

DEMOCRACY — A REALIST VIEW

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I

It is no part of my purpose to decry democracy as a political ideal. My object here is mainly to examine its practical working. I share to the full the prejudice of the Anglo-Saxon against Napoleons, Kaisers, and even Mussolinis, and I accept wholeheartedly the immortal phrase of Abraham Lincoln — as a political ideal. Grumble as we may at the working of the machinery of democracy, — and I am going to grumble a good deal about it here, — practical people have no reason to believe that there is anything wrong with democracy as an ideal. In principle democracy is undoubtedly the best system of government. Until human nature is so perfected that no government is necessary, democracy holds the field as the ideal form of government. Anarchy is, I submit, the ultimate ideal, but it will be centuries before that is possible. Meanwhile democracy is the best that we can hope for.

The best definition is that contained in the New English Dictionary, where democracy is defined as 'that form of government in which the sovereign power resides in the people as a whole.' 'Government of the people, by the people, for the people,' is almost as good a definition, but most of the definitions that have been given omit one or other of the essential ingredients of democracy. Thus Mazzini's 'Progress of all through all under the leadership of the best and wisest' is perfectly

compatible with a benevolent autocracy or with government by samurai. The essence of democracy lies in the possession of sovereignty by all the people in a community, and if the word 'all' were in Lincoln's phrase, as it possibly was in his mind, — though this is doubtful, as Lincoln probably never advocated the enfranchisement of women, — his definition could be accepted without reservation.

It is quite obvious that, accepting this strict definition of democracy, we cannot look in history for many examples of a complete democracy. Communities in which certain social classes, religious sects, subject races of either sex, did not share equally with their fellows the sovereign power may have delighted to call themselves democracies, and no doubt many of them have presented various features of the democratic system, but true democracies they were not. Immense instruction can be derived from the study of such communities, but it is always necessary to remember that they were not more than pseudo-democracies. The field for the study of true democracy in its practical working is extremely limited, and in but a very few cases have we anything but very modern material for our research. The term 'democracy' is so loosely employed that the essential limitation in its definition — 'resides in the people as a whole' — is usually ignored. The danger of this is that those who think about

democracy study the pseudo-democracies of history without realizing that such studies are apt to be misleading. The bed-rock facts are that democracy in its proper meaning is an essentially modern conception and that there are even now comparatively few examples of it.

To take an extreme instance: people often talk and write of the city-states of ancient Greece as democracies. Those states indeed possessed a splendid sense of citizenship and showed many democratic features, but underneath was the fundamentally undemocratic basis of slavery. In its prime Athens was an important slave market, and the State derived a considerable revenue from a tax on the sales. No community in which slavery existed can reasonably be termed a democracy, and comparatively little help in the examination of the workings of a democracy can be derived from studying such communities. This rules out, for instance, the United States before the Thirteenth Amendment of 1865. Similarly, countries which excluded Roman Catholics or Jews from the franchise are beyond our pale of inquiry. Also any country which has a franchise based on a high property-owning or educational qualification and any country in which there are not equal political rights for men and women are strictly outside. In varying degrees, as their conditions approach government by the 'people as a whole,' such communities afford useful experience of the tendencies that democracies show, but they are not very helpful when we want to get experience of how true democracies work.

I am not merely making a debating point. This consideration is vital. A fervor for democracy is spreading so rapidly over the whole globe that practically nobody in power pauses to realize that the world is plunging into

a Great Unknown. Here in England, the home of parliamentary government, people talk as if decades and even centuries of experience lay behind the assertion that 'government by all the people' is the best possible method. The truth is that our franchise reforms of 1832, 1867, and 1884, drastic though they seemed at the time, left us with a system in which the great masses of the people had very little part in the government of the country. Only in 1918, in the height of the wave of post-war sentimentalism which gave the United States prohibition and England democracy, did England really begin to merit the name 'democracy,' and not till the end of 1928 can England strictly claim the title, for only by that time will men and women be on an equal political footing. Sir Henry Maine, the great legal historian, gives us reason to be thankful that, up to 1918, democracy came to us slowly. 'It seems to me quite certain,' he has written, 'that, if for four centuries there had been a very widely extended franchise and a very large electoral body in this country, there would have been no reformation of religion, no change of dynasty, no toleration of dissent, not even an accurate calendar.' We can learn a great deal from our past experiences, but I feel confident that the rash rush to democracy that the British Parliament took in 1918 would never have been made if our legislators had realized that there was so little experience to guide them. We should have progressed toward democracy more slowly and should not now be engaged in completing the edifice without anybody in power querying the wisdom of what we are doing.

Similarly in the United States. Certain states have, probably, been true democracies for some time, but I unhesitatingly assert that the American

nation as a whole cannot yet be regarded as a true democracy. Were it not that Theodore Roosevelt—who, with Alexander Hamilton, has always been my hero of American history—did not hesitate to say that the Declaration of Independence was a document for which he had very little reverence, as it made certain untruths immortal, I should not dare in an American journal to be frankly critical of such a national charter. But how can any realist be otherwise than critical of a document which declared that 'we hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights. . . . That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed,' when in fact nearly ninety years later a constitutional amendment that 'neither slavery nor involuntary servitude . . . shall exist within the United States' failed to obtain the necessary two-thirds majority? We know that Jefferson, like Washington, Franklin, Hamilton, and even Patrick Henry, personally realized at moments that such utterances were in marked contrast with a reality that they would have altered if they could. But even the obvious lesson that political highfalutin is dangerous has not been learned, save by a realist like Roosevelt. Five years after the Thirteenth Amendment was at last accepted came the Fifteenth, declaring that 'the right of the citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.' Seldom have democratic principles been so drastically enacted into law. But what of reality? The study of the state electoral laws in the Southern States is

of great interest to a realist student of democracy.

Lest it be thought that I am criticizing American political policy, which would be an impertinence in an Englishman, I would say frankly that, were I an American, I should enthusiastically defend what has been done—though I should have opposed the Fifteenth Amendment had I been then alive and had the chance. I cite these facts merely to show the necessity for distinguishing between theory and practice when studying democracy.

II

The history of all countries teems with misunderstandings about democracy. In most countries to-day, certainly in both England and America, we hear politicians, and even statesmen, talking platitudes about democracy, without either realizing how very limited is our experience of it or considering whether its full adoption is not likely to upset their fondest beliefs. So it has always been. Could anything show the fervor of democratic belief better than the words of John Adams when defending John Hancock against the charge of smuggling? The Boston merchant, he argued, had never consented to the law which made his act a crime. 'He never voted for it himself and he never voted for any man to make such a law for him.' No doubt Hampden used similar words in his day. But the great men of history who led the battles of political liberty had merely relative ideas of the kind of liberty that they sought. Each wanted one or two steps farther. None even dreamed of a political system in which power rested with the people as a whole. Even to-day such statements are being made wholesale; for instance, by English politicians who have

opposed the enfranchisement of women, by Indian politicians who would fight rather than let any step be taken to emancipate the fifty million 'untouchables' of India, by Sunni Arabs in Irak who never dream of even encouraging the Shiah tribesmen to qualify for the vote, by Americans who would never allow the Fifteenth Amendment to be thoroughly carried out, and by South Africans who support laws for the physical segregation of negroes.

Unfortunately there are so few historians who can be trusted to scrutinize the democratic leaders of the past in the light of true democratic principles. In the most recent, and in many respects the best, history of England, by Dr. G. M. Trevelyan, I read, for instance, that 'English society was then (1773) still aristocratic, while American society was already democratic.' While the author admits that 'the Revolutionists . . . were not "Liberals," for they did not wish to allow liberty of speech or opinion to their opponents, whom they eventually expelled from the country,' yet he asserts that 'they were Democrats, with less than no reverence for any authority not derived directly from the people: they sought . . . to make the poor man count as much as the rich man in politics.' These are dangerous half-truths. Did Washington, Hamilton, Franklin, did even Jefferson ever dream of a system in which all people, regardless of color, sex, education, and so forth, equally shared political power? And, as to the last quotation from Dr. Trevelyan, how many of the leaders of 1776 wanted true political equality even between rich man and poor man? Surely the following words from a distinguished American professor are nearer the truth: 'In 1774 came the climax in the struggle between rich and poor,

East and West, those with a vote and those who were voteless, between privilege and the welfare of the common man. The two classes might work in harmony or might clash on the question of resistance to Great Britain, but they were pretty sure to be in opposition on the issue of individual rights.' (*Causes of the War of Independence*, by C. H. Van Tyne)

I hope that I have established the point that, except in rare and minor instances, true democracies are very modern and very few. I hope I have proved that very few of those in history who have had the name of democrat thrust upon them really deserve it, and that comparatively few of those to-day who talk democracy really mean that they want true democracy here and now. Before passing to an examination of how true democracy works, I would enter one more caveat. The assumption is widespread, especially in England and America, that democracy is spreading gradually over the whole globe. It may be, but even more remarkable is the reaction against it. Russia never was a democracy, and therefore the tyranny of Bolshevism is out of our picture. But in Italy and Spain, though full democracy was never realized, sufficient advance in the democratic direction had been made to make the régimes of Mussolini and of General Primo de Rivera a very marked contrast. Here we have two great nations, one certainly an enlightened first-rank Power, deliberately stopping the progress toward democracy and establishing new forms of government which conflict with most of the generally accepted conceptions of democracy. There is a good deal to be said for the view that Fascism is in reality far more democratic than the system which it superseded, since in its own peculiar way it does result in

government according to the popular will. Fascism may be an undemocratic way of realizing the essentials of democracy. But, however this may be, the fact is that in both Italy and Spain the conventional progress toward democracy was deliberately stopped.

Many movements are afoot in many parts of the world, especially in Egypt and India and, perhaps, in China, which may be interpreted as a growing demand for democracy, — though personally I am very suspicious of the genuineness of the democracy that is being demanded, — but there is no ground for maintaining that progress toward democracy is general. It is certainly within the bounds of possibility that we now living may see, first perhaps the completion of democracy, but then a huge reaction against it. A decade of complete democracy in England, which will, as I have said, only begin in 1929, may produce surprising reactions. And if ever an equal and effective franchise, regardless of color or sex, exists in the United States, the results in the hands of such a practical people as the Americans may be startling.

III

In looking for experience of the practical working of democracy, let us first of all glance briefly at the countries which were slower to adopt even the measure of democracy to which they attained. In Italy and Spain the adoption of parliamentary government with a semidemocratic franchise resulted in stagnation and corruption to such an extent that revolutions were caused in which most of the generally established beliefs of democrats were ignored. Blind believers in democracy would no doubt say that, if only the franchise had been more fully democratic in Italy and

Spain, all would have been well; like a doctor who, if his medicines disagree with the patients, promptly doubles the dose. With such it is hopeless to reason. I am content with the fact that fairly strong doses of democracy proved utterly unsuitable to the peoples of Italy and Spain.

Germany is as good an example of the practical blessings and drawbacks of democracy as any country can give. The Weimar Constitution of 1919 has been described by that distinguished historian, Dr. G. P. Gooch, as 'a consistent democracy' and he adds that 'the commentators who describe it as the most democratic constitution in the world are not exaggerating its character.' Germany now has universal suffrage for men and women over twenty; in fact, over half the population possesses the vote, and there are neither legal nor practical impediments in the way of the vote being used. Such democratic quackeries as proportional representation, the referendum, and the initiative have all been adopted. It would take more than one generation to enable any people to settle down with so democratic a constitution, and yet it is less than sixty years since the Germans became a united people, and up to 1919 they lived under a constitution that lacked every essential of democracy. There is no tradition of democracy, and without that an ultrademocratic constitution is a rash experiment.

In some respects experience since 1919 has been favorable. The country has surmounted unprecedented internal crises and pursued a peaceful policy under most trying circumstances toward her neighbors, but for the latter thanks are largely due to the disarmament clauses in the Treaty of Versailles. It is too early yet to answer the question whether the Germans can make a success of democracy. The

country is not politically happy and yearns for a leader, as was amply illustrated by the pathetic election of the elderly Hindenburg as President. The type of statesman thrown up by Germany's ultrademocratic system is not one that satisfies the German people, always prone to follow a big man. Up to the present, those who would be Napoleons have been kept quiet for fear of those who would be Lenins, and between the two democracy has had a fairly even course. But, as one who knows Germany and the Germans fairly well, I believe that Germany will have to pay for her sudden dash to democracy in 1919. The craving of the people for leadership will not indefinitely be suppressed, and the mediocrities which the democratic system exalts will not long be tolerated when the control of Germany's late enemies finally ceases. The election of Hindenburg was a portent not to be ignored. One can only hope that a compromise will be possible, but I feel sure that in that compromise, if it comes, there will be many departures from the pure democracy of 1919.

In his *Falldon Papers*, Viscount Grey (Sir Edward Grey) wrote, recalling events when he was first elected to Parliament in 1884, that 'at that time no one questioned that democratic representative government was the best form of government and that, as far as any government could do it, it would satisfy the needs of the community.' Even Viscount Grey, with all his ardent Liberalism and belief in democracy, does not claim that this is so now. The oncoming of democracy has resulted in a serious lowering of the respect in which our institutions of government are held in the country. In order to give the opinion of one who has at least no bias against democracy, let me quote Sir Henry Slessor, K.C., M.P., the Solicitor-General in the last

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Labor ministry, and probably the Attorney-General in the next. In a letter to the *Times* (May 6, 1927) he wrote: 'I believe the English Judiciary to be the only portion of our government which has survived the vulgarity and decadence of modern times. While the Executive and Legislature, both in personnel and achievement, display every sign of deterioration, the Judiciary alone remains worthy of its highest traditions.' It is noteworthy that under our constitution the people have no control whatever over the judiciary. The moral scarcely needs pointing.

I believe that candid Americans would tell the same tale of their country. In a book by a great American historian I read: 'We (in America) have applied universal suffrage to the whole administration of our city corporations and the result in most of our cities has been not merely disheartening, but debasing.' I for one refuse to believe that the vaudeville municipal politics of Chicago are typical of American urban life, but I wonder how many Americans who study their government, either urban or national, would assert that democracy does not debase the esteem in which government is held.

IV

True democracy presupposes two conditions: first, that the vast majority of the people have a genuine opinion upon public affairs; secondly, that electors will use their power for the public benefit. As regards England I feel certain that neither condition is yet fulfilled, and all my reading and contact with Americans here induce me to believe the same of America.

On the first point, though in national elections we often get 70 to 85 per cent of the electors voting, every

species of propaganda and misrepresentation is employed — by all parties in varying degrees — in order to whip up enough enthusiasm to get the voters to the poll. In municipal elections the proportion of electors who vote varies usually between 20 and 50 per cent. In London never have more than 51 per cent voted at an election for the London County Council. In some of the minor municipal authorities the apathy is such that elections have been swayed by unemployed voters who were actually drawing doles from municipal funds. The democratic system ignores the fact that the best citizens are often those who are not interested in public affairs. The man who has a happy home life, who is fond of study and has his hobbies, is far less likely to spend his time in political agitation or even in voting than is the man who is obsessed by some form of revolutionary mania. Democratic elections are of necessity biased against the men and women of conservative mind. Experience in America is, I gather, much the same. I happen to have before me figures relating to the last presidential elections in South Carolina: enfranchised population about 721,000, including 389,000 negroes who are described as 'only nominally citizens' — a strange comment on the Fifteenth Amendment; actual voters in the 1920 election 67,000 and, in 1924, 51,000. I should be surprised to learn that state or municipal elections showed any better results. But even if the electors in the mass have opinions, it can only be the very blind enthusiasts who believe in *vox populi vox dei*. Democracy is no guaranty of wisdom. After all, Lord North undoubtedly represented what public opinion there was in his day.

As to the other condition of democracy, that the electors will vote

according to their conception of the national interest, does experience so far justify us in believing this? When in Queen Victoria's time the middle and professional classes were by degrees given the vote, the State was strengthened, because the newly enfranchised electors did vote according to their view of what was good for the country. But our wholesale enfranchising of every adult is resulting in the slow suffocation of government, simply because class and trade interests are now being placed before the general welfare. Electoral appeals now are nearly always to the pocket and not to the conscience. We have reduced ourselves to a condition in which the mass of the voters is mainly concerned in extorting personal benefits from the public purse and in which those who pay taxes directly have but an insignificant voice at public elections. Our politics are becoming a gigantic conspiracy to make the rich poorer in the fond belief that thus the poor will become richer. All political parties vie with each other in offering bribes to the electors out of public funds. The Conservative (and theoretically antisocialist) Government of 1924 began its career with a huge scheme of free and partly contributory pensions which, at a time of the greatest financial anxiety, added many millions sterling to public expenditure. The shortage of houses for the wage-earning classes caused by the war has been mainly rectified by the provision of houses at uneconomic rents out of public funds, and even the *Times*, in a leading article (October 24, 1927), declared that 'the provision of homes for the working classes in town and country has come to be regarded as one of the social services incumbent on the State.' *L'appétit vient en mangeant*. The demand of the electors is insatiable.

What our electors look for from

politics is well shown in the letter written to his constituents by Sir John Simon, K.C., M.P., when he explained to them his forthcoming absence from England to preside over the Statutory Commission on the future government of India. 'During the time I am away,' he wrote (the *Times*, November 11, 1927), 'I have made arrangements which will enable the many questions as to pensions, compensation, unemployment benefit, and the like . . . to be dealt with efficiently on my behalf.' That is what interests the electors to-day. The last annual conference of the Labor (Socialist) Party was such that one correspondent wrote, 'I have come away from the Labor Party Conference with the impression that their policy is to put all the nation on the dole.' Despite our huge public expenditure for free education, the demand now is for free 'maintenance allowances' so that parents need not provide for their children while at school. The newly enfranchised classes seem to think of nothing but using their power for obtaining personal benefits. Our actual pauper population is about 1,200,000, and this figure takes no account of those who receive free education, uneconomic houses, free old-age pensions and pensions in widowhood, and unemployment benefits toward the cost of which they pay but a fraction. Such is our system of poor relief that, to quote an official report of the Ministry of Health, 'during the past six years numbers of young men, without employment and maintained on Poor Law relief, have married, securing thereby an increase in their income from relief, and have families, each addition to the family bringing its addition to the family income.' Since 1918 paupers are not deprived of their votes.

Can one wonder that it was necessary for a cabinet minister in the House

of Commons (July 5, 1926) to say: 'There was a very serious danger of political corruption. It was common knowledge that elections of Guardians (our Poor Law authorities) were being fought and won upon promises of extended relief, that those who refused to make such promises were accused of intending to stop relief altogether, that people in receipt of relief were being allowed to go about as canvassers, and that in some parts there was open and unabashed corruption'? A special law has recently been passed to supersede 'popularly elected' Guardians who thus abuse their public position, by officials nominated by the Ministry of Health. The record of one of the Boards of Guardians was thus described in a review of an official report in the *Times* (March 9, 1927): 'There are three outstanding facts. The first is their reckless grants of extravagant relief without proper investigation. The second is their remarkable method of packing their own body so as to exclude even a minority of possible critics. The third is their acceptance from their grateful beneficiaries of a *douceur* for themselves.'

To-day our theoretically democratic system of government has many features which render it farcical. I quote the following from a recent review of the Poor Law administration: 'One of the most unsatisfactory features of the extension of out-relief payments is that large numbers of the recipients are electors, and Socialist candidates can obtain their support by promises of more generous treatment than is considered just by . . . Guardians who consider the heavily burdened ratepayers as well as the unemployed. There are districts in East London where the "relief vote" is so strong and is so carefully "nursed" by the Socialists that it is almost hopeless,

while the general public is apathetic, to expect Labor Guardians to be displaced.' Our Charity Organization Society has issued a statement to the press wherein it was said that 'in portions of London . . . the Local Labor Party . . . offers outdoor relief on a lavish scale to all and sundry' and that this policy 'has been very freely adopted since the Act of 1918 removing the pauper disability.' Many other kinds of corruption exist in such areas — and East London is not at all a rare exception. Socialist members of local authorities vote themselves and their friends to Poor Law jobs. They make the promise of high wages or other benefits a platform in their electoral policy. They secure the support of local tradesmen by suggesting to the recipients of public relief where they should spend their relief money. Instances have occurred where Boards of Guardians have summoned meetings of relief recipients before coming to a decision on points of policy. These and kindred methods are being employed in all parts of the country, and the suggestion that is often made that 'public opinion' can put matters right by taking greater part in local elections is idle, because those who pay for the larger share of public expenditure either have no votes in the area where most of it is spent — for example, incorporated companies — or are greatly outnumbered by those in whose interest it is to maintain the present methods.

The United States is not a stranger to political corruption, though so far, thanks to industrial prosperity, there has apparently been little corruption of the sort that haunts us in Great Britain. But the facts I have cited, which are the immediate consequence of an undue rush toward the democratic goal, may be interesting as a warning, for no country can reasonably

expect an indefinite spell of prosperity. When bad times come it will be surprising indeed if the masses do not use their political power much in the same way as has happened with us. Rich America would be a paradise for the Socialists.

V

Nothing better illustrates the danger of enfranchising the masses before their moral and cultural development guarantees good citizenship than the latest proposal of the British Labor Party. That party, be it remembered, is the official opposition in Parliament and has already formed one ministry. For years the Labor Party advocated a capital levy. The folly of such a proposal was at length apparent even to Socialists, so in 1927 the party evolved as an alternative the surtax, a tax of two shillings in the pound upon all incomes over 500 pounds per annum derived from property or investments. Already, be it noted, 'earned' income is taxed at the rate of 20 per cent, and so-called 'unearned' income is taxed at a graduated scale up to about 50 per cent. Apart from this national taxation, we pay local rates on our houses, which in urban areas vary from 50 per cent to 100 per cent on the rent or annual value of the house. The latest proposal is in addition to all existing taxation. The capital-levy idea was put forward as a means for reducing our enormous war debt, and the Labor Party claims that the surtax would have the same result, as it would be paid by the same people who would have paid the capital levy. The original proposal was that the yield of the surtax — estimated at eighty-five millions sterling per annum, though this is probably a gross exaggeration — should be used for the same purpose, but at once the Socialist politicians were up in arms and now demand that

these millions shall be squandered on 'social services' — in other words, in more schemes for doles in one form or another.

The folly of such plans at our present stage can hardly be exaggerated. Even Mr. Philip Snowden, M.P., the Socialist ex-Chancellor of the Exchequer, admits that our huge war expenditure and our debt to America necessitate economies and savings. Only by individual savings can we rebuild our prosperity. Capital to-day is scarce, and therefore expensive, and, as Mr. Snowden says, 'lack of savings meant dearer money and the putting up of local and national taxation.' But the Socialist politician, whose eye is fixed solely on the votes of the masses, cares nothing for these warnings. Before the war we as a nation saved about four hundred millions sterling a year. To-day we are saving less, despite the fall in the value of money. Who is likely to save when his income from investments is to be thus penalized? The immorality of democratic politics under present conditions is clearly shown in the suggested exemption from this proposed tax of those whose investment income does not exceed 500 pounds a year. The reason is simply to avoid offense to the smaller capitalists, who in voting power far exceed those who have more than 500 pounds a year.

The enfranchisement of the masses before their sense of citizenship is adequate — mere education is not enough — results in an utter inability on the part of the electorate to face any big problem. Imperial problems and questions of foreign policy — except when Chinese Bolsheviki mesmerize the Labor Party — usually have with us to be regarded as non-party, for both parties know that they cannot make political capital out of them. And such vast problems as

overpopulation are utterly ignored; they are not good political business. The big problem in England to-day is national economy, but, such is our electorate, every politician knows that votes can best be gained by promising more expenditure. Even Conservative ministers, though they pay lip service to the creed of economy, have utterly failed to effect any adequate reduction in our national expenditure. Our public expenditure on education is now fifty as against nineteen millions sterling a year before the war; health insurance, unemployment insurance, and so forth, cost us thirty-six as against nineteen millions; our Civil Service expenditure is three times what it was before the war. These are the direct results of the extension of the franchise in 1918 — and more millions of voters are to be added by 1929. Surely this Rake's Progress should damp the ardor of those who talk platitudes about democracy.

Democracy under present conditions begets a most injurious sense of dependence on the community. The tale is the same in all countries. In a recent book on *Five Years of Irish Freedom*, the author, an Irishman himself, says that Home Rule has produced this result: the Irishman 'looks to the State for everything and forgets that the State is merely what he makes it.' Wherever democracy goes ahead of a true sense of citizenship, similar results must ensue. Big problems are ignored and politics become a sordid tussle for class benefits. As Dean Inge says in his book on *England*, 'any large and organized body which recognizes no duties to the State as a whole, but only to one class, may make popular government impossible. . . . Our institutions are adapted only to a nation which acknowledges a deep-lying unity and identity of interests beneath all political differences.'

What has been written here is, of

course, in condemnation of the electorate. But the electors are not so much to blame as the politicians. I have no faith in the platitudes of those who say that a nation has the government that it deserves; the same thing is said about a nation's press, a nation's theatre, and so on, and all these statements are at least half untruths, for the public is usually clay in the hands of the advertiser or the commercial magnate. Such sentiments ignore the vast responsibilities of leadership. Similarly I have no faith in the smug doctrine that it is only necessary to give people power in order to educate them to use it properly. 'We must now proceed,' said Robert Lowe in 1867, 'to educate our masters.' Experience since then, either in this country or elsewhere, affords no ground for saying that it is wise to grant power before people know how to use it for the common good.

One of the main troubles with democracy, when it is ahead of the sense of citizenship, is that the amassing of political influence appeals to the inferior types of citizens. Here, at least, England and America share troubles, and probably the trouble is worse in America than here, for here still survives the tradition of disinterested public service that has come down from aristocratic days. In all political parties a large number of candidates are utterly unworthy of the electors. On the Conservative side I could name men with shady financial pasts who are in politics because of what they can get out of public life. On the Labor side I could name men of wealth who are Labor merely because they think that Labor is winning and that, being inside the Labor Party, they stand a better chance of obtaining political posts. These men have usually never worked for a living, or, if they have, have not succeeded; they

have usually married rich wives or have inherited fortunes; they often live lives of personal extravagance. Yet they adopt surtaxes and all the other nostrums of the Socialist creed simply because they are the rule of the game. A democracy has to be very experienced and instructed to be able to measure up the politicians who appeal to it. One of the troubles of democracy, as Viscount Grey recently pointed out in an address at Birmingham, is that democratic governments are always so much busier than governments otherwise constituted that politicians in a democracy have little time to think. Public men to-day are experts in, to use Viscount Grey's words, 'thinking what can be said rather than what should be thought.' Democracy, he says, 'is founded on the assumption that the people will choose men wisely to conduct their affairs.' Can either England or America claim that that assumption is justified by experience and that it will become increasingly so when full democracy is established?

VI

The great need to-day is to realize the enormous limitations of the democratic system, to examine the past achievements of communities which have possessed varying elements of the democratic system, and, above all, to hasten slowly in the light of that experience in taking further steps on the democratic road. Go too fast, as in my view England has done, and the system threatens to destroy itself. There seems no limit to the self-confidence of men and women who happen to get elected — even if only a fraction of their constituents voted for them. We in England are free from laws preventing the teaching of evolution, women from smoking in public, or

people from drinking alcohol. But both British and Americans are traveling the same road, and, unless the public realizes the imperfections and limitations of democracy, reaction against democracy as an ideal may set in, as has happened in Italy and Spain.

There is a tremendous need for more modesty about democracy. The spirit of the authors of the Declaration of Independence or the Fifteenth Amendment is dangerous in the extreme. It is the spirit that sets up democratic government regardless of the absence of a fundamental basis necessary for its realization. In that spirit England has taken the first steps toward democracy in India, when those who know India best know how lacking are the elementary principles requisite for a democracy — as a remarkable American woman (Miss Katherine Mayo, authoress of *Mother India*) has recently had the courage and insight to point out. This is not the place to discuss the appalling social and religious customs of India, so candidly and authoritatively expounded in Miss Mayo's book, but the following from Lord Ronaldshay, ex-Governor of Bengal, is very much to our point: 'In a ward election in an important town seven out of eight candidates withdrew at the polling booth because the other was a man of low caste with whom they declined to compete. In another case the nominated members objected to sitting with elected members who, according to the social custom of the country, should stand in their presence.'

Would it not have been better to wait for the spirit of democracy to arise in India before dumping a pseudo-democratic constitution upon her? And yet Indian politicians are demanding full self-government at once. Lord Ronaldshay tells of one election where, out of 259 electors, ten recorded their votes, and we must

remember that India has one elector for about every forty of the population. By thus forcing democracy we can easily make a Hankow out of India's great cities, but the happiness of the people of India will not thereby be promoted. The same story is being told in Egypt and may yet be told in the Philippines. As to Europe, if ever there is again a Great War, its origin will assuredly lie in one or other of the small nations which the Great Powers, very largely led by President Wilson, so rashly set up in an enthusiasm for abstract theories of democracy and self-determination which has proved unwarranted.

Democracy is a great ideal, but so few in public life find it expedient to say how slowly the approach to it should be. Not long ago an American president said that 'the government of the United States is a device for maintaining in perpetuity the rights of the people, with the ultimate extinction of all privileged classes.' Such hyperbole is always dangerous. As a set-off, I would quote the late Frank I. Cobb, who on December 5, 1920, wrote in his *New York World* that 'the United States is now the one country among the great civilized nations in which the will of the people can never definitely be put into effect and in which it can be successfully overruled whenever a political cabal is organized for that purpose.' Both statements are doubtless exaggerations, but even if I were an American I should prefer the errors of the latter. Those who ignore the proved drawbacks of democracy and who publish sentimental half-truths about it are playing into the hands of those who would sweep away the whole system. Lenin was in a very true sense the creation of Kerensky. Mussolini undoubtedly owes his position to the Jeffersons and Patrick Henrys of Italy.

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