

EMOTION AND GOVERNMENT

ALL systems of government are ultimately supported upon three bases: the value of property, the value of life and **the** value of emotion. Oligarchy rests most strongly upon **the** first, democracy upon the second and dictatorship on **the** third. The ideal, **of** course, is an equal distribution **of** weight: as should theoretically obtain in England, where **the Lords** stand for land and money, the Commons for the average man, and the King for the old and moving tradition of a living country. But oligarchy **is** passing: democracy drags out a mechanized existence: young, ardent and austere minds turn to follow with a dedicated loyalty the leadership of a minority or of a man, the proletariat, the dictator, the monarch. Russia is ruled by the tiny Communist party, Italy by Mussolini, Germany by Hitler; Austria and Hungary meditate the restoration of the Hapsburgs.

The desire for political leadership springs from one **of** two causes. The first is the possession of a life so busy and emotionally so satisfying as to leave neither time nor energy for political activities: this is usually to be perceived among peasants and housewives, and is the foundation of monarchy. **In** the King the peasant **sees** the living embodiment of the loved land: in the Royal Family the woman finds the prototype of her own. The drama of marriage, child-bearing, and death, celebrated in magnificence for them, is charged with meaning for her: their life **is** symbolic and universal.

The second cause of a longing for authority is a life starved of feeling and of significance: the incoherent life of the young inhabitant of an industrial town, dependent **for** his living upon forces he can neither imagine nor control, with no horizon but factory chimneys, no interest in his work but his wages, no power to do anything for himself if he be unemployed. He has grown up amongst machines, and has **never** known the slow fruitfulness of the earth; he therefore assumes that mechanical force can

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solve all problems. He has been an insulated creature, sharing nothing with his fellow men but the fictitious enthusiasm of a football crowd; in devotion to a leader he can be delivered from himself into the current of a 'noble rage,' a disciplined brotherhood. As a person he *is* a self-conscious triviality; as a Blackshirt, a Brownshirt, a Redshirt he is the manifestation of a powerful movement. He is of the type which enjoyed the War, since it gave meaning to his actions and made him for the first time consciously a citizen.

But war on the one hand and violent dictatorship on the other are prices too high to pay for the fulfilment of the herd-instinct in irresponsible loyalty. There are millions of balanced men and women who have the leisure and the capacity for politics. Is there no way of tingeing democracy with emotion, so that not only they, but the whole electorate, can find a strenuous satisfaction in self-government?

By democracy I mean the right of every man to control his own money and his own life. This involves exercising an influence over the home policy in which is spent the money collected from him by direct and indirect taxation, and over the foreign policy which may demand his life in time of war. This is a sober, matter of fact business: and its weakness lies in its very sobriety. We inhabit an age of abundant and unfocussed religious feeling for which people are always trying to find an object. Accordingly, they make patriotism sacred, they regard policies as ends instead of means, they set **up** men to be adored as demi-gods, and they conceive of the State as the mystical community of the faithful. It is naturally exceedingly irritating to them to have it pointed out that political activity is merely the effort of an aggregation of people to whom private life is infinitely more important than public, to plan out the expenditure of their common finances in the wisest, justest and most convenient way. Thus the religious hattle cries—'Workers of the World, Unite'—'Empire Free Trade'—'Down with Fascism'—attract far more enthusiasm than, say, Major Eliot's **work** for agriculture, and the kindly commonsense of Mr. Lansbury who has pro-

vided Londoners with *so* many things they have long needed; playgrounds with sand and swings and see-saws for their children, running tracks for their youth, a bathing place for them all.

It is obvious that there is too little emotion about democracy as it stands. It has become abstract, rigid, commercialized, an affair of catch phrases on the one hand and statistics on the other. This is not only because we have had it *so* long in England that it is accepted and taken for granted. It is because local patriotism is starved, especially in large towns, whose units of life are small villages, each with its doctor, its church, its shops, its pubs. The people who live in such villages know one another almost as well as their counterparts in rural hamlets, especially the women and the manual workers: they have *as* keen an interest in one another's doings, as shrewd an insight into one another's characters, *as* habitual a friendship with the local milkman, postman, dustman, baker. They think it outrageous that the garage keeper's brother, who is out of work, should be forced to live on him; they grumble about the enormous price of bacon; they resent seeing familiar buses bought up by the London Passenger Transport Board: but they do nothing about it.

At municipal and national elections they do nothing. The doctrinaires and the dutiful vote from conviction: the majority remark that all politicians are alike, and then, preoccupied and hopeless, let things slide. This distrust of politicians arises from the fact that *the* life-spring of democracy—the power to choose *a* representative—has been pumped through an intricate network of conduits and pipes and sterilisers to issue, with the easy turning of a tap. as the power to choose a policy alone. without any experience of the human instrument which *is* to carry it out.

The elector's emotional root is his affection for the place in which he has always lived, his friendship with the neighbours he has always known, his love of and pride in familiar things: *a* feeling especially deep among poor people, who are affected less than the middle class by the increased mobility of life.

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This love of the small district which has framed the elector's life cannot be stretched or generalized very much, or, wearing thin, it frays out at last. If he is to feel that his share in government, however tiny it is, is real, he must go to the polls not only for a policy, but for a person. A representative is a person, a man or woman known and trusted, who, understanding the idiom of his constituents, will feel with their feelings, formulate their semi-conscious desires and who, faced with a sudden emergency, may be relied upon to act in accordance with his own common-sense character, and not merely to jerk with the automatic reflex-actions of party theory.

The lack of focus in these urban villages works together with the excessively elaborate centralization of political parties, to prevent electoral candidates from being true representatives. There is nowhere for the villagers to meet casually: and casualness is the soul of citizenship, which, once organized, becomes as lifeless, as hysterical, and as falsely hearty as schoolgirl cricket. There is no communal leisure in which idleness may flower into thought, thought fruit in action. The pub is the only place where people can be easy, sit quiet if they like and talk if they like, play Corinthian bagatelle or smoke interminably, and let their business be. But there are two objections to it as a centre of spontaneous local discussion, inasmuch as neither women nor politicians are to be found there. Even though the male half of the electorate may exchange ideas and impressions and slow arguments in the pub, they cannot get to know in habitual good fellowship the men between whom they may later have to choose. There is, indeed, no law that a candidate need ever have seen the constituency for which he is putting up: he is imposed upon it by a political party to whose principles he adheres, and that is all. He speaks at meetings of the local party whose members are already convinced of his case. He speaks at open meetings attended by the politically minded, the curious, and the sort of young man who is spoiling for a fight. He canvasses: but no one knows what he is like at leisure.

Since he cannot be known as a person, he has to adver-

tize himself as a personality: and he is photographed, caricatured, and interviewed as often as possible. Since he cannot appeal to those relevant emotions of the elector which are deeply rooted in time, place and habit, he must, in order to arouse enthusiasm, attempt to exploit such universal and irrelevant instincts as are common to all mankind, the love of gain, the love of women, and the love of children. He promises that his party will take less in taxation or give more in benefits than the other: if his wife is pretty, she does a deal of canvassing: his children's simplicity is prostituted to the cause, and they are set to bicycling about the streets bearing placards inscribed: 'Please vote for my Daddy.' The normal person can neither know the men who claim to speak for him, nor raise the issues on which he would like to vote: the unwanted oppression of tithes, the anomalies of the licensing hours, or the injustice of the betting regulations.

It is possible, of course, that the growth of industrialism has choked geographical democracy; in which case the experiment of voting by trades, which is in practice in Italy, might succeed in restoring that sense of power, responsibility and personal knowledge which is essential to self-government. Men know by long experience both the interests of their trade and the characters of their fellow workers: the plan has answered very well in the election of advisory councils, and there seems no reason to distrust its efficiency in creating Parliaments.

There are, however, two objections to this scheme, one practical, one theoretical. It makes no provision for such women as are not employed in trade. that is, for the vast majority of wives and mothers who stay at home, cooking, cleaning, mending, bearing and rearing children: and it ignores the fact that a person is primarily what he is, and not what he does, and that he may want to vote on other than purely economic issues.

One thing is certain; if democracy is not to die, something must be done to give it warmth, emotion, rooted reality, and it is the *demos*, not the democrats, that alone can do it.

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