

## DEMOCRACY

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There is one word which is constantly before us these days. It occurs in most writing and speech of people all over the world whenever present and future affairs are discussed. People seem to fall into two groups regarding the situation for which the word stands; some feel that there is "too much" of it and others feel that there is "too little." But no one seems wholly indifferent to it. It evokes emotional reactions in almost all who hear it used. The word is "Democracy."

Serious confusion exists about the meaning of this word. Crusades are organized for the preservation and extension of democracy without people understanding its conditions. No common purpose can be achieved without a common understanding by those who strive. One thing is easily apparent now: there seem to be as many different interpretations attached to the word as there are people who hear and use it. As a means of communication, its value is impaired, since it has no common meaning for all individuals.

It is an unfortunate defect of language that words can often obscure situations as well as clear them. When we become aware that a symbol like "democracy" means too many different things to different people, something must be done. The best solution at such times is to abandon the strictly verbal level of definition (explaining the meaning of words by other words) and to try to get to the non-verbal situation for which the symbol stands. We must try to describe what happens at the non-verbal level of action itself--in terms of function.

To understand the function of Democracy, we must go back many years in the history of human relationships and view the manner in which people related themselves to each other and the changes that have evolved. When the curtain rose on recorded civilization, we find that men were living

in groups as they do today. All groups had patterned arrangements called social organizations. During the period of settling down, one man or a few men had gained a position of personal power and dominance for themselves from which they could command the actions of the majority of men. These dominant figures were called masters, kings, leaders, etc.; the subservient group was called followers, servants, slaves, fellahs, etc. This manner of relationship is called by us the Master-Slave or Dominance-Submission kind of social organization.

Almost without exception, there was a great distance or disparity between the two groups with regard to the advantages they derived from the relationship. The advantages went to those with the power to command and the disadvantages to those who were only allowed to serve. There was little that could be called share-and-share-alike. Although their subordinates were made to believe that they enjoyed their particular "security," there was no notion that some kind of human relationships could be formed that would tend to distribute both the disadvantages and advantages more equitably. If a fight developed between the dominant and the submissive and the latter won, it quite frankly seized the power formerly held by the other. At no time did it pretend to diminish the distance between the top-dog and the under-dog, or to give up the exploitation of the many by the few.

But as the situation of the human race changed, the power-relationships were altered. Mankind was striving for more security and stability. Technology--better known as the invention of power devices such as arms, gunpowder, boats, machines, and the harnessing of steam and electricity--put power into the hands of more and more people. It became more difficult for one or a few to exercise the same degree of personal domination over the majority as in the past. History is a description

of countless large and small revolutions fought to diminish the power and advantage held by any minority over the majority. As the power of one grew less absolute, the powers of the others advanced and with it the personal advantages enjoyed by each. And, too, the Ruler was obliged to become more responsible for his acts, he had to share a larger portion of the disadvantages of the common lot.

In spite of these changes in the degree of authority existing between the dominant and the submissive, there was no change in the opinion that there must always be some who rule and others who are ruled. It was still assumed that certain people were, de jure or de facto, destined to command others. This basic assumption about power and superiority was not challenged even as an idea until as recently as the American and French revolutions. Only then did there begin to emerge the general opinion that government should be by agreement of the governed--that final authority should rest in the hands of all and not in the will of a few.

As a result of such thinking about human relationships, a few countries gained governmental forms which permitted each citizen to have his part in making the laws of the land. They decreed that all men were "equal" before the law and at the polls, and political equality was almost achieved. But men had lived since the childhood of the human race with customs which permitted great disparity of social and economic privilege; they were so accustomed to these that they believed them irremediable. As a result, even in the so-called Democracies, men did not use their political equality to remove the inequalities of social and financial status which they had inherited from the past. The old situation of Superior and Inferior continued to exist in its usual variety of forms. Exploitation of the majority by a smaller minority went merrily on its way. "Equality before the law" did not mean that the laws were framed to achieve equality of privilege and a common bond of responsibility for all, for mutual good.

Ruth Benedict says in her book, Patterns of Culture, that "no man ever looks on the world with pristine eyes. He sees it edited by a definite set of customs and institutions and ways of thinking. Even in his philosophical probings, he cannot go behind these stereotypes; his very concepts of the true and the false will have reference to his particular traditional customs."

Only this factor can explain why men did not use political equality to remedy the social and financial inequality inherited from the past. We are blinded by custom and oblivious to the obvious! Certain religions had admonished us to "bear one another's burdens," and other great teachers of the human race pointed out to us that our common situation can only be improved insofar as we get rid of exploitation and competition for personal superiority and learn to share the disadvantages as well as the advantages of our lot.

This, too, was a hint for us to train ourselves in a new manner of relationships. We developed words such as Equality, Fraternity, and Democracy to indicate thoughts and strivings in this direction, but the customs of the old pattern of Dominance and Submission still remain to be replaced sometime in the future. It is folly to pretend that we have come to the place where we want Fair Play, Democracy, Fraternity, or Equality, if we mean by these terms that we must give up the struggle for Special Privilege and the power to exploit weaker peoples.

There is no power on earth that could keep men from having what they want--if they want it. Psychologically speaking, Democracy is a way of regarding the rights and privileges of the other fellow! It is a frame-of-mind in which a man realizes that his personal security and advantage depend on guaranteeing that all others are made secure. This is a very different mind-set from the one we habitually employ from the past whereby each man believes his personal advancement can be accomplished only if he deprives another of gain. Perhaps no one under-

stood this better than Adler did when he invented the concept of Social Interest. He never lost sight of the problems of Superiority-Inferiority. Individual Psychology is a philosophy and a technique for influencing those who have made mistakes about ideas of power and dominance so that they will find the path toward mutuality.

Those who are interested in exploitation and exclusion like to point out that people are not born "equal" and that democracy is therefore impossible. What they mean is that we are not all alike in all respects. We all have the same fundamental needs and are injured by the same poisons or guns. The fact that some are more gifted in one respect or another is an advantage to all when share and share alike for the common good is the social goal; the community is enriched by the differences. And regardless of differences, all contributions are necessary. Insofar as each man gives of his best, all have made an equal contribution. It is no more difficult for the richly endowed to give his best effort and thought than it is for the less well endowed to give his best ability. When all men gain the inner-consent to give each of his best toward the commonweal for all, we shall find that the ideal situation we call democracy has been realized.

But men still want personal success instead of "equality" (mutual gain). We cannot hide our eyes to the fact that the prizes of our civilization are still given to the swift and the strong--and even the smallest child can see it. Predatory power is glorified and rewarded--and, of course, envied and emulated. We cannot hope that children will train themselves along non-predatory lines while this situation obtains. Nor can we hope that democracy will grow where only the strong are rewarded.

At this point it seems impossible that psychological, economic, social, or any other form of democracy can hope to establish itself against the inescapable teaching of Custom itself. But we are not without hope. Customs change when

a custom can no longer function. As we have pointed out before, all changes in our human situation were based on inventions that altered the basic situation of human association. The spread of technology has always rotted the hold of autocratic, irresponsible, specially-privileged groups. The customs and mores die and are replaced by others more in keeping with changed situations. Our fundamental situation as human beings has altered from that of chronic scarcities and famines to that of potential abundance for all.

This fact alone insures the achievement of social and economic equality. When men try to distribute the abundant products of machines by customs of distribution which evolved in an Age of Scarcity, they fail; in panic they try to create artificial scarcities by unemployment, destruction of goods, wars, etc. All unsocial means of this kind must fail. In time, common necessity obliges them to invent new ways of distribution appropriate to abundance instead of the old ways only appropriate for scarcities. And in time, all of us will be more adequately fed, housed, clothed, and educated if for no better reason than "to keep the machines running."

When this happens, the old pattern of dominance and submission will give way. Men rise to dominance only because they can keep other men hungry and these other men are obsequious only as a price for food. And as soon as the cancer of physical want is removed by Abundance, the prizes will no longer go to the swift and the strong; they will be given to those who are helpful and cooperative. And all will become helpful and cooperative since none can gain more by aggression and exploitation.

Adler ends his book, What Life Should Mean to You, with the statement that the human race has not begun to show its potentialities, since they can be developed only insofar as men can learn to reinforce the skills and abilities of one another through cooperation instead of curtailing them in competition and mutual sabotage by striving

for personal advancement at the expense of one another! Any social arrangements which permit dominance-submission and superior-inferior relationships to flourish retard the progress of the human race. The fullness of human development occurs only when each man feels responsible for the welfare of all other men as well as for himself. Any other human relationship breeds irresponsibility and degenerates into exploitation of one by another.

So then, let us regard the word "Democ-

racy" as referring to a life-situation we have not yet achieved on this earth-- as a situation which we can create as an antidote to the calamities of the present. Let it represent to us a life-situation in which men give up seeking personal salvation and enrichment at the expense of other men and discover it in mutual striving for mutual enrichment. Let it represent the life-situation in which each man gives his best gift, whether large or small, for the common good.

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### A CALL FOR LOYALTY\*

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In time of war everything is in flux; people are taken out of their surroundings, out of their jobs, their homes, and their families. Values are changing. Men have to leave positions for which they may have struggled for years. Will they find them again when they come back? Soldiers thousands of miles away from their wives will have other women around to comfort them in their discouragement or to share their exaltation at being alive at least for today. Women will be left at home carrying the responsibility for the family. Their husbands' picture may fade away under the burden and the reality of the present. Mothers will bury their sons for their country. Will their country remember them?

All of this would bring fear and terror if there were not one quality of human beings to overcome this insecurity: that quality is loyalty--the loyalty between employer and worker, between husband and wife, between government and people. To be loyal means to stand

by with trust, without immediate reward, and often with sacrifice, in gratefulness for that which we have received in the past, with the faith in a future of reciprocal beneficial relationship.

It is loyalty that we need most in a time like this and for which I plead today. Not at every time are values received and given equally. War times change the ability to render services. Our Individual Psychology Association as such may be in need of your loyalty throughout the war because individual members are giving their services to the full extent to the war effort. I plead with you to keep this association alive so that it may serve again. And in the spirit of this same loyalty let us honor the memory of Alfred Adler, the founder of Individual Psychology.

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\*Introductory remarks at the Annual Meeting of the Individual Psychology Association of Chicago on June 26, 1942.