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Is democracy the last word in government?, 1925.

"IS DEMOCRACY THE LAST WORD?"

RABBI ABBA HILLEL SILVER.

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JOSEPH T. KRAUS
Shorthand
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The law of action and reaction which holds good in nature holds good also in human society. In every department of social life we may discern the same swing of the pendulum, especially in the political phases of social existence. There the pendulum swings very rapidly from extreme liberalism to extreme conservatism and back again. Every great triumphant movement for democracy in the history of mankind was quickly followed by a wave of reaction. This disillusionment is inevitable because of the high expectancies of men which they set for themselves as their goal of achievement; and inasmuch as the real always lags behind the ideal, and what can be always in arrears to what ought to be, man following his great efforts in behalf of democratic achievement, inevitably becomes the victim of disappointment, disillusionment, and he even begins to question the value, the worthwhileness of the very thing for which he has just been sacrificing himself.

Take the American Revolution, for example, the American revolution, which was the struggle of men for economic, and political emancipation, began in a veritable glow of democratic enthusiasm and holy fervor. The Declaration of Independence is the exalted battle-cry of that great movement. The Declaration of Independence speaks of the inalienable rights of man--freedom, liberty, democracy. The Declaration of Independence breeds an exalted faith in man's capacity for self-government. Yet a few years later we find the very men who achieved the revolution despondent about popular government.

about liberty, about democracy.

In reading through Mr. Beveridge's excellent biography of John Marshall, I came across these significant reactions of the revolutionary leaders towards democracy: "The Secretary of State . . . says the knaves and fools of this world are forever in alliance. Liberty and licentiousness are to them the same thing. The wise and the good never form the majority of any large society, and it seldom happens that their measures are uniformly adopted or that they can always prevent the overthrow of themselves by the strong and almost never-ceasing union of the wicked and the weak." Madison, who later on became President, said: "There are subjects to which the capacities of the bulk of mankind are unequal, and on which they must and will be governed by those with whom they happen to have acquaintance and confidence."

There are subjects to which the capacities of the bulk of mankind are unequal; and Washington himself said that mankind when left to themselves are unfit for their own government; and the keen student of constitutional law, John Marshall, himself, said, following the riots which took place in the state of Massachusetts: "These violent, I fear bloody, dissensions in the state of Massachusetts, and in a state I thought inferior in wisdom and virtue to no one in the union, added to the strong tendency which the politics of many eminent characters among ourselves have to promote private and public dishonesty, cast a deep shade over the bright prospect which the revolution in America and the establishment of our free

government had opened for the voters of liberty throughout the globe. I fear," said Mr. Marshall,"--and there is no opinion more degrading to the dignity of man--that these have truth on their side who say that man is incapable of governing himself."

In our own day we experience some such reaction. The war was waged for democracy, to make the world safe for democracy, and yet following the war, eight years later, we find nearly two-thirds of Europe in the hands of reaction, of absolutism, and of tyranny. In England the Tory element is in ascendancy; and Fascismo is gaining ground rapidly in Italy, Mussolini flaunting the very principles of democracy, insisting that absolutism is the ideal form of government, and making no apologies for having scrapped the democratic institutions of Italy; in Hungary you have Admiral Horthy; even in Germany, nominally a republic, its greatest military disciplinarian, Hindenburg, is president of the republic; and of course in Russia, where 150 millions of Europeans live, in Russia you have the ideal autocracy. In no part of the world today is democracy so much a laughing-stock and so thoroughly discredited as in Russia.

Everywhere since the war nations seem to have become impatient with the slow, inefficient, cumbersome methods of democracy; everywhere where people faced a crisis, requiring immediate action, they turned almost instinctively to a few masterful, forceful, aggressive leaders; everywhere the high principles of democracy were sacrificed without a murmur--

in many instances to the needs of expediency. That happened, by the way, in our own country during the war. We free American citizens gladly sacrificed our privileges, our personal liberty, for the sake of the greater efficiency of the management of the war. We submitted without a murmur to dictation as to what we should produce and how we should produce, and what price we should be satisfied with, where we should work and how we should work, what we should eat, when we should not use coal, when we should not drive our automobiles,--a thousand and one infringements upon our personal liberty, guaranteed by the law, the basic law of the land. We accepted readily for the sake of a higher need. Democracy, in other words, was sacrificed.

We have one great example in the history of the United States when the machinery of democracy broke down. That was of course the Civil War. Here was perhaps the one great serious problem which faced the American republic--slavery. And the American people could not solve that problem through the amicable instrumentalities of democracy. They had to resort to the arbitrament of war--the bullets had to replace the ballots in order to solve that one great problem.

The question therefore arises: Is democracy the last word in government? Take the situation in Russia. If you listen to the apologists for the rulers in Russia they would say: "Why we are doing nothing but what the United States did during the war. We have no quarrels with democracy. We have just found it inoperative, inefficient. In order to

achieve some drastic reform, some radical reorganization of society, the machinery of democracy is too crude, too static to achieve those results. We need concentration of power; we need rigorous discipline; we need the masterful leadership of a few and the loyal obedience of the many to achieve what we are after. Once we have achieved our goal then we shall give latitude to everybody; then we shall restore some of the personal liberties which now we have deprived people of." Democracy is not a helpful tool in creating new social values, say these apologists of government by force.

Now there are other criticisms of democracy. Last week I read a most intelligent book, one which I would recommend to all of you to read--a book written by that keen student of politics, Walter Lipmann, called "The Phantom Public," in which the writer strips away a good deal of the glamor and the mysticism which have heretofore surrounded the great public, and, in a sense, democracy itself. I want to read one or two sentences from this book so that you may see the line of the new attack upon democracy.

Mr. Lipmann says: "In the cold light of experience the citizen knows that his sovereignty is a fiction. He reigns in theory, but in fact he does not govern. Contemplating himself and his actual accomplishments in public affairs, contrasting the influence he exerts with the influence he is supposed according to democratic theory to exert, he must say of his sovereignty what Bismarck said of Napoleon III: 'At a distance it is something, but close to it is nothing at all.'

Of the eligible voters in the United States less than half go to the polls even in a presidential year. During the campaign of 1924--the last presidential campaign--a special effort was made to bring out more voters. They did not come out. The Constitution, the nation, the party system, the presidential succession, private property, all were supposed to be in danger. One party prophesied red ruin, another black corruption, a third tyranny and imperialism if the voters did not go to the polls in greater numbers. But half the citizenship was on duty. "In fact," continued Mr. Lippmann, "realistic thinkers in Europe have long ago abandoned the notion that the collective mass of the people direct the course of public affairs. Robert Michels, himself a Socialist, says flatly that 'the majority is permanently incapable of self-government,' (very much like the statement of John Marshall and George Washington) and quotes approvingly the remark of a Swedish Socialist Deputy, Gustaf F. Steffen, that 'even after the victory there will always remain in political life the leaders and the led.' Michels, who is a political thinker of great penetration, unburdens himself finally on the subject by printing a remark of Hertzen's that the victory of an opposition party amounts to 'passing from the sphere of envy to the sphere of avarice.'

"It was assumed," says the writer, "by the democratic philosophers of the last century that the popular will was wise and good if only you could get at it. They proposed extensions of the suffrage, and as much voting as

possible by means of the initiative, referendum and recall, direct election of Senators, direct primaries, an elected judiciary, and the like. They all begged the question, for it has never been proved that there exists the kind of public opinion which they presupposed. Nor is there any evidence to show that the persons who do participate are in any real sense directing the course of affairs."

And, lastly, "The individual man does not have opinions on all public affairs. He does not know how to direct public affairs. He does not know what is happening, why it is happening, what ought to happen. I cannot imagine," says the writer, "how he could know, and there is not the least reason for thinking, as mystical democrats have thought, that the compounding of individual ignorances in masses of people can produce a continuous directing force in public affairs."

"I do not wish to labor the argument any further than may be necessary to establish the theory that what the public does is not to express its opinions but to align itself for or against a proposal. If that theory is accepted, we must abandon the notion that democratic government can be the direct expression of the will of the people. We must abandon the notion that the people govern. Instead we must adopt the theory that, by their occasional mobilization as a majority, people support or oppose the individuals who actually govern. We must say that the popular will does not direct continuously but that it intervenes occasionally."

This is very much of a come-down for those of

us who have been assuming that the people govern themselves, and that in the masses of the people there is resident a certain wisdom which, if given an opportunity, will properly direct the agencies of government.

And there is one other criticism and then we shall be through with the criticisms of democratic government, a criticism one hears from writers like Henry Adams, Agnes Replogle and others--that democracy somehow makes for mediocrity, that democracy has a tendency to level things downward to a low level of capacity, that democracy supports the mediocre average but does not make possible or protect excellency. And so you have the full indictment of democracy--inefficiency. It does not give to man what man thinks it does, and it makes for a low level of culture and civilization.

Is democracy, then, the last word in government? I think it is. These criticisms are all valid but valid in a very restricted sense, and they do not touch the heart of the democratic philosophy, but only specific applications are made in specific instances. It is true, for example, that in periods of crises people will abandon here and there the democratic procedure; and wisely so. When a man is well, physically well, he can indulge himself in a good deal of freedom; he can do almost anything he wishes to. But when a man faces a physical break-down, when his health is menaced, that man, at the advice of his physicians--and if he is wise he will accept that advice--that man will delimit his freedom, he will put himself on a very restricted diet;

he will delimit the things he can do, he will restrict the freedom of his activity. Now he is sacrificing something, to be sure, but he is sacrificing those things for a greater gain. The restrictions are self-imposed and therefore there is no sacrifice of will for freedom.

It is true, for example, that in the case of the Civil War democracy broke down completely. That was not the fault of democracy, it was the fault of those people who lived under these institutions who were too selfish and too blinded and too misled to refer this critical problem to the arbitrament of the vote instead of the war. The Civil War was one of the most tragic and useless wars of the history of mankind. All the slaves could have been emancipated by purchase, no slave-holder losing one farthing, and the government of the United States would not have paid one one-hundredth of the price which it ultimately paid for the Civil War.

The people of 1860 had not risen to the heights of the democratic possibilities of their government and, stupidly, they preferred to settle by force what could well have been settled by compromise. Democracy did not avert Civil War, but what other system of government could have averted it? Against human stupidity the Almighty himself is impotent. The case of Russia, which is very often brought as an indictment of democracy, is no indictment of it at all, but, in a way, it is a defense of democracy. The experiment in Russia has as yet not been of that unalloyed success to

warrant one in using it in derogation of democracy.

Bolshevism in Russia has as yet achieved nothing. Nothing! Czarism was overturned not by bolshevism but by democratic Russia under the leadership of that somewhat capable but not forceful Kerensky. The economic condition of the Russian people today is not even on that low level where it was in the days of the czar before 1914, and the good things which have been achieved in the last few years in the realms of education, in the realms of protection of children, may very well have been achieved under a democratic system of government as they have been in other democracies.

Mr. Lippmann's contentions I believe are nearly all true, but they do not discredit democracy; they merely point out the delimited sphere in which the public can function in government. From a democratic point of view it is not at all important that the public shall pass judgment upon every issue, however involved, and however intangible. Our society is too great today, too vast, too scattered, problems are too intricate, too detailed for a busy public, each member of which is involved in earning a living and in following his own interests and his own pleasures to pass accurate and scientific and worthwhile judgment; and it is not at all important that he should do so. The public is not meant to be, in a democracy, the executive.

From the point of view of the democratic philosophy I believe these four things are essential--and as

long as these four things are preserved, so long is democracy dominant: (1) that every member of a society be the equal of every other member before the law; that there be no caste system before the law; (2) that any citizen shall be privileged to hold any office to which his fellow citizens wish to elevate him; that no offices be restricted to certain groups and certain classes; (3) that citizens shall have the privilege to elevate into office whomever they please; (4) that all controversies of whatever character--political, economic, social--be settled amicably by vote and not brutally by force.

That is the whole technique of democracy, and it is my contention that within this framework--equality before the law, the right to hold office, the right to put men in office, and the compulsion to settle party differences by vote--that within this framework all human progress is possible, and that therefore the democratic system of government is the ultimate system of social organization. To be sure, in the days to come conditions will arise which will necessitate revisions here and there. It may be found necessary in the days to come, for example, to give more power to the executive, to the chief executive; it may be found necessary, for example, to create a staff of experts; it may be found necessary to centralize power in one instance and decentralize power in another instance; it may be found necessary to make a thousand and one corrections and revisions in democracy; but as long as these four principles are

safe-guarded the democratic doctrine is established.

And I believe that as long as men live upon the earth, so long will they ultimately return to this system of self-government as the best, as the most efficient in the long run of all systems; because facts of human nature are very permanent. As long as men live upon the earth they will live in societies; as long as they live in societies there will be conflicts of interests, because each man will strive to achieve the largest measure of freedom for himself. That is a law of human life. And as each man strives to achieve the largest measure of freedom for himself, he inevitably comes in conflict with his neighbor. Now these conflicts, which existed ten thousand years ago, and which will exist fifty thousand years from today, --these conflicts can take on one of two characters. The one is war. "I will match my strength against yours, and if I win I am master, and if I lose I am slave."

Now society has discovered, or is likely to discover before very long, that war is provocative of other wars and provocative of other conflicts; that it settles nothing permanently; that it is the most costly to both master and slave. That is one way of settling these conflicts. That way has been tried and that way is being fast abandoned by men as inefficient in the long run, even though it seems to be the most efficient in its immediate results.

The second way is by election, which is after all a sublimated form of war. An election is war without its

brutality and without its horrors. The majority says to the minority, "I can lick you if it comes to a show-down of force, but what is the use? You know that I am in the majority, and therefore let me run this government until such time as you can persuade more people to think as you do, and you will be the majority and I will yield to you."

Abraham Lincoln gave a definition of democracy which, to my mind, holds as good today as it did in those trying days when it was uttered, and it just sums up what we are trying to say this morning. Abraham Lincoln said: "As I would not be a slave so I would not be a master." This expresses my idea of democracy. Whatever differs from this to the extent of difference is not a democracy." As I would not be a slave, as I would not wish to be licked in this conflict, so I must not wish to be master. For in a democracy he who loses is still equal to him who wins. They are both citizens. In a war you have master and slave, victor and vanquished.

Furthermore, democracy is the ultimate form of government, because as long as men will live upon the face of the earth, each man will try to ascend as high as he can, to gain as much of political and economic and social goods of life as he can. Now society may adopt one of two attitudes to this ascending effort of all the members of a community: it may either arbitrarily establish delimitation; it may either say to one class, "Thus far shall you go and no farther," and to another class, "Ye are the more privileged,

ye can go further." That is the caste system, that is aristocratic government, that is oligarchic government,-- not monarchical. There can be a degree of fixation on the part of society beyond the limits of which man may not go in his self-development; or society can be an open field with no barriers. "You must make your own race, and you will win only that goal which you yourself can reach."

It has been said that democracy is a step-ladder; its institutions, its opportunities are in the form of a step-ladder, but each man has got to do his own climbing, and each man can climb as high as his powers or his good fortune will enable him to climb. If he does not reach the top it is not society's responsibility and it is not society's fault. Now it seems to me that this plan of free opportunity and universal protection by law of each man's legitimate efforts towards self-evolvment is the safest, soundest and securest form of social organization; therefore, to my mind, the most ultimate and the last word.

One other thought and I shall be through. It does not follow at all that democracy may make for mediocrity. France is a democracy and France today is not a nation of mediocrity because France has a marvelous tradition of culture and a thousand years of civilization back of it. There is in France a set of rules and standards which fifty generations have established. In the United States we have not those standards as yet. We have not because we are a young nation; we have not yet evolved a tradition of culture

or civilization which evaluates and determines the worth of things.

That will come in the course of time. When our first run towards acquisitiveness will pass away, when we shall have exploited to the last degree the wealth and resources of the land, when we shall settle down to the normal pace of a continental land, then we shall perhaps pay more attention to cultural values than we do today; and then excellency will begin to emerge.

I am not at all convinced that democracy makes for mediocrity. When a democracy like the United States has produced an Emerson, a Whitman, a Lincoln, a John Dewey, a William James, a Roosevelt, a Wilson, it does not at all follow that it makes for mediocrity. Democracy is the last word in government because it places worth upon every human being. It has not at all been established that every human being is worth while, and that every life is sacred any more than it has been established that human life in general is worth while. But we believe that it is; we will to believe that it is. A democracy has posited a dogma, the holiest dogma of society, that every human life has a transcendent dignity, a worth, a holiness about it, and that every opportunity should be given by society through the democratization of opportunities and through the protection by law, through the removal of barriers,--that every opportunity shall be given to each and every human life because it is holy, to expand itself, to fulfill itself to the last degree of its

potency and its capacity. It has faith in every child of God.

Now I say that that philosophy is the most ultimate word in civilization. Nothing that has been said, nothing that is likely to be said about man has transcended or can transcend this transfiguration of man into the realm of sanctity. Each life is unique, each life is part of the divine life, and therefore each life ought to be, by right should be, free.

--o--



Young
ko, Barberto

MUSSOLINI RAPS U. S. DEMOCRACY

*More Apparent Than
Real, He Says.*

ROME, Jan. 10.—(AP)—The democracy of the United States is more apparent than real, Benito Mussolini said in a special interview today. It functions well, the premier went on, because of the nation's immense superabundance of natural riches, which permits a huge and constant waste of energies.

Criticizing the democratic form of government as inherently a disperser of energies, the Fascist leader said it was workable in the United States where enormous resources permitted "luxury" waste, but impossible in Italy, where poverty necessitated the organization of the nation as "militia, unable to lose any battle."

Death Ends Shoe Argument.

CINCINNATI, Jan. 10.—(AP)—Charles Whitney, 19, died in a hospital tonight of gunshot wounds he received yesterday in an argument with two men over a pair of shoes that had been left in a room at the Spencer house, occupied by the men. Police are holding the two men.

Neckwear
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ter soiled
play and
priced s
lower for

Collar ar
Collar

Suggestin
sive neck
tailored o
dresses.
fashion -
one tub
their dar

(M

1. Law of action & reaction - Every dept - political - Every great triumphant movement for ultimate - disillusionment
1. The American Revolution - Declaration - a few years later -
 2. Beveridge - John Marshall -
 3. French Revolution - Napoleon -
 4. Our own day - Tory - Hindenburg - Mussolini - Horthy - Greece - Russia -

2. Criticism of Democracy.

- ① Not a system for Emergency, or progress.
1. War-crisis - too cumbersome - we are scorped on perogative -
 2. In crisis or in proper use of power not useful prepared leader - dem is inefficient - Russian apolo- gists - need concentration, strips down
 3. In crisis dem breaks down - and

② Wasteful & inefficient - Mussolini

③ Does not make for Equality - aristocracy & stock-gard, plutocracy, soap and vegetable - Shun - widening gap -

④ Fraternity - K.K.K. - bigotry - Negro - 12 mil

⑤ Liberty - mobocracy - the clamoring voice of the hord - cruel, cowardly mob -

(6) Mediocrity - level downward - hateful place
for a man of genius - mass production.
- vulgarize - 'best seller' - religion - more
tooth-ache - standards & success -

(7) Lippman - The Phantom Rabbi - illusion of
popular front ——— (read)

3. Last word? gest.

1. all criticism valid to a point - do not touch
heart & problem -

(a) It is true in crisis people abandon dem. prind.
- turning so - Sick - Rest self-imposed

(b) breaks down in civil war, no fault
1 dem - C. W. useless & tragic - in

face & stupidity even God is helpless
- Russia - Antro. has achieved nothing

(c) From a democr. pt of view it is not
necess. that men should pass judgment

4. Only 3 things essential for democ.
(1) no caste system before law. Equality

- stimuli -

(2) Privileged to hold office & elect to office

(3) All controversies settled by vote

within this framework all human progress is possible

6) May be found necessary to revis, grant more power - specialists - Centrally or decentral -

5. Facts of human life constant - society -
conflict & interests - settled by (1) war
(2) Vote. (1) I will make my strength.
Costly ^{have marks & slave} (2) Election - substantive form

(H) Lincoln - "As I would ~~be~~ not be a slave.
so I would not be a master. This ex-
presses my idea of democracy. Whatever
differs from this, to the extent of difference
is not democracy."

6. All men aspire. Soc. can adopt me & 2
mks. (1) Caste (2) Equality. Run race -
climb ladder

7. Modernity, (1) France. Tradition. R. Ruskin
- will come - after first passion for acquisition
- Emerson - Whitman - Walt Whitman - always
- James - Roosevelt - Wilson - Young
- growth - voluntary - imperfect.

8. Every human life sacred. Wojna -
(1) More social assets.
(2) Social Cooperation - Socialized Decisions