

Zo d'Axá

He is Elected

1900

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Listen to the edifying story of a pretty little white ass, candidate in the capital. It isn't a Mother Goose rhyme, or a story from *Le Petit Journal*. It's a true story for the old kiddies who still vote:

A burro, son of the country of LaFontaine and Rabelais, an ass so white that M. Vervoort gluttonously ate it, aspired — in the electoral game — to a place as legislator. The day of the elections having arrived this burro, the very type of a candidate, answering to the name of Worthless, pulled off a last minute maneuver.

On this hot Sunday morning in May, when the people rushed to the polling places, the white ass, the candidate Worthless, perched on a triumphal wagon and, pulled along by voters, traversed Paris, his good city.

Upright on his hoofs, ears to the wind, proudly emerging from his vehicle gaudily painted with electoral posters — a vehicle in the shape of an urn — the head high between the water glass and the presidential bell, he passed through the anger, the bravos and the gibes.

The ass looked on a Paris that gazed on him.

Paris! The Paris that votes, the crowd, the people sovereign every four years... the people sufficiently foolish to believe that sovereignty consists in naming its masters.

As if they were parked in front of the town halls were flocks of voters, the dazed, fetishists who held the little cards with which they say: I abdicate.

Mr. Anyone will represent them. He will represent them all the better in that he represents no ideas. And it'll be fine. We'll make laws, we'll balance the budget. The laws will mean more chains; the budget will mean new taxes... .

Slowly the ass went through the streets.

Along the way the walls were being covered with posters by members of his committee, while others distributed his proclamations to the crowd:

"Think carefully, dear citizens. You know that your representatives are fooling you, have fooled you, will fool you — yet still you go to vote. So vote for me! Elect the ass!... I'm not any dumber than you."

This frankness — a little brutal — wasn't to everyone's taste.

"We're being insulted," some of them said.

"Universal suffrage is being mocked," others more accurately cried out.

Someone angrily brandished his fist at the ass and said:

"Filthy Jew!"

But a sonorous laugh broke out. The candidate was being acclaimed. Bravely, the voters mocked both themselves and their elected representatives. Hats waved, canes. Women threw flowers... .

The ass passed.

He descended from high in Montmartre towards the Latin Quarter. He crossed the *Grands Boulevards*, le Croissant where, without salt, the stuff is cooked that the gazettes sell. He saw the Halles where the starving — the Sovereign People — glean piles of rubbish; the quays, where the voters choose bridges as lodgings... .

The heart and the brain! This was Paris! This was democracy!

We are all brothers, old vagabonds! Pity the bourgeois! He's got gout... and he's your brother, people without bread, man without work, worn out mother who, tonight, will go home tonight to die with the little ones...

We are all brothers, young conscript! It's your brother the officer down there, with his girl's corset and forehead covered with bars. Salute! Fix bayonets! In line! The Code awaits you — the military code. Twelve bullets in your skin for a gesture. It's the republican tariff.

The ass arrived before the Senate.

He rolled alongside the palace, where guards pushed each other on leaving. He continued along the outside (alas!) of the too-green gardens. Then he reached the Boulevard St-Michel. On the café terraces people clapped. The crowd, ceaselessly growing, grabbed copies of the proclamations. Students hooked themselves to the wagon; a professor pushed the wheels...

And as three o'clock sounded, the police appeared.

Since 10:00 am, from post to commissariat, the telegraph and the telephone signaled the strange passage of the subversive animal. The order to bring him in was issued: Arrest the ass! Now the city watchmen blocked the candidate's route.

Near the Place St-Michel Worthless's faithful committee was summoned by the armed forces to bring the candidate to the nearest commissariat. Naturally, the Committee passed over this order: right over the Seine, where the wagon soon stopped in front of the Palace of Justice.

More numerous, the policemen surrounded the unmoved ass. The Candidate was arrested at the gate of the Palace of Justice from which Deputies, swindlers and all the great thieves exit as free men.

The wagon lurched from the movements of the crowd. The agents, the brigadier in the lead, seized the shafts and put on the breast-harness. The Committee didn't insist; they harnessed up the policemen.

It was thus that the white ass was released by his most fervent partisans. Like a vulgar politician, the animal went in the wrong direction. The police re-attached him, and Authority guided his route... From that moment on, Worthless was nothing but an official candidate. His friends no longer knew him. The Prefecture opened wide its doors, and the ass entered as if it were his home.

... If we speak about this today it's to let the people know — the people of Paris and the countryside, workers, peasants, bourgeois, proud Citizens, dear lords — that the white ass Worthless has been elected. He has been elected in Paris. He has been elected in the provinces. Add up the blank and the voided ballots, add the abstentions, the voices and the silences that normally gather to signify disgust or contempt. Do some statistics, if you please, and you can easily verify that in all districts the monsieur who is fraudulently proclaimed deputy didn't receive a quarter of the votes. From this flows the imbecilic locution "relative majority." You might as well say that at night it's relatively day.

And in this way the incoherent, brutal Universal Suffrage, which is based on number — and doesn't even have that — will perish in ridicule. In speaking of the elections in France the gazettes of the entire world, without any malice, brought together the two most notable facts of the day:

"In the morning, around 9:00, M. Felix Faure went to vote. In the afternoon, at 3:00, the white ass was arrested."

I read this in three hundred newspapers. I was encumbered with clippings from The Argus and the *Courrier de la Presse* . There were reports in English, Wallachian, Spanish. . . which I nevertheless understood.

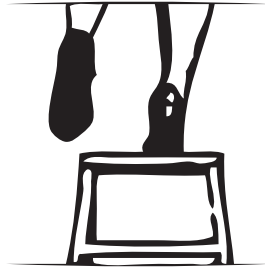
Each time that I read Felix Faure, I was sure that they were speaking of the ass.

* * *

Editor's note: During the electoral period the poster-program was really pasted up on the walls, and the day of the vote the satirical candidate really traversed Paris, from Montmartre to the Latin Quarter, cutting through the enthusiastic or scandalized crowd that loudly demonstrated. Boulevard du Palais, the ass was duly apprehended by the police, who set themselves to drag him to the pound. As the newspapers of the time reported, if there wasn't a fight between the ass's partisans and the representatives of order it's thanks to the editor of *La Feuille* who cried out: "Don't carry on; he's now an official candidate."

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