This eleventh volume includes essays, reviews, and speeches by John Dewey, 1925-1953. Dewey was a prominent American philosopher and educational reformer. The volume is part of the John Dewey's Collected Works, and was published by the University of Chicago Press. The text discusses Dewey's later works, ranging from 1925 to 1953. The introduction argues that Dewey's ideas continue to be relevant today, and that his contributions to philosophy, education, and social theory are still being studied and debated. The book is edited by Jo Ann Boydston and includes contributions from various textual editors. The volume is dedicated to those who have contributed to the understanding of Dewey's works, and includes an introduction by John J. McDermott.
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Democracy Is Radical

There is comparatively little difference among the groups at the left as to the social ends to be reached. There is a great deal of difference as to the means by which these ends should be reached and by which they can be reached. This difference as to means is the tragedy of democracy in the world today. The rulers of Soviet Russia announce that with the adoption of the new constitution they have for the first time in history created a democracy. At almost the same time, Goebbels announces that German Nazi-socialism is the only possible form of democracy for the future. Possibly there is some faint cheer for those who believe in democracy in these expressions. It is something that after a period in which democracy was scorned and laughed at, it is now acclaimed.

No one outside of Germany will take seriously the claim that Germany is a democracy, to say nothing of its being the perfected form of democracy. But there is something to be said for the assertion that the so-called democratic states of the world have achieved only “bourgeois” democracy. By “bourgeois” democracy is meant one in which power rests finally in the hands of finance capitalism, no matter what claims are made for government, by and for all the people. In the perspective of history it is clear that the rise of democratic governments has been an accompaniment of the transfer of power from agrarian interests to industrial and commercial interests.

This transfer did not take place without a struggle. In this struggle, the representatives of the new forces of production asserted that their cause was that of liberty and of the free choice and initiative of individuals. Upon the continent and to a lesser degree in Great Britain, the political manifestation of free economic enterprise took the name of liberalism. So-called liberal parties were those which strove for a maximum of individualistic economic action with a minimum of social control, and did so in the interest of those engaged in manufacturing and commerce. If this manifestation expresses the full meaning of liberalism, then liberalism has served its time and it is social folly to try to resurrect it.

For the movement has definitely failed to realize the ends of liberty and individuality which were the goals it set up and in the name of which it proclaimed its rightful political supremacy. The movement for which it stood gave power to a few over the lives and thoughts of the many. Ability to command the conditions under which the mass of people have access to the means of production and to the products that result from their activity has been the fundamental feature of repression of freedom and the bar to development of individuality through all the ages. It is silly to deny that there has been gain to the masses accompanying the change of masters. But to glorify these gains and to give no attention to the brutalities and inequities, the regimentation and suppression, the war, open and covert, that attend the present system is intellectual and moral hypocrisy. Distortion and stultification of human personality by the existing pecuniary and competitive regime give the lie to the claim that the present social system is one of freedom and individualism in any sense in which liberty and individuality exist for all.

The United States is the outstanding exception to the statement that democracy arose historically in the interest of an industrial and commercial class, although it is true that in the formation of the federal constitution this class reaped much more than its fair share of the fruits of the revolution. And it is also true that as this group rose to economic power it appropriated also more and more political power. But it is simply false that this country, even politically, is merely a capitalistic democracy. The present struggle in this country is something more than a protest of a new class, whether called the proletariat or given any other name, against an established industrial autocracy. It is a manifestation of the native and enduring spirit of the nation against the destructive encroachments of forces that are alien to democracy.

This country has never had a political party of the European “liberal” type, although in recent campaigns the Republican
party has taken over most of the slogans of the latter. But the attacks of leaders of the party upon liberalism as one form of the red menace show that liberalism has a different origin, setting and aim in the United States. It is fundamentally an attempt to realize democratic modes of life in their full meaning and far-reaching scope. There is no particular sense in trying to save the word ‘liberal.’ There is every reason for not permitting the methods and aims of democracy to be obscured by denunciations of liberalism. The danger of this eclipse is not a theoretical matter; it is intensely practical.

For democracy means not only the ends which even dictatorships now assert are their ends, security for individuals and opportunity for their development as personalities. It signifies also primary emphasis upon the means by which these ends are to be fulfilled. The means to which it is devoted are the voluntary activities of individuals in opposition to coercion; they are assent and consent in opposition to violence; they are the force of intelligent organization versus that of organization imposed from outside and above. The fundamental principle of democracy is that the ends of freedom and individuality for all can be attained only by means that accord with those ends. The value of upholding the banner of liberalism in this country, no matter what it has come to mean in Europe, is its insistence upon freedom of belief, of inquiry, of discussion, of assembly, of education; upon the method of public intelligence in opposition to even a coercion that claims to be exercised in behalf of the ultimate freedom of all individuals. There is intellectual hypocrisy and moral contradiction in the creed of those who uphold the need for at least a temporary dictatorship of a class as well as in the position of those who assert that the present economic system is one of freedom of initiative and of opportunity for all.

There is no opposition in standing for liberal democratic means combined with ends that are socially radical. There is not only no contradiction, but neither history nor human nature gives any reason for supposing that socially radical ends can be attained by any other than liberal democratic means. The idea that those who possess power never surrender it save when forced to do so by superior physical power, applies to dictatorships that claim to operate in behalf of the oppressed masses while actually operating to wield power against the masses. The end of democracy is a radical end. For it is an end that has not been adequately realized in any country at any time. It is radical because it requires great change in existing social institutions, economic, legal and cultural. A democratic liberalism that does not recognize these things in thought and action is not awake to its own meaning and to what that meaning demands.

There is, moreover, nothing more radical than insistence upon democratic methods as the means by which radical social changes be effected. It is not a merely verbal statement to say that reliance upon superior physical force is the reactionary position. For it is the method that the world has depended upon in the past and that the world is now arming in order to perpetuate. It is easy to understand why those who are in close contact with the inequities and tragedies of life that mark the present system, and who are aware that we now have the resources for initiating a social system of security and opportunity for all, should be impatient and long for the overthrow of the existing system by any means whatever. But democratic means and the attainment of democratic ends are one and inseparable. The revival of democratic faith as a buoyant, crusading and militant faith is a consummation to be devoutly wished for. But the crusade can win at the best but partial victory unless it springs from a living faith in our common human nature and in the power of voluntary action based upon public collective intelligence.