

# The Franklin Press

and

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## Democracy, Yesterday and Today

"... American democracy as practiced today is far from the democracy conceived by Jefferson and Payne."

Of the many interesting observations in Miss Nancy Jones' letter, published elsewhere on this page, none is more penetrating than the one quoted above. For much of our present-day misunderstanding and confusion grows out of the failure of our leaders, as well as the people themselves, to appreciate the great changes that have occurred since the adoption of the Constitution of the United States. Radical changes have been written into the law of the land, and even greater changes have occurred in our thinking.

What the founding fathers set up was a representative government; they had no intention of establishing a democracy. Most of them, including Washington, were inclined to be suspicious of the people; they sought to protect the nation against popular excesses, and to lodge the actual power of administration in the hands of the educated—which, in that day, usually meant the well-to-do.

Jefferson and his followers, it is true, were democrats, though rather mild in their views as compared with today's conception of democracy. It is interesting to note, too, that they called themselves "republicans", because the word "democracy" was politically unpopular at that time; and Jefferson's election as president, even as one who believed in a republic, was bemoaned by many honest, patriotic Americans as a national calamity.

Jefferson himself was in France at the time the constitution was drafted, and he studied the document with considerable skepticism; it was conservative indeed as compared with his Declaration of Independence. He was so doubtful about it, in fact, that he demanded—and obtained—the Bill of Rights. Thus the Constitution, with the Bill of Rights incorporated into it, represented a compromise. Certain rights of the individual were guarded by the Bill of Rights, but the administration of the government was carefully put well out of reach of the people.

The founding fathers, too, had in mind a government under which the people were not expected to pass upon issues; instead, it was to be a representative government, with the people given the right to choose their representatives, but with the responsibility for deciding policies placed in the hands of a few men the people had chosen to act in their behalf. That conception is illustrated in the way the electoral college, as originally set up, was designed to work. It was not intended that the people should be given a choice between candidates for the presidency; the people were expected merely to choose electors, who, in turn, would meet and, after deliberation, select a man to serve as chief executive of the nation.

Since that day, the whole form of our government has been greatly altered, while our thinking has moved far to the left. Nor—contrary to the views of some—did all the changes come with the New Deal. While more changes, perhaps, were crowded into the 13 years of Roosevelt's administrations than any similar period, the New Deal era merely climaxed and hastened a movement that started with Jefferson's election, 146 years ago, and has continued ever since.

Andrew Jackson took the nation a long way toward democracy. The Civil War destroyed the doctrine of state's rights. And, in more recent—but pre-New Deal—years, the tendency has been illustrated in the popular election of United States senators, once named by the general assemblies, and by the institution of party primaries in place of the old convention method, under which a few representatives selected the candidates.

Today, therefore, if we want to understand what is happening in America, we should bear in mind that we have neither a strictly representative government nor a pure democracy, but stand somewhere between those two extremes.

We cannot understand the America of 1946 by going back to the founding fathers and stopping there; we can understand it only if we view it in the light of what happened at the constitutional convention of 1787, plus what has been happening down through the years since. For American government has been what it had to be to survive—a growing thing, constantly changing to meet changing conditions.

"There is retribution in history"—Zebulon B. Vance.

## LETTERS

### LABOR AND DEMOCRACY

To the Editors of The Clayton Tribune and The Franklin Press, and Mr. J. Q. West:

I first read the letter captioned "Danger Ahead", when it was reprinted in The Franklin Press at the suggestion of Mr. W. C. Zickgraf, with the notation that it "contains food for thought". It does indeed contain food for thought. More than that, it points out with glaring certainty that it is high time that people do think, and fairly and democratically.

I do not, at the outset, agree with Mr. West—but I think his agonized, pessimistic views voice the thoughts not only of Mr. J. Q. West, but also, all too often, of Mr. J. Q. Public. Graft, grab and selfishness are the order of the day, but they had their beginning not so recently as V-J Day. There is strife and dissension among us, but to accept this situation as insoluble, or to blame it exclusively on labor and the recently soaring number and propensity of strikes, is to deny the precept that a democracy can ever exist as a democracy.

Apparently Mr. West has a conception of the relation of labor to corporations as a long-standing attempt of the working man to take away from the owner of a business, a "capitalist", money which rightfully belongs to him and to which the worker has no right. The latter, through organization, has at last found a voice, and many people object to the noise that he is making with it right at the moment. The fact that this group of people known as "labor" are asking for higher wages and better working conditions, and are withholding their services until these things are granted to them, seems to constitute a threat to our very system of government; not only that, but through some flight of fancy Mr. West puts labor in unexplained control of the corporations, and thereby has the country heading for anarchy, civil war, and communism.

I fail, I am afraid, to grasp the significance of these fears. In the first place, if stock in the corporations, against which labor is striking, were owned by laborers, I do not believe that under the existing programs in these corporations it would make a lot of difference in the management of the companies. It is a long and expensive process to buy up all the voting stock in a large corporation. Stockholders are seldom in close enough contact with the executives of large corporations, and seldom appear at stockholders' meetings in large enough numbers, to carry much weight in changing its policies.

Neither is the amount of money spent in stockholders' dividends or raises in workers' salaries such a tremendous percentage of net profits as the public—to which group the laborer belongs—is led to believe. Bonuses are paid to executives. Tremendous advertising campaigns clutter the airways and periodicals ad nauseum. Cutthroat competition at enormous expense is carried out to eliminate competitors, stabilize prices, and allocate market areas. Research, the results of which are all too often withheld because a new product would antiquate equipment installed for production of the product now on the market—all these things comprise a much larger percentage of the bills which the consumer is footing.

The right of labor to strike is an essential part of our democratic system, as inalienable and necessary a part of it as the freedom of the press, without which neither Mr. West nor I would be able to print these letters. Through misinformation, labor and communism have become closely connected bugbears which are supposed to be threatening American democracy. I hold that American democracy as practiced today is far from the democracy conceived by Jefferson and Payne, fought for by Washington and his barefoot soldiers. I hold that democracy has far more serious threats than the so-called Labor front. I agree that Mr. Stalin "sits on the side lines, grinning, watching... our effort to live with ourselves." He can well afford to grin—but he grins at what we are doing to our democracy, the things preached by our constitution and Declaration of Independence while we practice exactly the opposite ideas, the laughable inefficiency of our statesmen and our politicians and our own stupidity and indifference at election time.

In the same issue of The Press as Mr. West's published letter, appeared an editorial which makes the statement that "If politics is rotten, the fault is ours," and two three-column advertisements of the platforms of opposing candidates for a seat in congress. Both of these fine politicians arraign the public on platforms consisting of carefully boiled-down local affairs; neither of them mentions one national issue. It is these national issues which drive Mr. West and me to write these "agonized articles". Why, in a democracy, can national politicians run on such half-baked, diswater problems as the Blue Ridge parkway and the Kephart fish hatchery and not have the public rise up in protest? It is all very fine to have someone assure us that it will be brought to the attention of congress that Western North Carolina needs things to draw the tourist business, but what about the Case bill? What about the National Housing act? What about fascism in Franco Spain? What about food for the starving? What about the atomic inventions?

I suggest that we go one step farther than an open-eyed realization that we are headed for anarchy, civil war, or whatever it is we are so hopelessly headed for. I suggest that the only way for a democracy to be run is for the PEOPLE, including every individual who is old enough to vote, to insist that he know what he is voting for. The local issues, on which the groundwork for grab, graft and selfishness are so frequently laid, must become secondary until the tremendous job of settling our post-war difficulties is taken care of, by capable men, men who we insist run upon honest, clear, specific and comprehensive platforms. I suggest that we give much thought to the borderline between the authority of a president to declare a national emergency which so many of his policies have denied, and the authority of a fascist dictator; and I suggest that we let Mr. Truman know what we think.

If Mr. West wants to see some good in his so-called labor wars, let him go back and read the Constitution of the United States.

—NANCY JONES

New York, N. Y.  
June 3, 1946.

## Others' Opinions

### ROSS EAKIN

Major J. Ross Eakin devoted more than half of his adult life to the conservation and development of one of his country's greatest natural resources, its national parks. More than a year ago ill health forced him to retire as superintendent of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, a post to which he had given his whole energy from the time this great recreation area had begun to assume the form envisaged by its founders.

The devotion of this public servant to a trust of immense responsibility sustained every attack but failing health. He labored to build the Park to the point of preeminence which it has now attained—the most popular National park in America. Those who may have differed with him in methods never questioned his dedication of purpose. When Major Eakin came under a spoilsman's attack from Senator McKellar of Tennessee in 1941 this newspaper and many others defended the Park superintendent's integrity and exulted in his personal exoneration.

The towering park in the Smokies is its own evidence of the tireless labors of a man who was ever ambitious for its advancement. Ross Eakin was possessed of the vision needed to transform the last real wilderness of eastern America into a place of recreation and aesthetic satisfaction for his countrymen. The people of North Carolina will join with those of Tennessee in mourning the passing of a gentleman and a public servant who worked with them to fulfill a dream at last come to happy realization.—Asheville Citizen.

Build your church within your heart and take it with you everywhere.—Anon.

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