

# The Public

A National Journal of Fundamental Democracy &  
A Weekly Narrative of History in the Making

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## EDITORIAL

### Roosevelt's Napoleonic Democracy.

Theodore Roosevelt talks of democracy as if he were a democrat. Probably he thinks he is one. But his democracy, like the democracy of Napoleon Bonaparte whom he ominously resembles in personal characteristics and unaccountable popularity, is of that spurious kind which evolves empires and breeds despots. It is the exact reverse of the American ideal. His speech in Egypt, and his supplementary one at Guildhall, London, which have been attributed to shirtsleeve manners, are worse than that; they are rightly denounced by the Sacramento Bee as un-American. The Bee calls them "blasphemy upon the lips of an American citizen," for stultifying the "elemental and primary declaration of America's great proclamation of universal liberty," that governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed. And so interpreted, those speeches are now justified by the Outlook, a magazine with which Mr. Roosevelt is editorially connected and which faithfully reflects his Napoleonic democracy. In its issue of June 18, the Outlook asserts its belief that "the statement in the Declaration of Independence that governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed is false."



The fact that Mr. Roosevelt is a contributing editor to the Outlook, would not be enough in itself to make him responsible for this categorical

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denial of American democracy. Nor can it be urged that he may have contributed the Outlook editorial from which we quote; the author of that editorial is evidently more candid or less sophisticated than Mr. Roosevelt. But this number of the Outlook appears to have been edited with the distinct purpose of exploiting and justifying Mr. Roosevelt's type of democracy. The purpose is so evident that nothing short of a repudiation of the blunt climax we quote can make even the most friendly reader suppose that it misrepresents Mr. Roosevelt's views. An indiscreet generalization it may be, but not an inaccurate one. In the same issue of the Outlook a paper on "the spirit of democracy" figures prominently. This is by Dr. Lyman Abbott, the editor in chief, who finds that there is now a new American democracy, child of two conflicting American democracies of the Nineteenth century—the idealistic of Hebrew and Puritan ancestry through New England, and the materialistic from Rome and France through Virginia,—which is now struggling with the contradictory characteristics it inherits from its ancestors. Also in this issue of the Outlook there is a stenographic report of an extemporaneous speech by Mr. Roosevelt at Christiania, Norway — edited by him for publication but hitherto unpublished—in which, expounding "the colonial policy" of the United States, he defends the subjugation of the Philippines in terms that would have delighted George III and Lord North had they been uttered with reference to the American colonies. Then there is the editorial climax, which may or may not have had Mr. Roosevelt's approval, but which seems to be a correct generalization of his views: "We believe that the statement in the Declaration of Independence that governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed is false."

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The unsoundness of that belief as a political principle may be put aside; to argue against it as a principle might be called "academic" by the Outlook, and "sentimental," or "foolish," or "indecent," by Mr. Roosevelt. Nor would it be worth while to quote the words of Abraham Lincoln and his compeers who founded the Republican party, or the fathers of the Republic itself, who, as Lincoln said, conceived it in liberty and dedicated it to the proposition that all are created equal. To hark back to those men might be challenged as an appeal from the youthful American democracy of the Twentieth century to the dead democracy of the Nineteenth. But waiving all such "sentimental" and "academic" considerations, it be-

hooves the American people to consider the possibilities under present circumstances of Mr. Roosevelt's democracy as generalized by the Outlook, with reference to their own safety.

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Following its assertion of the falsity of the Declaration of Independence in so far as that document assigns the just powers of government to the consent of the governed, the Outlook adopts as "always, everywhere and eternally true" the "principle embodied in the Declaration that governments exist for the benefit of the governed." Accordingly it reasons that "whether the Filipinos consent or do not consent to the government exercised over them is not the fundamental question;" that "the fundamental question is whether that government is exercised over them for their benefit." Although the particular application is to the Philippines, the principle is generalized by the Outlook as "always, everywhere and eternally true." Manifestly, then, with reference to American citizens themselves, the democracy of Roosevelt, as expounded by the Outlook and evident from his own recent speeches, rests fundamentally upon the monarchical principle. Whether the American people "do or do not consent to the government exercised over them is not the fundamental question," but "the fundamental question is whether that government is exercised over them for their benefit." This is Roosevelt's democracy, as it is the Outlook's, as it is the Emperor William's, as it was Napoleon's.

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The sultanic impudence of Roosevelt's assumption in this respect would surpass belief if the man himself had left room for a doubt. But its danger is the prime consideration. Declaring that he will lead his country to higher levels of democracy, and in his superlative egotism believing it no doubt, he beckons it on toward the potter's field of every republic in history that came under the influence of a personage like himself. He would tear away the very basis of this Republic, the rock-bottom principle it rests upon, which is not that a British monarch might not govern us better for our own benefit than we can govern ourselves, but that it is our right to govern ourselves. He would twist the principle of government to which the founders of this Republic appealed for the sympathy of mankind, into a hollow and false excuse for revolt. And what he would have our Republic do with weaker peoples, the logic of his position would justify his doing with us if he had the opportunity that the historic

wreckers of republics have had. Would the Constitution stay his hand? Read from his Christiana speech in the issue of the Outlook already referred to, with reference to the San Domingo treaty: "I found considerable difficulty in getting the United States Senate to ratify the treaty, but I went ahead anyhow and executed it until it was ratified." This was supremely dictatorial, for under the Constitution a treaty is not a treaty until it is ratified by the Senate. He might as lawfully have enforced a bill under consideration by Congress, before Congress enacted it. But, says this Napoleonic democrat, "the opposition was a purely factious opposition, representing the smallest kind of politics with a leaven of even baser motive." If such a man, with the army and the navy at his command, encouraged by the kind of idolatrous popularity that raised Napoleon to an absolute dictatorship upon an imperial throne, were obsessed with the notion that a benevolent dictator could govern the American people better "for their benefit" than they govern themselves, with their Lorimers, and Tammanys, and Hearsts, and Busses, and socialists, and anarchists, their labor unions, their trusts, their plutocrats, their bothersome State lines, their corrupt legislatures, their dilatory courts and their foolish sentimentalists—if such a man, so tempted and so equipped, were to resolve upon becoming a dictator "for the common good," is it so certain that American citizenship would be safe? Suppose he did find considerable difficulty in getting Congress to agree with him. Might he not "go ahead anyhow," until they did agree? And wouldn't he find his warrant in what would seem to him in those circumstances to be "a purely factious opposition, representing the smallest kind of politics," and may be "with a leaven of even baser motive"?

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Yet there is good reason to fear that in the name and behalf of democracy, and with the support of masses of genuine democrats in all parties, Theodore Roosevelt may again be called out of private life to a term as President, and this time under circumstances more favorable than our country has ever before experienced for a Napoleonic personality to seize upon Napoleonic power. We trust the alternative of Roosevelt or Taft will not occur at the next Presidential election. But if it should, better King Log than King Stork. Though Taft slumbers while plutocrats intrench themselves, taxation under popular control would serve at any time as a weapon to pierce even the thickest fortifications of "vested

rights." But if a Napoleonic character like Roosevelt once seized the government to administer it according to his own notions of what is for "the benefit of the governed," the damage would be irreparable. No doctrine more dangerous to popular liberty has ever been formulated than this of the Roosevelt cult, that "just governments exist for the benefit of the governed," when that otherwise true doctrine is isolated from the balancing principle that "governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed."

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#### **Aldrich and Cook.**

Senator Dolliver credits last year with "two important hoaxes—the discovery of the North Pole by Dr. Cook and the revision of the tariff downward by Senator Aldrich." Isn't this comparison severe upon Cook?

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#### **More Railroad Regulation.**

We are now to learn whether a special court for the regulation of the proceedings of the Interstate Commerce Commission in regulating the business of railroads, will make railroad regulation efficient, or whether it will be necessary to create further regulatory machinery. The mechanism for regulating the administration of public service by private corporations seems to be progressively complex.

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#### **"Barbarous Mexico."**

We published recently an editorial (p. 532) on the stoppage by the American Magazine of its series of articles on "Barbarous Mexico," by John Kenneth Turner, in which we described the stoppage as sudden and unaccountable and as having puzzled readers of that magazine; and in the same editorial we quoted Mr. Turner as having explained in the Appeal to Reason, of Girard, Kansas, which has taken up the publication of the series, that the editors of the American Magazine found themselves face to face with "a power whose might they misjudged and which threatens to crush them." We believed then, and we believe still, that this was Mr. Turner's sincere judgment of the American's reasons for discontinuing his articles. But the following explanation by Ray Stannard Baker, one of the responsible editors of the American, is better evidence of the motives of the Magazine than anybody's judgment. Mr. Baker writes:

The facts are these: Mr. Turner went to Mexico and got the material for a number of able articles. We took great pains in the office, in the presentation