

CHAPTER XIII  
POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC DEMOCRACY  
EXPLOITATION

Economic democracy is, in all probability, the oldest institution and, no doubt, the earliest thinker, who used the earth for the production of his needs, realized that the earth was for the good of all. At any rate, we may be sure that he never gave the question a second thought. He was free, completely free, for no one governed him, no one controlled him. Democracy in the purest sense of the term must have been established at the beginning, and came to an end only when the original democrats had made estates for themselves which were worth stealing. It is the stealing business that usually puts an end to the best of institutions.

Political democracy, however, is something entirely different, and usually means in practice the organization of the tax collectors, the political means. Government becomes unionized, usually with two or more contending parties within the union. One party may differ from the other by the methods it will pursue in collecting tribute; another difference may be that the one will promise the electors that it will take less than the other. At any rate, political democracy, and the formation of the State, are very much for the same purpose: the exploitation of the economic means by the political means. Yet, there have been extraordinary differences to be noticed among various types of political democracies. Freeman has held up for our regard the organization

and practice of Switzerland. Many times in the political story of the English people, the historian has pointed out how vastly superior their system was to others of the same period.

Studying the works of some of the observers of the American Republic, who lived about the middle of the last century, it is possible to turn over page after page of their writings and imagine one was reading the story of a latter day Utopia. De Tocqueville wrote a flattering description of what he saw here but, on the other hand, Lecky was not so fulsome in his praise; and, since Lecky, Bryce has pointed out some of the evils of the system, and leaves us a little disheartened as to what the future of this State will be. Whether all, or any, of these people have been writing about democracy or not is a moot question, for they have been dealing with this subject primarily from the standpoint of an extended franchise which included nearly all adult males. The woman had no vote in national affairs when these commentators made their investigations.

#### ECONOMIC BASIS

But what constitutes a democracy? No one has gone into this matter very deeply and, indeed, it is impossible to go into it deeply unless the economic condition of the people is first appraised, and a value placed upon each and every one's opportunity to produce for himself or herself. This is what is called the economic basis of democracy. Mere political democracy, based on adult suffrage, is shown in every State to be the veriest catch-penny scheme. What value is there in such a democracy when millions of the people who are entitled to go to the polls live below the poverty line? not the malingers, the incapacitated, and the voluntary paupers, but

the deserving poor who wish to work, and earn for themselves and their families, but never get the opportunity to do more than merely subsist. What is the value, in measurable terms, to the breadwinners of such a State, of the bauble called the vote? Surely it cannot be said that the constitution of the government itself is sufficient for the purposes of determining what is a democracy. To indicate the complexities of such an argument, it is necessary only to contrast the English political democracy with our own. The two are entirely distinct, and touch at almost no point. In the first place, the graft and corruption, which American investigators of political institutions have pointed out as rampant in this country, do not exist in England. The American cabinet is not elected, nor are numbers of persons who hold bureaucratic positions. These people could not hold office in England under the Crown unless they were elected. Furthermore, the whole system of appropriation in this country is contrary to all financial procedure as practiced in Parliament. There is no pork barrel in England, and it has been well said by many of our own critics that if it ceased to exist in this country, there would be few who would take the trouble to go to Congress. The selfish interests in banking and industry, to which this administration so often refers, know quite well that they have a long way to go in the business of looking after themselves before they touch the limit that has been reached by our politicians.

#### TENURE OF OFFICE

Then the matter of the four-year term for a President has been questioned. Certainly the men who agitated for the reform of Parliament, at the beginning of the last century in England, would never have agreed

that a long fixed term of office was democratic. Indeed, much of the agitation that took place at that time was for annual Parliaments. In England, the practice is to have only one Prime Minister. In this country, there are any number of Prime Ministers in Congress. Indeed, it is possible for each separate measure to have its own Prime Minister. And as for the power of leaders in Congress, such would not be tolerated for a moment in the English Parliament. Of course, it must be admitted that there is a vast difference between a Parliament situated in London, in close touch with the country, and a Congress situated in Washington, thousands of miles distant from many of the States.

Then again, under a so-called democratic regime, the importance that is given to the South is not commensurate with regard to population, industrial activity, and taxable value. During this administration's first regime, the North practically kept the South alive. Senator Logan of Kentucky said, "Kentucky is for the New Deal because it has got three hundred million dollars from the New Deal." Federal relief funds, and the Agricultural Adjustment Administration, from 1933 to 1935, presented South Carolina with over one hundred and eight million dollars. Arkansas, described by the Executive as "the wonder State," received one hundred and forty-three million dollars in three years. Alabama, which contributed five million dollars to the Federal Treasury in 1934, received in four years one hundred and seventy-four million dollars in Federal relief. Such is democratic financial juggling for holding the votes of the Solid South!

#### POLITICAL SECURITY

The vote is not now an instrument for deciding what the electors desire, so much as it is one for electing per-

sons who will enjoy the place and power for maintaining their political security in office, and a good living for themselves. Swarms of big and petty bureaucrats infest the land from coast to coast. And this business of political security for the "ins" is the biggest business in the world. Federal, State and local governments employ more than 3,250,000 persons at an annual cost in excess of \$4,500,000,000. The Federal government has nearly 850,000 employees, but of this number some 310,000 are outside the civil service. So it is not difficult to understand why the chief organizer of the party laid it down that the test of a candidate's fitness for a political job was: "Is he a Democrat?" The same gentleman declared unblushingly that "one office-holder is worth forty votes."

It is true there are still to be found in the country men who imagine a seat in Congress will give them an opportunity to carry out certain reforms in the interest of the people, but this is never a single-hearted ambition, because under this system it is very difficult to leave out of consideration the matter of "making a living out of politics." Everything now is so organized that members of Congress are concerned, from one year's end to another, chiefly with the notion of keeping a good berth, by allotting sums voted in appropriations, and of finding jobs for a certain class of their constituents who have the power locally to influence their return at the next election. At best, it may be said of our system that it is political democracy without the pains and penalties of a workable Corrupt and Illegal Practices Act. It is lawless. The scandals of election day reek with unsavory practices which, in any self-respecting country, would be punished with severity. It is not too broad a statement to say that in certain

wards the vote manipulators succeed in polling utterly disreputable persons—men and women who cannot speak the language, aliens, minors, and even the dead! Personation seems to be rife everywhere. Everybody knows it, but little or no action is taken in the matter. Deliberate miscounts and faking of votes seem to be part of the day's business. In Chicago recently, five women were tried for such offenses and, to the surprise of most people, they were found guilty, but they have so far not served their sentences.

#### INTELLIGENT VOTERS

Even in a political democracy it may be presumed that the term "intelligent voter" must be given due consideration, because in this country there is still a notion that the eligibility of the person seeking to be put on the register is determined according to his or her intelligence. But this question of eligibility based on the intelligence of the elector, leaves the door of the franchise wide open to nearly all and sundry here. It would be almost impossible to appoint a registrar who was free from the bias of party politics. The difficulties of deciding broadly who is, and who is not, intelligent may be guessed when one considers the enormous difficulties of dealing with over forty millions of voters.

But what is an intelligent voter under this system? No one has an answer to this question. To know merely "something" of the Constitution, a "little" of the history of the country, and to be "slightly" familiar with the burning questions of the day, is no test of the political intelligence of the voter. Yet, judging from the reports of educationists, certainly not ten percent of the people who go to universities would be able to qualify. Indeed, the more intelligent a man or woman

may be, the greater becomes the difficulty of deciding whether it is a question of mere intelligence for deciding how to cast a vote. At the last election there were numbers of men who did not vote, because for them the Democratic Party had ceased to exist. Rather than vote against the administration, they abstained. But, on the other hand, there were numbers who were not satisfied with the Republican candidate, and who voted for the administration because trade was better, and they wished to do nothing that would cause a set-back. Presumably, it would be almost impossible to find the intelligent voter who utterly disregarded the party names of the candidates, and cast his vote for the good of the country.

There are so many crucial questions attached to this business of voting, even in one's own interest, that the exercise of the franchise is becoming an almost intolerable burden on the mind of an honest man. Take two questions that are never raised as issues, which may very easily be the imponderables of an election for him: one, the question of the conduct of elections; two, the matter of politicians making a living at the game. To say nothing about the utterly undemocratic system of voting appropriations, and the enormous power that has been given by Congress to the Executive, there are, besides, almost innumerable questions regarding the machinery of politics in Congress, such as lobbying, high pressure groups, the excessive power of minorities, the favor which is shown to trade union groups, and the lack of political education in the organization of the party. In England, political education goes on from one year's end to another. The electorate seems to be constantly in touch with members, and both sides debate the issues. Although it cannot be said that the English

system is by any means perfect, it, nevertheless, makes a pretense of laying the political facts before constituents.

#### THE LAST ELECTION

At the last election here a stranger studying the reports of publications, during the last month of the campaign, would surely have come to the conclusion that the vast majority of the people of the United States were in such a perilous condition physically, mentally, and financially, that both parties thought it was utterly impossible for them to help themselves. Each party vied with the other as to the amount of baksheesh to be distributed. There were two questions which popped up every now and then, but these left the great mass of the electors cold. One was the Constitution, so far as the actions of the Supreme Court were concerned, and the other was whether the administration was Socialistic or something else. The vast mass of the people knowing nothing whatever about the Constitution, less indeed than many of the members of the administration, failed to rally round those who considered the Constitution was in danger. And as for the tendency of the administration going either in the direction of Socialism or Communism, that did not bother the vast majority for a moment, for it did not matter to them whether relief came from a Socialist government or a Communist government. Their chief interest in the election was: how much is there for us? So, when the question of the intelligence of the voter is to be considered, it is very difficult to decide in which way he could show his intelligence, if he has any. It cannot be said that a man is unintelligent if his mind is centered on his stomach. Hunger and privation are very real things to great masses of the people, whether they



be deserving or not. Still, the seat of intelligence is not generally considered to be in the mid-riff; but he would be a bold man, regarding things politically in this country, who would say that the seat was anywhere else.

The strange thing about it all is that so many seemingly intelligent, educated persons, or persons who had "passed through" universities, rallied to the side of the administration. One notable case in particular: just to show how complex the question of intelligence is, was that of a well-known New York banker who wrote two books condemning the administration root and branch, dealing with the most vital problems in clear-cut argument, suddenly through some dislocation of the seat of his intelligence decided that what he had written did not amount to anything at all, and that because of some arrangement regarding the exchanges, he would throw in his lot with the administration. Now, if such a thing can happen to so responsible a person as the head of a great New York bank, what will happen to the wretched creature who is bullied by the local ward-heeler, "hell bent for Roosevelt's election?"

#### TRADITION

Somehow the notion that an elector is an essential link in the tradition of a country still sticks in the minds of certain men. It is a sound notion, and, probably, not at all a bad one on which to base the question of a title to the franchise. After all, what is better deserving of conservation than the tradition of a country, of a people? It is like the experience of a man's life: it is the sum of all his defeat, of all his triumph, and he can no more dispense with that at any time of his life, no matter how conditions change, than he can dispense with his own soul; for, indeed, it is a part of his soul. The

vicissitudes through which he has passed have marked him indelibly, and shaped him as a man. So it is with the tradition of a country, and particularly this country. Think of how it came into being! Think of the Civil War! If there be one thing more than any other that the intelligent elector should regard, it is the fact that in about a century and a half the people of the United States threw open the gates of opportunity to the people of the world! Draw a line from Plattsburg southwest to New Orleans, and consider what pioneers did for their posterity west of that line! What was done in fifty years by the men of pick and shovel, by the families who crossed the plains in covered carts, is all in the tradition of the people of this country, and the achievements they wrought—each achievement accompanied with great privation and suffering—were like the vicissitudes in a man's life, shaping his character and stability. But all this can mean nothing to the people who are not of their stock. There is no tradition for them; there is no United States! Therefore, the great mass of the people who voted at the last election were deficient in the very values that go to make up an intelligent voter, for an intelligent voter is one who will conserve the best interests of his country!

All the problems of the unequal distribution of wealth, of the increase of poverty, the building up of a vested interest in bureaucracy, and the waste, corruption and self-seeking of politicians, are as nothing to this matter of maintaining and carrying on the tradition; for all these blights upon the body politic are remediable, and there have always been proposals for reforming them. But once a tradition is lost, it is lost forever. There is no known remedy for restoring the tradition of a people. The vain strivings of Pericles

surely point a lesson worth noting. But each civilization of the past had its Pericles who strove to save what was best by pampering the mass and, in every instance, there was nothing but failure to be recorded.

#### THE DOCILE MAJORITY

One of the maddest notions that afflict people today is that the majority should be given by politicians what they desire. The Executive is moved to ask Congress to enact certain measures which he thinks the people demand, and which he imagines will be good for them to have. An Executive was never supported by such a docile majority. Yet, in no other walk in life, in no other channel of affairs, has anyone a faith in the majority, such as is expressed in the political arena.

It is, however, quite another matter when one has to regard a majority from the standpoint of its intelligence. A board meeting of commercialists or financiers is usually made up of men who have been informed as to the nature of the questions to be discussed. These people are usually banking people and business people, and know something of the rudiments of the work. In such a meeting there may be several different ideas of how a matter should be dealt with. Discussion takes place and when the vote is put, and the matter decided one way or the other, every man at the meeting knows whether or not the rules have been followed, whether opportunity has been given for a director to express himself, and whether the decision has been arrived at by sensible people. So it is with the meeting of a body of scientists or a body of artists. But the moment one enters the political arena, it is a very different story that has to be recorded. In our country where would one look for a skilled politician in the old sense of the

term? Of course, it might be said that it would be impossible to find a politician who was not something of a megalomaniac, that all politicians place power and party strength high above all questions of procedure and policy. This can be easily understood by taking a glance at what has taken place in our time when questions of procedure and policy have endangered power and party loyalty. But there were statesmen, certainly not many, in our day, who made every attempt to dignify their calling, serve their country to the best of their abilities, and preserve their own honor.

#### OPPORTUNISTS

Both Gladstone and Lincoln said it was impossible to be a politician and an honest man. We all realize in the game of politics that there are far too many enticements to be resisted by the man who may be a candidate for election, whose honor yet is untouched, and whose ideals are unblemished. Office maketh the man, and the magnet of power draws him willy-nilly in the direction where it is to be found. Then there seems to be nothing easier than finding excuses for changing principles. The emergencies of the time may overturn citadels of best intention. A large majority may, overnight, as it were, make an opportunist of an honest man. This can happen in no other walk in life, for the man who would attempt to trick his fellows in the arts and sciences, would suffer penalties from which he could not easily recover prestige. In business and finance the tricky ones might go unscathed for a while, but the end is sure and, when their misdemeanors and delinquencies are discovered, they are penalized. But not so in politics! Indeed, today, vast millions seem to

take a delight in every trick that is played by a politician, so long as they benefit from the trick that is played.

#### TIPS

A long way we have travelled in this country from that man who served a dollar dinner, and one day was tipped a quarter by a delighted customer, when the bill was paid at the desk. The story goes, the restaurateur looked at the quarter, and said, "A cigar?" "No," said the customer, "that's for you for giving me a good dinner." With a look of fearful disgust, the hotel-keeper pitched the quarter out of the window, looked his guest straight in the eye, and said, "What the hell do you think I am—the janitor?"

Now, you can tip anybody, and a majority that has been tipped is surely not one that should have all the say of how big the tip should be. The Executive must surely know what has been done in the way of tipping, and when he talks about carrying out the behest of his great majority, he must know thoroughly well that a majority that will be tipped cannot be the thinking section of the people. Let us suppose the illiterate, the paupers, the criminals, and the feeble-minded of a State, made up fifty-five percent of the voters who elected a man to office. Would it be according to democratic procedure for the elected ruler to carry out the behests of his majority? No one outside a lunatic asylum would agree to such a proceeding. Dr. Huse, who wrote an instructive book called *The Illiteracy of the Literate*, says only a small minority of persons is capable of understanding the real meaning of what is read.

#### RADIO SPEECHES

If the vast majority of people is not capable of understanding what is read, what is to be said of these

people when they are expected to understand what is said to them over the radio? I should think all thoughtful people would agree, that, if they had to consider a serious question, they would much rather have it put before them in writing. Why? Because in speaking, the tricks of the voice can tickle the ear to the disadvantage of the understanding. Stendhal says that it was Malagrida, not Talleyrand, who said: "Speech was given to man to enable him to conceal his thoughts." It was generally accepted when I was a young man in active politics that a speech which sounded good, often read badly, and for years I made a study of speeches that sounded dull and uninteresting and found the vast majority of them, when printed in Hansard (official report), full of excellent material.

The radio used for political purposes is a curse, no matter who uses it, for it will never be the man of poor delivery, and excellent matter, who will attract large audiences; but the man with a charming voice, and an ingratiating manner, who has nothing much to say. Add to this the enormous power of tickling the fancy of the listener by telling him that he is to be enriched by the policy of the speaker, and an irresistible attraction between the two is cemented. Therefore, when a stream of high-sounding phrases, and humanitarian tags, is poured upon the ears of the majority, the least intelligent part of the community, you have a condition in which the megalomania of the speaker is evident. Moreover, when business people are intimidated, coerced, and penalized, at almost every turn, the elements of protest have been silenced.

#### VOTING

The qualifications for voting by the States seem to have been laid down with a view to enabling as many

persons as possible to register. No citizen under the age of twenty-one is eligible for a vote. In a few States paupers are debarred. In West Virginia those who are receiving temporary and emergency aid, because of the unemployment situation, are permitted to vote. Mississippi has a law which specifically enables those receiving relief payments to vote. Felons, idiots, or lunatics cannot register, but a felon who has had his citizenship restored, can vote. It is required in all the States that a voter must be able to read or write (preferably the United States Constitution), or understand, at least, what is read to him. Bribery is a felony. New York and some other States have a literacy test for first voters. In many States a citizen who is to be away on election day can swear in his or her vote beforehand. The longest period of residence in a precinct is six months—and that in three States only. In most of the States, less than thirty days of residence are necessary. In eight States, ten days residence in the precinct suffice to qualify for registration. It may be imagined what duplication takes place under such a system, and perhaps the looseness of the laws, to a great extent, explains how the enormous polls at the last elections were possible.

In the recent election, over 45,600,000 persons registered votes. Comparing these figures with the two preceding elections, we notice that in 1932 over 39,000,000 votes were counted, and in 1928, over 36,000,000 were cast. Between 1928 and 1932 there was an increase of over three millions, but between 1932 and 1936, there was an increase of nearly six millions. Now according to the government figures of July 1936, the population of the States was estimated at 128,429,000. This means that over one-third of the population (men, women and children) in the United States, exercised the fran-

chise. The latest figures for all persons under voting age amounted to 47,608,991. This is registration not known in any other country in the world. The inference is that every person who was registered must have polled. A poll of eighty-five percent of persons on the register is considered exceedingly high in countries where elections are properly conducted.

#### ELECTION SCANDALS

We can, however, imagine what took place at the last election by looking at the report of the scandalous state of affairs which has been brought to a judge and jury in Kansas City. In Judge Reeves' instructions to the grand jury, he said:

"We can't surrender the ballot boxes to thugs, gangsters and plug-uglies who patrol the streets with machine guns. We can't stand for that any longer. Reach for all—even if you find them in high authority. Move on them. My information is that the population of Kansas City is less than 400,000. The last registration was something like 270,000. A registration like that would call for a population something like 600,000."

The Federal judge who tried the case, Merrill E. Otis, said:

"Defendants do not believe the judge (instructing the grand jury) should have manifested in his charge the detestation of this particular type of crime. He should have denounced piracy in the South Seas but not election thievery in Missouri. He should have been lukewarm in his charge. He should have soft-pedaled the matter. He should have said: 'Gentlemen of the grand jury: Everybody's doing it. Let is pass'."



The amazing majority the party received may be explained in some measure by the facts unearthed at the trial in Kansas City. It is reported that the certified presidential returns in a precinct gave President Roosevelt 686 votes and his opponent, Alfred M. Landon, 61. Evidence was given that Roosevelt actually received 570 votes and Landon 170. The official count, of the same precinct, gave no votes to the Republican congressional nominee, although the grand jury count showed he actually received 162 votes, and that more than a dozen citizens testified that they voted the straight Republican ticket. But this is information from Kansas City only. What took place in New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, Boston and other large cities, may be left to the imagination, and that is the only place where an inkling of what took place will find lodgement. The Executive and the Congress know very well how they were elected. All Presidents, all Congresses, have some idea of how the votes are gathered, and how they are counted. Complete neophytes are never chosen by the machines to contest a Federal or local election.

#### GILDED SINNERS

Some years ago a well-known Senator was asked to take an interest in an effort to clean up some of the electioneering mess in a big city. His reply was that he could not be a party to interfering with State "rights," for under the Constitution it is left to each State to judge the qualifications of its own electorate. He shook his head sadly, and agreed with his petitioners that it was a shocking state of affairs, but Congress could do nothing about it. After all, a vote is a vote in the United States, just as it is in any other country, but here the vote has an income value, and the man who

gets the majority of them usually lands on a bed of roses, and enjoys luxuries of various kinds, far in excess of any rosy dream he has ever indulged in.

The amazing thing about the revelations which come from the case tried in Kansas City is that it was ever presented to the grand jury, and that there was a grand jury there who found a bill. And yet it seems to be necessary for candidates to indulge in vote-catching charges, such as those levelled at bankers and industrialists by the Executive. Why time should be wasted on economic royalists, and the selfish interests of manufacturers, is hard to explain, for if the conditions which obtain in Kansas City, as revealed in the evidence submitted in the case, are general in the big centers, it is surely unnecessary to go to the trouble of referring to the sins of business men. But the Executive must have his sinner, so long as he is not a local boss of elections. Only gilded sinners appeal to the Executive mind. Here he is on safe ground. As a sin-picker he is an adept. He knows how to choose the one that will not back-fire, or kick against the pricks. Some day he may wake up to the fact that a good many other political sins have contributed to his success, sins he does not feel disposed to refer to in a speech.