

DEMOCRACY AFTER THE WAR

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Democracy after the war by J. A. Hobson

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J. A. HOBSON

**DEMOCRACY
AFTER THE WAR**

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DEMOCRACY AFTER THE WAR

BY

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PREFACE

THE cause of democracy has suffered almost as much from its friends as from its enemies. For while the latter have held it to be either undesirable or unattainable, the former have represented it either as achieved already or as inevitable. Now, neither of these former representations is true. Effective democracy nowhere exists either in the politics or industry of any nation. The forms of political self-government, indeed, exist in Britain, France, America and elsewhere with varying measures of completeness. But nowhere does the will of the people play freely through these forms. In every country the will of certain powerful men or interests is pumped down from above into the party machinery that it may come up with the formal register of an electorate denied the knowledge and opportunity to create and exercise a will that is informed and free. Popular opinion and aspirations act at best as exceedingly imperfect checks on these abuses of political self-government. So evident has been the failure of all democratic forms hitherto devised that hostile critics have pronounced democracy incapable of realization. "The people is that part of a State which does not know what it really wants" is the pronouncement of a famous political philosopher in Germany, and it expresses the judgment of many in this country

It contains a powerful element of truth. Democracy, alike in politics and industry, has here, as elsewhere, been impossible because the people have not got a clear understanding of what they want. It has, indeed, been a chief business of their enemies to prevent them from gathering this fruit from the tree of knowledge

And the lazy assumption of many so-called democrats that democracy needs no striving for, because it is inevitable, has played into the hands of despotism and oligarchy. They have been content to float along a rising tide. With Macbeth they have proclaimed, "If Chance will have me king, why, Chance may crown me." But there is no such tide of chance or destiny working without the conscious will and effort of men. Nor does it suffice to substitute for destiny a general enthusiasm of popular emotions or revolutionary aspirations. Such energy is impotent without rational direction. Real democracy cannot be achieved unless a sufficient amount of intelligent co-operation based upon clear purpose is available.

Now, the first requisite to this clearing of purpose and this intelligent co-operation is a survey of the ground and forces of the enemy. For the people can only gain mastery by defeating and ejecting those who hold it now. The war has here done good service by lighting up the country and bringing out in clear relief the full alliance of reactionary forces with which democracy is called upon to deal. Militarism stands out so conspicuously in this alliance that it seems best to take it for a starting-point in our survey and then to consider the political, economic and social supports which gather round it.

Examining the bonds of sympathy and interest which unite the reactionary forces, we find them centred in the arbitrary "will to power."

Although the "will to power" has other independent sources, its chief instrument and embodiment in modern society is the capitalist structure of industry and the abuses of property that spring therefrom. I am compelled to accept as substantially correct the general socialist analysis, presenting, as the main cause of what is wrong in politics and industry, the direction of human industry by capitalists in the pursuit of private profit. But equally I am convinced that the socialist analysis is damaged for rational persuasion by an excessive simplification of the problem and in particular by ignoring or disparaging the importance of non-economic factors. I have, therefore, endeavoured by investigation of various phases of the reactionary movement to discover and exhibit the nature of the unconscious interplay between the different sorts of reactionary agents in the fields of politics, industry, education and social life. The general result is to show that, if democracy is to recover its losses and to advance after the war, it must confront, not only with enthusiasm but with considered policy, the formidable array of reactionaries, realizing that the causes of peace, democracy and internationalism are one and indivisible, and that with the triumph of this confederacy the cause of personal liberty, political and industrial as well as spiritual, is indissolubly bound.