

## DEMOCRACY AND MODERN PROBLEMS

**Renunciation** is not agreeable to any body or person, but I have expressed the opinion that democracy ought to renounce; that its prosperity and success depend upon renunciation. This needs some explanation and illustration.

In another form the same idea has often been enunciated. If we want a free government we must be content to forego a great many fine things which other civil forms might get for us. A "free government," under the democratic republican form, first of all renounces all the ceremonial and pageantry of the aristocratic or monarchical form; that is of little importance, although perhaps we assume too easily that the poetic and imaginative element is absent from a democratic community. But a democratic republic will never be neat, trim, and regular in its methods, or in the external appearance which it presents; it will certainly lack severity and promptitude of operation. A great many things are sure to be left at loose ends; in a word, there is sure to be little discipline. There is a lounging air, a lack of formality, an exaggerated horror of red tape, a neglect of regularity.

Beyond this, however, and more important, is the fact that there are important functions which older forms of the state have been accustomed to perform, which the democratic republic cannot well perform: it cannot make war without great waste and expense, both of life and money; it cannot do any work which requires high

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and strict organization, and do it well — if it tries to do work of that kind, it does it only at great expense, and under great waste. Germany is the best drilled and disciplined state of modern times, while the United States is the leading example of a democratic republic. The judgments of these two countries about each other, and their influence on each other, are among the most remarkable facts in modern life. The judgments of Germans generally on the United States are those of men accustomed to an administrative system which works accurately and promptly, also pedantically and cheaply, on a system which is inaccurate and unprompt, and is not cheap; they are accustomed to respect state action, to believe in it, and to rely upon it; with a population trained to respond at the tap of the drum, uneducated to individual initiative, and with a bureaucracy of long tradition and intense training, the state may present itself as an entity of a different sort, and an agent of different power from the American State. The question then is, whether we can draw any inferences as to state functions from Germany, or whether we should be willing to see the American State undergo those changes which it would have to undergo in order to fit it to undertake all the functions which are undertaken by the German State.

This question needs only to be stated to answer itself. The especial changes which the American State would have to undergo would be to weaken democracy and to strengthen bureaucracy. These are the two changes which would be the most impossible of all which could be attempted. It is much more probable that democracy will sweep away all the bulrushes in the shape of “monarchical institutions” which are being built up against it, and, seizing upon the military organization and the state socialistic institutions as at once its prey

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and its instrumentalities, will triumph over everything else, in Germany as well as elsewhere.

If we turn back, then, to the free democratic state as the state of the present and future, the one which is alone possible for us and which must go on to meet and work out its destiny, then I think it will appear that its civil service is its weakest point. The recent history of the French Republic, joined with our own, has gone far to show that a republican system with party government is drawn toward the abuse of the civil service by forces which it is folly to underestimate. One must shut one's eyes to facts if one would deny that the sentiments "I am a Democrat," "this is a Republican Administration," strike a responsive chord in the hearts of the masses, where denunciations of the corruption of the civil service, or of wasteful expenditures of public money, fall on dull ears. These watchwords, however, are only the doctrines: "To the victor belong the spoils," and "Woe to the vanquished," in a little less cynical and shocking form, and they mean that, in the modern democratic state, parties fight each other for control of the state, which they rule, having won it, like a conquered territory. If this state, then, has state-socialistic functions, it is sure to produce the worst exploitation of man by man which has ever existed; to live under it, and not be in it, would be to suffer a tyranny such as no one has experienced yet.

I should not like to be understood to speak lightly of preaching as a means of awakening the reason and conscience of men to convictions which are universally right and true. Anything which can be gained in this direction is sure to produce manifold fruit in politics and economic policy; but hitherto we have not done much against the abuse of the civil service except by preach-

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ing. The statesman has to accomplish his purposes by adopting measures, and by founding institutions which can set social forces in operation, or prevent their operation. He must have an adequate means or must make the best of a case as he finds it.

In the present case, therefore, I maintain that the way to minimize the dangers to democracy, and from it, is to reduce to the utmost its functions, the number of its officials, the range of its taxing power, the variety of its modes of impinging on the individual, the amount and range of its expenditures, and, in short, its total weight; for among the other vices and errors of the prevailing tendency, this is one of the worst, that we do not see that whatever extends the functions of the state increases its weight. Against this view nothing has ever yet been brought forward but the pure assumption which has all experience against it, that, if the state should not do things they would not be done at all.

And there is another course of thought which seems to me to run in the same direction.

We often boast that this is an age of deliberation, and it is, of course, true that, as compared with any earlier period, men of the most civilized states do act by deliberation where formerly they acted by instinct. It is, however, still true of even the most enlightened community which could be found, that the mass of the people in it live by instinct. The torments of always giving one's self a reason, satisfactory to reason and conscience, for everything one does, are a privilege of high culture. The ancient philosophers never got further than the question: what is the highest good in life? The modern thinking world reached so high as to spend a year, perhaps, in debating whether life is worth living. That was certainly a proud triumph; the mass of man-

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kind, however, are contented and eager to live without deliberating about it.

Now democracy calls for a great amount of deliberation and reflection from the mass of mankind; and especially, if we are determined not to follow the policy of letting things work themselves out, but are determined to exert ourselves upon them, according to ideals which we have formed, then the democratic state is destined to make bigger and bigger demands upon the reflective power of its citizens. If it does so, it will fail to get the response which it expects. Once more the path of wisdom seems to lie in making the demands of the state as few and simple as possible, and in widening the scope of the automatic organs of society which are non-political, in order to see whether they will not prove capable, if trusted.

When we are told that the state would do all things better, if we would give it more things to do, the answer is that there is nothing which the state has not tried to do, and that it has only exceptionally performed anything well, even war or royal marriages, and that, on the contrary, here in the United States, where the other policy has had more trial than anywhere else — favored, it is true, by circumstances — it has proved beneficent in the extreme. Therefore, if, after all, it is only a question of whether to put faith in the state or to put faith in liberty, an educated American ought not to hesitate long which to do.