

A Congress Debates Democracy

By Stanford Bissell

"It has become urgent to stress the prosaic truth that supermen, demi-gods and gods are not born of human parents. Only helpless and very human babies are born in this world of ours. Moreover, their only sporting chance of ever achieving greatness depends on their being born and bred in a free community, where individual man is allowed freely to develop his mind, his soul, and his talents; to discover his vocation, to express his thoughts, to feel free, and to live in freedom. . . . This is the greatest, the most important boon of democracy."

Thus spoke John M. Ciechanowski, former Minister to the United States from Poland, in his address before the Congress on Education for Democracy at Teachers College, Columbia University.

Why, then, do men lose their freedom?

A Statesman's Democracy

Stanley Baldwin, former Prime Minister of Great Britain has an answer, delivered to the Congress at the Waldorf-Astoria. "The success of a democracy," he said, "depends upon everyone realizing his responsibility to it; thinking of his rights and forgetting for a time his rights—a democrat should work for and be prepared to die for his democratic ideals, as the Nazis and Communists are for theirs. And he will never work for it, much less die for it, unless he is convinced that democracy is capable of making a country worthy of his ideals. Courage and Faith, Love and Wisdom—those are what we all need. . . . May God give us right judgment in all things."

These are the words of status quo. This is the defeatist meat of the ages, fed to the robbed of all nations. Such is the diet that is slowly starving democracy throughout the world.

Business Men's Democracy

When we turn from statesmen to business leaders in the hope of some-

thing substantial, what do we get? Listen to H. W. Prentiss, Jr., tycoon of the National Association of Manufacturers: "Hope for the future of our republic and for the correction of its shortcomings does not lie in more and more democracy. It hinges on the resurgence of individual patriotism and religious faith. The schools and churches of America must get into action—and that right early—if we are to keep the republic our fathers died to found and save."

Winthrop W. Aldrich, Board Chairman of the gigantic Chase National Bank told the Congress: "One of the greatest weaknesses of our democracy is that most of us are unwilling to accept our primary responsibilities as citizens of exercising this individual self-discipline. If we can implant in our people the Christian virtues which we sum up in the word character, and, at the same time, give them a knowledge of the line which should be drawn between voluntary action and governmental compulsion in a democracy, and of what can be accomplished within the stern laws of economics, we will enable them to retain their freedom, and, at the same time, make them worthy to be free."

So, from our business men we still get the piffle we used to get from high school graduation speakers. Democracy thrives on Christian virtues and on patriotism!

History's Warning

The lesson of history was given to the Congress by Charles A. Beard, noted historian: "In words that admit of no equivocation these great of old who instruct us from their tombs declare that politics and economics are forever united. Ringing through utterances like the tones of a clear bell is the warning thesis: A wide diffusion of property and a general equality of condition are the very foundation stones of popular government; a high concentration of wealth is incompatible with universal suffrage; a broad distribution of opportunity and assurance to labor is necessary to the security of re-

publican institutions; the revolutions which have shaken other societies to pieces have sprung from the antagonism of private interests and popular power, fired by ambitious leaders. . . .

"The crisis in national life forecast long ago has arrived. This is the age in which the wisdom of the wisest patriots is required for the resolution of the dilemma. **Not curtailment but expansion of production is now a primary need of American democracy.** Our output of wealth must be materially increased and there must be a distribution of employments, goods, and services wide enough to afford those opportunities and assurances upon which popular government rests and must ever rest. If the wisdom is lacking, force may be offered as a substitute."

With these words, Mr. Beard commences to clarify the issue. The Congress is beginning to learn that democracy has something to do with political economy, which "includes in its domain the greater part of those vexed questions which lie at the bottom of our politics and legislation, of our social and governmental theories."

The Problem of Democracy

This basic idea was extended still further by John W. Studebaker, United States Commissioner of Education, during the last session of the Congress at Carnegie Hall, thus: "The boastful propaganda of the totalitarian regime is not the basic menace to democracy. Fundamentally, self government is being undermined by its failure to solve the crucial problems of the technological age. Ten million unemployed, vast farm surpluses, unused plant capacity, waste and destruction of surpluses, widespread and utterly needless poverty in the presence of scientific power for unprecedented productivity—these are the factors which threaten democratic life. . . . We are off on the wrong foot, it seems to me, if we satisfy ourselves merely with propagandizing people on the desirability of democracy. It

isn't democracy that is in question in the minds of many; what they're worried about is the economic and social system which fails to give them opportunity and reasonable security."

The problem of democracy has been discovered by the educators! Men give up their freedom for the demagogic promises of bread and Thirty Dollars every Thursday, appeals which take root only when the great enigma of poverty in the midst of plenty is not solved. Unless it is solved democracy as a form of government cannot survive. But business men and politicians are adamant. To make democracy work, they say, "let us kindle a new fire of patriotism and religion in the mind and heart of every true American."

Sine Die Adjournment

Thus the Congress on Education for Democracy defined the alignment. Educators recognize the problem, but are harried in their efforts to find the solution by their fear of disturbing the status quo and the expediency of disturbing business men and politicians. The latter maintain that the system doesn't work because the professors have fallen down on their job of training the youth in fervent respect for home, country and God.

Your reporter left the Congress with the firm conviction that democracy and the world needs many more classes of the Henry George School of Social Science.