

# THE DIFFICULTIES OF DEMOCRACY<sup>1</sup>

BY COUNT ALBERT APPONYI

EVERY thinking man has doubtless asked himself these questions: Why are we all talking about a crisis of democracy to-day? Why has democracy ceased to exist in many places, and why is its survival so precarious in others? Every friend of democracy should unflinchingly face these questions, for there must be forces hostile to democracy at work that explain these tendencies. If the trouble is not due to some fatal defect in democracy itself, — which I personally refuse to admit, — it must lie in the conditions of our time, and we must remedy those conditions if we would save democracy.

First of all, we must be perfectly clear in our minds what democracy is. Some of its achievements are already so well established as to be virtually beyond attack in any civilized country. For example, the equality of all citizens before the law and the legal right of every individual to an equal opportunity to rise in any career he may choose to follow are never contested in principle, although the principle may be violated in practice in countries where democracy is more of a pretense than a reality. In this primitive sense of the word, which makes democracy mean simply equality and the abolition of artificial privileges, it may exist under an absolute government. Julius Cæsar championed a democratic autocracy against an aristocratic republic. Napoleon tried to do the same. Equalitarian autocracy may be a transitional step to true democracy.

But when we speak of the difficulties of democracy to-day we do not refer to the principle of equality, but to government by the people and for the people. This is the aspect of the democratic ideal that is struggling for survival against hostile influences that vary in different countries and that are often sadly misunderstood. The source of this misunderstanding is generally our tendency to identify our own will with the people's will, and to stigmatize as undemocratic what we ourselves disapprove without stopping to investigate whether it may not, after all, be what the masses of the people want. . . .

Democracy does not mean the direct rule of the masses, for that has never existed, but a form of government in which every citizen can have his say on all fundamental questions, and in which the will of the majority eventually — even if slowly and hesitatingly — prevails. The people must have protection, counterweights, securities, against their own tyranny quite as much as, if not more than, against the tyranny of others. All unlimited power is a danger for the community, because not even public opinion can be trusted with unbounded sway. The American Constitution is a marvelous example of the devices by which a democracy has set up balances and counterbalances against its own aberrations. The independence of the President in appointing his Cabinet, which is not responsible to Congress; the limited coöperation of the Senate in certain executive acts; the different constitution of the two Houses of Con-

<sup>1</sup>From *Pester Lloyd* (Budapest German-Hungarian daily), February 15

gress; the distinction between organic law and ordinary statutes; the difficulty of amending the Constitution; the independent authority of the courts to decide whether a law does or does not violate the Constitution, and their power to declare legislative Acts invalid — these form, as I say, a marvelous system of weights and counterweights by which processes of government, while constantly responding to the public will, are kept under control.

Democracy assumes an entirely different form in republican France, where it sprang from a revolution instead of from the ancient traditions of a people. There it meant a conscious break with the past. . . . To-day France, with her democratic-republican institutions, has perhaps the most securely established system of government of any Great Power on the Continent. The political machinery that she has built up since the Revolution possesses undisputed authority, and unconditionally controls — this is the decisive thing — her armed forces. But it took no less than seven political overturns to give the country its present stability, and about a century to achieve it. France owes the fact that she could thus transform her political constitution without imperiling her existence, and even without permanently diminishing her prestige in Europe, primarily to the marvelous administrative organization that Napoleon's genius bequeathed her — an organization that suits the national character, that is in many ways rooted in the traditions of the old régime, and that has withstood all changes in her rulers. She also has to thank for this the intense patriotism of her people, which has prevented the members of any political party, after the first emigration, from taking advantage of her foreign embarrassments for personal political ends.

Nevertheless, it would be presump-

tuous to the verge of folly for a nation like our own, whose political discipline and respect for authority are already undermined, to resort to revolution to attain a form of government that it can eventually acquire with safety and certainty by a process of gradual evolution. Hungary, possessing as she does vigorous national traditions that can be adapted to the needs of progress, would take a suicidal step in attempting to hasten these evolutionary processes by a revolution. Political children may toy with that idea; sensible men will reject it.

The difficulties and perils that now threaten democracy do not exist in France, England, Belgium, Holland, Switzerland, and the Scandinavian countries. They manifest themselves strongly, however, in Spain, Italy, Germany, Hungary, and our neighboring States. When we analyze these difficulties and perils we come, in my opinion, to the following results:—

1. In all countries where democracy has not evolved out of the customs of the people, but has been decreed by a Government or a Party, it is hampered by the weaknesses of every political improvisation. The masses are not competent for the tasks democracy lays upon them without generations of previous schooling. Neither are they willing to submit to the necessary restraints inherent in democracy, because the institutions that incorporate these restraints lack the authority that only sentiment springing from a long tradition gives them.

2. In several countries democracy encounters internal divisions among the people that prevent national unity and coöperation. But such unity is an indispensable prerequisite for democracy. There must be a united people before the will of the people can be law. This unity exists in every country where democracy is already a success.

The French, British, Belgians, and so on, habitually think of their nations as a unit. In those countries the Social Democrats are just as patriotic as any other Party. They may preach internationalism as a theory, but when it comes to the point their own country is their first concern. For that reason political controversies do not threaten the essential unity of the nation, which stands above them. There is a supreme will of the people that rules.

But where a united people does not exist, there can be no such popular will. Either the community falls asunder, or one element proves itself powerful enough to dominate the others. Not the popular will but the will of a faction rules, and does so, not as a constitutionally established authority, but by force.

I think I am doing our neighboring States no injustice when I place them in this latter category. Real democracy — the participation of the whole people in the government — can hardly exist where a fraction of the people is compelled by force to be part of the State and regards the country to which it belongs at best with a feeling of resignation, and with no loyalty or affection. Naturally those in control of the government in such countries resort to every device in their power to weaken and exterminate politically this dissentient fraction of the population. To talk of democracy under such circumstances is a pure misuse of language. What are the Czechoslovak Republic, Yugoslavia, and Greater Rumania except Czech, Serb, and Rumanian imperialisms?

But there are other countries where democracy is rendered impossible by conflicts between different social classes so bitter and irreconcilable that they prevent common action, because neither class will tolerate without a resort to force a government by the

other class even when founded on a constitutional majority. This is the situation in Italy under the Fascisti, who do represent, of course, a popular movement, but who are not willing to submit their control of the government to the test of a popular vote. When you reproach the Fascisti for this, they say they have no choice, because the Italian Socialists are so saturated with Communism that they will use violence to gain power. Fascisti terrorism, they tell you, is an indispensable measure of defense adopted by bourgeois society to combat Bolshevik terrorism and a dictatorship of the proletariat, and all the economic and civic demoralization that they would bring. In truth the success of the Fascisti in organizing bourgeois society, or at least a part of it, to successfully defend itself against a Red Terror is of great importance. But many responsible and authoritative public men in Italy deny the existence of an emergency that justifies this choice between two kinds of terrorism. The present situation in Spain is due to similar causes, although, following the unfortunate precedents of the last century, arbitrary government in that country has taken the form of a military dictatorship.

Without going into further detail, let me point out the logical conclusion from what I have just said of this second class of difficulties which democracy is encountering. They all spring from irreconcilable discord between sections of the population, whether the dividing line be between nationalities or social classes. These obstacles will continue as long as those divisions exist. The divisions will exist as long as any single element of the people designs, or is suspected of designing, to seize the government by force.

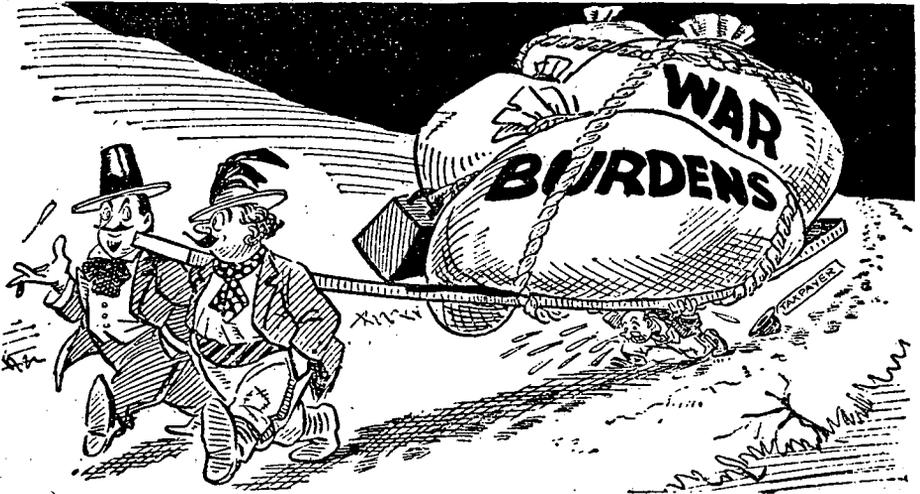
3. I come now to democracy's third difficulty. It is peculiar to the conquered countries, and is perhaps the

principal obstacle to successful democracy in their particular case. It lies in the fact that these new democratic governments must shoulder the crushing burden, and the equally crushing odium, of fulfilling a Peace Treaty against whose conditions the people rebel. An unpopular democratic government is a self-contradiction, and yet any government, no matter what its character, that undertakes such a task must be unpopular. It may be a bitter necessity to fulfill the Treaty: it may be folly to resist it. Advocates of fulfillment may be perfectly right, and the sincerest patriotic motives may move them to do what they believe to be their duty. None the less, they can never shake off the opprobrium which the instinctive aversion of the emotional masses will heap upon them. Any vigorous nation is incapable of an abnormal — or, I would rather put it, supernormal — degree of cool, calculating thought. In any case, outraged national pride and sense of justice make it

very easy for enemies of popular governments to discredit all democratic institutions in the eyes of the common people.

Therefore democracy is at the present moment endangered in many countries. Its survival depends upon removing the obstacles here described. Their removal is vitally important for the future of all mankind, for the evolution of every country, because the only natural line of political evolution lies in the direction of democracy. Those who believe — either with sorrow or with gratification — that democracy will perish, and that we shall return to the reactionary governments of old, are blind to the lessons of history. Under the sway of certain emotions the minds of men may turn back longingly for a moment to the institutions of the past, forgetful of the irresistible laws of progress. But that is a dangerous indulgence, for which sooner or later — and probably sooner rather than later — they must pay a bitter penalty.

#### EUROPE'S OVERWORKED POLITICIANS



Putting Their Shoulders to It. — *Daily Express*, London

## A WORD ABOUT FRANCE<sup>1</sup>

BY PAUL SEIPPEL

FRANCE, mobile as she seems on the surface, shows remarkable consistency to one who studies her closely. Throughout the centuries she has remained essentially the same. I have just returned from a trip through that land of memories from the Midi to Paris and from Paris to La Touraine: Calm your fears — I do not intend to describe my journey. What is there new to write about in a land which everybody knows, and which is daily becoming more and more the cross-roads of two hemispheres? All I shall do is to jot down one or two general impressions.

In the first place, why do all these strangers, who discommode real Frenchmen not a little by unceremoniously taking possession of their country, come here? For a mild climate, an agreeable life, and amusement, no doubt. But also for something else. On his return from America Guglielmo Ferrero pointed out, in a book of remarkable perspicacity, the distinctive difference between the United States and France: in the former there has been a remarkable development of quantitative civilization; in the latter there has been an exquisite refinement of qualitative civilization. Now, after having acquired quantity, we like to use it to procure quality. That is why every luxurious transatlantic steamer is packed with fat-pursed Yankee tourists.

Quality in all things — cooking, manners, politeness, feminine elegance,

<sup>1</sup>From *Journal de Genève* (Swiss Liberal-Democratic daily), April 26

polished language, measure and delicacy of taste. We are told that all this is being ruined by the cosmopolitan invasion. That may be true of Paris, where that invasion centres. This spring that city resembled an Anglo-Saxon colony. Everybody spoke English, especially the Germans, who go to all lengths — though in vain — to appear like the noble Islanders. In the hotel where I stopped I was forced to insist that the servants speak to me in French. All the public notices were in English, with a French translation at the bottom. Even the little ladies at the Casino de Paris and the Folies Bergères are studying English, paying instructors to teach them out of their modest purses.

But if you draw a circle with a radius of two kilometres around the Opera House, you will find old Paris just outside the circumference — the same familiar agglomeration of suburbs, each a city in itself. Unquestionably the boulevards are hideous. American advertisements deform them most impudently. At every other step one strikes you in the eye like a pugilist's fist and makes you see a whole constellation of stars.

But cross the river and go only as far as La Rue Jacob, or saunter slowly in Le Marais, and you will find that nothing has changed for half a century. You will see the same restaurants run by the same proprietors or their sons, the identical carefully selected menus, the identical excellent wines, *Côtes du Rhône* or *de l'Anjou*. You can often read over the doorway of some