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AU REVOIR TO DEMOCRACY

By THE EDITOR

GOVERNMENT is business. War is business. As a general thing democracy is not business. Therefore democracy in wartime has proved to be more or less a delusion in government. The very thing we have been told a million times we are fighting for, we can't use in the business of fighting; or if we do we lose.

Democracy as we knew him before the war is a sick man. He may get better. But before he does he is going to get worse. "Demos" the people and "krao" I rule—we shall have to redefine the word and say that democracy means not the rule of the people, but "I rule the people." Which is the way they get despotism and slaves in Germany, so we draw the line at that and ask ourselves—what then?

We all believe in the rights of free speech; in parliamentary censure of ministers or of the whole executive by the opposite party; in hue and cry if the administration's methods don't suit a majority of the people and turning the rascals out when they become either inefficient or corrupt. That is democracy as expressed by the curious survival known as Parliament. England knew how to put a crimp in Cabinets when she put the beggars right in the front benches of the House where they simply could not escape; and if a minister preferred to be off fishing on the day when the affairs of his department were to be put under the searchlight, with a microscope on the end of the lens, we had the Habeas Corpus Act or something like it to hale him in again. And what England has in large we have in ten parliaments and legislatures of all sizes in Canada. Since we were school-boys we have taken off our hats to this as the highest form of responsible government; of down with tyrants, death to star chambers, away with King George Thirds and Charles Firsts and King Johns.

Take the wings of the morning into the uttermost parts of the earth wherever the government by the people is said to belong, and see what has become of it. In the words of some poet, "there ain't no sich animile." Democracy definable by that standard has folded her tents like the Arabs. We said long ago that it never could be; that we would win this war by just being ourselves and put despotism forever on the scaffold. Demos must be respected. Parliament must be upheld. Everything done by the nation behind the lines until the point where the army machine was handed over to the commander-in-chief must originate from the free-will of the people and be scrutinized by the people, through their representatives in Parliament; because the whole story of how responsible government came to be on the earth is the story of how England became the mother of self-governing nations of which Canada is the greatest example in the world.

The President of the United States is an autocrat compared with the Premier of Canada or the King of England. He is not elected to Congress, has nothing to do with Congress, picks out his own Cabinet, who may never have seen the inside of Congress and never will, and goes about the business of running the nation at one end of the town while Congress away up at the other end of Pennsylvania Avenue goes on talking. The Overman Bill gives this autocrat of democracy still more power to prose-



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cute the war without the aid or hindrance of Congress.

But look at Ottawa. A Union Government has pulled most of the teeth of virile Opposition. We are being governed, not by acts of responsible ministers, but by Orders in Council enacted by the Executive who go through some of the motions of being responsible to Parliament, but know jolly well in Council that Parliament has become mainly an Amen corner. So we have the budget and its new direct taxes, without a murmur from Parliament; two weeks later a list of embargoes making some things unimportable, and again Parliament has no objection; so why should the people? One month the farmers are told to produce; the next to shoulder arms; reason—exigency at the front, imperative, absolute, unconditional. Premier Borden tells Parliament that if it doesn't like his handling of the democracy and titles problem it may get another leader. And Parliament doesn't get another leader. In all these things we acquiesce, because we say the times call for action and there is no time to debate. To establish democracy, we must put democratic methods on the shelf, because they only give the lawyers in Parliament a chance to waste the country's time and money.

GLANCE across at England. Parliament there long ago became a mere Greek chorus chanting the responses. Even the greatest of all Cabinets, the 23, found its main business—war—confined to a junta of five picked by the Premier. And whenever things at the front get into a muddle, it is not Parliament that straightens them out, but the Premier and his junta in co-operation with the War Office; and if the War Office doesn't march to the music why the W. O. must be reformed—which it was. Parliament rises en masse to support Lloyd George, and it knows why. And all the Ramsay

Macdonalds and Philip Snowdens and John Dillons know the reason also.

In France President Poincaré long ago retired to the wings. The centre of the stage is held by the Premier who, the fourth since the war, has become next thing to an autocrat; and if he were to have been anything else the Tiger Clemenceau would not have taken the job.

All the world knows what unrestrained democracy has done, is now doing for poor old glorious, God-forsaken Russia, who was far better off under the decadent autocrat Nicholas than she is under the foaming, state-disrupting, capital-destroying Trotzky.

Germany shows all the signs of tightening the ropes. When the war began there was a phantom Reichstag that made some show of criticizing the war lords. Now Germany has centred her real worship of despotism in one Ludendorff, who has even greater power, even if less authority, than the Kaiser.

AND if we look at the armies for a sign, we find that at last democracy has vanished from our front, about two years later than it should have done, putting the armies of five nations under the absolute control of one generalissimo who is a despot if there ever was one, or he may as well resign.

Thus as the war reaches further and further back, as the people at home are conscripted and mobilized and taxed and food-regulated and embargoed, the function of democracy in wartime vanishes. Responsible government was all right in war for just about as long as Business as Usual was all right—and that was long ago. Now that war has become everybody's business in the pocketbook and the kitchen and the factory and the camp, it is everybody's business to get along without what we call democratic methods in government. And if we don't real democracy may yet vanish from the earth.

Democracy is the carrying out of the people's will. If the people will to win a war by means of a useful despot whom they can replace with another when he falls down—that is democracy, and a much more workable kind than a lot of wrangling members of Parliament who don't know any more about the war than the people who elected them. Roosevelt may argue that the administration is the servant of the people. So it is in peace; not in war.

Two things remain: If a democracy is to be governed by enlightened despotism, democracy has a right to as much of the truth about the war as it can get. Censorship and anti-sedition laws should be reduced to a minimum; because democracy loves to talk. The other thing that sticks out plainly is—that if it was can make government so important that it drafts the biggest-business experts of the nation into public service, then after the war, unless we let government slide back into its old disreputable methods, we shall be rid of the bogey that big men absolutely won't go into politics because politics is a waste of time. Government is business. Politics should be the greatest pursuit of big men. And democracy must either get rid of the idea that government is a party debate or get rid of itself; because the business of government won't have that kind of democracy.