

*July 28, 1920.*—To the Cinquantenaire this morning with the dogs. The Parc Léopold has become intolerable in its neglect, dirty and littered, the pond covered with green scum.

This afternoon occurred grave events. At four o'clock I turned into the rue Ducale, on my way to Desamblancx's,<sup>1</sup> when I saw an enormous crowd assembled at the rue de la Loi, near the Ministries. The crowd was dense, and filled the rue de la Loi from kerb to kerb as far as the place de la Nation, before the Parliament House. There were banners and bawling orators, and a squadron of policemen on horseback stretched across the street, with drawn sabres, calmly sitting their splendid horses and holding back the mob. For mob it was—a veritable scene of revolution. I looked on a moment and learned that the manifestation had been organized by the Anciens Combattants, who were there to force the Chamber, then sitting, to pass the bill providing a bonus for them—the same sort of grab proposed in America. I went on to Desamblancx's, talked with him a while about the binding of some books, and as I came away, passed by the same crowd. It was an ugly sight; the men composing it for the most part young, with rather vapid, grinning faces, except those who were haranguing little groups, and these all had the hard expression of fanatics, with gleaming eyes. They were all speaking Flemish.

I came home to tea, and, still uneasy about the demonstration, returned with Armour to the scene. He said, as we turned into the rue Ducale, and saw the mob, that the scene recalled to him all that he had witnessed in Petrograd in the early days of the Russian revolution. The crowd was smaller than when I saw it earlier, and the mounted gendarmes had slowly pushed it back to the rue Ducale, leaving the rue de la Loi and the place de la Nation clear. The Park was closed, its gates guarded by policemen. The space in front of the Palace was clear, mounted gendarmes forbidding access to it. That was all we saw. On our way back to the Embassy we met Guy d'Oultremont, who laughingly said that all the Deputies had run away.

Later I learned that the Chamber, having had under discussion a new measure providing for the creation of a fund to be used to relieve the necessities of ex-soldiers, the organization of ex-soldiers had objected, demanding that any money voted by Parliament be divided equally among the discharged soldiers without distinction. A "manifestation" had been called, and the crowd gathered. Max went out to meet them, argued with them, asked them to withdraw, and so on. This they agreed to do provided he withdrew his police, which he had the inconceivable stupidity to consent to do. The

<sup>1</sup> A bookbinder and bookdealer of Brussels, and a warm friend of Whitlock's.

police were withdrawn, Max was cheered, and the ex-soldiers went away. Half an hour later they returned, three or four thousand of them, and there now being no police, rushed, shouting and brandishing sticks and banners, on the Palais de la Nation, entered the Salle des Pas Perdus, easily scattered the few guards there, smashed glass to their hearts' content, rushed up the stairways and burst into the Chamber where the Deputies were sitting. President Brunet declared that the Chamber would not sit under such menace, and scenes of wild disorder followed, the rioters trying to mount the tribune, planting their banners on the President's dais, engaging in fisticuffs with certain deputies, and at last sitting down in the deputies' seats and lighting their pipes! After an hour of scuffling and fighting and all sorts of disgraceful scenes, the rioters were somehow induced to leave the Chamber.

It is said that it is partly due to a plot of the Flemish activists, and I shouldn't wonder if that were true. The approaches to all the public places are patrolled by mounted policemen tonight.

At Desamblancx, this afternoon, we were discussing social progress as it reveals itself under the reign of the disciple of Karl Marx and in the diocese of the Maison du Peuple.

The old bookbinder, in his long white linen blouse, told his story with sadness in his face and voice. He employs about a dozen men. The oldest has been with him for forty-eight years, and is now a grandfather; the youngest in point of service has been with him seventeen. He, in that long workman's blouse, works with them. He pays the union rate of wages, always has. He has always interested himself in their affairs, helped them in their troubles—sickness, debt, whenever a baby was born, and so on. On New Year's day they always come to wish him "a good a happy New Year." The Feast of the Assumption, August 15th, is also the birthday of Desemblancx's wife, and because of this, every year he closed down his shop, gave every one of his employes a week's holiday with full pay, and in addition "a free pass" that is, a ticket on the railway, good for five days and allowing the holder to travel where and when and as often as he pleases. Every year the day after the birthday, the men sent Desemblancx a letter to thank him for this. He preserved all these letters in his safe; the relations between him and his men were of the best; he was friends with all of them.

Last year they wrote him no letter. He asked Jef, the oldest—he of the forty-eight years' service—why this was; Jef, much embarrassed

said that there was "opposition," that some one from the Maison du Peuple had explained that it was silly for them to do this; that he, Desamblancx, was a "patron," a bourgeois, that he had exploited them, and so on.

The old man was and is deeply hurt. The joy has gone out of his little shop. The men come no more to wish him "a good and happy New Year." He has discontinued the week's holiday, the "a free pass," and all that.