



Mr. Ford's Page

THE destructionist groups, which have been making so much noise of recent months and causing the government so much difficulty in dealing with them, represent a type of individual which we always have with us. If they are apparently very noisy now about destroying the more settled and time-proved institutions, it is only because these institutions happen to be to the fore. When the subject was something else, the attitude was the same.

That is to say, the man whose only remedy for governmental flaws is to destroy the government, is the same type of man who goes to breaking dishes on the floor in a fit of anger. He would rather smash his pipe than clean it; he would rather strike his son than counsel him; he would rather damn his opponent than understand him.

Whenever men of this type are placed up against any problem which needs intelligence and patience for its solution, they react at once to their temperamental cure-all, destruction. They are the kind of men who rip a collar to pieces because a buttonhole will not readily open. In a world of their own these men would not be bothersome, for in a world controlled by them there would be nothing to destroy. The very lack of the product of other men's constructive patience would force them to grub for the means to live; it would leave them no time for their peculiar disorder to assert itself. There is mighty little of the destructive element in a state of society which strains everybody's energies to make both ends meet.

Destructive temperaments are largely the product of a condition of plenty and leisure. "Men kick when they wax fat." Destructiveness is a pest which can live only in cultivated fields. Let it destroy that on which it lives, and the destructiveness dies too, like a mania which has sated itself.

The world is large and there is much merit in a recent suggestion that a fertile island under control of the United States should be set aside for those who apparently abhor government, an island where, without duress or hindrance but with unlimited encouragement, they could work out their own theories to logical conclusions and see with their own eyes the end thereof.

However, it is not the destructionists that society needs to fear today, but another and larger class which we may call The Obstructionists. The absolute destructionists are few and futile. They never really destroy except in the physical sense, they never really change anything; at best they are but the tools of those whose principles are constructive.

But the Obstructionists are many and influential. The friends of destruction form the red-hot center, but there is an outer rim of people who escape the fire but remain within range of the heat—a more numerous group than the others, but very harmful.

ONE of the differences between the two is this: the destructionist is always conscious of his position and purpose, but a man may be an obstructionist without knowing it. It may show itself in him not so much a temper as a habit.

If we could assemble the wastes, the leaks, the costly hindrances against which the world must make headway every day, the sum of them would stagger us. They are all the result of intentional or thoughtless obstructionism.

Take the coal situation: everybody connected with it in any way whatsoever has come in for his criticism, and yet there is an element we never hear about that affects every coal user. The little thieves that rake the coal cars at every stop—how much do they add to the price of coal?

Very considerably. A car is shipped containing so many tons. It arrives containing a less weight. Shortage claims are made and the railroads have to make up the difference. These shortages amount to very large sums of money. Who pays it? Ultimately the coal user. The railroad, to protect itself against the shortages caused by thievery, adds the cost to the price of carrying the coal. The man who uses the coal pays for the average

amount of coal the thief takes, in order that he may get the amount of coal he ordered. Probably never a single coal thief ever dreamed that he was an element in the situation at all, but he is. He is an obstructionist.

Little dishonesties, multiplied by twenty-five or thirty million citizens, are a far costlier drain on the country than the larger dishonesties of a few powerful rich men. Yet it is more convenient to blame the prominent few than the obscure multitudes.

In fact it is a fetich with the people, that everyone may be wrong but them. And it is one of the signs of a true leader of the people that he dare rebuke them, that he does not praise them as all-wise and perfect.

Obstructionism is the real trouble of the country today. The attitude of a large proportion of our people seems to be to sag back in the breeching. The only use of a breeching is to hold the wagon back! When the breeching is most in use, the wagon is going down hill! Let this be a word to the wise.

I**N THE present state of affairs, delay is as bad as destruction. We need not fear the Destructionist as much as the Obstructionist. The former builds on a fallacy which will destroy itself. But the latter is a temper that holds everything back. A person need not be important in the usual sense to obstruct progress. Progress just now means production. And everybody is important in production, from the sweeper to the boss. Even the office boy can hold back or help forward. The best ally of the would-be destroyer is the pale and neutral lagger.**

THE yard-master down at the freight yards is also a very important factor. If he is still playing the old game of waiting for a bribe before he will move urgently needed cars in or out, he is an obstructionist. One day's delay on a car may mean the loss of 10,000 days of work. A day's delay on material may mean the loss of an important contract. No one can compute the loss which has been forced on the people of the country by incompetency or unwillingness among men who are responsible for the movement of material and cars throughout the land.

But it is the same wherever obstructionism prevails. Even an office boy may have his part in slowing up the business day, or snarling it at some important point. The stenographer may unconsciously disarrange a whole series of transactions. The janitor responsible for the lighting or heating of an office or factory may help the organization press forward into the collar, or assist it to sag back in the breeching.

Someone may say, "Why talk of breeching in a day of gears? Only farmers and horsemen will understand what you mean by breeching."

Well, this is the reason: life, after all, is run by man-power. You may dispense with horse-power both in man and beast—for the ordinary use of human energy for purposes that might as well be answered by machinery, is just taking your horse-power out of men's bodies, that is all.

Man-power, not muscular power, but man-power, is still the staple of all achievement.

Men harness themselves to a task. The power they put forth in it is their interest, their efficiency, their hope. When these are present in full force, men press forward into the collar; when these are lacking, men sag back into the breeching, for our jobs are only the harnesses we have put on in order to accomplish something. If we sag back on the job, we hold back the load, we don't deliver the goods.

We have machinery to take the place of man's muscles; we have no machinery to take the place of his willingness and interest. Man is like a pulse, he beats strong and full, or slow and weak, but it is the pulse that determines all matters at last. There is no substitute for men, there is no substitute for human co-operation and industry and willingness to put things through.

We suffer for lack of that man-power which it is peculiarly the gift of man to put forth—the power of self-motivation, the power of going at it and sticking to it and getting it done. Too many of us have become wheelbarrows which must be trundled along. We need to become self-starters, and so move obstructions out of the way, instead of becoming an obstruction ourselves.