

(December 5)

## Democratic Tendencies: Safe and Unsafe.

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ADDRESSING the Canadian Club on the subject, "Democratic Tendencies: Safe and Unsafe," Dr. Charles W. Eliot, former President of Harvard University, said:

*Mr. President and Gentlemen,*—The democratic tendencies with which I propose to deal appear in all democratic countries, such as Switzerland, France, Australia, Canada, and the United States. They are also manifest in some countries, like England and Germany, in which numerous survivals of the feudal system still persist. Let us first consider the unsafe or undesirable tendencies, which ought to be first clearly perceived, and then resisted, in order that democracies may make durable progress.

All democracies exhibit a tendency to complacency or self-satisfaction, which militates against progress. In consequence of this self-satisfied state of mind they are apt to remain ignorant of customs and methods that have elsewhere proved useful or highly promising. Thus one Swiss canton will long remain uninterested in definite progress which another canton has achieved, or one state in the American Union will remain for decades ignorant of, or uninterested in, legislation which has been a proved success in another state. This same self-satisfaction is the foundation for the tendency to self-glorious pride which all democracies exhibit—notably, the French, the American, and the English. The self-glorification would be harmless, though foolish, if it did not tend to prevent the enterprising enquiry and study that must usually precede a social or governmental advance.

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\* Dr. Charles W. Eliot has been referred to as the most distinguished private citizen of the United States. His chief work has been as President for thirty years of Harvard University, Boston, the greatest University of the United States. This gave him naturally a pre-eminent position in educational circles, but his opinions on all sorts of public questions have been sought and heard with the greatest interest. For many years it is doubtful if any other citizen of the Republic not in public life has equalled his influence along various paths for the betterment of the life of the people.

The individualism which free government fosters tends to produce in many persons an unreasonable self-confidence. Thus almost everybody in the United States thinks himself capable of planning his own house, laying out his own road or street on his own land, and of acting as school agent or school committeeman, or town selectman. Democratic faith in experts is scanty and feeble. So long as government remained simple in its functions this artless self-confidence was meritorious in the individual, and not unsafe for the community; but in proportion as all government, whether local or national, becomes complex, this failure to perceive that the expert is necessary becomes dangerous to stable progress. Applied science now enters so abundantly into most of the functions of government, whether local or national, that the services of experts have become essential to the efficient performance of government work of all sorts; and it can no longer be assumed that the ordinary citizen is capable of discharging properly the actual manager's duties in any department of town or city work. The democracies must learn to distrust the untrained man, and must acquire respect for experts and confidence in them.

It is characteristic, also, of democracies that popular opinion, and action based thereon, move forward and backward without steadiness of march, a democratic populace being in this respect just like a stumbling, wayward, inconsistent man, who nevertheless struggles onward. A benevolent despot, or a benevolent oligarchy or upper class, can achieve industrial or social progress with more certainty and rapidity than a democratic mass can, as the excellence of municipal government in Germany, in contrast with the failure of municipal government in the United States, abundantly demonstrates. If, for example, millions of common people have to be persuaded that fiat money is an evil, it will take longer to abolish fiat money in a democracy which has once adopted it than it will to get rid of it in an intelligent despotism or autocracy which has been temporarily forced to issue a depreciating currency. As a rule, a democracy must learn from its own experience; it has great difficulty in profiting by the experience of others. A small ruling class, which for some reason wants to learn, is much more capable than a democracy of learning from the experience of other people recorded in books or open to inspection.

Democracies tend to increase the number of elective offices and to elect their officials for short terms. This is one of the most undesirable tendencies that democracies have manifested.

The theory on this subject is that the people can so retain effective control over the public servants. In practice the elections become so frequent and the ballots so long that the people really part with their power to a few professional political managers, of whom the most intelligent are themselves office-holders. In the United States these managers are known as "bosses" and "machines"; and there they have been responsible for a great deal of corruption, inefficiency, and misrule under the forms of democratic government. The remedies are reduction in the number of elective offices, with the consequent shortening of the ballots, lengthening of tenures, and the utmost publicity concerning the acts of parties and candidates before elections and of legislatures in the preparation of legislation.

It is a natural consequence of frequent elections and the multiplication of elective offices in a democracy that the members of legislatures and the office-holders should be frequently changed. At any one moment, therefore, many of the legislators and officials are without experience in the management of public affairs; and are, therefore, not only ignorant of their duties, but timid in entering upon them. Feeling strongly their own inexperience and incapacity, they naturally wish to follow precedent. Hence the extraordinary conservatism of democratic administration. The tendency is strong towards a timid adherence to established methods, even when administrative abuses are in plain sight. The principle that it is better "to bear those ills we have than fly to others that we know not of" has enormous weight in democratic administration.

The perfect freedom to travel and to change one's residence or place of work which prevails in most democracies has certain dangers in regard to family life and the social habits of the people. If a laboring population, through the prevailing liberty, becomes nomad, family life is apt to be impaired. Casual and temporary aggregations of men separated from their families are apt to disregard some of the moral obligations held sacred in permanent communities—men can desert their wives by merely shifting their places of work; divorce is facilitated by the action of courts mainly in consequence of the frequency of desertion; and the life-long residence in one village or one town, which is a great security for family affection and the homely virtues, is lost to great numbers of persons. This same free migration of the laboring people promotes that formidable concentration of population which characterizes to-day all the civilized states, but is

worst in huge democracies. The concentration is itself one of the grave evils which accompany liberty; it gratifies the newborn desire for commotion, pleasure, and gregarious excitement, but brings in its train a troop of physical and moral dangers.

Despotic and oligarchic governments always used their power to promote the interests of the throne, the nobles, and the priests—that is, of certain classes very small in comparison with society as a whole. Democracies exhibit the same unpatriotic tendency to promote through legislation and otherwise the interests of separate classes in the community; but the favored classes are not small, but large, as, for instance, trades unionists, laborers whose income is small, and mechanics as such. Any class likely to be favored in a democracy commands, as a rule, a considerable number of votes, which politicians wish to secure; and if the class is also highly organized, legislative favors to it are all the more probable. This democratic tendency to class legislation appears in what is called "labor legislation," in the exemption from taxation of small incomes and the tools of a trade, and in the tariffs which increase the profits of capital in a few industries. To give any private persons, or any special class, advantages through governmental action is always prejudicial to the interests of the community as a whole; and it is by no means clear that illegitimate favors to a large class are less injurious than illegitimate favors to a small one. The numerous exemptions of favored classes from the operation of tax-laws which ought to be universal in their application—like the exemption of incomes under two thousand dollars, for example—unquestionably impair the interest of those who profit by them in sound government and particularly in wisely economical government. When millions of men who, in their own opinion and belief, contribute nothing to the support of government, can cast votes which may determine the public policies, the foundations of the state in justice and equity are less solid than they ought to be. If, for example, by the votes of untaxed citizens progressive taxes are levied on incomes and inheritances, there is danger that the running expenses of government will be paid in some measure out of capital which ought to be preserved for industrial purposes. This danger is more imminent in a country which, like the United States, habitually uses the greater part of its revenue for unproductive expenditure, as, for instance, for military pensions and the building and maintenance of a navy, than in a state which, like Switzerland, has few unproductive expendi-

tures. That the progressive income and inheritance taxes to which all democracies incline may be used for unproductive expenditures instead of the productive expenditures to which in private hands they probably would have been chiefly devoted, is not the only objection to them; if they are made large, so as to confiscate considerable portions of great incomes or great estates, their imposition discourages in the most capable money-earning class the accumulation of property. Now, on this accumulation of property and its preservation from generation to generation the progress of the arts, sciences, and industries ordinarily depends.

It would be safer, therefore, for democracies to avoid all sorts of class legislation, both those which aim at giving special privileges to a class or classes and those which aim at imposing special burdens on a class or classes; but to this rule exceptions may wisely be made in communities where the abjectly poor are numerous or the very rich become oppressive.

Under oligarchies the higher grades of the public service are apt to be overpaid, and the lower grades underpaid. In democracies the tendency is just the other way—the lower grades are apt to be better paid in proportion to the service rendered than the upper grades. Moreover, most democracies exhibit a tendency to outdo aristocratic governments in the creation of sinecures; but the sinecures exist, for the most part, in the lower grades of the public service—more clerks are employed than are needed, more laborers are set to dig a ditch than can possibly work in it to advantage, postmasters are allowed to hire for a fraction of their salaries assistants who do almost all their work, unnecessary substitutes are employed because the regular men are given shorter hours, longer vacations, or more holidays than are really needed. These democratic errors increase expense and diminish efficiency. They give privileges or advantages to numerous employees, to the injury of the service as a whole as regards both fairness and discipline. Through all these errors of democracies the individual suffers as well as the state or the community. It is impossible to demoralize a public service without demoralizing the individuals who are members of it. As the Emperor Marcus Aurelius Antoninus said many centuries ago: "That which is not good for the swarm, neither is it good for the bee."

All democracies tend strongly to collective action through public law, and through the action of the innumerable corporations, associations, and combinations which are fostered

by democratic legislation. The collective action of the community is taken more by these chartered corporations, associations, and trusts than by direct governmental action; and much of it is economical, effective, and wise from the democratic point of view, provided, however, that the democracy succeeds in resisting effectively the tendency of collective industrial action to create monopolies by destroying competition. The success of the existing democracies, whether in Europe or in America, in regulating monopolies and maintaining the good kinds of competition, has been far from perfect, but their recent efforts in this wise direction have been highly creditable, and are likely to persist, perhaps because the mass of any people suffers from monopolies and hates them, whereas despotic or autocratic governments have always been inclined, first, to maintain monopolies themselves as sources of revenue; and, secondly, to sell monopolistic privileges to private persons for cash. Kings and princes used to grant monopolies to favorites or to purchasers at high prices; democracies, having inadvertently permitted, or even abetted, the establishment of many monopolies, are now beginning to regulate them effectively by public law and public administrative force.

Let us turn now to the wholesome, or desirable, tendencies of democracy. In the first place—and this is fundamental—democratic government tends to quicken the courage and energy of the citizens. It does this, first, by leaving the individual freer than he has been under any other form of government, freer to come and go, freer to pursue the occupation which most attracts him, freer to rise from one social or industrial layer to another, and freer to contrive and secure improvement for his family, and particularly for his children. Then, to assure these various freedoms, a democracy abolishes all privileges of birth, permits no inheritances of title or function, and no castes or fixed class distinctions, provides elementary, and even secondary, education at low cost or free, and ultimately makes some elementary education compulsory for all children. It thus encourages in almost every citizen the initiative and aspiration which are main sources of efficiency.

Democracy has the effect to make the individual citizen and society as a whole habitually hopeful. The democracies are all characterized by a general expectation of progress and improvement—of greater good to be. Now, hope is a principal element in both private and public happiness. In spite of the exaggerated denunciations of modern industrialism in which socialists and unionists nowadays indulge, an immense,

almost universal, hopefulness has characterized the free peoples for several generations past.

The broad suffrage which a democracy always confers contributes strongly to the mental development of the mass of the people. It gives them numerous opportunities to think, discriminate, and judge, calls all the voters from time to time away from the routine of their ordinary lives, and makes them consider questions and procedures of wide interest, which are often difficult and many-sided. Democracy has no better tendency than this, for whatever makes a man think about the common welfare, or his own welfare in connection with that of others, enlarges and exalts him. It is a chief merit of the democratic form of government that it makes every conscientious citizen take thought for interests and hopes which far transcend his own. In any genuine democracy there will always be a considerable amount of new legislation, and this legislation will have a progressive quality. The goal of democracy—the largest happiness of the greatest number possible—is never reached; but democratic legislation is always pressing toward that goal, and is therefore progressive. Democracy recognizes no fixed, permanent code, either in law or in ethics. No single authority come out of the past prevents progress in Christian states, as the Koran, a fixed, unalterable authority in both Church and State, obstructs progress in Islam. Many people to-day are inclined to regret that democracy makes so many new laws; but the tendency to progressive legislation is one of the best that democracies exhibit; although it often happens that experiments in legislation are entered on with too little consideration.

All democracies tend to spend more and more money on education of all kinds—elementary and advanced, cultural and utilitarian, liberal and technical or industrial, linguistic, historical, and scientific. This is the wisest tendency of democracies, because ignorance and superstition make genuine freedom impossible. A recent admirable development of democratic activity in education is the extension of public expenditure for teaching purposes quite beyond the period of childhood and youth. Thus, the efforts to promote the public health, such as the campaigns against tuberculosis and the bubonic plague, proceed mainly by the provision of public instruction through illustrated lectures, exhibitions, and the press. This instruction is addressed to adults as well as children, and to all classes of the urban population. The same admirable democratic tendency is illustrated by the recent use of public money in teaching better farming, by itinerant lec-

turers and model farms, to the entire agricultural class already settled on the land, but not working to advantage. In the United States national money, state money, and part of the income of the great Rockefeller endowment, called the General Education Board, are all used in this way.

Democracy tends strongly to produce a wide distribution of property among the people. Thus almost every adult male in the United States, whose parents were born there, has property of some sort—land, a house, furniture, tools or other chattels, a savings bank deposit, a life insurance policy, a share in the stock of some corporation, or a bond of some corporation, town, or city. Every such owner is a conservative force, ready to defend the right to hold private property, and to transmit it to descendants. To these fundamental rights, which foster the personal virtues of industry, frugality, and constancy in family loves, and are, indeed, the foundations, both moral and material, of civilization itself, the nineteenth century added a new democratic privilege—that of receiving and transmitting education. The privilege caps the climax of the long democratic ascent. It makes safe the universal participation in government which many political philosophers have thought dangerous, and opens a long vista of social and industrial progress. People who are concerned about the alleged progress of socialistic doctrine ought to find consolation in the fact that diffused property-holding, education, and inborn love of freedom in combination oppose strong obstacles to the progress of genuine socialism in democracies.

Recent years have supplied many demonstrations of the truth of the statement that in democracies a well-informed public opinion ultimately decides all political and social questions. The tendency of public opinion in democracies is, therefore, worthy of careful study. Time does not permit me to mention more than three comparatively recent developments of public opinion in free states; but all these three are of high importance. In thorough-going democracies public opinion has settled to the conviction that the social levelling which results from a democracy must always be levelling up. Since freedom has no tendency to produce equality of conditions, but the very reverse, there will be in perpetuity many classes, or layers, in democratic society. What democracy can do for this diversified society is, first, to keep the different layers mobile and not stiff, so that there shall be freedom of motion for the individual through and among them; and, secondly, it can be continually lifting the manners and morals of the lower layers up toward the level of the higher. In this process,

however, democratic opinion has no illusions. It knows that there must always be individual leaders of superior merit, and it is eager for leadership; it knows, too, that "in the scales of the destinies brawn will never weigh as much as brain," as James Russell Lowell said. Not the equality of all men, or even equality of opportunity, but infinite diversity, with appropriate and available opportunity for each sort of human being, is the democratic goal.

In the second place, democratic institutions unquestionably promote a general sympathy and good-will among all classes of the community; and, in consequence, democratic society has arrived in recent years at a clear perception that no class in the community, however self-respecting, can be completely happy, or even comfortable, so long as any other class is vicious or degraded, and therefore miserable. The precepts and practices of preventive medicine have done much to bring democracies to this last opinion. They realize to-day as never before that "the sores of Lazarus have a poison in them against which Dives has no antidote," to quote again that wise and far-seeing democrat, James Russell Lowell. Hence innumerable efforts on the part of government, voluntary associations, and public-spirited individuals to dig up ancient evils by the roots, to defeat pestilences and imprison contagions, both moral and physical; to secure public sanitation in town and country, and for urban populations free means of health and wholesome pleasures—in short, to promote the common good.

Finally, there is a beneficent growth of democratic public opinion against the worst survival of barbarism, war, a growth rooted in the convictions that the democratic masses pay all the costs of war, and that war costs more and more in both blood and treasure, as applied science creates more and more costly and efficient means of destruction, and improves the means of transportation by land and sea, so that the areas devastated by war and the size of armies and navies can be greatly enlarged, but enlarged at tremendous cost. It is clear that under a democratic form of government war will always be more costly than under an oligarchic or despotic, because more will be spent on the private soldier, inexperienced officers and civil agents will inevitably cause much waste of both men and material, and exaggerated and fraudulent pension schemes will prolong through at least two generations after a war a widespread demoralization. The progress of democracy has already made dynastic wars impossible, and bids fair soon to prevent wars between Christian nations for the conquest of

territory. It remains for democratic public opinion to bring about the establishment of an international tribunal, with an international police force behind it, to which all disputes between nation and nation can be referred for settlement; and subsequently to find the means of stopping the progressive expenditure on armaments and military and naval training.

The strong tendency of democratic opinion against war is one of the best signs of our times. Democracies have been accused of being quick to fight, when swept by waves of passion or of fear; but it is very doubtful if democracies have in the past been any more liable than aristocracies to either fury or panic. However this may be, in the future the well-grounded conviction that in their blood and their labor the masses pay the terrible cost of war is likely to exercise a calming influence in times of popular excitement. It is only the burden of past war and of preparations for new ones which to-day prevents the liberal expenditure of public money for the direct promotion of human welfare on a great scale.