

The Great Political Crisis

By JOHN PEPPER

WE are passing thru one of the deepest and most important political crises of the United States. The politicians and the press of the capitalists themselves are forced to admit it. Indeed, not only do they admit the crisis, but they proclaim it, they cry it out, wailing and in despair. And to prove that this crisis is actually present, and does not exist only in our Communist wishes, we here give a few of the most important remarks of the politicians and newspapers of both big parties:

"The people of this country are profoundly shocked. Popular confidence in public men is badly shaken. All of us, irrespective of party, seem to the people more or less bespattered. Something like an explosion has occurred perilously near the foundations of the Republic."

—Senator Pepper, Republican, in the Senate, Feb. 7.

"The gravity of the situation can hardly be exaggerated. If the confidence of the people in our Government is to be maintained—nay, if it is to be deserved—all officers who have betrayed their trusts must be brought to the bar of the courts."

—Senator Reed, Democrat, in the Senate, Feb. 7.

"No situation more humiliating, more demoralizing, and to some extent, more discouraging, has ever been heretofore for our consideration or the consideration of those who have gone before."

—Senator Borah, Republican, in the Senate, Feb. 8.

"The structure of our government rocks upon its very foundations. The only way to restore to the government the confidence of the people—confidence so essential to its perpetuity—is to follow every guilty man with the utmost rigor of the law and to drive from public office every man who by connivance or supineness allowed this crime to be committed."

—Senator Walsh, Democrat, in the Senate, Feb. 8.

"What is going on in Washington is much more significant and may become much more ominous, than anything which happens in a meeting of Communists at Madison Square Garden. If it shall appear that the taint of corruption has deeply penetrated both political parties, a great impetus will be given to discontent. Should Congress fail to show itself absolutely

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determined and fearless in cleansing our public life, the effect would be most unsettling in many sections of the nation."

—New York Times editorial, Feb. 6.

"The federal government has often faced great danger. It has not hitherto experienced so great a national shame."

—Senator James A. Reed, Democrat, in the Senate, Feb. 7.

"It was not because Denby and Fall, or Doheny and Sinclair, are bad men that the navy's oil reserves were fraudulently transferred from public to private hands. No, it is because a huge and sinister system of private monopoly and corrupt business has been built in this country which sought and to a large measure gained control of the government and by extorting for itself special privileges of all kinds is destroying the incentive for honest enterprise."

—Senator LaFollette, Republican, in the Senate, Feb. 11.

"The faith of the people in their own government is shaken and the damaging effects upon public morale are so grave that the security of democratic institutions is seriously imperiled."

—McAdoo, Democrat, before the Senate Investigation Committee, Feb. 10.

"The Senate's action today creates one of the most extraordinary situations in the history of the country. Never before has either branch of Congress taken action to cause the dismissal by the President of one of his cabinet officers. The Senate votes to confirm removals but never before has voted to remove one."

—James R. Nourse, correspondent of the Herald and Examiner, Feb. 12.

"We must go to the root of this gigantic evil, and the root of it is the plain fact that government has drifted out of the hands of the citizenship and into the hands of the powerful financial cliques."

"The United States is not a democracy today."

"It is not a republic today."

—Herald and Examiner, editorial, Feb. 2.

"In fact, the public mind is in such a temper that if the predatory financial interests played their old game and captured both party conventions for 'safe' candidates, nothing would stop the popular revolt and the election of an insurgent third party candidate."

—New York American, editorial, Feb. 6, entitled "Some Results of Oil Scandal You Can See with Half an Eye".

"Frederick Landis sums up the disgraceful selling out of the people and the navy in a few energetic words, 'None can measure the moral detriment of this greasy mess at Washington. It casts off fumes of disgust, suspicion, communism, and assures the common crook that his is a noble profession.'"

—Arthur Brisbane in the Hearst papers of Jan. 27.

"The appalling conditions prevailing in Washington today—corruption, graft, incompetence—have created a situation more dangerous to government than Bolshevism itself."

—Letter by McAdoo to his campaign manager, Feb. 12.

The capitalist class must be in a very desperate situation if it is forced to speak in such tones of itself.

An explosion endangers the foundations of the Republic!

The gravity of the situation can hardly be exaggerated!

The structure of our government rocks upon its very foundations!

Private monopoly gained control of the government!

The faith of the people in their own government is shaken!

The security of democratic institutions is imperilled!

The United States is not a democracy today! It is not a republic today!

The popular revolt will elect an insurgent Third Party candidate!

The corruption of Washington casts off fumes of disgust, suspicion, communism!

The conditions in Washington are more dangerous to government than Bolshevism itself!

And we can affirm with glee that the ruling capitalist class and its government are indeed in the greatest danger. They are in danger of completely losing the confidence of the great masses. And that is a mortal danger for the capitalist government. The capitalist government is the government of a small minority, but it can exist only if it can rely on the confidence of the great non-capitalistic masses. The rule of every capitalist government is based on two factors: on the one hand physical force, the power of the state machine, and on the other hand, the confidence of the masses. It is, therefore, naive and one-sided for many to believe that for the overthrow of the capitalist government, force alone is sufficient. And it is equally naive and one-sided of many to believe that pure propaganda, which wins the masses, is alone, sufficient. It is no accident that lost wars are the best occasions for revolution because a lost war destroys the army, the tool of physical force of the government, and destroys at the same time the confidence of the masses in the capacity of the government to conduct the affairs of the nation.

The Teapot Dome scandal is less than a lost war for the American capitalist class; but it is a thousand times more than an ordinary case of political corruption. The Teapot Dome scandal will not shake the structure of the army, and the bureaucracy, but it has shaken and will shake still further the other pillar of the power of the ruling class: the confidence of the masses.

But we should not overestimate the significance of the Teapot Dome scandal as an isolated, single factor. Of course it is unique, in that all the important leaders of both political parties of capitalism are at once so thoroly compromised. But we must see clearly that a whole series of important and deep political factors operated simultaneously to make possible the effect of the tremendous Teapot Dome scandal.

The process of the loss of confidence of the non-capitalist masses in the leadership of the capitalist class did not begin with the Teapot Dome scandal, but on the contrary it reached its present high point with the Teapot Dome scandal. The suppressing monopoly of trusts was the first great factor which affected the masses.

Our participation in the world war was the second factor which filled the non-capitalist masses with discontent.

The great economic crisis of 1921-22 with its five and a half million unemployed workers exercised a deep and bitter effect.

The frightful crisis of agriculture which hurls millions of farmers into misery and bankruptcy is another important revolutionizing factor.

The present economic depression which started in the second half of 1923 is again an ingredient in evoking and deepening the general discontent.

All these factors have been operating together for years to sharpen the class conflicts, to undermine the confidence of the non-capitalist elements towards capitalist rule and to help to disintegrate the two-party system, to make the system of checks and balances of the American constitution more and more unworkable. The Teapot Dome scandal did not create the great political crisis of our country; the Teapot Dome scandal has only made this crisis more conscious, has deepened and accelerated it.

Great social forces must work in the depths of society in order to make political scandals, such as the Rasputin scandal in Russia, the Dreyfus affair in France, the Teapot Dome scandal in the United States into political events of prime importance.