

WHAT EVER HAPPENED TO DEMOCRACY?

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PEOPLE are quite generally agreed that perfect governments, like perfect marriages, do not now exist. They agree, moreover, that all existing governments (and marriages) are oppressive, unjust, and even iniquitous, in certain particulars. This is to be expected. What is surprising is that the vast majority of men are sufficiently sentimental to imagine that there can be perfect governments (and marriages) which will produce universal happiness and contentment and will oppress no one.

This sentimentality in the face of adverse demonstration is as heroic as it is unfortunate. We meet it generally. Take, for instance, the opinions of recently returned European travelers. Mr. William Henry Chamberlin assures us, after several years in Russia, that the Soviet government is a cruel despotism based upon terror with dictator Stalin as chief assassin. At the same time Miss Anna Louise Strong assures us, after several years in Russia, that Stalin is in no sense a dictator, and that the Russian government is benevolent and wise.

Mr. Max Eastman, our most charming and intelligent radical, agrees with her not at all, however: for he thinks Russia has departed from the kindly internationalism of Lenin and Trotzky. It has, instead, adopted crass nationalism, and loyalty to dictator Stalin has replaced proper loyalty to the proletariat and international brotherhood. Mr. Ludwig Lewisohn returns from Europe crying, "A pox on both your houses!" and asserting that both Fascism and Communism regiment the populace both as to bodily and mental or spiritual nutrition and values.

All of these good people, however, seem assured that a perfect government can be brought into being—one which will not, of course, deal unfairly or oppressively with their own kind of people. Meanwhile the more learned Communists can cite chapter and verse of their Holy Vedas to show us how the best of all governments will reign supreme when we all become devotees of the true faith.

We do not need to go to Russia to find novelty in government. Right in the United States, and in the memory of the present writer, we have had a wide variety of totally different governments, all de-

clared rotten by certain people who thought they knew how to formulate the basic principles of good government. Since 1900 we have had governments which governed as little as possible, absolute dictatorships, dictatorship by request of the general public which wished to escape responsibility, outright plutocracy, state capitalism—even a great deal of socialism.

But people have always complained and have as regularly contended that it would be easy enough, by a few changes, to produce a good government that would oppress no one. All forms of government displease because they oppress certain individuals or groups. Yet changes in government merely seem advantageous because they shift the onus of oppression to new backs. They in their turn become offensive and intolerable as soon as the new oppressed appreciate their status and organize for relief.

Consider a group that sociologists have the delicate habit of describing as "underprivileged." During any period of our country's history certain people have been unemployed. It has usually been felt that somewhere within that larger circle of the unemployed stood a group that might rightly be called unemployable—the utter misfits, the incompetent, the mentally or neurologically deficient. Many of us who were not in this grouping at the time have felt that many of these misfits should simply be taken up and colonized under scientific supervision in such a way that they would be self-sustaining outside the regular economic mechanisms of our society.

Then, we felt, the rest of us could get along very well on our own resources. No relief would be necessary, for the least of our citizens would be self-supporting. However, they would be so only under some sort of regimentation or other. Even this would be quite tolerable to us, so long as we could escape the regimentation; but if the condition of our country became such as to expand the circle of the underprivileged until we ourselves stood therein as incapable of making our way under existing circumstances, the very perfect scheme would begin to seem oppressive and intolerable to us.

This is generally true of government and the problems it faces. The last Administration at Washington, faced with an economic crisis, undertook state capitalism to the most extraordinary degree it had ever been undertaken in this country. It also undertook a marked degree of socialization, increasingly making our government operative as well as functional. But it clung to certain basic prin-

ciples that compelled it to leave a very large number of people in extreme want.

That government became offensive and we voted in what was called the New Deal which was, in a sense, revolutionary. It set out at once to redistribute income and has already gone far in such redistribution. It went even further in the matter of socialization, putting the government actively into production of many commodities and actually redistributing the finished products within relief channels but entirely outside the profit market.

Then it went even further, and that was revolutionary. For the first time in history our government consciously regarded itself as responsible for the economic status of the citizens. However, it took this enormous responsibility upon itself without immediately beginning to perfect any mechanism that would make the economic well-being of the citizen contingent upon his own initiative and exertion. It left him to regard basic necessities as his right without the necessity for working. Something must in time be done to curb this tendency towards demoralization, but this does not alter the revolutionary character of the government's avowal of policy.

In taking this economic responsibility the government did precisely what a large group declared it should do when the previous Administration was in power. Immediately, however, that these new policies—limited redistribution of wealth, accelerated socialization of government, and avowal of governmental responsibility for the economic well-being of the citizens—got under way, certain citizens who had accepted the acts of the previous Administration as wise, began to protest the regimentalizing dictatorship of the New Deal. Why? Simply because they in turn felt the oppressive hand of government.

All government is, and by its nature must be, oppressive. Basically there can be but two extreme types of government, Imperialistic and Democratic. The former, in its purest manifestation, regards the State as supreme and the individual citizen of value only in proportion to his ability to contribute to the perfection of the State. The latter, in its purest form, would provide the greatest possible amount of individual liberty consistent with the provision of that minimum of social liberty without which no State can exist today.

In the former the State, in the latter the individual, would be emphasized. But in neither, and in no modern, populous, highly in-

dustrialized State, could any government possibly exist which did not infringe upon the personal rights of certain groups or individuals. Every form of government is and must be more or less oppressive. No matter how democratic it pretends to be, a modern government must regulate foods, drugs, automobiles, buildings, public health, and so forth and must, in so doing, infringe upon the absolute freedom of certain persons. Individual liberty must be restricted in order to provide maximum social liberty under the existing circumstances.

This is true in every sphere of life and under whatever kind of government there is. It is just as true that no government can deal "justly"—i.e. softly—with all the governed. There must be injustice, or an infringement of those personal liberties which are "rights" in unorganized society. A man with no neighbors within ten miles may do a great many things that men, organized in a complex city community, can not be permitted to do. But a government must be careful not to carry oppression to unnecessary lengths under ordinary conditions.

For the success of a government depends in part upon the psychological condition of the governed. Today American farmers are demanding a greater degree of regimentation, in order to get their non-cooperative fellows in line, than the Agricultural Adjustment Administration thinks wise because in more normal times the rules evolved may be regarded by these same farmers as oppressive. Again, a government like Hitler's may go much further in the matter of oppression than a more stable government of a more normal people, because chaos is the only alternative.

The success of a government usually depends, however, upon its ability to keep the oppressed classes to a relatively small minority, and to foster even in their minds the delusion that the injustice done them promotes their own good—by promoting the greater good of all—and actually is not, when seen in proper light, injustice at all! True enough a crisis government which offers chaos as its alternative, can afford to be less careful about this than a more normal government which can be turned out of office by simple elective machinery and another different but stable government established. Even then it is unwise for a crisis government to drive the oppressed classes to such desperation that the sympathy of other nations goes out to them.

When a government fails at this highly technical job it cuts its own throat. When under Wilson's War-time dictatorship we harshly oppressed conscientious objectors, we still tried to make it appear that this was for their own and the greater good. In case of partial failure of the government at this job the oppressed may organize and defeat it in an election. If its failure is abject and complete, a large numerical body with a strong sense of being ill-used may, with proper leadership provoke sporadic violence or even revolution.

But this can occur only if crisis psychology rules the public, if there exists some compact group with an attractive new design for government, and if capable leaders arise. The program of this group should be full of bold, forceful generalizations but hazy in detail, and even it may be discarded or greatly modified in case the group rides to power. If, however, chaos offers the sole alternative to a weak, inefficient, oppressive government which provides some measure of control, things may run along indefinitely without revolutionary change.

A new government, however achieved, has an initial advantage. It does not have to buy good will; it brings along its own. Everybody expects a new deal but only a certain portion of the citizens can get it. Under the Russian revolution the new deal went to the previously-oppressed class, the proletariat. Under our Revolution in 1776 power remained in the hands of the wealthy and influential as before—except that it went to the plutocracy of America from the aristocracy of Great Britain. Much later, after the accession of Jackson, the rugged individualists and the small business men got things into their hands. Power did not return to the plutocracy until after the industrial revolution and the consolidation of finance—say by the time of Mark Hanna and William McKinley.

But in all these cases the new government brought a change. Those who had been oppressed gained release, but always at the price of oppression for other classes. For those who formerly had things their own way began to be oppressed for the greater good. Later the new government settled down to a rather dreary routine while the public, glad to have rid itself of "injustice," and gladder still to have cast all responsibilities upon the new government (for responsibility is always anathema to your average citizen) turned with great relief back to its daily tasks.

In time conditions are seen to be no better—by and large—than they were before. If the government is wise a new, minor adjustment is in order, a few new individuals or groups acquire power and a few others are newly burdened. For a successful government must always be shifting the burden of oppression and injustice from some shoulders to others. It must meanwhile carefully foster new illusions in the minds of the oppressed. Governments never oppress maliciously unless through stupidity and ineptitude, but no government can exist without oppression.

In the United States we have a singular system that permits almost complete revolution by elective or judicial means. This rests in part upon the innate timidity and docility of our common people in the face of bitter misfortune. It rests also in part upon the fortuitous circumstance that, thanks to John Marshall, the Supreme Court can entirely change the character of our government every so often by a few judicious decisions. Finally we have great facility for calling new things by old names, for stretching legal interpretations to the limit, and for successful self-delusion.

We can easily think we are getting just what we want when we are offered its precise opposite. We can sincerely believe our government has not changed radically, in spite of complete revolution, merely because certain externals have remained undisturbed. Nor is this unusual. Nor are we enslaved by delusion, for men never are. They can not know everything about everything and must always take many things on authority or faith. We must all labor under delusions constantly and on many subjects and, if by a slow process of education, we are deprived of one set of delusions in one domain of our thought, we soon nurture another set in another domain.

Our Declaration of Independence reads—"We hold these truths to be self-evident, . . . that all men are created equal" yet biology directly denies this, declaring that even eggs themselves differ markedly in quality. All are not equal in intelligence nor can we take any two babies and make them equal by giving them a proper and hospitable environment. The original raw material to make a high quality product simply is not in the biological stuff of which they were constructed.

We hold the delusion of complete freedom, a thing more nearly approached under despotism in ancient China than ever by us. For this ancient government, though despotic, was so permeated by the-

ories of virtue and good action that a Chinese could travel anywhere he wanted to without let, hindrance, or report. He could set up legitimate business at any place he wished. He was not obliged to become educated, or to follow a calling, or even to be a soldier. There were no sumptuary, no civil, no municipal laws—only the penal code existed, and it was not rigidly enforced. Yet propriety and virtue so abounded that society ruled itself and a decent, respectable family man had nothing to fear.

But the Chinese of those days were a quiet people who trusted each other. They had maximum freedom under despotism. The despotisms of today are not so benign. Now, for some years we have witnessed a trend away from democracy and towards imperialism. Russia, Italy, Spain, Austria, Hungary, Germany, Bulgaria—one by one they go. We bewail the menace to democracy, overlooking the fact that all governments rest really upon the consent of the governed.

The disintegration of mutual trust and voluntary cooperation upon which democracy is based occurs rapidly in periods of crisis when fear is rampant. This in turn inevitably produces an imperialism which may be communistic in faith in one country, fascistic in another. When and if the crises pass the trend will be reversed. Since God has gone out of fashion it is quite natural for people today to trust the authority of the State when they are frightened. Even very intelligent people will under such circumstances tend to champion tyrannical governments run by cruel, heartless, or stupid men.

We should remember, when we tend to scorn such imperialistic ventures in modern government, that Madison's *Journal* carries much evidence that our own Founding Fathers severely distrusted the people. George Washington and other leaders of his day repeatedly deprecated the power of the average man to establish self-government. Voters were few in those days. Washington himself was elected President by a handful of propertied citizens. The whole tenor of the times was to reserve power in the hands of the most intelligent, the test for intelligence being the possession of property.

Modern dictatorships, accompanied as they usually are by forms of exaggerated and exalted adulation that border psychologically upon the deification of the ruler (an old Roman custom) are, it is true, atavistic. The modern dictator becomes for the time as much God as was Augustus of old. The attitude is similar to that of Is-

lam and is embodied in the Shi'ite doctrine of the Caliphate. It partakes of the texture of folk hero myths. Moreover there is in every human being a partly suppressed desire for power. This can too seldom be gratified directly, so vicarious gratification in the person of the exalted dictator plays its part.

The situation that produces strong imperialistic governments is such as always to inhibit the self-assertive impulses of individuals. It emphasizes instead their abject helplessness. Then a personality arises who "saves" (or is felt to save) the situation; the child:parent relationship intervenes; dependent emotions towards the ruler appear, helped along by pseudo-identification with his very person; individuals next take pleasure in magnifying his might and glorifying his power, and even his cruelty; masochistic and sadistic trends manifest themselves and the ruler, first a symbol, becomes a seeming reality. Hope revives. Despair appears banished. Even the dictator's cruelty and stupidity appear admirable and honorable.

At all times, however, the real power is in the hands of the vast horde who are in physical majority. They may give this power to Hitler or Mussolini or they may delegate it to a Communistic party or an American President, but it is theirs to withdraw at will. No government and no ruler ever has power other than that it or he is permitted to have by the governed. But the governed are so fearful in the presence of responsibility and of the necessity for making bold decisions that they freely relinquish power to any individual or organization willing to take it.

Often the government or the dictator in such circumstances has no program. That is not necessary. Hitler and Mussolini have manufactured their programs as they went along, guided by the exigencies of the occasion. It is necessary for a successful responsible government, even when it rests upon the free and absolutely voluntary consent of the governed, to adopt an experimental attitude, to govern play by play. The announcement of a rigid, formal, or inelastic program nullifies its best efforts at once. It definitely points out those who will be oppressed by it. It sets up propositions for an opposition to demolish. It is possible for such a government to be much wiser than certain European dictatorships, but it must also be plastic.

While it can never be perfect, we have no evidence that man is a rational, logical animal adapted to live under an ideal or scientifically adjusted social, economic, and political system. Until we have

evidence that man is not simply a congenitally unregenerate scoundrel, it seems a waste of time to bemoan his sad estate or even to try providing him with a perfect government and puncturing his delusions. For man must be deluded to be happy. No man or woman could even be a successful monogamist without an equipment of durable self-delusions.

So long as man is a whimsical, emotional, disorderly animal, so ready to surrender his power and his possessions to those who promise to keep these for him safely and use them for his benefit, certain things will follow inevitably. Millions of us will voluntarily surrender power; we want nothing to do with responsibility. Naturally more aggressive individuals, or institutions like government, will preempt such power and may use it to oppress the very people to whom it "rightfully" belongs, but who voluntarily cast it aside!

When the so-called New Deal appeared on the scene our people were worried and perplexed. They had no idea what to do. They wanted above all things to bestow power and responsibility upon some one who would get them out of the mess. The previous government refused this grant of power. The New Deal accepted it and, quite deliberately, also the responsibility that accompanied it. Certain citizens were very much dissatisfied. They had too little money. Their loyalty to government flagged. So the new government distributed some money among them, thus redistributing the national income.

There was as little resort to imperialism as possible under the circumstances. Even that minimum was exquisitely decked out as pure democracy. The Old Deal had oppressed too many citizens. It was impeded by bigoted beliefs which did not impede the New Deal. The New Deal could also create auspicious psychological conditions; it could make the public think that increased expenditure by government, producing increased indebtedness, was not the disastrous thing it had been painted.

The specific mechanisms used by the New Deal in accomplishing its purposes were inconsequential. The vast machinery erected was an artifact. It was useful and necessary because impressive and quieting of fear. For the same reason it is better for a government to print bonds and to borrow money against these, than for it to print money directly—though both processes are economically identical. The oppressed classes were restive because they had too little.

The New Deal so arranged things that a great many of them received more income, in money or in goods. The government's first obligation, that of self-preservation, was accomplished.

The success of the New Deal thereafter, and hereafter, depended and depends upon the facility with which it makes proper adjustment to new conditions that arise. This demands the services of supremely competent administrators. The production of such administrators is something that we have done very little to encourage. Indeed government has remained very largely a rule-of-thumb empiricism instead of becoming a science. Basic questions have never been investigated scientifically.

We do not know whether or not bureaucracy, committee or commission rule, representative government, or authoritative executive government offers the most efficient means of performing certain tasks. We do not know whether parliaments or congresses, administrative committees, or responsible executives work better in actual practice. We have never studied the real value of the advisory committee, though we pretty well know such a committee is usually ruled by one man and acts in some essentials almost as would a single executive. Some committees are better than one man; some are worse; some members contribute their knowledge; others add nothing to the pool.

In the past century scientific and technical progress have completely changed the environment of government. Those who have had or who have developed knowledge have not had power, largely because they do not want it, fortunately because they probably could not exercise it wisely. The scientist or technician does not generally have the qualities that make a good ruler. Moreover the old type of ruler, equipped with native intelligence and political astuteness, lacks the necessary knowledge to cope with the complex problems he faces. The cause of the breakdown in government is apparent.

Government fails for lack of properly trained administrators who can make, with informed intelligence, the necessary adjustments in the face of recurrent change in our complex society. For scientific and technical progress produce constantly recurring change. Governments must equate these changes for the good of the governed. All government is destined to oppress a minority for the good of the majority but only under carefully trained administrators, guided by experts, can modern government function well enough to regain its lost respect.