

THE INSTITUTE FOR SEMANTOGRAPHY

A Non-Profit Institution for the Promotion of Semantics and Semantography

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SEMANTOGRAPHY SERIES NO. 133

PROFESSOR CARLTON WASHBURNE AND SEMANTOGRAPHY

This issue is written in conjunction with Issue No. 129 "Explaining Semantography to an American Magazine Writer". The other issues written in explaining Semantography to that writer are No. 130, 132, 134, 135 and 136. That writer received the first 84 numbers of the Semantography Series and in No. 130 I have quoted from his letters in which he said that of all the issues he likes best Issue No. 78 - Mr. Paul Byers' article in 'PEOPLE' a Sydney illustrated magazine. Paul Byers is an American Journalist. Some of his writing about me and my work I liked, other items he mentioned exasperated me because they were a perversion of the truth and in this issue I feel it necessary to put matters right about what he said of my meeting with Professor Carlton Washburne. Herebelow is the relevant text from his article which appeared in 'PEOPLE' issue April 9th, 1952, page 38.

"On the other hand the tactics he has used to introduce visiting scholars to semantography has sometimes curled the hair of conservative bodies. When an American educator passed through Sydney on a lecture tour a few years ago, Bliss badgered the tour sponsors for an interview with their guest but was consistently refused. The visitor, they said, was in a great hurry and had no time.

But they failed to reckon with Bliss' persistence. He met the American at the airport, brushed the welcoming delegate aside, cornered his prey in a taxi and earbashed him all the way to his hotel - leaving a respectable Sydney educational society with horrified feelings of hostility toward Bliss, and perhaps toward semantography. The American scholar, however, was successfully earbashed into submission and is now in Bliss' records with genuine quoted compliments for semantography. Having been introduced to the subject - although somewhat harshly - he has given it considerable study and has even helped Bliss to promote the idea in America."

This story is more than exasperating. It is a shameful lie and perversion of the truth. Here is what really happened. Professor Washburne visited Australia as guest of the New Educational Fellowship. The other visitor who appeared with Professor Washburne on the lecture platform was James Hemming, an educationalist from Great Britain. After one of their lectures I approached both lecturers asking them to give me an interview and mentioning that I wanted to introduce them to a new idea. James Hemming agreed to this and we met later on when he returned to Sydney after his extensive tour. Professor Washburne whose stay in Australia was for less time than Hemming told me that he had to leave for the other capital cities and he will return on the 1st September, 1950. He will arrive from Melbourne by aeroplane and will have to stay in Sydney for about six hours before boarding the plane for the United States. He asked me to come to the airport. This I did.

I found at the airport two women and one man, members of the New Education Fellowship who also waited for Washburne. In another issue (to be written) I shall tell of the futile efforts which I have made to interest the new Education Fellowship of Sydney (of which I was a member) in my work. They did not want to hear it and did not want even an informative talk to anyone of them. It was enough apparently that I was not a certified teacher.

When seeing the 3 people from the New Education Fellowship, I greeted them and answered their enquiry that I was waiting for Professor Washburne. At this there were whispers and then one told me that Professor Washburne would have no time for me as he is bound to meet some Minister or someone. I told them in courteous tones that Professor Washburne has asked me to wait for him and it is only for Professor Washburne to cancel this appointment. They tried to

persuade me not to speak to Professor Washburne. I refused. At that time my state of mind was that of quiet desperation. The fact that the New Education Fellowship refused to hear about my work was disappointment enough. Here now is my first opportunity to introduce a great American Scholar to my work and here they are again, New Education Fellows, who try to prevent it. I was determined to stay.

When the plane arrived, the women rushed out to the tarmac, greeted Washburne and started to whisper looking at me. I saw that they tried to persuade Professor Washburne to cancel our meeting. It took some time, but at least Professor Washburne came up to me and said "Mr. Bliss I am sorry but I have little time and my friends have made arrangements for me. I do not think that I have time to speak to you." This meant, of course, for me the end of my hopes. In desperate mood, I said to Professor Washburne, seeing that we are alone and that the 3 people cannot hear me. "Professor, here is the text of your lecture which you gave over the Australian National network and in which you expressed great interest in every new idea in education. Here is the letter with which the Australian Broadcasting Commission gave me permission to quote you in print. Well, either you meant what you said, then you have got to listen to me, or you did not mean it. How many new ideas in education have you really seen in Australia? I know of all the trends in Australia and I know there is no new idea to be seen here, except mine. Haven't you had enough palavers here and must you refuse me the few minutes I have been waiting for? Let those females go to the devil! I am the only man who can show you a new idea in education here and I say that you cannot refuse me this short interview! You have still 6 hour's time before you leave". At this, Professor Washburne was taken aback by my outburst and wavered. At that moment, the two women and man came along and tried to take him away, saying to me that I can see that Professor Washburne is busy. My mind worked feverishly, and I asked "where are you taking Professor Washburne?" The answer was North Sydney (the idea with the Minister was a lie). "Well then", I said "let me go with you, Professor, in the car and give me the time you spend in the car." At this the 3 members protested, saying there is no room in their car for me. "Well," I said, "I shall take a taxi and the taxi will follow you." This proposal they simply could not refuse because they saw that Professor Washburne would have the greatest difficulty to refuse me travelling with him. I called a taxi and we went in. One of the women went to the driver and made quite sure that I shall not take the Professor away somewhere else, and so off we went.

From Mascot to North Sydney is a drive of about only 20 minutes. With all the desperate eloquence at my command in the jolting taxi, I explained to Washburne my work and especially the semantics of Semantography with regard to the training of children in the recognition of vague and ambiguous words, which are only hurting other people.

I saw that he was very much impressed and on arrival at his destination he said to me that he thinks the idea is great and that I should make some experiments with children, adolescents, adults of different I.Q. I should teach them something of my Semantography and should record it, in how quick a time they are absorbing it and can work with it.

I was overwhelmed with his good words. The reader must understand that this was the first time during the last 8 years when I have had the opportunity to explain to a responsible educator my work. I was elated and jubilant and asked him whether he would be kind enough to write down what he said. He agreed to this readily and taking out his fountain pen, he wrote the following words.

"A brief examination of the "100 Symbol Elements" idea of Mr. C.K. Bliss, shows it to be ingenious."

"I believe it should be subjected to controlled experimentation to demonstrate whether or not it is practicable. If it proves practicable, it could be of great value."

As this was the first written testimonial on my work, written by a professional educator, I was much elated about it. I overlooked of course the mental reservations made in it by Washburne ("whether or not it is practicable"). I mistook the word "ingenious" to have some reference to "genius". I felt intense joy.

Again we shook hands. I said goodbye to him. He could see from my glowing face that he had made me very happy.

A few weeks later I met his colleague, James Hemming, and explained to him my work. James Hemming took the Synopsis with him and wrote to me afterwards the following: (This is the complete extract from Semantography Series No.6)

JAMES HEMMING,

Research Officer of the Association for Education in Citizenship, England's Member of the National Institute of Industrial Psychology, the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations, Author of DEMOCRACY IN SCHOOL LIFE, TEACH THEM TO LIVE, THE CHILD IS RIGHT, (co-author), etc. writes:

"The world is now one, technologically and economically speaking. There is, thus, an urgent need to develop a language-free means of conveying ideas universally as, in limited fields, has already been achieved by musical notations and by the international symbols used in mathematics, electronics, etc.

Your system is designed precisely to achieve this and warrants an extensive trial with children, with adults, with persons of different nationalities and with individuals of varying intelligence. If the system stands up to this test - and I see no reason why it should not --then obviously, this particular method of jumping the language barrier between peoples should be developed as rapidly and as widely as possible."

These statements are incorporated in Semantography Series No. 6 together with statements by Bertrand Russell and other scholars.

These two statements made me very happy and I believed that now the way is open to other educators. Carleton Washburne and James Hemming will inform other educators and sooner or later interest in my work will gather momentum. The opposite happened.

In his speech over the Australian National Network, Carleton Washburne said these words - "In most of your schools here in Australia, in my own country in Britain, in France, in Italy, in China, wherever you wish to go, the great bulk of the schools are still plodding along doing a little better the same things they were doing a generation ago", and then he added the following words which, however, were deleted in the printed version which appeared in the weekly journal of the Australian Broadcasting Commission. He said, "We educators take easily to technical innovations, but we resist any change we even pride ourselves with the antiquity of our educational innovations."

I have followed his radio talk and have written down these words in shorthand and they are engraved in my mind ever since. Here is a great confession made by a great educator about the educators in general. He himself proved the truth of his own statement. ^{Though} we corresponded in the friendliest terms, he did nothing whatever for Semantography and refused even to propose to the librarian of Brooklyn College (where he taught) the acquisition of my three books. The set which I have given to him gratis remained unused and useless in his own library. 5 years later when most of my sets were gone, I asked him whether he would contribute his set to the Public Library of New York. He agreed to this, handed over my 3 volumes to the Librarian of the Public Library. This was the end of all my hopes which I have set in the first educator whom I introduced to my Semantography.