

Outline of a lecture delivered in the Short Course on
"The Citizen in the modern World."

CONFLICTING PHILOSOPHIES IN EUROPE.

Almost by common consent, the conflict of political philosophies in Europe to-day is described as the challenge of Fascism and Communism to Democracy. We will see later on that such a view is not entirely adequate.

Let us for the purpose of our analysis define our terms simply thus: by Fascism we mean the political philosophy common to Italian Fascismo, the Catholic corporative state in Austria, and National Socialism in Germany; by Communism, the political philosophy of the ruling group in the U.S.S.R.; by Democracy, the political philosophy inspiring the institutions of the rest of Europe in so far as the countries concerned have not fallen under the sway of one of the two new philosophies. By this account Poland, Jugoslavia, Greece, Portugal and some other states have more or less Fascist regimes, and France, Belgium, Holland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Switzerland and Czechoslovakia are the democratic countries of the European Continent.

British and Continental democracy contrasted.

The discrepancy between British and Continental ideals seems so great that it might appear to be almost misleading to apply the term "democratic" to both the British and the Continental systems.

British democracy is a system of government built upon the idea of liberty. It consists in a mode of deliberation and leadership designed to secure the greatest possible measure of freedom in the community. Democratic deliberation and leadership are intended to ensure that "things get done" and that they get done with the least possible interference with the liberty of individuals and groups of individuals. Such methods are meant to safeguard the expression of all relevant trends of opinion in the community and to make sure that they become articulate before decisions are eventually taken. Eventually, for one of the main purposes of democratic methods of deliberation is to avoid all but unavoidable decisions,

and to keep those that have proved unavoidable within the limits of the greatest measure of common consent. Thus alone can non-conforming minorities be protected against the tyranny of majorities. Limiting the power of governments and, consequently, restricting the functions of the State are essential features of a system that is directed towards the achievement of the greatest possible freedom in society.

Continental democracy is a system of government built upon the principle of equality. Liberty merges into equality; that all men are born free, means that they are all born equal. Governments exist in order to safeguard individuals against domination by other individuals, thus securing the good life for all. Continental democracy is not a mode of governing; - it is an aim of government. It is not a method of discussing decisions, but a definition of their ultimate purpose. The power of governments to take decisions unhampered by the opposition of dissenting minorities appears therefore as a necessary guarantee against the obstructions of the common good by vested interests and privileged minorities. Methods of discussion that would lend themselves to obstructive practices are regarded as undemocratic as are likewise all other limitations of the power of the majority to rule.

Freedom and equality are the corollaries of the Christian idea of personality, but we must not forget that in the institutional life of society freedom and equality represent opposite principles. Libertarian and equalitarian democracy start on different institutional lines. Universal suffrage and educational equality are the characteristics of an equalitarian society. The first has been introduced into England only after the war whereas it is several generations old on the Continent; the second, unknown in present-day England in any but a most limited sense, has been a dominating factor on the Continent for more than half a century. Social groups in England are separated by their education whereas in Continental nations education brings social groups together. In recent years some measure of equality of educational opportunities has been gradually introduced into this country, but the general ideal of upbringing retains a rigid class character; the educationally privileged child of the common people leaves his class as a matter of course and passes into a different social stratum. The "speech bar" in this country is nearly as rigid as the speech bar in the U.S.A. Under these conditions the speech bar

a social equality cannot prevail. Even if the rulers of this country wished to add equality to freedom, they would necessarily fail in this endeavour for a long time to come in the face of the cultural chasm separating the social classes.

There is, of course, on the surface of it a substantial degree of overlapping between the British and the Continental systems. British liberal democracy has more and more come to acknowledge the equalitarian aim of the "good life for all" to be an essential of democracy. At the same time Continental democracy would certainly refuse to be satisfied with equality if it merely meant an equality of misery and enslavement; on the Continent also liberty is accepted as an essential of the good life. Accordingly, British and Continental democracy have several institutions in common as constitutionalism i.e. representative government and party system as well as a system of civic rights. But the significance of these institutions is very different indeed according to the libertarian or equalitarian emphasis predominating in British and Continental democracy respectively.

Democracy in Europe therefore is not an unambiguous term. It must be kept in mind that the challenge to democracy on our days is a challenge to the continental type of democracy. This type of democracy, however, is not, as we have seen, a mere unsuccessful or, at the best, incomplete imitation of the English model, but an essentially different system with origins of its own. Nevertheless, the perepeteia of the crises confronting Continental democracy is by no means irrelevant to this country. Several reasons can be adduced. First, the problems facing Continental democracy are not restricted to the Continent, deriving as they do from a worldwide development common to all industrial society in our time; second, the imperative need for adaptation to a changing world arises independently of the causes that make for the change; third, Great Britain herself has been more recently introducing into her insular system of democracy elements of the Continental democracy. The underlying reason for this last development may be possibly found in the gradual disappearance in our days of the two conditions that were at the root of British insularity, i.e. military safety and economic security.

The Nature of the Challenge.

However this may be, it is important to realize the nature of the challenge to Democracy as represented by Fascism and Communism.

Democracy on the one hand, Fascism and Communism on the other, are not strictly comparable terms. Democracy

is a political philosophy; its institutions are essentially restricted to the political field. Even where, as in this country, Democracy is regarded as a method that can be, and, in fact, is applied to other spheres of social activities besides politics as e.g. the church, academic life, trade unions and co-operatives etc., it still stops short of the organisation of production and distribution of material goods i.e. the economic field proper. Fascism and Communism are not restricted to the political sphere, they are social rather than political philosophies. Their reference is to society as a whole. Their common substance could be defined as a desire to alter the relationship of the political to the economic system within a given society.

Under political democracy the economic system is a distinct sphere in society; it runs according to its own laws, without outward interference. For various reasons into which we cannot enter here, this condition of affairs appears to be passing away all over the world. Nations are developing into more closely knit units. The political and the economic system show a tendency of fusing. Faced with the necessity of achieving such a new and close relationship, Continental democracy broke down.

The crisis came about everywhere in a more or less typical fashion. Political democracy proved incompatible with liberal competitive economics. The leaders of industry were undermining the authority of popular government, popular government was attacking and interfering with the activities of industry. A point was reached when both the political and the economic system were threatened by paralysis. Out of a situation of this kind sudden revolutionary transformations arose. Fascism was almost everywhere the outcome of a prolonged state of deadlock between political democracy and a competitive system based on the private ownership of the means of production.

The two possible solutions appeared to be either to extend political democracy to the whole of society so as to include the economic system, or to discard the democratic system. The first is usually called the socialist solution because the economic system must undergo a change if the industrial apparatus should be brought under democratic control. The latter is the fascist solution. Political democracy is abandoned and the economic system is retained in a slightly modified form, but, in contrast to Socialism, maintaining the property system itself.

Communism, which we defined as the political philosophy of the U.S.S.R., appears in this light somewhat as a side issue. Soviet-Communism is the outcome of an attempt at establishing a socialist economy under singular conditions (lack of literacy, lack of industries, lack of democratic traditions.) In spite of its dictatorial methods it must, on account of its Political philosophy, be regarded as a variant of the equalitarian creed.

The actual political clash occurred on the Continent between the fascist tendency at abolishing political democracy and at integrating society on the basis of the existing economic system and the forces of democracy attempting to maintain themselves by extending the power and influence of the democratic state to the whole of society, including the economic system.

At this point the conflict of philosophies entered the political field. Democratic institutions are the outcome of a definite interpretation of the meaning of human life in community. As long as that interpretation holds good, democracy exists. Its institutions may be thrown out of gear, they may even be forcefully suppressed, but, basically, they are not destroyed, they are only in abeyance and will reappear as soon as the pressure is removed. Thus no permanent establishment of fascist regime is possible without the previous destruction of the philosophic roots of democracy. These are to be found in that conception of human personality which derives its validity from the New Testament. For this reason wherever Fascism becomes conscious of itself, it must attack Christianity, as the case of National Socialist Germany shows.

While on the Continent Fascism and Socialism appeared at the critical juncture as clear cut alternatives, under different conditions, as in Great Britain and the U.S.A., they may well be regarded as two opposing tendencies at work within a given society. They are rooted in two distinct spheres, the political and the economic. In the political sphere there is a tendency to make representative democracy more effective and more efficient; in the economic sphere the tendency is towards a corporative organisation of industry. According to the prevalence of the one or the other of the two tendencies, society as a whole can be said to be moving in the socialist or the fascist direction. Those who are committed to a democratic philosophy of society must realize that the outcome of the present crisis of mankind may well depend on the capacity of political democracy to prevail over the fascist tendency inherent in modern industry.

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and to keep those that have proved unavoidable within the limits of the greatest measure of common consent. Thus alone can non-conforming minorities be protected against the tyranny of majorities. Limiting the power of governments and, consequently, restricting the functions of the State, are essential features of a system that is directed towards the achievement of the greatest possible freedom in society.

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Under the competitive system

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The two possible solutions appeared to be either to extend political democracy to the whole of society so as to include the economic system, or to discard the democratic system *altogether*. The first is usually called the socialist solution because the economic system must undergo a change if the industrial apparatus should be brought under democratic control. The latter is the fascist solution. Political democracy is abandoned and the economic system is retained in a slightly modified form, but, in contrast to Socialism, ~~maintaining~~ *is maintained* the property system itself *is*

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BOARD OF EDUCATION

Outline of a lecture delivered at the Short Course on

"The Citizen in the Modern World." Oxford, 1937

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by

DR. KARL POLANYI

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interests and privileged minorities. Methods of discussion that would lend themselves to abusive practices are regarded as undemocratic, as are, likewise, all other limitations of the power of the majority to rule.

We are used to regarding freedom and equality as correlatives, for they are both corollaries of the Christian idea of personality. But we must not forget that in the institutional life of society freedom and equality represent opposite principles. Libertarian and equalitarian democracy start on different institutional lines. Universal suffrage and educational equality are the characteristics of an equalitarian society. The first has been introduced into England only after the War whereas it is several generations old on the Continent; the second, still unknown in present-day England in any but the most limited sense, has been an outstanding feature of Continental culture for more than half a century. Social groups in England are separated by their education whereas in Continental nations education rather tends to bring social groups together. In recent years some measure of equality of educational opportunities has been gradually introduced into this country, but the general ideal of upbringing retains its rigid class-character - the educationally favoured child of the common people, almost as a matter of course, leaves his class and passes into a different social stratum. The "speech-bar" in this country is nearly as rigid as the colour-bar in the U.S.A. Under these conditions the principles of an equalitarian democracy could not prevail. Even if the rulers of this country wished to add equality to freedom, for a long time to come they would fail to achieve this end in the face of the cultural chasm separating the social classes.

There is, of course, on the surface, a substantial degree of overlapping between the British and the Continental systems. British liberal democracy has come more and more to acknowledge the equalitarian aim of the "good life for all" to be an essential of democracy. At the same time Continental democracy would certainly refuse to be satisfied with equality if it merely meant an equality of misery and enslavement; on the Continent also liberty is accepted as an essential of the good life. Accordingly, British and Continental democracy have several institutions in common as constitutionalism i.e. representative government and party system, as well as a system of civic rights. But the significance and function of these institutions is very different according to the libertarian or equalitarian emphasis obtaining in British and Continental democracy, respectively.

Democracy in Europe, therefore, is not an unambiguous term. It must be kept in mind that the challenge to Democracy in our days is a challenge to the Continental type. This type of democracy, however, is not, as we have seen, a mere unsuccessful or, at the best, incomplete imitation of the English model, but an essentially different system with origins of its own. Nevertheless the peripeteia of the crisis confronting Continental democracy is by no means irrelevant to this country. Several reasons can be adduced. First, the problems facing Continental democracy are not restricted to the Continent, deriving as they do from a world-wide development common to all industrial societies of our time; second, the imperative need for adaptation to a changing world arises independently of the courses that make for the change; third, Great Britain herself has been more recently introducing into her insular system of democracy elements of the Continental type. The underlying reason for this last development may be possibly found in the gradual disappearance in our days of the two main conditions that were, historically, at the root of British insularity, i.e. military safety and economic security.

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However this may be, it is important to realise the nature of the challenge to democracy as represented by Fascism and Communism.

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Under our present competitive system industry forms a distinct sphere in society; it runs according to its own laws, without interference from outside. For various reasons into which we cannot enter, this condition of affairs appears to be passing away all over the world. National societies are developing into more closely knit units. The political and the economic system show a tendency of fusing. Faced with the necessity of achieving such a new and close relationship, Continental democracy broke down.

The crisis came about everywhere in a more or less typical fashion. Political democracy proved incompatible with liberal competitive economics. Between the two a deepseated tension developed. The leaders of industry were undermining the authority of popular governments, popular governments were attacking and interfering with the activities of industry. Eventually a point was reached when both the political and the economic system were threatened by paralysis. Out of a situation of this sort sudden revolutionary transformations arose. Fascism was thus almost everywhere the outcome of a prolonged state of deadlock between political democracy and a competitive system of industry based on the private ownership of the means of production.

Theoretically, the two possible solutions to the deadlock appeared to be either to extend political democracy to the whole of society so as to include the economic system, or else, to discard the democratic system altogether. The first is usually called the socialist solution because the economic system must undergo a change if the industrial apparatus should be brought under democratic control. The latter is the Fascist solution. Political democracy is abandoned and the economic system is retained in a slightly modified form, but, in contrast to socialism, the property system itself is maintained unchanged.

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But the actual political clash occurred on the Continent between the Fascist tendency to abolish political democracy and to integrate society on the basis of the existing economic system and the forces of democracy attempting to maintain themselves by extending the influence of the democratic state to the whole of society, including the economic system.

It was at this point that the conflict of philosophies entered the political arena. Democratic institutions are the outcome of a definite interpretation of the meaning of human life in community. As long as that interpretation holds good, democracy exists. Its institutions may be thrown out of gear, they may even be forcefully suppressed, but, basically, they are not destroyed, they are only in abeyance and will reappear as soon as the pressure is removed. No permanent establishment of a Fascist regime is, therefore, possible without the previous destruction of the philosophic roots of democracy. These are to be found in that conception of human personality which derives its validity from the New Testament. For this reason, wherever Fascism becomes conscious of itself, it must attack Christianity, as is the case in National Socialist Germany.

While on the Continent Fascism and Socialism appeared at the critical juncture as clear cut alternatives, they may well be regarded, under different conditions, as in Great Britain and the U.S.A., as two opposing tendencies at work within a given society. These two tendencies are rooted in two distinct spheres, the political and the economic. In the political sphere there is a tendency to make representative democracy more effective and more efficient; in the economic sphere the tendency is towards a corporative organisation of industry. According to the prevalence of the one or the other of the two tendencies, society as a whole can be said to be moving in the socialist or the fascist direction. Those who are committed to a democratic philosophy of society must realise that the outcome of the present crisis of mankind may well depend on the capacity of political democracy to prevail over the fascist tendency inherent in modern industry.