Later, the originator repeats them in the fancy that he has made a clever discovery, or because he likes the sound of his own voice, or both. In either event, he soon has a following. And, if any of these talking apes have access to a newspaper or television station, their utterances have a fair chance of coming into "good usage."

Perhaps one of the first words to occupy the jugglers was "time." Doubtless then, as now, when commenting on approaching old age it was said: "How time goes." Actually, time doesn't go anywhere, we do.

Another word, not always so innocently used in a class society such as ours is "progress." To the man who is accumulating wealth from the labor of others it is progress as he climbs upward to ease and luxury on the shoulders of his fellow human beings. And it keeps his ladder from shaking when he has those beneath him aping the word "progress," when they say with Voltaire's Candide: "It's all for the best in the best of possible worlds." Look what this energetic gentleman is doing! We could all do the same if we were not so lazy. To both rulers and subject progress has ever been bigger cities and nations, faster speed, and above everything else — more people. Rabbits also believe in progress, both in speed and in numbers.

"Freedom," no doubt was used early by all ruling classes, first, to establish their own position, later to console their subjects. "Liberty" has been utilized to the same ends. Taken literally, these words mean: do as you please. But try it and ere long you collide with someone who is also doing as he pleases. If you are one of that great mass of mankind which provides all the wealth in the world and pleases to accept in exchange all its poverty you may discover through time, (the first 90 years are the most difficult) that that powerful minority, the owners of capital, are the ones who control and dispense the progress, the freedom and the liberty.

PRIVILEGE

"Privilege" is another word which covers "a multitude of sins." The ruling class donor of this anodyne seems ever capable of making their loving subjects (or objects) happy by permitting them to work and to vote.

"Thanksgiving" is one day each year in which the humble are even more so than usual, when they become grateful to those above them on the earth or in the sky for things they possess mostly in fancy, when everything (real or supposed) is "bountiful." A given family lives on the fringe of an ever encroaching desert where the fields of grain more often wither than ripen, where life is harsh from its very beginning; yet on this blessed day they deliver up thanks to some nothing, for giving them nothing.

Santa Claus is another hocus pocus which comes once each year to the children of working men. But to the large owners of capital he is no "hocus pocus," and comes every day to fill the hung stockings of the aforementioned gentry to and beyond the hursting point. This trustful, seldom complaining, "Santa" consists of the great mass of workers, both men and women.

Doubtless the most used catch-word in all the world of today is "communism." Not only is it permissible and popular to call the person who disagrees with you a "communist," it is often a patriotic duty. And not only is it like Bergen's "Charlie McCarthy" and mows 'em down, it is a safe, calculated insult. If you question a man's parentage or a woman's morals it could get you into hot water, but call them "communists" and you have really "produced." Whether you know anything of even the first syllable of the "name" you have called them would be unimportant and not at all strange, for perhaps 95% of those who use the word do not know communism from rheumatism, unless some are like me and have rheumatism.

DEFENSE

"Defense" is another subtle word, and with a sinister portent. It is almost always started on its way by those who plan offense. Under cover of this product of forked tongues we are noisily informed that the greater the show of force by capitalist powers and the closer the machinery of destruction of each gets to the others, the greater the guarantee of "peace." We are even told that it is merely defense when one drops bombs onto the war potential of a rival, thereby preventing him from taking the offensive. There are some noble distinctions between words. "Wherever reason falters, a WORD steps in to take its place."

But if we tire of current catch-words we can always turn to phrases. Take "management and labor" for a start. Here is concealment carried almost to its ultimate. Once it is seen that labor is mental and physical energy used in the production of wealth it automatically follows that management is mental labor. Yet a distinction is attempted by the word-magicians and we have a subtlety sublime; the inference being that there is no companion named Capital, or if there should be, he is a useful and productive laborer! Well, there can be no question but that the capitalist "works." He may even burn the candle at both ends scheming how to get all the money in the world before he dies; but then, so does the "second story" man work, only this latter gentleman is sent to jail.

An equally magical phrase is "the people." This has been the poaching ground for political sycophants and shysters for a long, long time. As a boy in the U.S.A., I was thrilled at mention of Lincoln's "Government of the people . . ." etc. But like most children (and adults), I was unaware that it didn't mean a thing. That government is a human institution is understood; most certainly it is not of the horses, of the cattle, or of the sheep. Otherwise the apings of Lincoln's utterance have no real meaning.

GOOD GOVERNMENT

"Good government" has become something of a successor to the "people." And it seems to "pack 'em in." Only recently, in Winnipeg, a 90-year-old British object staggered three blocks to his poll to vote for good government. Before our becoming drunk with this phrase it might be well to find out what today's good government implies. The best are those which govern most, not least, as Jefferson would have liked them. Modern governments have one paramount purpose — to see that capital functions. To accomplish this duty they must make certain that working people work. Most workers live out their lives under the illusion that governments exist to serve them. It is precisely the opposite — they are here to make you serve, and that is exactly what a "good" government does. It must ensure that wealth producers surrender up surplus values, that they receive less than they produce. Further, a government must