Democracy and the Occupation

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THE POLITICAL ethics of a people are found in their state papers, speeches and books of their statesmen and political leaders and in their actions. Where these standards are high, growing out of the Judeo-Christian ethic, candor, which is also a high ethic, requires that the people shall admit that they have not on all occasions, by their actions, lived up to their standards.

But this is not discouragingly dangerous. For so long as a people acknowledge the existence and validity of high standards, then conscience will drive them from failure up and onward to renewed achievement. It is only when a people abandon or deny their high standards that they are in danger. For then, there being no standard, there can be no conscience to aid them to realize the degrading quality of the slime in which they are wallowing . . .

The people of the United States, in my opinion, have two basic state papers, the Declaration of Independence of July 4, 1776, and the Constitution with its first 10 amendments, called the Bill of Rights, which followed the Declaration by some 15 years.

THE DECLARATION, largely the work of Jefferson, lays down the fundamental ethic, the Constitution reaffirms the ethic, in part in the preamble, but primarily the purpose of the Constitution is to provide the machinery by which the ethic may be brought into existence and maintained for the benefit of the people, who desire to enjoy and to expand the benefits inherent in the ethic... Eighty-seven years later, in 1863, at Gettysburg, Abraham Lincoln reaffirmed part of the basic beliefs...

Jefferson and Lincoln, men of different generations and of different social and economic strata, the former of the landed gentry, the latter from the relatively penniless, pioneering, small farmers, both expressed the same basic political philosophy. This in itself is in the best American tradition, namely, absence of rigid stratification of political thinking upon class lines. They both declared that all men are "created equal"; and, that government is "of the people, by the people", that is to say that government "derives (its) just powers from the consent of the governed."

Lincoln also stated expressly, that which is implicit in the Declaration, that such government should be "for the people"—a government which produces the highest degree of liberty and economic well-being and security for the greatest number of the people.

I OFTEN FIND that Americans, as well as Germans and other occidental people, are confused by the statement that all men are "created equal." They point out the obvious individual economic inequalities into which people are born. They point out, admitting the strong effect of cultural, educational and economic environment upon humans, that nevertheless they do seem to be born with varying proclivities, if not indeed capacities, for doing things with their hands or with their brains, that cannot be accounted for purely upon the basis of environment. Then they say all men are not "created equal."

However, the sense in which the term is used has to do with the right which men have to enjoy a society in which there is equality of opportunity to attain their full dignity as a human being—a human being created in the image of God and therefore containing, a spark of the divine, the "leaven" which is capable of expanding under the influence of the Holy Spirit, so as to reflect and produce Godliness here "on Earth as it is in Heaven." Therefore the sense in which the words "all men are created equal" are used in the American political thinking, is consistent with that of any religious concept which believes in a Fatherhood of God over a brotherhood of Man.

Quite akin to this is also the belief that "governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed;" that government must be "of the people and by the people."

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War, being immoral, is also undemocratic and therefore the results following in the wake of war must be immoral and therefore undemocratic .... The victors, having had to restort to force to overcome force, must inevitably continue to use force after the conflict has ended .... The occupation of Germany is ... the result of the power and authority which the United States is empowered to exercise as the result of the resort to war by the German nation under the Hitler government. It is the philosophically and abstractly immoral and, therefore, theoretically undemocratic result which always follows an immoral cause, namely the resort to war. But the people of the United States did not originate the cause. Therefore, the resulting position of occupying power is neither of their choosing nor to their liking. — *Excerpt from Director LaFollette's article.*

There is expressed in this thought many related ideas and ideals . . .

The demand that government come from the people carries with it the idea that man is too dignified to allow some other person, without his consent, to lay down the rules under which he shall live out his life. It is true that his consent is usually expressed through a vote, cast in regularly spaced or legally provided-for elections, for a necessarily-limited number of policy making and administrative offices in the government.

But the fact that he can exercise this degree of participation, if it is implemented with means, in the form of laws, whereby he can rectify his mistakes of policy or his lack of proper evaluation of the integrity and probity of individuals elected by him, within a reasonably short time after they become apparent to him, does make his government exist with and by the consent of the governed.

IT IS OBVIOUS that although the exercise of the right to vote confers dignity upon a man, it does not free him from an obligation to restrain himself in his action if his opinions shall not prevail. There is implied in the exercise of the right to vote, an agreement to abide by the result of the vote.

This requires that the people who comprise the society shall also establish rules by which the result shall be measured. In the United States, in a preponderating expression of public opinion we have decided that a majority of the votes cast, and in some instances a mere plurality, shall decide the election of individuals or the choice of policies.

(I know that this issue is a very controversial one in Germany today. I hasten to say that my declaration of the American system is not made with the intent to influence the decision which is to be made on that issue. Certainly, if I am to discuss American political ethics, it must be clear that I am obliged, however, to state the American system as a fact. I do only that.)

Once this decision has been made in the United States, then the individual who finds his opinion expressed by his vote is the minority opinion is bound not alone by law but morally to abide by it. To do otherwise would be to turn "freedom," which is a stabilizing influence in society, into "license" which is unrestrained individuality creating chaos.

However, there are also several implied promises given by those who constitute the majority to those who were in the minority, upon which the minority has the right to rely if freedom is to continue to prevail in the life of a democratic society.

THE FIRST of these is that the result was honestly reached. This means that there was no economic or social or physical coercion of the members of the society, which was so intense in degree that the average citizen could not be expected to resist it, operating in favor of those who supported the candidate or the issue which prevailed. For if those conditions were present, then anti-democratic means—for coercion is always irreligious and therefore anti-democratic—procured the result and the majority has no moral right to demand acquiesence by the minority in a decision thus obtained.

This article is an abridget text of the address which Mr. La-Follette delivered at the Convention of the Evangelical Assembly of Wuerttemberg-Baden at Bad Boll in Goeppingen County on Dec. 10.

But the second of these implied promises is far more basic and therefore far more important. In any democratic society the members cast their votes on the implied promise that at legally regulated intervals issues pertinent to the conduct of government will be submitted to the people for decision.

It follows therefore that the members of a minority, though defeated, acquiesce in the role of the majority on the assumption that at a later date they will be able to convince enough other members of the society, including some of those who presently constitute the majority, that the interests of the society as a whole will be better served, of the views of those presently in minority are adapted.

IT IS UPON the inviolability of this rule that the continuity of order and internal peace in democratic societies rests. It so rests because the right to argue and to work for a change of governmental policy, coupled with the certainty that at a legally-fixed future date the whole society may again express itself in an orderly free election, assures a man that his individual dignity is being preserved in that society. Contrarywise, if and when a majority, having obtained power, denies to the minority all future right to exercise equally-favorable democratic means to change its government, then freedom ceases to exist in such a society.

And with the loss of freedom, the moral obligation of those in the minority to accept the rule of the majority also ceases. Just as those German citizens, who opposed Adolph Hitler and his Nazi Party adherents, owed no moral obligation to obey his laws after he destroyed their power to change their government by orderly democratic means, so today the people of Czechoslovakia, who did not participate in or support the recent Communist seizure of power, are under no moral obligation to acquiesce in the rule of the present regime.

Observe also that each of these regimes found it necessary to strike down those who opposed them by coercion and force. It is and will be always so. Whenever you find immoral seizure and maintenance of power you find illegal means used to destroy those who oppose it. Whenever you find that, you find no freedom. Whenever you find no freedom, you find human dignity debased. Whenever you find human dignity debased you find no religion based upon Judeo-Christian ethics being practiced, as distinguished from preached. Whenever you find no such religion being practiced, you find no democracy.

HOWEVER, the American political ethic also recognizes that democracy is more than a mere rule by majority. Therefore democracy is more than merely handing people a ballot and providing by law for

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