

Democracy and the Crisis

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In the Parliaments of the Empire there has been no such open suspension of normal government, but in all of them you will find that legislation by Order-in-Council is freely resorted to, and that the right of debate has been considerably curtailed. Speaking of the measures taken in the British Parliament to deal with the crisis, Professor Laski says: "The Government has overthrown at a stroke the result of the historic struggle in this country to place the control of expenditure in the hands, not of the Executive, but of Parliament. The conventions of the British Constitution have not been more violently outraged in our time."

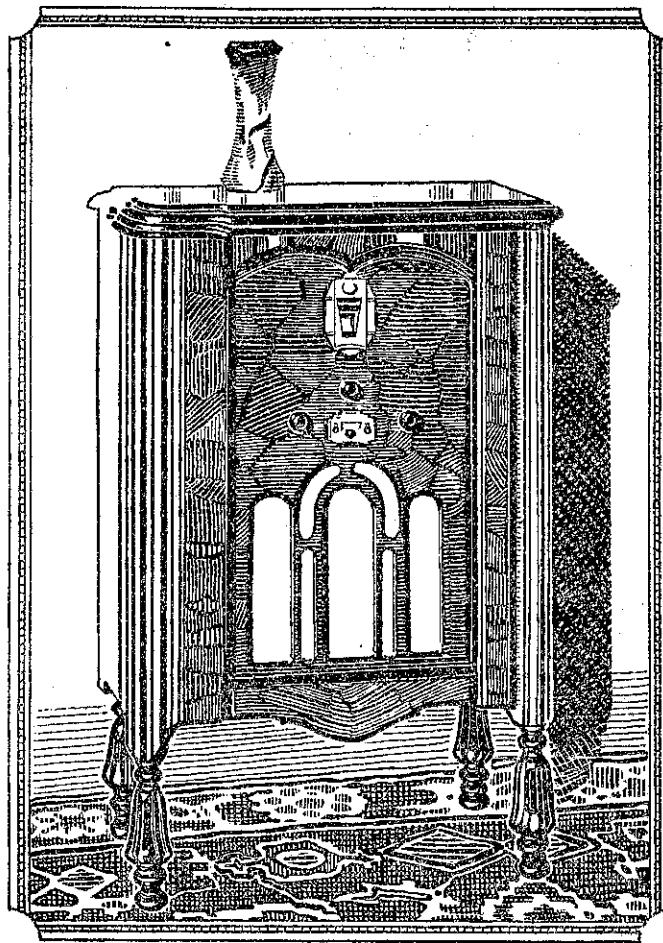
The freedom of the electors has been as much curtailed as the freedom of members of Parliament. At least three countries in the Empire have set up what are called national Governments. That is, groups of political leaders have said to the electors, "We want a free hand to deal with the crisis. We will not tell you what we are going to do, but we ask for your complete confidence." And the bewildered electors have, in effect, given these men a free hand. It is fair to say that such elections are not free, democratic elections, and that the result of them is to set up a mild form of dictatorship. The keystone of democratic government is the responsibility of the elected representative to the people, but there can be no effective responsibility if the elected representative makes no promises which he can be held accountable for.

There is one other aspect of these National Governments worth noting, and that is that the members generally quarrel among themselves. That is only natural. The Ministers belong to different political parties, and sooner or later they will disagree on fundamental issues. The present British Cabinet is split on the Free Trade issue, and although, by a rather unique arrangement, they have agreed to differ, I think you will admit that such a fundamental disagreement seriously damages the efficiency of Cabinet, and must ultimately destroy it.

I have said that as a result of the crisis, the freedom of members of Parliament, and of the electors has been seriously curtailed. But what is more serious, the freedom of Governments themselves has been curtailed. I am merely stating what is history when I say that there is hardly a Government in the world to-day that has not, at some time in the last 12 months, had to do what the bankers told it to do. The bankers told Mr. MacDonald's Labour Government that if a loan was to be raised, the rates of unemployment relief would have to be cut. The Labour Government was unable to agree to this and had to resign.

As a result of this sort of thing, the phrase "bankers' ramp" has been coined, and some people have talked as if the bankers were in a conspiracy to defeat the will of democracy. I think this is a foolish way of looking at what happened. The bankers were as much distressed as the Government were, and they took reasonable and

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