

to us through the press and newsreels and television as much that happens in our own country - perhaps better! We do know the names and often a good many intimate personal details about many of the principal public figures in the United States. Some of their Senators seem as well known to us as their actresses and athletes. We read and hear a great deal of their political comment and criticism - that great American flood of public talk and controversy. We even have our own heroes and villains in American politics.

But this does not mean that we really understand what is going on in the public life of the United States nor that we are able to reach sound conclusions concerning it. Indeed, it is my impression that because Canadians do not in general appreciate the many and fundamental differences between our systems of government, we often draw wrong conclusions as to the course of United States policy and misjudge the motives and intentions of Americans.

My friend George Ferguson of the Montreal Star made a speech recently to an audience of American journalists in which he touched on this source of foreign misunderstanding of the United States. After describing the impression of confusion and disorder created by the loud clamour of public debate and controversy, Mr. Ferguson noted that "the untrained outsider is likely to conclude that a people so inherently confused and unstable has only itself to blame for the disasters that are bound to pursue it."

But the real situation is quite otherwise, Mr. Ferguson pointed out. The patient observer will come to realize "that the prophesied disasters seldom occur, and that, when the smoke and steam and noise have died away, the great nation-wide town meeting has come up with some very reasonable and moderate conclusions."

We in Canada are accustomed to Parliamentary institutions, to the British system of Cabinet government. The Americans are accustomed to a quite different system in which the Administration and the Legislative branch are separate and distinct. That basically is why we find it difficult to understand why or how Congressional Committees, let us say, may follow a line, publicly and often violently opposed to the President - even when a majority is of the same political party. Such a situation (and I could cite many other examples) is totally foreign to us. Our whole habit of thought is conditioned by our own methods of government. And so is the Americans'. And we must keep this constantly in mind in following their public affairs or we will most certainly be led astray.

Another reason perhaps why our understanding of things American may be less perfect than we think is to be found in the sources of our information. Many, perhaps most of our interpretations of what goes on in the United States derive from American sources. The American scene is for the most part reported for Canadians by Americans - Americans who are writing not for us at all, but for other Americans. The number of