

CHAPTER XXI

THE CLASSICAL DOCTRINE OF DEMOCRACY

I. THE COMMON GOOD AND THE WILL OF THE PEOPLE

THE eighteenth-century philosophy of democracy may be couched in the following definition: the democratic method is that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions which realizes the common good by making the people itself decide issues through the election of individuals who are to assemble in order to carry out its will. Let us develop the implications of this.

It is held, then, that there exists a Common Good, the obvious beacon light of policy, which is always simple to define and which every normal person can be made to see by means of rational argument. There is hence no excuse for not seeing it and in fact no explanation for the presence of people who do not see it except ignorance—which can be removed—stupidity and anti-social interest. Moreover, this common good implies definite answers to all questions so that every social fact and every measure taken or to be taken can unequivocally be classed as “good” or “bad.” All people having therefore to agree, in principle at least, there is also a Common Will of the people (=will of all reasonable individuals) that is exactly coterminous with the common good or interest or welfare or happiness. The only thing, barring stupidity and sinister interests, that can possibly bring in disagreement and account for the presence of an opposition is a difference of opinion as to the speed with which the goal, itself common to nearly all, is to be approached. Thus every member of the community, conscious of that goal, knowing his or her mind, discerning what is good and what is bad, takes part, actively and responsibly, in furthering the former and fighting the latter and all the members taken together control their public affairs.

It is true that the management of some of these affairs requires special aptitudes and techniques and will therefore have to be entrusted to specialists who have them. This does not affect the principle, however, because these specialists simply act in order to carry out the will of the people exactly as a doctor acts in order to carry out the will of the patient to get well. It is also true that in a community of any size, especially if it displays the phenomenon of division of labor, it would be highly inconvenient for every individual citizen to have to get into contact with all the other citizens on

every issue in order to do his part in ruling or governing. It will be more convenient to reserve only the most important decisions for the individual citizens to pronounce upon—say by referendum—and to deal with the rest through a committee appointed by them—an assembly or parliament whose members will be elected by popular vote. This committee or body of delegates, as we have seen, will not represent the people in a legal sense but it will do so in a less technical one—it will voice, reflect or represent the will of the electorate. Again as a matter of convenience, this committee, being large, may resolve itself into smaller ones for the various departments of public affairs. Finally, among these smaller committees there will be a general-purpose committee, mainly for dealing with current administration, called cabinet or government, possibly with a general secretary or scapegoat at its head, a so-called prime minister.¹

As soon as we accept all the assumptions that are being made by this theory of the polity—or implied by it—democracy indeed acquires a perfectly unambiguous meaning and there is no problem in connection with it except how to bring it about. Moreover we need only forget a few logical qualms in order to be able to add that in this case the democratic arrangement would not only be the best of all conceivable ones, but that few people would care to consider any other. It is no less obvious however that these assumptions are so many statements of fact every one of which would have to be proved if we are to arrive at that conclusion. And it is much easier to disprove them.

There is, first, no such thing as a uniquely determined common good that all people could agree on or be made to agree on by the force of rational argument. This is due not primarily to the fact that some people may want things other than the common good but to the much more fundamental fact that to different individuals and groups the common good is bound to mean different things. This fact, hidden from the utilitarian by the narrowness of his outlook on the world of human valuations, will introduce rifts on questions of principle which cannot be reconciled by rational argument because ultimate values—our conceptions of what life and what society should be—are beyond the range of mere logic. They may be bridged by compromise in some cases but not in others. Americans who say, “We want this country to arm to its teeth and then to fight for what we conceive to be right all over the globe” and Americans who say, “We want this country to work out its own problems which is the only way it can serve humanity” are facing irreducible differences of ultimate values which compromise could only maim and degrade.

Secondly, even if a sufficiently definite common good—such as for

¹ The official theory of the functions of a cabinet minister holds in fact that he is appointed in order to see to it that in his department the will of the people prevails.

instance the utilitarian's maximum of economic satisfaction²—proved acceptable to all, this would not imply equally definite answers to individual issues. Opinions on these might differ to an extent important enough to produce most of the effects of “fundamental” dissension about ends themselves. The problems centering in the evaluation of present versus future satisfactions, even the case of socialism versus capitalism, would be left still open, for instance, after the conversion of every individual citizen to utilitarianism. “Health” might be desired by all, yet people would still disagree on vaccination and vasectomy. And so on.

The utilitarian fathers of democratic doctrine failed to see the full importance of this simply because none of them seriously considered any substantial change in the economic framework and the habits of bourgeois society. They saw little beyond the world of an eighteenth-century ironmonger.

But, third, as a consequence of both preceding propositions, the particular concept of the will of the people or the *volonté générale* that the utilitarians made their own vanishes into thin air. For that concept presupposes the existence of a uniquely determined common good discernible to all. Unlike the romanticists the utilitarians had no notion of that semi-mystic entity endowed with a will of its own—that “soul of the people” which the historical school of jurisprudence made so much of. They frankly derived their will of the people from the wills of individuals. And unless there is a center, the common good, toward which, in the long run at least, *all* individual wills gravitate, we shall not get that particular type of “natural” *volonté générale*. The utilitarian center of gravity, on the one hand, unifies individual wills, tends to weld them by means of rational discussion into the will of the people and, on the other hand, confers upon the latter the exclusive ethical dignity claimed by the classic democratic creed. *This creed does not consist simply in worshiping the will of the people as such* but rests on certain assumptions about the “natural” object of that will which object is sanctioned by utilitarian reason. Both the existence and the dignity of this kind of *volonté générale* are gone as soon as the idea of the common good fails us. And both the pillars of the classical doctrine inevitably crumble into dust.

II. THE WILL OF THE PEOPLE AND INDIVIDUAL VOLITION

Of course, however conclusively those arguments may tell against this particular conception of the will of the people, they do not debar us from

² The very meaning of “greatest happiness” is open to serious doubt. But even if this doubt could be removed and definite meaning could be attached to the sum total of economic satisfaction of a group of people, that maximum would still be relative to given situations and valuations which it may be impossible to alter, or compromise on, in a democratic way.

trying to build up nother and more realistic one. I do not intend to question either the reality or the importance of the socio-psychological facts we think of when speaking of the will of a nation. Their analysis is certainly the prerequisite for making headway with the problems of democracy. It would however be better not to retain the term because this tends to obscure the fact that as soon as we have severed the will of the people from its utilitarian connotation we are building not merely a different theory of the same thing, but a theory of a completely different thing. We have every reason to be on our guard against the pitfalls that lie on the path of those defenders of democracy who while accepting, under pressure of accumulating evidence, more and more of the facts of the democratic process, yet try to anoint the results that process turns out with oil taken from eighteenth-century jars.

But though a common will or public opinion of some sort may still be said to emerge from the infinitely complex jumble of individual and group-wise situations, volitions, influences, actions and reactions of the "democratic process," the result lacks not only rational unity but also rational sanction. The former means that, though from the standpoint of analysis, the democratic process is not simply chaotic—for the analyst nothing is chaotic that can be brought within the reach of explanatory principles—yet the results would not, except by chance, be meaningful in themselves—as for instance the realization of any definite end or ideal would be. The latter means, since *that* will is no longer congruent with any "good," that in order to claim ethical dignity for the result it will now be necessary to fall back upon an unqualified confidence in democratic forms of government as such—a belief that in principle would have to be independent of the desirability of results. As we have seen, it is not easy to place oneself on that standpoint. But even if we do so, the dropping of the utilitarian common good still leaves us with plenty of difficulties on our hands.

In particular, we still remain under the practical necessity of attributing to the will of the *individual* an independence and a rational quality that are altogether unrealistic. If we are to argue that the will of the citizens *per se* is a political factor entitled to respect, it must first exist. That is to say, it must be something more than an indeterminate bundle of vague impulses loosely playing about given slogans and mistaken impressions. Everyone would have to know definitely what he wants to stand for. This definite will would have to be implemented by the ability to observe and interpret correctly the facts that are directly accessible to everyone and to sift critically the information about the facts that are not. Finally, from that definite will and from these ascertained facts a clear *and prompt* conclusion as to

particular issues would have to be derived according to the rules of logical inference—with so high a degree of general efficiency moreover that one man's opinion could be held, without glaring absurdity, to be roughly as good as every other man's.³ And all this the modal citizen would have to perform for himself and independently of pressure groups and propaganda,⁴ for volitions and inferences that are imposed upon the electorate obviously do not qualify for ultimate data of the democratic process. The question whether these conditions are fulfilled to the extent required in order to make democracy work should not be answered by reckless assertion or equally reckless denial. It can be answered only by a laborious appraisal of a maze of conflicting evidence.

Before embarking upon this, however, I want to make quite sure that the reader fully appreciates another point that has been made already. I will therefore repeat that even if the opinions and desires of individual citizens were perfectly definite and independent data for the democratic process to work with, and if everyone acted on them with ideal rationality and promptitude, it would not necessarily follow that the political decisions produced by that process from the raw material of those individual volitions would represent anything that could in any convincing sense be called the will of the people. It is not only conceivable but, whenever individual wills are much divided, very likely that the political decisions produced will not conform to "what people really want." Nor can it be replied that, if not exactly what they want, they will get a "fair compromise." This may be so.

³ This accounts for the strongly equalitarian character both of the classical doctrine of democracy and of popular democratic beliefs. It will be pointed out later on how Equality may acquire the status of an ethical postulate. As a factual statement about human nature it cannot be true in any conceivable sense. In recognition of this the postulate itself has often been reformulated so as to mean "equality of opportunity." But, disregarding even the difficulties inherent in the word opportunity, this reformulation does not help us much because it is actual and not potential equality of performance in matters of political behavior that is required if each man's vote is to carry the same weight in the decision of issues.

It should be noted in passing that democratic phraseology has been instrumental in fostering the association of inequality of any kind with "injustice" which is so important an element in the psychic pattern of the unsuccessful and in the arsenal of the politician who uses him. One of the most curious symptoms of this was the Athenian institution of ostracism or rather the use to which it was sometimes put. Ostracism consisted in banishing an individual by popular vote, not necessarily for any particular reason: it sometimes served as a method of eliminating an uncomfortably prominent citizen who was felt to "count for more than one."

⁴ This term is here being used in its original sense and not in the sense which it is rapidly acquiring at present and which suggests the definition: propaganda is any statement emanating from a source that we do not like. I suppose that the term derives from the name of the committee of cardinals which deals with matters concerning the spreading of the Catholic faith, the *congregatio de propaganda fide*. In itself therefore it does not carry any derogatory meaning and in particular it does not imply distortion of facts. One can make propaganda, for instance, for a scientific method. It simply means the presentation of facts and arguments with a view to influencing people's actions or opinions in a definite direction.

The chances for this to happen are greatest with those issues which are quantitative in nature or admit of gradation, such as the question how much is to be spent on unemployment relief provided everybody favors some expenditure for that purpose. But with qualitative issues, such as the question whether to persecute heretics or to enter upon a war, the result attained may well, though for different reasons, be equally distasteful to all the people whereas the decision imposed by a non-democratic agency might prove much more acceptable to them.

An example will illustrate. I may, I take it, describe the rule of Napoleon, when First Consul, as a military dictatorship. One of the most pressing political needs of the moment was a religious settlement that would clear the chaos left by the revolution and the directorate and bring peace to millions of hearts. This he achieved by a number of master strokes, culminating in a concordat with the pope (1801) and the "organic articles" (1802) that, reconciling the irreconcilable, gave just the right amount of freedom to religious worship while strongly upholding the authority of the state. He also reorganized and refinanced the French Catholic church, solved the delicate question of the "constitutional" clergy, and most successfully launched the new establishment with a minimum of friction. If ever there was any justification at all for holding that the people actually want something definite, this arrangement affords one of the best instances in history. This must be obvious to anyone who looks at the French class structure of that time and it is amply borne out by the fact that this ecclesiastical policy greatly contributed to the almost universal popularity which the consular regime enjoyed. But it is difficult to see how this result could have been achieved in a democratic way. Anti-church sentiment had not died out and was by no means confined to the vanquished Jacobins. People of that persuasion, or their leaders, could not possibly have compromised to that extent.⁵ On the other end of the scale, a strong wave of wrathful Catholic sentiment was steadily gaining momentum. People who shared that sentiment, or leaders dependent on their good will, could not possibly have stopped at the Napoleonic limit; in particular, they could not have dealt so firmly with the Holy See for which moreover there would have been no motive to give in, seeing which way things were moving. And the will of the peasants who more than anything else wanted their priests, their churches and processions would have been paralyzed by the very natural fear that the revolutionary settlement of the land question might be endangered once the clergy—the bishops especially—were in the saddle again.

⁵ The legislative bodies, cowed though they were, completely failed in fact to support Napoleon in this policy. And some of his most trusted paladins opposed it.

Deadlock or interminable struggle, engendering increasing irritation, would have been the most probable outcome of any attempt to settle the question democratically. But Napoleon was able to settle it reasonably, precisely because all those groups which could not yield their points of their own accord were at the same time able and willing to accept the arrangement if imposed.

This instance of course is not an isolated one.⁶ If results that prove in the long run satisfactory to the people at large are made the test of government *for* the people, then government *by* the people, as conceived by the classical doctrine of democracy, would often fail to meet it.

III. HUMAN NATURE IN POLITICS

It remains to answer our question about the definiteness and independence of the voter's will, his powers of observation and interpretation of facts, and his ability to draw, clearly and promptly, rational inferences from both. This subject belongs to a chapter of social psychology that might be entitled Human Nature in Politics.⁷

During the second half of the last century, the idea of the human personality that is a homogeneous unit and the idea of a definite will that is the prime mover of action have been steadily fading—even before the times of Théodule Ribot and of Sigmund Freud. In particular, these ideas have been increasingly discounted in the field of social sciences where the importance of the extra-rational and irrational element in our behavior has been receiving more and more attention, witness Pareto's *Mind and Society*. Of the many sources of the evidence that accumulated against the hypothesis of rationality, I shall mention only two.

The one—in spite of much more careful later work—may still be associated with the name of Gustave Le Bon, the founder or, at any rate, the

⁶ Other instances could in fact be adduced from Napoleon's practice. He was an autocrat who, whenever his dynastic interests and his foreign policy were not concerned, simply strove to do what he conceived the people wanted or needed. This is what the advice amounted to which he gave to Eugène Beauharnais concerning the latter's administration of northern Italy.

⁷ This is the title of the frank and charming book by one of the most lovable English radicals who ever lived, Graham Wallas. In spite of all that has since been written on the subject and especially in spite of all the detailed case studies that now make it possible to see so much more clearly, that book may still be recommended as the best introduction to political psychology. Yet, after having stated with admirable honesty the case against the uncritical acceptance of the classical doctrine, the author fails to draw the obvious conclusion. This is all the more remarkable because he rightly insists on the necessity of a scientific attitude of mind and because he does not fail to take Lord Bryce to task for having, in his book on the American commonwealth, professed himself "grimly" resolved to see some blue sky in the midst of clouds of disillusioning facts. Why, so Graham Wallas seems to exclaim, what should we say of a meteorologist who insisted from the outset that he saw some blue sky? Nevertheless in the constructive part of his book he takes much the same ground.

first effective exponent of the psychology of crowds (*psychologie des foules*).⁸ By showing up, though overstressing, the realities of human behavior when under the influence of agglomeration—in particular the sudden disappearance, in a state of excitement, of moral restraints and civilized modes of thinking and feeling, the sudden eruption of primitive impulses, infantilisms and criminal propensities—he made us face gruesome facts that everybody knew but nobody wished to see and he thereby dealt a serious blow to the picture of man's nature which underlies the classical doctrine of democracy and democratic folklore about revolutions. No doubt there is much to be said about the narrowness of the factual basis of Le Bon's inferences which, for instance, do not fit at all well the normal behavior of an English or Anglo-American crowd. Critics, especially those to whom the implications of this branch of social psychology were uncongenial, did not fail to make the most of its vulnerable points. But on the other hand it must not be forgotten that the phenomena of crowd psychology are by no means confined to mobs rioting in the narrow streets of a Latin town. Every parliament, every committee, every council of war composed of a dozen generals in their sixties, displays, in however mild a form, some of those features that stand out so glaringly in the case of the rabble, in particular a reduced sense of responsibility, a lower level of energy of thought and greater sensitiveness to non-logical influences. Moreover, those phenomena are not confined to a crowd in the sense of a physical agglomeration of many people. Newspaper readers, radio audiences, members of a party even if not physically gathered together are terribly easy to work up into a psychological crowd and into a state of frenzy in which attempt at rational argument only spurs the animal spirits.

The other source of disillusioning evidence that I am going to mention is a much humbler one—no blood flows from it, only nonsense. Economists, learning to observe their facts more closely, have begun to discover that, even in the most ordinary currents of daily life, their consumers do not quite live up to the idea that the economic textbook used to convey. On the one hand their wants are nothing like as definite and their actions upon those wants nothing like as rational and prompt. On the other hand they are so amenable to the influence of advertising and other methods of persuasion that producers often seem to dictate to them instead of being directed by them. The technique of successful advertising is particularly instructive. There is indeed nearly always some appeal to reason. But mere assertion, often

⁸ The German term, *Massenpsychologie*, suggests a warning: the psychology of crowds must not be confused with the psychology of the masses. The former does not necessarily carry any class connotation and in itself has nothing to do with a study of the ways of thinking and feeling of, say, the working class.

repeated, counts more than rational argument and so does the direct attack upon the subconscious which takes the form of attempts to evoke and crystallize pleasant associations of an entirely extra-rational, very frequently of a sexual nature.

The conclusion, while obvious, must be drawn with care. In the ordinary run of often repeated decisions the individual is subject to the salutary and rationalizing influence of favorable and unfavorable experience. He is also under the influence of relatively simple and unproblematical motives and interests which are but occasionally interfered with by excitement. Historically, the consumers' desire for shoes may, at least in part, have been shaped by the action of producers offering attractive footgear and campaigning for it; yet at any given time it is a genuine want, the definiteness of which extends beyond "shoes in general" and which prolonged experimenting clears of much of the irrationalities that may originally have surrounded it.⁹ Moreover, under the stimulus of those simple motives consumers learn to act upon unbiased expert advice about some things (houses, motorcars) and themselves become experts in others. It is simply not true that housewives are easily fooled in the matter of foods, *familiar* household articles, wearing apparel. And, as every salesman knows to his cost, most of them have a way of insisting on the exact article they want.

This of course holds true still more obviously on the producers' side of the picture. No doubt, a manufacturer may be indolent, a bad judge of opportunities or otherwise incompetent; but there is an effective mechanism that will reform or eliminate him. Again Taylorism rests on the fact that man may perform simple handicraft operations for thousands of years and yet perform them inefficiently. But neither the intention to act as rationally as possible nor a steady pressure toward rationality can seriously be called into question at whatever level of industrial or commercial activity we choose to look.¹⁰

And so it is with most of the decisions of daily life that lie within the little field which the individual citizen's mind encompasses with a full sense of its reality. Roughly, it consists of the things that directly concern himself, his family, his business dealings, his hobbies, his friends and enemies, his township or ward, his class, church, trade union or any other social group

⁹ In the above passage irrationality means failure to act rationally upon a given wish. It does not refer to the reasonableness of the wish itself in the opinion of the observer. This is important to note because economists in appraising the extent of consumers' irrationality sometimes exaggerate it by confusing the two things. Thus, a factory girl's finery may seem to a professor an indication of irrational behavior for which there is no other explanation but the advertiser's arts. Actually, it may be all she craves for. If so her expenditure on it may be ideally rational in the above sense.

¹⁰ This level differs of course not only as between epochs and places but also, at a given time and place, as between different industrial sectors and classes. There is no such thing as a universal pattern of rationality.

of which he is an active member—the things under his personal observation, the things which are familiar to him independently of what his newspaper tells him, which he can directly influence or manage and for which he develops the kind of responsibility that is induced by a direct relation to the favorable or unfavorable effects of a course of action.

Once more: definiteness and rationality in thought and action¹¹ are not guaranteed by this familiarity with men and things or by that sense of reality or responsibility. Quite a few other conditions which often fail to be fulfilled would be necessary for that. For instance, generation after generation may suffer from irrational behavior in matters of hygiene and yet fail to link their sufferings with their noxious habits. As long as this is not done, objective consequences, however regular, of course do not produce subjective experience. Thus it proved unbelievably hard for humanity to realize the relation between infection and epidemics: the facts pointed to it with what to us seems unmistakable clearness; yet to the end of the eighteenth century doctors did next to nothing to keep people afflicted with infectious disease, such as measles or smallpox, from mixing with other people. And things must be expected to be still worse whenever there is not only inability but reluctance to recognize causal relations or when some interest fights against recognizing them.

Nevertheless and in spite of all the qualifications that impose themselves, there is for everyone, within a much wider horizon, a narrower field—widely differing in extent as between different groups and individuals and bounded by a broad zone rather than a sharp line—which is distinguished by a sense of reality or familiarity or responsibility. And this field harbors relatively definite individual volitions. These may often strike us as unintelligent, narrow, egotistical; and it may not be obvious to everyone why, when it comes to political decisions, we should worship at their shrine, still less why we should feel bound to count each of them for one and none of them for more than one. If, however, we do choose to worship we shall at least not find the shrine empty.¹²

¹¹ Rationality of thought and rationality of action are two different things. Rationality of thought does not always guarantee rationality of action. And the latter may be present without any conscious deliberation and irrespective of any ability to formulate the rationale of one's action correctly. The observer, particularly the observer who uses interview and questionnaire methods, often overlooks this and hence acquires an exaggerated idea of the importance of irrationality in behavior. This is another source of those overstatements which we meet so often.

¹² It should be observed that in speaking of definite and genuine volitions I do not mean to exalt them into ultimate data for all kinds of social analysis. Of course they are themselves the product of the social process and the social environment. All I mean is that they may serve as data for the kind of special-purpose analysis which the economist has in mind when he derives prices from tastes or wants that are "given" at any moment and need not be further analyzed each time. Similarly we may for our purpose speak of genuine and definite volitions that at any moment are given independently of attempts to manufacture them, although we

Now this comparative definiteness of volition and rationality of behavior does not suddenly vanish as we move away from those concerns of daily life in the home and in business which educate and discipline us. In the realm of public affairs there are sectors that are more within the reach of the citizen's mind than others. This is true, first, of local affairs. Even there we find a reduced power of discerning facts, a reduced preparedness to act upon them, a reduced sense of responsibility. We all know the man—and a very good specimen he frequently is—who says that the local administration is not his business and callously shrugs his shoulders at practices which he would rather die than suffer in his own office. High-minded citizens in a hortatory mood who preach the responsibility of the individual voter or taxpayer invariably discover the fact that this voter does not feel responsible for what the local politicians do. Still, especially in communities not too big for personal contacts, local patriotism may be a very important factor in “making democracy work.” Also, the problems of a town are in many respects akin to the problems of a manufacturing concern. The man who understands the latter also understands, to some extent, the former. The manufacturer, grocer or workman need not step out of his world to have a rationally defensible view (that may of course be right or wrong) on street cleaning or town halls.

Second, there are many national issues that concern individuals and groups so directly and unmistakably as to evoke volitions that are genuine and definite enough. The most important instance is afforded by issues involving immediate and personal pecuniary profit to individual voters and groups of voters, such as direct payments, protective duties, silver policies and so on. Experience that goes back to antiquity shows that by and large voters react promptly and rationally to any such chance. But the classical doctrine of democracy evidently stands to gain little from displays of rationality of this kind. Voters thereby prove themselves bad and indeed corrupt judges of such issues,¹³ and often they even prove themselves bad judges of their own long-run interests,

recognize that these genuine volitions themselves are the result of environmental influences in the past, propagandist influences included. This distinction between genuine and manufactured will (see below) is a difficult one and cannot be applied in all cases and for all purposes. For our purpose however it is sufficient to point to the obvious common-sense case which can be made for it.

¹³ The reason why the Benthamites so completely overlooked this is that they did not consider the possibilities of mass corruption in modern capitalism. Committing in their political theory the same error which they committed in their economic theory, they felt no compunction about postulating that “the people” were the best judges of their own individual interests and that these must necessarily coincide with the interests of all the people taken together. Of course this was made easier for them because actually though not intentionally they philosophized in terms of bourgeois interests which had more to gain from a parsimonious state than from any direct bribes.

for it is only the short-run promise that tells politically and only short-run rationality that asserts itself effectively.

However, when we move still farther away from the private concerns of the family and the business office into those regions of national and international affairs that lack a direct and unmistakable link with those private concerns, individual volition, command of facts and method of inference soon cease to fulfill the requirements of the classical doctrine. What strikes me most of all and seems to me to be the core of the trouble is the fact that the sense of reality¹⁴ is so completely lost. Normally, the great political questions take their place in the psychic economy of the typical citizen with those leisure-hour interests that have not attained the rank of hobbies, and with the subjects of irresponsible conversation. These things seem so far off; they are not at all like a business proposition; dangers may not materialize at all and if they should they may not prove so very serious; one feels oneself to be moving in a fictitious world.

This reduced sense of reality accounts not only for a reduced sense of responsibility but also for the absence of effective volition. One has one's phrases, of course, and one's wishes and daydreams and grumbles: especially, one has one's likes and dislikes. But ordinarily they do not amount to what we call a will—the psychic counterpart of purposeful responsible action. In fact, for the private citizen musing over national affairs there is no scope for such a will and no task at which it could develop. He is a member of an unworkable committee, the committee of the whole nation, and this is why he expends less disciplined effort on mastering a political problem than he expends on a game of bridge.¹⁵

The reduced sense of responsibility and the absence of effective volition in turn explain the ordinary citizen's ignorance and lack of judgment in matters of domestic and foreign policy which are if anything more shocking in the case of educated people and of people who are successfully active in non-political walks of life than it is with uneducated people in humble stations. Information is plentiful and readily available. But this does not seem to make any difference. Nor should we wonder at it. We need only compare a lawyer's attitude to his brief and the same lawyer's attitude to the

¹⁴ William James' "pungent sense of reality." The relevance of this point has been particularly emphasized by Graham Wallas.

¹⁵ It will help to clarify the point if we ask ourselves why so much more intelligence and clear-headedness show up at a bridge table than in, say, political discussion among non-politicians. At the bridge table we have a definite task; we have rules that discipline us; success and failure are clearly defined; and we are prevented from behaving irresponsibly because every mistake we make will not only immediately tell but also be immediately allocated to us. These conditions, by their failure to be fulfilled for the political behavior of the ordinary citizen, show why it is that in politics he lacks all the alertness and the judgment he may display in his profession.

statements of political fact presented in his newspaper in order to see what is the matter. In the one case the lawyer has qualified for appreciating the relevance of his facts by years of purposeful labor done under the definite stimulus of interest in his professional competence; and under a stimulus that is no less powerful he then bends his acquirements, his intellect, his will to the contents of the brief. In the other case, he has not taken the trouble to qualify; he does not care to absorb the information or to apply to it the canons of criticism he knows so well how to handle; and he is impatient of long or complicated argument. All of this goes to show that without the initiative that comes from immediate responsibility, ignorance will persist in the face of masses of information however complete and correct. It persists even in the face of the meritorious efforts that are being made to go beyond presenting information and to teach the use of it by means of lectures, classes, discussion groups. Results are not zero. But they are small. People cannot be carried up the ladder.

Thus the typical citizen drops down to a lower level of mental performance as soon as he enters the political field. He argues and analyzes in a way which he would readily recognize as infantile within the sphere of his real interests. He becomes a primitive again. His thinking becomes associative and affective.¹⁶ And this entails two further consequences of ominous significance.

First, even if there were no political groups trying to influence him, the typical citizen would in political matters tend to yield to extrarational or irrational prejudice and impulse. The weakness of the rational processes he applies to politics and the absence of effective logical control over the results he arrives at would in themselves suffice to account for that. Moreover, simply because he is not "all there," he will relax his usual moral standards as well and occasionally give in to dark urges which the conditions of private life help him to repress. But as to the wisdom or rationality of his inferences and conclusions, it may be just as bad if he gives in to a burst of generous indignation. This will make it still more difficult for him to see things in their correct proportions or even to see more than one aspect of one thing at a time. Hence, if for once he does emerge from his usual vagueness and does display the definite will postulated by the classical doctrine of democracy, he is as likely as not to become still more unintelligent and irresponsible than he usually is. At certain junctures, this may prove fatal to his nation.¹⁷

¹⁶ See ch. xii.

¹⁷ The importance of such bursts cannot be doubted. But it is possible to doubt their genuineness. Analysis will show in many instances that they are induced by the action of some group and do not spontaneously arise from the people. In this case they enter into a (second) class of phenomena which we are about to deal with. Personally, I do believe that genuine instances exist. But I cannot be sure that more thorough analysis would not reveal some psycho-technical effort at the bottom of them.

Second, however, the weaker the logical element in the processes of the public mind and the more complete the absence of rational criticism and of the rationalizing influence of personal experience and responsibility, the greater are the opportunities for groups with an ax to grind. These groups may consist of professional politicians or of exponents of an economic interest or of idealists of one kind or another or of people simply interested in staging and managing political shows. The sociology of such groups is immaterial to the argument in hand. The only point that matters here is that, Human Nature in Politics being what it is, they are able to fashion and, within very wide limits, even to create the will of the people. What we are confronted with in the analysis of political processes is largely not a genuine but a manufactured will. And often this artefact is all that in reality corresponds to the *volonté générale* of the classical doctrine. So far as this is so, the will of the people is the product and not the motive power of the political process.

The ways in which issues and the popular will on any issue are being manufactured is exactly analogous to the ways of commercial advertising. We find the same attempts to contact the subconscious. We find the same technique of creating favorable and unfavorable associations which are the more effective the less rational they are. We find the same evasions and reticences and the same trick of producing opinion by reiterated assertion that is successful precisely to the extent to which it avoids rational argument and the danger of awakening the critical faculties of the people. And so on. Only, all these arts have infinitely more scope in the sphere of public affairs than they have in the sphere of private and professional life. The picture of the prettiest girl that ever lived will in the long run prove powerless to maintain the sales of a bad cigarette. There is no equally effective safeguard in the case of political decisions. Many decisions of fateful importance are of a nature that makes it impossible for the public to experiment with them at its leisure and at moderate cost. Even if that is possible, however, judgment is as a rule not so easy to arrive at as it is in the case of the cigarette, because effects are less easy to interpret.

But such arts also vitiate, to an extent quite unknown in the field of commercial advertising, those forms of political advertising that profess to address themselves to reason. To the observer, the anti-rational or, at all events, the extra-rational appeal and the defenselessness of the victim stand out more and not less clearly when cloaked in facts and arguments. We have seen above why it is so difficult to impart to the public unbiased information about political problems and logically correct inferences from it and why it is that information and arguments in political matters will “register” only if they link up with the citizen’s preconceived ideas. As a rule, however, these

ideas are not definite enough to determine particular conclusions. Since they can themselves be manufactured, effective political argument almost inevitably implies the attempt to twist existing volitional premises into a particular shape and not merely the attempt to implement them or to help the citizen to make up his mind.

Thus information and arguments that are really driven home are likely to be the servants of political intent. Since the first thing man will do for his ideal or interest is to lie, we shall expect, and as a matter of fact we find, that effective information is almost always adulterated or selective¹⁸ and that effective reasoning in politics consists mainly in trying to exalt certain propositions into axioms and to put others out of court; it thus reduces to the psycho-technics mentioned before. The reader who thinks me unduly pessimistic need only ask himself whether he has never heard—or said himself—that this or that awkward fact must not be told publicly, or that a certain line of reasoning, though valid, is undesirable. If men who according to any current standard are perfectly honorable or even high-minded reconcile themselves to the implications of this, do they not thereby show what they think about the merits or even the existence of the will of the people?

There are of course limits to all this.¹⁹ And there is truth in Jefferson's dictum that in the end the people are wiser than any single individual can be, or in Lincoln's about the impossibility of "fooling all the people all the time." But both dicta stress the long-run aspect in a highly significant way. It is no doubt possible to argue that given time the collective psyche will evolve opinions that not infrequently strike us as highly reasonable and even shrewd. History however consists of a succession of short-run situations that may alter the course of events for good. If all the people can in the short run be "fooled" step by step into something they do not really want, and if this is not an exceptional case which we could afford to neglect, then no amount of retrospective common sense will alter the fact that in reality they neither raise nor decide issues but that the issues that shape their fate are normally raised and decided for them. More than anyone else the lover of democracy has every reason to accept this fact and to clear his creed from the aspersion that it rests upon make-believe.

IV. REASONS FOR THE SURVIVAL OF THE CLASSICAL DOCTRINE

But how is it possible that a doctrine so patently contrary to fact should have survived to this day and continued to hold its place in the hearts of the people

¹⁸ Selective information, if in itself correct, is an attempt to lie by speaking the truth.

¹⁹ Possibly they might show more clearly if issues were more frequently decided by referendum. Politicians presumably know why they are almost invariably hostile to that institution.

and in the official language of governments? The refuting facts are known to all; everybody admits them with perfect, frequently with cynical, frankness. The theoretical basis, utilitarian rationalism, is dead; nobody accepts it as a correct theory of the body politic. Nevertheless that question is not difficult to answer.

First of all, though the classical doctrine of collective action may not be supported by the results of empirical analysis, it is powerfully supported by that association with religious belief to which I have adverted already. This may not be obvious at first sight. The utilitarian leaders were anything but religious in the ordinary sense of the term. In fact they believed themselves to be anti-religious and they were so considered almost universally. They took pride in what they thought was precisely an unmetaphysical attitude and they were quite out of sympathy with the religious institutions and the religious movements of their time. But we need only cast another glance at the picture they drew of the social process in order to discover that it embodied essential features of the faith of protestant Christianity and was in fact derived from that faith. For the intellectual who had cast off his religion the utilitarian creed provided a substitute for it. For many of those who had retained their religious belief the classical doctrine became the political complement of it.²⁰

Thus transposed into the categories of religion, this doctrine—and in consequence the kind of democratic persuasion which is based upon it—changes its very nature. There is no longer any need for logical scruples about the Common Good and Ultimate Values. All this is settled for us by the plan of the Creator whose purpose defines and sanctions everything. What seemed indefinite or unmotivated before is suddenly quite definite and convincing. The voice of the people that is the voice of God for instance. Or take Equality. Its very meaning is in doubt, and there is hardly any rational warrant for exalting it into a postulate, so long as we move in the sphere of empirical analysis. But Christianity harbors a strong equalitarian element. The Redeemer died for all: He did not differentiate between individuals of different social status. In doing so, He testified to the intrinsic value of the individual soul, a value that admits of no gradations. Is not this a sanction—and, as it seems to me, the only possible

²⁰ Observe the analogy with socialist belief which also is a substitute for Christian belief to some and a complement of it to others.

²¹ It might be objected that, however difficult it may be to attach a *general* meaning to the word Equality, such meaning can be unraveled from its context in most if not all cases. For instance, it may be permissible to infer from the circumstances in which the Gettysburg address was delivered that by the “proposition that all men are created free and equal,” Lincoln simply meant equality of legal status versus the kind of inequality that is implied in the recognition of slavery. This meaning would be definite enough. But if we ask why that proposition should

sanction²¹—of “everyone to count for one, no one to count for more than one”—a sanction that pours super-mundane meaning into articles of the democratic creed for which it is not easy to find any other? To be sure this interpretation does not cover the whole ground. However, so far as it goes, it seems to explain many things that otherwise would be unexplainable and in fact meaningless. In particular, it explains the believer’s attitude toward criticism: again, as in the case of socialism, fundamental dissent is looked upon not merely as error but as sin; it elicits not merely logical counterargument but also moral indignation.

We may put our problem differently and say that democracy, when motivated in this way, ceases to be a mere method that can be discussed rationally like a steam engine or a disinfectant. It actually becomes what from another standpoint I have held it incapable of becoming, viz., an ideal or rather a part of an ideal schema of things. The very word may become a flag, a symbol of all a man holds dear, of everything that he loves about his nation whether rationally contingent to it or not. On the one hand, the question how the various propositions implied in the democratic belief are related to the facts of politics will then become as irrelevant to him as is, to the believing Catholic, the question how the doings of Alexander VI tally with the supernatural halo surrounding the papal office. On the other hand, the democrat of this type, while accepting postulates carrying large implications about equality and brotherliness, will be in a position also to accept, in all sincerity, almost any amount of deviations from them that his own behavior or position may involve. That is not even illogical. Mere distance from fact is no argument against an ethical maxim or a mystical hope.

Second, there is the fact that the forms and phrases of classical democracy are for many nations associated with events and developments in their history which are enthusiastically approved by large majorities. Any opposition to an established regime is likely to use these forms and phrases whatever its meaning and social roots may be.²² If it prevails and if subsequent developments prove satisfactory, then these forms will take root in the national ideology.

The United States is the outstanding example. Its very existence as a sovereign state is associated with a struggle against a monarchical and aristocratic England. A minority of loyalists excepted, Americans had, at the

be morally and politically binding and if we refuse to answer “Because every man is by nature exactly like every other man,” then we can only fall back upon the divine sanction supplied by Christian belief. This solution is conceivably implied in the word “created.”

²² It might seem that an exception should be made for oppositions that issue into frankly autocratic regimes. But even most of these rose, as a matter of history, in democratic ways and based their rule on the approval of the people. Caesar was not killed by plebeians. But the aristocratic oligarchs who did kill him also used democratic phrases.

time of the Grenville administration, probably ceased to look upon the English monarch as *their* king and the English aristocracy as *their* aristocracy. In the War of Independence they fought what in fact as well as in their feeling had become a foreign monarch and a foreign aristocracy who interfered with their political and economic interests. Yet from an early stage of the troubles they presented their case, which really was a national one, as a case of the "people" versus its "rulers," in terms of inalienable Rights of Man and in the light of the general principles of classical democracy. The wording of the Declaration of Independence and of the Constitution adopted these principles. A prodigious development followed that absorbed and satisfied most people and thereby seemed to verify the doctrine embalmed in the sacred documents of the nation.

Oppositions rarely conquer when the groups in possession are in the prime of their power and success. In the first half of the nineteenth century, the oppositions that professed the classical creed of democracy rose and eventually prevailed against governments some of which—especially in Italy—were obviously in a state of decay and had become bywords of incompetence, brutality and corruption. Naturally though not quite logically, this redounded to the credit of that creed which moreover showed up to advantage when compared with the benighted superstitions sponsored by those governments. Under these circumstances, democratic revolution meant the advent of freedom and decency, and the democratic creed meant a gospel of reason and betterment. To be sure, this advantage was bound to be lost and the gulf between the doctrine and the practice of democracy was bound to be discovered. But the glamour of the dawn was slow to fade.

Third, it must not be forgotten that there are social patterns in which the classical doctrine will actually fit facts with a sufficient degree of approximation. As has been pointed out, this is the case with many small and primitive societies which as a matter of fact served as a prototype to the authors of that doctrine. It may be the case also with societies that are not primitive provided they are not too differentiated and do not harbor any serious problems. Switzerland is the best example. There is so little to quarrel about in a world of peasants which, excepting hotels and banks, contains no great capitalist industry, and the problems of public policy are so simple and so stable that an overwhelming majority can be expected to understand them and to agree about them. But if we can conclude that in such cases the classical doctrine approximates reality we have to add immediately that it does so not because it describes an effective mechanism of political decision but only because there are no great decisions to be made. Finally, the case of the United States may again be invoked in order to show that the classical doctrine sometimes appears to fit facts even in a society that is big and highly

differentiated and in which there are great issues to decide provided the sting is taken out of them by favorable conditions. Until this country's entry into the First World War, the public mind was concerned mainly with the business of exploiting the economic possibilities of the environment. So long as this business was not seriously interfered with nothing mattered fundamentally to the average citizen who looked on the antics of politicians with good-natured contempt. Sections might get excited over the tariff, over silver, over local misgovernment, or over an occasional squabble with England. The people at large did not care much, except in the one case of serious disagreement which in fact produced national disaster, the Civil War.

And fourth, of course, politicians appreciate a phraseology that flatters the masses and offers an excellent opportunity not only for evading responsibility but also for crushing opponents in the name of the people.

CHAPTER XXII

ANOTHER THEORY OF DEMOCRACY

I. COMPETITION FOR POLITICAL LEADERSHIP

I THINK that most students of politics have by now come to accept the criticisms leveled at the classical doctrine of democracy in the preceding chapter. I also think that most of them agree, or will agree before long, in accepting another theory which is much truer to life and at the same time salvages much of what sponsors of the democratic method really mean by this term. Like the classical theory, it may be put into the nutshell of a definition.

It will be remembered that our chief troubles about the classical theory centered in the proposition that “the people” hold a definite and rational opinion about every individual question and that they give effect to this opinion—in a democracy—by choosing “representatives” who will see to it that that opinion is carried out. Thus the selection of the representatives is made secondary to the primary purpose of the democratic arrangement which is to vest the power of deciding political issues in the electorate. Suppose we reverse the roles of these two elements and make the deciding of issues by the electorate secondary to the election of the men who are to do the deciding. To put it differently, we now take the view that the role of the people is to produce a government, or else an intermediate body which in turn will produce a national executive¹ or government. And we define: the democratic method is that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people’s vote.

Defense and explanation of this idea will speedily show that, as to both plausibility of assumptions and tenability of propositions, it greatly improves the theory of the democratic process.

First of all, we are provided with a reasonably efficient criterion by which to distinguish democratic governments from others. We have seen that the classical theory meets with difficulties on that score because both the will and the good of the people may be, and in many historical instances have been,

¹ The insincere word “executive” really points in the wrong direction. It ceases however to do so if we use it in the sense in which we speak of the “executives” of a business corporation who also do a great deal more than “execute” the will of stockholders.

served just as well or better by governments that cannot be described as democratic according to any accepted usage of the term. Now we are in a somewhat better position partly because we are resolved to stress a *modus procedendi* the presence or absence of which it is in most cases easy to verify.²

For instance, a parliamentary monarchy like the English one fulfills the requirements of the democratic method because the monarch is practically constrained to appoint to cabinet office the same people as parliament would elect. A “constitutional” monarchy does not qualify to be called democratic because electorates and parliaments, while having all the other rights that electorates and parliaments have in parliamentary monarchies, lack the power to impose their choice as to the governing committee: the cabinet ministers are in this case servants of the monarch, in substance as well as in name, and can in principle be dismissed as well as appointed by him. Such an arrangement may satisfy the people. The electorate may reaffirm this fact by voting against any proposal for change. The monarch may be so popular as to be able to defeat any competition for the supreme office. But since no machinery is provided for making this competition effective the case does not come within our definition.

Second, the theory embodied in this definition leaves all the room we may wish to have for a proper recognition of the vital fact of leadership. The classical theory did not do this but, as we have seen, attributed to the electorate an altogether unrealistic degree of initiative which practically amounted to ignoring leadership. But collectives act almost exclusively by accepting leadership—this is the dominant mechanism of practically any collective action which is more than a reflex. Propositions about the working and the results of the democratic method that take account of this are bound to be infinitely more realistic than propositions which do not. They will not stop at the execution of a *volonté générale* but will go some way toward showing how it emerges or how it is substituted or faked. What we have termed Manufactured Will is no longer outside the theory, an aberration for the absence of which we piously pray; it enters on the ground floor as it should.

Third, however, so far as there are genuine group-wise volitions at all—for instance the will of the unemployed to receive unemployment benefit or the will of other groups to help—our theory does not neglect them. On the contrary we are now able to insert them in exactly the role they actually play. Such volitions do not as a rule assert themselves directly. Even if strong and definite they remain latent, often for decades, until they are called to life by some political leader who turns them into political factors. This he does, or else his agents do it for him, by organizing these volitions, by working them

² See however the fourth point below.

up and by including eventually appropriate items in his competitive offering. The interaction between sectional interests and public opinion and the way in which they produce the pattern we call the political situation appear from this angle in a new and much clearer light.

Fourth, our theory is of course no more definite than is the concept of competition for leadership. This concept presents similar difficulties as the concept of competition in the economic sphere, with which it may be usefully compared. In economic life competition is never completely lacking, but hardly ever is it perfect.³ Similarly, in political life there is always some competition, though perhaps only a potential one, for the allegiance of the people. To simplify matters we have restricted the kind of competition for leadership which is to define democracy, to free competition for a free vote. The justification for this is that democracy seems to imply a recognized method by which to conduct the competitive struggle, and that the electoral method is practically the only one available for communities of any size. But though this excludes many ways of securing leadership which should be excluded,⁴ such as competition by military insurrection, it does not exclude the cases that are strikingly analogous to the economic phenomena we label “unfair” or “fraudulent” competition or restraint of competition. And we cannot exclude them because if we did we should be left with a completely unrealistic ideal.⁵ Between this ideal case which does not exist and the cases in which all competition with the established leader is prevented by force, there is a continuous range of variation within which the democratic method of government shades off into the autocratic one by imperceptible steps. But if we wish to understand and not to philosophize, this is as it should be. The value of our criterion is not seriously impaired thereby.

Fifth, our theory seems to clarify the relation that subsists between democracy and individual freedom. If by the latter we mean the existence of a sphere of individual self-government the boundaries of which are historically variable—*no* society tolerates absolute freedom even of conscience and of speech, *no* society reduces that sphere to zero—the question clearly becomes a matter of degree. We have seen that the democratic method does not necessarily guarantee a greater amount of

³ In Part II we had examples of the problems which arise out of this.

⁴ It also excludes methods which should not be excluded, for instance, the acquisition of political leadership by the people's tacit acceptance of it or by election *quasi per inspirationem*. The latter differs from election by voting only by a technicality. But the former is not quite without importance even in modern politics; the sway held by a party boss *within his party* is often based on nothing but tacit acceptance of his leadership. Comparatively speaking however these are details which may, I think, be neglected in a sketch like this.

⁵ As in the economic field, *some* restrictions are implicit in the legal and moral principles of the community.

individual freedom than another political method would permit in similar circumstances. It may well be the other way round. But there is still a relation between the two. If, on principle at least, everyone is free to compete for political leadership⁶ by presenting himself to the electorate, this will in most cases though not in all mean a considerable amount of freedom of discussion *for all*. In particular it will normally mean a considerable amount of freedom of the press. This relation between democracy and freedom is not absolutely stringent and can be tampered with. But, from the standpoint of the intellectual, it is nevertheless very important. At the same time, it is all there is to that relation.

Sixth, it should be observed that in making it the primary function of the electorate to produce a government (directly or through an intermediate body) I intended to include in this phrase also the function of evicting it. The one means simply the acceptance of a leader or a group of leaders, the other means simply the withdrawal of this acceptance. This takes care of an element the reader may have missed. He may have thought that the electorate controls as well as installs. But since electorates normally do not control their political leaders in any way except by refusing to reelect them or the parliamentary majorities that support them, it seems well to reduce our ideas about this control in the way indicated by our definition. Occasionally, spontaneous revulsions occur which upset a government or an individual minister directly or else enforce a certain course of action. But they are not only exceptional, they are, as we shall see, contrary to the spirit of the democratic method.

Seventh, our theory sheds much-needed light on an old controversy. Whoever accepts the classical doctrine of democracy and in consequence believes that the democratic method is to guarantee that issues be decided and policies framed according to the will of the people must be struck by the fact that, even if that will were undeniably real and definite, decision by simple majorities would in many cases distort it rather than give effect to it. Evidently the will of the majority is the will of the majority and not the will of "the people." The latter is a mosaic that the former completely fails to "represent." To equate both by definition is not to solve the problem. Attempts at real solutions have however been made by the authors of the various plans for Proportional Representation.

These plans have met with adverse criticism on practical grounds. It is in fact obvious not only that proportional representation will offer opportunities for all sorts of idiosyncrasies to assert themselves but also that

⁶ Free, that is, in the same sense in which everyone is free to start another textile mill.

⁷ The argument against proportional representation has been ably stated by Professor F.A.Hermens in "The Trojan Horse of Democracy," *Social Research*, November 1938.

it may prevent democracy from producing efficient governments and thus prove a danger in times of stress.⁷ But before concluding that democracy becomes unworkable if its principle is carried out consistently, it is just as well to ask ourselves whether this principle really implies proportional representation. As a matter of fact it does not. If acceptance of leadership is the true function of the electorate's vote, the case for proportional representation collapses because its premises are no longer binding. The principle of democracy then merely means that the reins of government should be handed to those who command more support than do any of the competing individuals or teams. And this in turn seems to assure the standing of the majority system within the logic of the democratic method, although we might still condemn it on grounds that lie outside of that logic.

II. THE PRINCIPLE APPLIED

The theory outlined in the preceding section we are now going to try out on some of the more important features of the structure and working of the political engine in democratic countries.

1. In a democracy, as I have said, the primary function of the elector's vote is to produce government. This may mean the election of a complete set of individual officers. This practice however is in the main a feature of local government and will be neglected henceforth.⁸ Considering national government only, we may say that producing government practically amounts to deciding who the leading man shall be.⁹ As before, we shall call him Prime Minister.

There is only one democracy in which the electorate's vote does this

⁸ This we shall do for simplicity's sake only. The phenomenon fits perfectly into our schema.

⁹ This is only approximately true. The elector's vote does indeed put into power a group that in all normal cases acknowledges an individual leader but there are as a rule leaders of second and third rank who carry political guns in their own right and whom the leader has no choice but to put into appropriate offices. This fact will be recognized presently.

Another point must be kept in mind. Although there is reason to expect that a man who rises to a position of supreme command will in general be a man of considerable personal force, whatever else he may be—to this we shall return later on—it does not follow that this will always be the case. Therefore the term “leader” or “leading man” is not to imply that the individuals thus designated are necessarily endowed with qualities of leadership or that they always do give any personal leads. There are political situations favorable to the rise of men deficient in leadership (and other qualities) and unfavorable to the establishment of strong individual positions. A party or a combination of parties hence may occasionally be acephalous. But everyone recognizes that this is a pathological state and one of the typical causes of defeat.

¹⁰ We may, I take it, disregard the electoral college. In calling the President of the United States a prime minister I wish to stress the fundamental similarity of his position to that of prime ministers in other democracies. But I do not wish to minimize the differences, although some of them are more formal than real. The least important of them is that the President also fulfills those largely ceremonial functions of, say, the French

directly, viz., the United States.¹⁰ In all other cases the electorate's vote does not directly produce government but an intermediate organ, henceforth called parliament,¹¹ upon which the government-producing function devolves. It might seem easy to account for the adoption or rather the evolution of this arrangement, both on historical grounds and on grounds of expediency, and for the various forms it took in different social patterns. But it is not a logical construct; it is a natural growth the subtle meanings and results of which completely escape the official, let alone legal, doctrines.

How does a parliament produce government? The most obvious method is to elect it or, more realistically, to elect the prime minister and then to vote the list of ministers he presents. This method is rarely used.¹² But it brings out the nature of the procedure better than any of the others. Moreover, these can all be reduced to it, because the man who becomes prime minister is in all normal cases the one whom parliament would elect. The way in which he is actually appointed to office, by a monarch as in England, by a President as in France or by a special agency or committee as in the Prussian Free State of the Weimar period, is merely a matter of form.

The classical English practice is this. After a general election the victorious party normally commands a majority of seats in Parliament and thus is in a position to carry a vote of want of confidence against everyone except its own leader who in this negative way is designated "by Parliament" for national leadership. He receives his commission from the monarch—"kisses hands"—and presents to him his list of ministers of which the list of cabinet ministers is a part. In this he includes, first, some

presidents. Much more important is it that he cannot dissolve Congress—but neither could the French Prime Minister do so. On the other hand, his position is stronger than that of the English Prime Minister by virtue of the fact that his leadership is independent of his having a majority in Congress—at least legally; for as a matter of fact he is checkmated if he has none. Also, he can appoint and dismiss cabinet officers (almost) at will. The latter can hardly be called ministers in the English sense of the word and are really no more than the word "secretary" conveys in common parlance. We might say, therefore, that in a sense the President is not only prime minister but sole minister, unless we find an analogy between the functions of an English Cabinet minister and the functions of the managers of the administration's forces in Congress.

There is no difficulty about interpreting and explaining these and many other peculiarities in this or any other country that uses the democratic method. But in order to save space we shall mainly think of the English pattern and consider all other cases as more or less important "deviations" on the theory that thus far the logic of democratic government has worked itself out most completely in the English practice though not in its legal forms.

¹¹ It will be recalled that I have defined parliament as an organ of the state. Although that was done simply for reasons of formal (legal) logic this definition fits in particularly well with our conception of the democratic method. Membership in parliament is hence an office.

¹² For example, it was adopted in Austria after the breakdown in 1918.

party veterans who receive what might be called complimentary office; secondly, the leaders of the second rank, those men on whom he counts for the current fighting in Parliament and who owe their preferment partly to their positive political value and partly to their value as potential nuisances; third, the rising men whom he invites to the charmed circle of office in order to “extract the brains from below the gangway”; and sometimes, fourth, a few men whom he thinks particularly well qualified to fill certain offices.¹³ But again, in all normal cases this practice will tend to produce the same result as election by Parliament would. The reader will also see that where, as in England, the prime minister has the actual power to dissolve (“to go to the country”), the result will to some extent approximate the result we should expect from direct election of the cabinet by the electorate so long as the latter supports him.¹⁴ This may be illustrated by a famous instance.

2. In 1879, when the Beaconsfield (Disraeli) government, after almost six years of prosperous tenure of power culminating in the spectacular success of the Congress of Berlin,¹⁵ was on all ordinary counts entitled to expect a success at the polls, Gladstone suddenly roused the country by a series of addresses of unsurpassable force (Midlothian campaign) which played up Turkish atrocities so successfully as to place him on the crest of a wave of popular enthusiasm *for him personally*. The official party had nothing to do with it. Several of its leaders in fact disapproved. Gladstone

¹³ To lament, as some people do, how little fitness for office counts in these arrangements is beside the point where description is concerned; it is of the essence of democratic government that political values should count primarily and fitness only incidentally. See below, ch. xxiii.

¹⁴ If, as was the case in France, the prime minister has no such power, parliamentary *coteries* acquire so much independence that this parallelism between acceptance of a man by parliament and acceptance of the same man by the electorate is weakened or destroyed. This is the situation in which the parlor game of parliamentary politics runs riot. From our standpoint this is a deviation from the design of the machine. Raymond Poincaré was of the same opinion.

Of course, such situations also occur in England. For the Prime Minister's power to dissolve—strictly, his power to “advise” the monarch to dissolve the House of Commons—is inoperative either if his party's inner circle sets its face against it or if there is no chance that elections will strengthen his hold upon Parliament. That is to say, he may be stronger (though possibly still weak) in Parliament than he is in the country. Such a state of things tends to develop with some regularity after a government has been in power for some years. But under the English system this deviation from design cannot last very long.

¹⁵ I do not mean that the temporary settlement of the questions raised by the Russo Turkish War and the acquisition of the perfectly useless island of Cyprus were in themselves such masterpieces of statesmanship. But I do mean that from the standpoint of domestic politics they were just the kind of showy success that would normally flatter the average citizen's vanity and would greatly enhance the government's prospects in an atmosphere of jingo patriotism. In fact it was the general opinion that Disraeli would have won if he had dissolved immediately on returning from Berlin.

had resigned the leadership years before and tackled the country single-handed. But when the liberal party under this impetus had won a smashing victory, it was obvious to everyone that he had to be again accepted as the party leader—nay, that he had become the party leader by virtue of his national leadership and that there simply was no room for any other. He came into power in a halo of glory.

Now this instance teaches us a lot about the working of the democratic method. To begin with, it must be realized that it is unique only in its dramatic quality, but in nothing else. It is the oversized specimen of a normal genus. The cases of both Pitts, Peel, Palmerston, Disraeli, Campbell Bannerman and others differ from it only in degree.

First, as to the Prime Minister's political leadership.¹⁶ Our example shows that it is composed of three different elements which must not be confused and which in every case mix in different proportions, the mixture then determining the nature of every individual Prime Minister's rule. On the face of it, he comes into office as the leading man of his party in *Parliament*. As

¹⁶ It is characteristic of the English way of doing things that official recognition of the existence of the Prime Minister's office was deferred until 1907, when it was allowed to appear in the official order of precedence at court. But it is as old as democratic government. However, since democratic government was never introduced by a distinct act but slowly evolved as part of a comprehensive social process, it is not easy to indicate even an approximate birthday or birth period. There is a long stretch that presents embryonic cases. It is tempting to date the institution from the reign of William III, whose position, so much weaker than that of the native rulers had been, seems to give color to the idea. The objection to this however is not so much that England was no "democracy" then—the reader will recall that we do not define democracy by the extent of the franchise—as that, on the one hand, the embryonic case of Danby had occurred under Charles II and that, on the other hand, William III never reconciled himself to the arrangement and kept certain matters successfully in his own hands. We must not of course confuse prime ministers with mere advisers, however powerful with their sovereign and however firmly entrenched in the very center of the public power plant they may be—such men as Richelieu, Mazarin or Strafford for instance. Godolphin and Harley under Queen Anne were clearly transitional cases. The first man to be universally recognized at the time and by political historians was Sir Robert Walpole. But he as well as the Duke of Newcastle (or his brother Henry Pelham or both jointly) and in fact all the leading men down to Lord Shelburne (including the elder Pitt who even as foreign secretary came very near to fulfilling our requirements *in substance*) lack one or another of the characteristics. The first full-fledged specimen was the younger Pitt.

It is interesting to note that what his own time recognized in the case of Sir Robert Walpole (and later in that of Lord Carteret [Earl of Granville]) was not that here was an organ essential to democratic government that was breaking through atrophic tissues. On the contrary, public opinion felt it to be a most vicious cancer the growth of which was a menace to the national welfare and to democracy—"sole minister" or "first minister" was a term of opprobrium hurled at Walpole by his enemies. This fact is significant. It not only indicates the resistance new institutions usually meet with. It also indicates that this institution was felt to be incompatible with the classic doctrine of democracy which in fact has no place for political leadership in our sense, hence no place for the realities of the position of a prime minister.

soon as installed however, he becomes in a sense the leader of *Parliament*, directly of the house of which he is a member, indirectly also of the other. This is more than an official euphemism, more also than is implied in his hold upon his own party. He acquires influence on, or excites the antipathy of, the other parties and individual members of the other parties as well, and this makes a lot of difference in his chances of success. In the limiting case, best exemplified by the practice of Sir Robert Peel, he may coerce his own party by means of another. Finally, though in all normal cases he will also be the head of his party in *the country*, the well-developed specimen of the prime ministerial genus will have a position in the country distinct from what he automatically acquires by heading the party organization. He will lead party opinion creatively—shape it—and eventually rise toward a formative leadership of public opinion beyond the lines of party, toward national leadership that may to some extent become independent of mere party opinion. It is needless to say how very personal such an achievement is and how great the importance of such a foothold outside of both party and Parliament. It puts a whip into the hand of the leader the crack of which may bring unwilling and conspiring followers to heel, though its thong will sharply hit the hand that uses it unsuccessfully.

This suggests an important qualification to our proposition that in a parliamentary system the function of producing a government devolves upon parliament. Parliament does normally decide who will be Prime Minister, but in doing so it is not completely free. It decides by acceptance rather than by initiative. Excepting pathological cases like the French *chambre*, the wishes of members are not as a rule the ultimate data of the process from which government emerges. Members are not only handcuffed by party obligations. They also are driven by the man whom they “elect”—driven to the act of the “election” itself exactly as they are driven by him once they have “elected” him. Every horse is of course free to kick over the traces and it does not always run up to its bit. But revolt or passive resistance against the leader’s lead only shows up the normal relation. And this normal relation is of the essence of the democratic method. Gladstone’s personal victory in 1880 is the answer to the official theory that Parliament creates and cashiers government.¹⁷

¹⁷ Gladstone himself upheld that theory strongly. In 1874, when defeated at the polls, he still argued for meeting Parliament because it was up to Parliament to pass the sentence of dismissal. This of course means nothing at all. In the same way he studiously professed unbounded deference to the crown. One biographer after another has marveled at this courtly attitude of the great democratic leader. But surely Queen Victoria showed better discernment than did those biographers if we may judge from the strong dislike which she displayed for Gladstone from 1879 on and which the biographers attribute simply to the baleful influence of Disraeli. Is it really necessary to point out that

3. Next, as to the nature and role of the cabinet.¹⁸ It is a curiously double-faced thing, the joint product of Parliament and Prime Minister. The latter designates its members for appointment, as we have seen, and the former accepts but also influences his choice. Looked at from the party's standpoint it is an assemblage of subleaders more or less reflecting its own structure. Looked at from the Prime Minister's standpoint it is an assemblage not only of comrades in arms but of party men who have their own interests and prospects to consider—a miniature Parliament. For the combination to come about and to work it is necessary for prospective cabinet ministers to make up their minds—not necessarily from enthusiastic love—to serve under Mr. X and for Mr. X to shape his program so that his colleagues in the cabinet will not too often feel like “reconsidering their position,” as official phraseology has it, or like going on a sitdown strike. Thus the cabinet—and the same applies to the wider ministry that comprises also the political officers not in the cabinet—has a distinct function in the democratic process as against Prime Minister, party, Parliament and electorate. This function of intermediate leadership is associated with, but by no means based upon, the current business transacted by the individual cabinet officers in the several departments to which they are appointed in order to keep the leading group's hands on the bureaucratic engine. And it has only a distant relation, if any, with “seeing to it that the will of the people is carried out in each of them.” Precisely in the best instances, the people are presented with results they never thought of and would not have approved of in advance.

4. Again, as to Parliament. I have both defined what seems to me to be its primary function and qualified that definition. But it might be objected that my definition fails to do justice to its other functions. Parliament obviously does a lot of other things besides setting up and

professions of deference may mean two different things? The man who treats his wife with elaborate courtliness is not as a rule the one to accept comradeship between the sexes on terms of equality. As a matter of fact, the courtly attitude is precisely a method to evade this.

¹⁸ Still more than the evolution of the prime minister's office, that of the cabinet is blurred by the historical continuity that covers changes in the nature of an institution. To this day the English cabinet is legally the operative part of the Privy Council, which of course was an instrument of government in decidedly pre-democratic times. But below this surface an entirely different organ has evolved. As soon as we realize this we find the task of dating its emergence somewhat easier than we found the analogous task in the case of the prime minister. Though embryonic cabinets existed in the time of Charles II (the “cabal” ministry was one, and the committee of four that was formed in connection with Temple's experiment was another), the Whig “junto” under William III is a fair candidate for first place. From the reign of Anne on only minor points of membership or functioning remain to disagree on.

pulling down governments. It legislates. And it even administers. For although every act of a parliament, except resolutions and declarations of policy, makes “law” in a formal sense, there are many acts which must be considered as administrative measures. The budget is the most important instance. To make it is an administrative function. Yet in this country it is drawn up by Congress. Even where it is drawn up by the minister of finance with the approval of the cabinet, as it is in England, Parliament has to vote on it and by this vote it becomes an act of Parliament. Does not this refute our theory?

When two armies operate against each other, their individual moves are always centered upon particular objects that are determined by their strategical or tactical situations. They may contend for a particular stretch of country or for a particular hill. But the desirability of conquering that stretch or hill must be derived from the strategical or tactical purpose, which is to beat the enemy. It would be obviously absurd to attempt to derive it from any extra-military properties the stretch or hill may have. Similarly, the first and foremost aim of each political party is to prevail over the others in order to get into power or to stay in it. Like the conquest of the stretch of country or the hill, the decision of the political issues is, from the standpoint of the politician, not the end but only the material of parliamentary activity. Since politicians fire off words instead of bullets and since those words are unavoidably supplied by the issues under debate, this may not always be as clear as it is in the military case. But victory over the opponent is nevertheless the essence of both games.¹⁹

Fundamentally, then, the current production of parliamentary decisions on national questions is the very method by which Parliament keeps or refuses to keep a government in power or by which Parliament accepts or refuses to accept the Prime Minister’s leadership.²⁰ With the exceptions to be noticed

¹⁹ Sometimes politicians do emerge from phraseological mists. To cite an example to which no objection can be raised on the score of frivolity: no lesser politician than Sir Robert Peel characterized the nature of his craft when he said after his parliamentary victory over the Whig government on the issue of the latter’s policy in Jamaica: “Jamaica was a good horse to start.” The reader should ponder over this.

²⁰ This of course applies to the pre-Vichy French and pre-Fascist Italian practice just as much as to the English practice. It may however be called in question in the case of the United States where defeat of the administration on a major issue does not entail resignation of the President. But this is merely due to the fact that the Constitution, which embodies a different political theory, did not permit parliamentary practice to develop according to its logic. In actual fact this logic did not entirely fail to assert itself. Defeats on major issues, though they cannot displace the President, will in general so weaken his prestige as to oust him from a position of leadership. For the time being this creates an abnormal situation. But whether he wins or loses the subsequent presidential election, the conflict is then settled in a way that does not fundamentally differ from the way in which an English Prime Minister deals with a similar situation when he dissolves Parliament.

presently, *every* vote is a vote of confidence or want of confidence, and the votes that are technically so called merely bring out *in abstracto* the essential element that is common to all. Of this we can satisfy ourselves by observing that the initiative in bringing up matters for parliamentary decision as a rule lies with the government or else with the opposition's shadow cabinet and not with private members.

It is the Prime Minister who selects from the incessant stream of current problems those which he is going to make parliamentary issues, that is to say, those on which his government proposes to introduce bills or, if he is not sure of his ground, at least resolutions. Of course every government receives from its predecessor a legacy of open questions which it may be unable to shelve; others are taken up as a matter of routine politics; it is only in the case of the most brilliant achievement that a Prime Minister is in a position to impose measures about a political issue which he has created himself. In any case however the government's choice or lead, whether free or not, is the factor that dominates parliamentary activity. If a bill is brought in by the opposition, this means that it is offering battle: such a move is an attack which the government must either thwart by purloining the issue or else defeat. If a major bill that is not on the governmental menu is brought in by a group of the governmental party, this spells revolt and it is from this angle and not from the extra-tactical merits of the case that it is looked upon by the ministers. This even extends to the raising of a debate. Unless suggested or sanctioned by the government, these are symptoms of the government forces' getting out of hand. Finally, if a measure is carried by inter-party agreement, this means a drawn battle or a battle avoided on strategical grounds.²¹

5. The exceptions to this principle of governmental leadership in "representative" assemblies only serve to show how realistic it is. They are of two kinds.

First, no leadership is absolute. Political leadership exerted according to the democratic method is even less so than are others because of that competitive

²¹ Another highly significant piece of English technique may be mentioned in this connection. A major bill is or was usually not proceeded with if the majority for it fell to a very low figure on the second reading. This practice first of all recognized an important limitation of the majority principle as actually applied in well-managed democracies: it would not be correct to say that in a democracy the minority is always compelled to surrender. But there is a second point. While the minority is not always compelled to yield to the majority on the particular issue under debate, it is practically always—there were exceptions even to this—compelled to yield to it on the question whether the cabinet is to stay in power. Such a vote on the second reading of a major government measure may be said to combine a vote of confidence with a vote for shelving a bill. If the contents of the bill were all that mattered there would hardly be any sense in voting for it if it is not to make the statute book. But if Parliament is primarily concerned with keeping the cabinet in office, then such tactics become at once understandable.

element which is of the essence of democracy. Since theoretically every follower has the right of displacing his leader and since there are nearly always some followers who have a real chance of doing so, the private member and—if he feels that he could do with a bigger hat—the minister within and without the inner circle steers a middle course between an unconditional allegiance to the leader's standard and an unconditional raising of a standard of his own, balancing risks and chances with a nicety that is sometimes truly admirable.²² The leader in turn responds by steering a middle course between insisting on discipline and allowing himself to be thwarted. He tempers pressure with more or less judicious concessions, frowns with compliments, punishments with benefits. This game results, according to the relative strength of individuals and their positions, in a very variable but in most cases considerable amount of freedom. In particular, groups that are strong enough to make their resentment felt yet not strong enough to make it profitable to include their protagonists and their programs in the governmental arrangement will in general be allowed to have their way in minor questions or, at any rate, in questions which the Prime Minister can be induced to consider as of minor or only sectional importance. Thus, groups of followers or even individual members may occasionally have the opportunity of carrying bills of their own and still more indulgence will of course be extended to mere criticism or to failure to vote mechanically for every government measure. But we need only look at this in a practical spirit in order to realize, from the limits that are set to the use of this freedom, that it embodies not the principle of the working of a parliament but deviations from it.

Second, there are cases in which the political engine fails to absorb certain issues either because the high commands of the government's and the opposition's forces do not appreciate their political values or because these values are in fact doubtful.²³ Such issues may then be taken up by outsiders who prefer making an independent bid for power to serving in the ranks of one of the existing parties. This of course is perfectly normal politics. But there is another possibility. A man may feel so strongly about a particular question that he may enter the political arena merely in order to have it solved in his way and without harboring any wish to start in on a normal political career.

²² One of the most instructive examples by which the above can be illustrated is afforded by the course taken by Joseph Chamberlain with respect to the Irish question in the 1880's. He finally outmaneuvered Gladstone, but he started the campaign while officially an ardent adherent. And the case is exceptional only in the force and brilliance of the man. As every political captain knows, only mediocrities can be counted on for loyalty. That is why some of the greatest of those captains, Disraeli for instance, surrounded themselves by thoroughly second-rate men.

²³ An issue that has never been tried out is the typical instance of the first class. The typical reasons why a government and the shadow cabinet of the opposition may tacitly agree to leave an issue alone in spite of their realizing its potentialities are technical difficulty of handling it and the fear that it will cause sectional difficulties.

This however is so unusual that it is difficult to find instances of first-rank importance of it. Perhaps Richard Cobden was one. It is true that instances of second-rank importance are more frequent, especially instances of the crusader type. But nobody will hold that they are anything but deviations from standard practice.

We may sum up as follows. In observing human societies we do not as a rule find it difficult to specify, at least in a rough commonsense manner, the various ends that the societies under study struggle to attain. These ends may be said to provide the rationale or meaning of corresponding individual activities. But it does not follow that the social meaning of a type of activity will necessarily provide the motive power, hence the explanation of the latter. If it does not, a theory that contents itself with an analysis of the social end or need to be served cannot be accepted as an adequate account of the activities that serve it. For instance, the reason why there is such a thing as economic activity is of course that people want to eat, to clothe themselves and so on. To provide the means to satisfy those wants is the social end or meaning of production. Nevertheless we all agree that this proposition would make a most unrealistic starting point for a theory of economic activity in commercial society and that we shall do much better if we start from propositions about profits. Similarly, the social meaning or function of parliamentary activity is no doubt to turn out legislation and, in part, administrative measures. But in order to understand how democratic politics serve this social end, we must start from the competitive struggle for power and office and realize that the social function is fulfilled, as it were, incidentally—in the same sense as production is incidental to the making of profits.

6. Finally, as to the role of the electorate, only one additional point need be mentioned. We have seen that the wishes of the members of a parliament are not the ultimate data of the process that produces government. A similar statement must be made concerning the electorate. Its choice—ideologically glorified into the Call from the People—does not flow from its initiative but is being shaped, and the shaping of it is an essential part of the democratic process. Voters do not decide issues. But neither do they pick their members of parliament from the eligible population with a perfectly open mind. In all normal cases the initiative lies with the candidate who makes a bid for the office of member of parliament and such local leadership as that may imply. Voters confine themselves to accepting this bid in preference to others or refusing to accept it. Even most of those exceptional cases in which a man is *genuinely* drafted by the electors come into the same category for either of two reasons: naturally a man need not bid for leadership if he has acquired leadership already; or it may happen that a local leader who can control or

influence the vote but is unable or unwilling to compete for election himself designates another man who then may seem to have been sought out by the voters acting on their own initiative.

But even as much of electoral initiative as acceptance of one of the competing candidates would in itself imply is further restricted by the existence of parties. A party is not, as classical doctrine (or Edmund Burke) would have us believe, a group of men who intend to promote public welfare "upon some principle on which they are all agreed." This rationalization is so dangerous because it is so tempting. For all parties will of course, at any given time, provide themselves with a stock of principles or planks and these principles or planks may be as characteristic of the party that adopts them and as important for its success as the brands of goods a department store sells are characteristic of it and important for its success. But the department store cannot be defined in terms of its brands and a party cannot be defined in terms of its principles. A party is a group whose members propose to act in concert in the competitive struggle for political power. If that were not so it would be impossible for different parties to adopt exactly or almost exactly the same program. Yet this happens as everyone knows. Party and machine politicians are simply the response to the fact that the electoral mass is incapable of action other than a stampede, and they constitute an attempt to regulate political competition exactly similar to the corresponding practices of a trade association. The psycho-technics of party management and party advertising, slogans and marching tunes, are not accessories. They are of the essence of politics. So is the political boss.