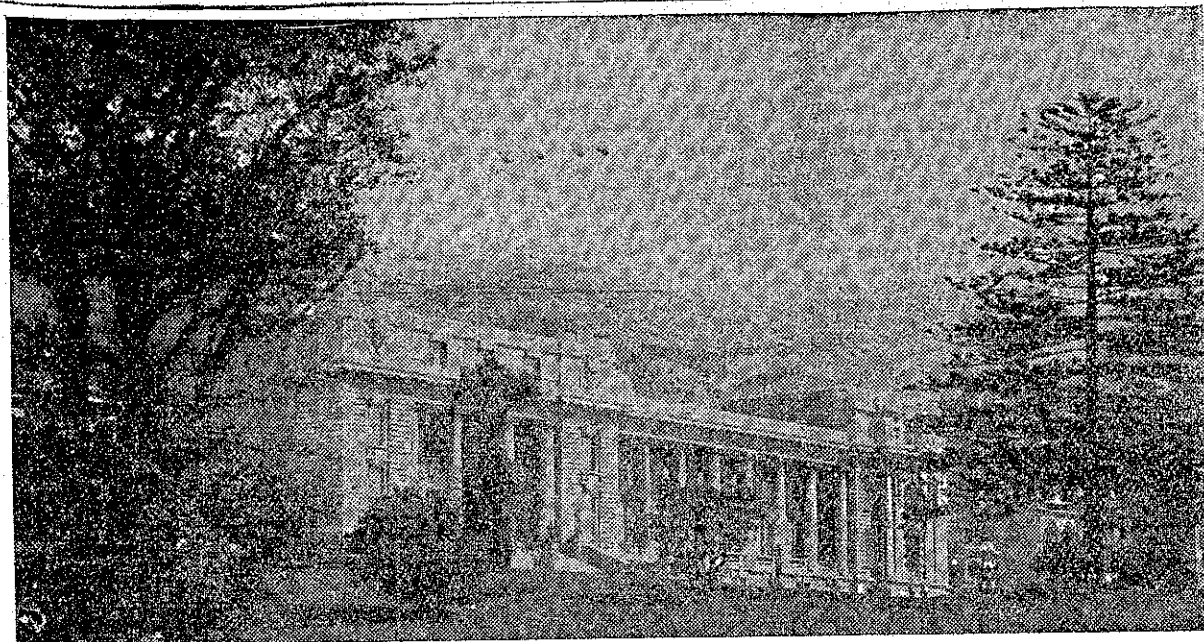




Aspects of Democracy

Left: The handsome New Zealand Parliamentary Buildings—symbols of democracy, which, according to Mr. Webb, has been only a phase in evolution. And that phase is passing.

Below: The proletariat have their say. A British election scene in a working-class district.

Democracy and the Crisis

A Talk from 3YA

by

L. C. WEBB

ONE of the comfortable beliefs of the nineteenth century was that democratic government would go on spreading till it embraced the whole earth. The belief was excusable. Each of the century's revolutions saw a few more countries endowed with Parliamentary constitutions, and it was natural to conclude that the progress of democracy was one of the inevitable processes of human evolution.

It is, therefore, rather surprising to find that the world, and Europe in particular, is much less democratic than it was 30 years ago, and that the reaction against democracy is gathering force.

The reason is fairly simple. In the nineteenth century politics was confined to politics; nowadays politics has got tangled up with economics. Every voter can reasonably be expected to have an opinion on such questions as the extension of the franchise, relations with Ireland, or religion in schools. But these are questions which have been settled long ago. The real questions in politics to-day are economic questions, and in these it is rare that the electorate can pronounce

on them intelligently. It is also rare that Parliaments can deal with them intelligently.

This change in the subject matter of politics has been going on for 50 years, and for 50 years democracy has been growing less and less effective. But it is only the severe impact of the financial crisis that has made us realise how utterly incompetent those institutions are.

As an illustration of the failure of democratic institutions I might point to the existence of dictatorships in so many European States, but I want to call attention to a less noticeable and therefore more dangerous aspect of the decay of democracy that has been revealed by the crisis.

The crisis has not so far upset any Parliamentary Governments, but it has sapped their vitality and left them as mere shams.

Germany, where the crisis began, has nominally a Parliamentary Government. In fact, the present German Government has been kept in office by the President and not by popular will. And it is legislating, not by Parliamentary processes, but by decree, under the emergency.

(Continued on page 2.)

