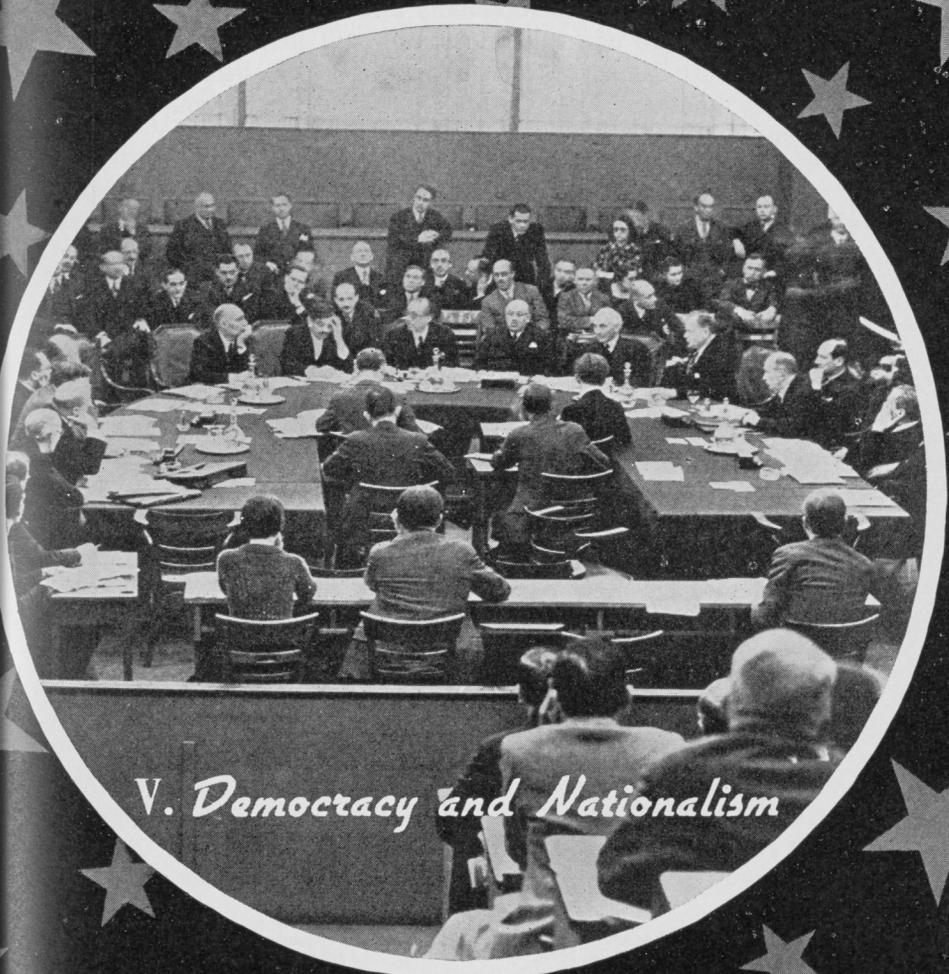


AUGUST, 1941

BULLETIN P25 (New Series)

The *Challenge* to **DEMOCRACY**



V. Democracy and Nationalism

AGRICULTURAL EXPERIMENT STATION—AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION SERVICE, Cooperating
IOWA STATE COLLEGE AMES, IOWA

The Challenge to Democracy

The democratic way of life is being challenged today all over the world. Its superiority is widely denied and its security is seriously imperiled. The American people consequently are interested in understanding the dangers that confront them and in guarding against them. Democracy needs strengthening both internally and externally, and farm people can and must and will help do the job, both because of their numbers and because they know perhaps better than any other group the meaning of the democratic way of life.

It is the purpose of this bulletin and others in its series to show what produced the present situation and suggest some of the things that need to be done about it—not by farm people alone but by rural America and urban America working together. This is the fifth of eight bulletins on the subject. They deal with the following topics:

- Democracy on trial.
- How much centralization in government?
- The place of the family farm.
- The test of citizenship.
- Democracy and nationalism.
- Toward a new rural statesmanship.
- Improving public administration.
- The machine and democracy.

The Challenge to Democracy

V. Democracy and Nationalism¹

BY C. H. MATTERSON²

Modern democracy and modern nationalism are two developments which the men of today have inherited from the nineteenth century. They have developed concurrently over the past century and a half and on occasions have appeared to be not only complementary but even necessary to each other. Today the very existence of democracy appears to be threatened by the excesses of nationalism. It is the purpose of this bulletin to consider how this has come about in order to understand the problem with which this generation is confronted.

THE NATURE OF NATIONALISM

Democracy has been defined elsewhere in this series, but what is meant by "nationalism" needs, perhaps, some consideration. Nationalism is difficult to define, and the difficulty lies in the fact that it exists in varying degrees. In all forms it can be said to be a group feeling. This group is generally characterized by an historical tradition, language, literature, customs and values which are common to its members. The appreciation of a common cultural heritage and a common past is the fundamental bond which holds together the members of a nation. It is, however, only the first stage in the development of nationalistic feeling. From this it develops generally into an affection for a given area of land and the idea of a "fatherland" for which, if necessary, one would be willing to fight. Political independence for the group soon becomes a goal, the achievement of which becomes a national aspiration. If and when independence is achieved it is apt to be several generations after the first stage of national development, and it is at this point that nationalism becomes both constructive and dangerous.

¹This bulletin is fifth of a series on The Challenge to Democracy prepared by members of the History and Government Department, Iowa State College.

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It is constructive when — as has often happened — it operates in conjunction with democracy to inspire a people to establish democratic principles as the basis of the political institutions of their new national state. Inspiration comes from the martyrs and heroes that a struggle for independence generally gives to a nation. Nearly every nation has had its George Washington or its "minute men" whom it honors for their role in its national history. Respect, which often verges upon worship, for some one individual is an important part of the development of pride in a nation's past.

Such pride is often justifiable, but it can, when carried to extremes, turn nationalism into dangerous paths. National pride often leads to a blind refusal to admit that errors have been made, and a refusal to admit that mistakes have been made in the past leaves little hope for improvement in the future. Each nation, with its heroes and achievements of which it is justifiably proud, is likely to fail to appreciate that other nations have similar achievements and similar pride. This becomes the basis of the most extreme form of nationalism, the super-race idea. This is the belief that, since one's nation has achieved so much in the past, it is a chosen people, destined to dominate the family of nations. Not all nations reach the super-race stage, but there is ample current evidence that some do. There is no fast rule as to speed of development through these stages of nationalism, but by 1914 a large number of national groups in Europe had reached the stage of demanding political independence.

By 1914 democracy had had a century-long career of gradual successes. The United States had been a democracy for over 100 years; Great Britain had at last achieved universal manhood suffrage in 1884; France was a republic, Italy a constitutional monarchy; Germany and Austria-Hungary had their elected legislative bodies whose powers were restricted but whose prospects for further democratic development appeared good; even in Russia the first signs of a democratic form of government were being seen in the newly-established Duma. In the various struggles of the

nineteenth century, democracy could claim the loyalties of many men over even nationalism in the people who left their native lands, especially in central Europe, to come to the new world to gain a freedom that did not seem to be attainable at home.

NATIONALISM AND DEMOCRACY IN THE WAR OF 1914-1918

The war of 1914-18 seemed to bring both of these developments to a climax. At its beginning the contending powers were lined up purely on a basis of national or imperial interests, but after 1917, when autocratic Russia dropped out and the United States entered, the war gained at least the appearance of a struggle between the democracies and the countries in which democracy was limited. Two great republics, the United States and France, and two monarchies in which an elected representative body was the center of power, Great Britain and Italy, were the leaders of an alliance struggling against monarchies in which the role of elected legislatures was secondary. The appearance then of a struggle in behalf of democracy was real enough, and the American people could easily believe President Wilson's famous statement, made in all sincerity, that America was fighting in the war in order "to make the world safe for democracy." In the light of later developments it is difficult to refrain from cynicism when one recalls the famous slogan of that war, but the fact remains that the sincere enthusiasm that it aroused, especially in the United States, for a grand crusade in behalf of a political ideal was a testimony of belief in democracy. Indeed, the height of the enthusiasm and the sincerity of the idealism of that time has made the later bitterness and cynicism all the greater.

Another phrase, popularized by President Wilson, during the last months of that war was, "the self-determination of peoples." This was the principle that national groups should have the right to decide for themselves under what government they would live. There were many people in Europe to whom such a principle made a great appeal. The Poles, Czechs, Slovaks and southern Slavs among others were such.

All had been under governments dominated by some other nationality, and all had reached the stage of demanding political independence. By proclaiming "the self-determination of peoples" as one of the bases of a future peace settlement, President Wilson was promising these peoples that their national aspirations would be realized in an allied victory. Thus the cause of the allies took on the appearance of being the cause of both democracy and nationalism and, when triumph came in the fall of 1918, many believed that both had achieved their goals.

THE VICTORY OF 1918

The winning of a war is one thing and the making of peace is another, and it was not long before the ideals which had been preached during the war were being either forgotten or distorted by the diplomats. National interests — and obviously those of the victors only — were the paramount considerations in the minds of most of the peace-makers.

This is not hard to understand. In the course of any war, and especially of a long one, national feelings are aroused to a fever pitch. Extreme glorification of one's own nation and equally extreme hatred of the enemy is preached on all sides. It is too much to expect that when the guns cease firing people will suddenly cease hating. Thus, a peace treaty, drawn up immediately after a war, is not apt to reflect a sincere desire to prevent future wars or even to make a fair settlement all around but rather to gain revenge for the past war and to establish one's own nation in the most powerful position possible for the future. An election in Great Britain was won in December 1918 by an overwhelming majority for the Lloyd George coalition on a platform of "Hang the Kaiser and make Germany pay for the war," neither of which, obviously, could be done. The policies of the other countries, with the exception of the United States which had renounced any annexations or indemnities, were similar to the British attitude.

THE "SELF-DETERMINATION OF PEOPLES"

The conflict between the idealism of President Wilson and the "realism" of the European statesmen resulted in a series of peace treaties which were at best a compromise. It was soon evident, even to President Wilson, that nationalism, once encouraged as it had been during the war, is not easily moderated. The complex character of the nationality problem and the extreme ambitions of the various national groups made it impossible to satisfy even all the victors not to mention drawing up peace terms which might be palatable to the defeated nations. The principle of "self-determination" was applied when it would benefit the victors, but it was forgotten when it would benefit the vanquished. There were countless examples of this, of which Italy's claim to the Tyrol, Poland's to the Corridor and Danzig, and Rumania's to all of Transylvania were but a few. The request of Austria to be incorporated into republican Germany was refused because of French national interests. The credit for that unification of German peoples fell to the Nazi dictatorship instead of the German republic.

Much has been made by many men, ranging from Woodrow Wilson to Adolf Hitler, of the glaring weaknesses of the Versailles treaty. For our purposes, however, it must be pointed out that progress was made toward satisfying the demands of the principle of nationalism. In 1914 there had been, roughly, 60 million people in Europe under the rule of some alien nationality; as a result of the Versailles arrangements that number was reduced to 20 million. Twenty million dissatisfied people are not to be overlooked by any means, but the satisfaction of the nationalistic hopes of twice that number was no mean achievement. Certainly political boundaries and national boundaries, although still far from perfect, were "in closer accord than they had ever been since nationalism had first become a vital force." Furthermore, there was still hope that the remaining problems could be settled peaceably through the new instrument for settling international problems, the League of Nations. President Wilson gave way to the nationalist desires of the allies because he expected that the League would later, in

calmer times, remedy the "wrongs of Versailles." General Smuts, the South African delegate at the Conference, best expressed this hope at the time. "There are territorial settlements," he said, "which will need revision There are indemnities stipulated which cannot be executed without grave injury to the industrial revival of Europe, and which will be in the interests of all to render more tolerable and moderate . . . and I am confident that the League of Nations will yet prove the path of escape for Europe out of the ruin brought about by this war." Nationalism then had won the peace so completely that hope for a lasting peace still lay in the future.

"SAFE FOR DEMOCRACY"

And what of democracy? Even before the armistice President Wilson had given some reality to the idea that a victory for the allies would be a victory for democracy also by insisting that the allies would deal only with a government which could claim to represent the German people. A revolution in Germany produced a democratic form of government and eventually resulted in the Weimar republic which Hitler destroyed 15 years later. Similarly, democratic forms were set up in the new states which nationalism had created ranging from Finland to Yugoslavia. Parts of eastern Europe and nearly all of central Europe where Tsars and Emperors had played the major roles now seemed to have been won for democracy. The appearance, especially in some of the smaller nations where cliques of army officers or of wealthy landowners or industrialists rather quickly seized control of the democratic machinery, was somewhat deceiving, but it seemed reasonable to hope that, in time, these nations would develop along democratic lines. Certainly more people were living under democratic forms of government than had ever done so before. The victory of democracy seemed to be as complete, if not as dangerous, as that of nationalism.

BETWEEN THE WARS

What then caused the high hopes of 1920 to prove so terribly vain in 1940? The answer has already been touched

upon, namely, the continuance of rabid nationalistic feeling long after the war. This, it will be remembered, was to be checked by the League of Nations. It was the hope of the sponsors of the League that it would attract the loyalty and devotion which people had hitherto accorded to their respective nations. It was, indeed, a vain hope. None of the victorious powers was willing to make the sacrifices which would have to be made if the League were to be a success. The defeated powers were not asked to join, a fact which immediately gave the League the appearance of being merely a continuation of the alliance which had won the war rather than an international organization designed to preserve peace and international goodwill. American nationalism showed itself in our flat refusal to join the League, even with reservations. America was going to "return to normalcy" and "normalcy" to many Americans meant withdrawing completely from European affairs. The crusading impulse which had been so strong during the war gave way to a strong isolationism. It was claimed by many — a claim which sounds rather hollow today — that America had no interest in European affairs and should not concern itself with trying to settle Europe's quarrels. The often-made assertion that America's refusal to join the League necessarily doomed that organization to failure and thereby made us responsible for much that has happened in the past 10 years can never be proved. Too many "ifs" are involved to reach any definite conclusion, but it is clear that our refusal either to join the League or to make a special treaty with France made France look to guarantees of security other than the League and enabled France to turn the League into an instrument of her own national policy.

FRENCH NATIONALISM AND GERMAN DEMOCRACY

Through the early 1920's French policy concentrated on keeping Germany a second-rate power. This policy rested on several things. First, there was the use of the League of Nations, not to maintain world peace but to maintain the treaty of Versailles. This use was, of course, the exact opposite of the use to which President Wilson had hoped the League would be put. Second, a system of alliances was

developed involving Poland, Czechoslovakia, Rumania, and Yugoslavia, all of whom had much at stake in the preservation of the Versailles treaty. Alliance systems were considered one of the fundamental causes of the war of 1914, and the League was supposed to eliminate them, but by 1925 France had ringed Germany with allies. Third, France maintained a large standing army of over 500,000 men which she insisted was necessary even though Germany was limited to 100,000 men. All attempts at disarmament, to which the League members were committed, were blocked by France and her allies. Finally, Germany was to be kept weak economically by the imposition of an exorbitant reparation and indemnity bill and by the use of firm methods in collecting the huge sums.

It was, perhaps, in the latter two points that the real danger to democracy lay. Germany, in spite of her defeat, was potentially one of the strongest nations in the world. She had enjoyed the status of a "Great Power"; she had, for good or evil, stood off almost singlehandedly, the major part of the civilized world for 4 years. German nationalism had been aroused as much as French or British or Polish or any other, and merely because she was the defeated power one could not expect her to forget her own national pride. Germany was certainly the most important nation in central Europe. There, if anywhere, it was to be hoped that democracy would not only survive but thrive. The Weimar constitution provided a good start; it was, indeed, one of the most democratic constitutions in the world. It was apparent, however, that democracy would need every possible encouragement. Conservative groups on the one side and Communist groups on the other sought to undermine the new republic. The former charged the new government with humiliating Germany by signing the disastrous treaty of Versailles. Furthermore, it was this government that had to incur the odium attached to raising the large sums of money which had to be paid by the already bankrupt nation to the allies for reparations.

The climax came when France illegally occupied the Ruhr district, the industrial heart of Germany, as a measure to

force Germany to pay. The Ruhr occupation had two important, long-range results. It renewed the hatred and bitterness of the German people toward the French, and it served as the final factor in producing the great inflation of the German currency in 1923. Before this wild inflation was over it took a billion German marks to buy a dollar's worth of goods. For many people it meant that the savings of a lifetime were wiped out at a stroke, and the middle class, an important element in any democracy, was practically ruined. Many of the later recruits of the Nazi movement were the sons of the middle class families who had seen their futures collapse along with the value of the mark. Foreign loans, through the agency of the Dawes Plan, staved off immediate disaster, but the seeds that were sown were destined in a few years to bear bitter fruit and to make the job of the democratic leaders within Germany all the more difficult. Democracy now, besides being associated with defeat in war, was associated with economic collapse in peace. Nationalist groups in Germany were making their appearance and in their propaganda were definitely linking national humiliation with democracy. It was at this time, November 1923, that the Nazi party made its first bid for recognition in the famous "Beer Hall Putsch."

Stresemann, the German Foreign Minister, sought concessions from the allies. Concessions were made, especially during those periods when Briand was directing French foreign policy, but they were generally "too little and too late" to satisfy the reborn German nationalism which was being stirred up by Hitler, at that time relatively unknown and taken seriously by very few. Stresemann himself, who labored hard to gain a real diplomatic victory which could be credited to the republic, summed up the situation in April 1929, which was considerably before the threat of the Nazis was taken seriously elsewhere. "If you had given me one concession," he said in an interview with the Englishman, Lockhart, "I could have carried my people. I could still do it today. But you have given me nothing, and the trifling concessions which you have made have always come too late. In their private conversations your diplomats,

your Ministers are friendly and full of promises but in public, at Geneva, everywhere they fall into line with the French and it is by their public actions that I must judge them. Patience, they say, and all will be well. But they cannot see that the ground here is slipping away under my feet.

"Nothing remains now except brute force," he added. "The future is in the hands of the new generation, and the youth of Germany, which we might have won for peace and for the new Europe, we both have lost. That is my tragedy and your crime."³ Stresemann was, perhaps putting upon the allies more than their share of the blame for the development of extreme nationalism and of disdain for democracy in Germany, but there is no doubt that their share was a large one.

The example of the effect of nationalism in France upon democracy in Germany has been cited at some length because it is the clearest illustration of what happened to democracy in a world that had just been made safe for it. To a lesser degree the same sort of thing happened in the Danube valley, especially to Austria who found herself cut off from her neighbors by high tariff barriers and became an outstanding victim of economic nationalism. As such she easily fell a prey to the dictatorship of Dollfuss even before Hitler annexed the country to form his "Greater Germany."

NATIONALISM IN ITALY

All this, however, cannot explain the disappearance of democracy in Italy. Italy was one of the victorious powers who supposedly had waged and won the war for democracy. Italy, however, had never pretended to believe in the crusade for democracy. She had entered the war for frankly imperialistic reasons and definitely expected to be paid for her efforts by new lands in Europe and colonies in Africa. When her statesmen returned from the peace conference with only slight territorial gains, they were charged with inability to protect Italy's national interests. The treaties of 1919 were viewed with almost as much bitterness in Italy as in Ger-

³Lockhart, Bruce. Retreat from glory.

many, and the government which had agreed to them — as a matter of fact it could have done little else — quickly lost the confidence of the people. A sense of outraged nationalism along with the social and economic distress of the depression of 1921, in dealing with which there was an utter lack of leadership on the part of the government, produced a willingness to abandon what was considered a static democracy for the dynamic program of Fascism.

THE FAILURE OF THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS

From this very sketchy survey of recent events, it appears that those who thought that democracy had come into its own in 1920 were sadly mistaken or were lulled into a false sense of security. Hope such as that expressed by General Smuts had no reasonable basis. The League succeeded in settling only disputes between lesser powers, and when a great power felt that its "national honor" was at stake it refused to submit the question to the League.

Italy set the example for flouting the League in the Corfu Incident in 1924. Japan followed suit in the Manchurian Affair in 1932. The next year Germany withdrew from the League, and 2 years later Italy disregarded the League in the Ethiopian Crisis. After that it was apparent, even to the most optimistic supporter of the League, that there was little to be hoped from it.

The failure of the League to inspire confidence was well illustrated in its attempts at disarmament. The treaty of Versailles had stated that the compulsory disarmament of Germany was merely a prelude to a general disarmament. Large armies would, if the League functioned as it was supposed to function, no longer be necessary, but France and her allies demanded more security than they felt the League offered before they would talk about disarmament. All negotiations came to nought during the 1920's; their only result was to show that nations would still entrust their national interests only to their own armed forces. All this was grist for Hitler's mill, and he was making much of the unfulfilled promise of the allies to disarm. When the League finally called a disarmament conference in 1932 a deadlock ensued and, when nothing had been accomplished by Octo-

ber 1933, Hitler, who was now in power, used this failure as an excuse to withdraw Germany from both the conference and the League.

ECONOMIC NATIONALISM

Nationalism was also reflected in the economic policies of nearly all countries. Tariff barriers, erected during the 1920's, checked the interchange of goods and made the problem of paying war debts, which in themselves were enough to keep national feelings at a high pitch, even more difficult. The depression which struck in the early 1930's only made matters worse as each country raised its tariff still higher. Even Great Britain, the stronghold of free trade, finally turned to a tariff. The climax came when a World Economic Conference, meeting in London in 1933, collapsed chiefly because no one was willing to make any concessions.

TODAY AND TOMORROW

In the last analysis democracy was completely overshadowed by nationalism even in what appeared to be the hour of its triumph. The two ideas which had fought side by side were not able to share the victory. Over 80 years ago, at a time when these ideas still appeared to be allied, the English scholar, Lord Acton, in a remarkable analysis which has turned out to be almost a prophecy wrote, "Nationality does not aim either at liberty or prosperity, both of which it sacrifices to the imperative necessity of making the nation the mould and measure of the State. Its course will be marked with material as well as moral ruin, in order that a new invention may prevail over the works of God and the interests of mankind. There is no principle of change, no phase of political speculation conceivable, more comprehensive, or more arbitrary than this. It is a confutation of democracy, because it sets limits to the exercise of the popular will, and substitutes for it a higher principle. It prevents not only the division, but the extension of the State, and forbids to terminate war by conquest and to obtain security for peace."

In the midst of a great war, the outcome of which is in

doubt, it is difficult to offer a detailed solution to this problem, but the broad outlines at any rate can be drawn. Presumably, if Germany wins in Europe, that continent will be organized on the super-race principle, and very possibly the question of whether or not the world can exist "half slave and half free" will be resolved only by a long struggle between the Old World and the New, fought at least in economic, if not military, terms.

If, however, Nazism is defeated and the super-race theory is discredited, what then? Proposals concerning postwar plans may seem to be counting chickens before they are hatched, but a workable plan for world organization which will be acceptable to all nations cannot be drawn up overnight. The old methods of large armaments and balance-of-power politics have obviously failed as preservers of either peace or of the permanent supremacy of any one nation. It would, perhaps, be fatal to hopes for future civilization if the world were to revert to these old methods merely because of the lack of an alternative.

There have already been several proposals made. One, Mr. Streit's plan for "Union Now," was made even before the present war broke out. This, briefly, proposes a union of the democracies of the world which would have a central, federal government, organized on democratic principles with sufficient authority and power to enforce its decisions. In the end, Mr. Streit envisages a world not dissimilar to the United States, a group of states each with its own government but each a part of a union to which all ultimate loyalties are given. Another proposal is a revival of the League of Nations with the changes which the experience of the past 20 years indicates are necessary if it is to succeed in a second try. Still another proposal is a plan for a United States of Europe similar to that proposed by Briand over a decade ago. Such an organization would be too limited in scope to be a guarantee of world peace, but Europe has been the cradle of the past world wars and, if peace could be preserved there, it would be an important step in the right direction.

These are the chief proposals that have been made, and

very probably any plan that is adopted in the future will be some variation of one of these three. They may differ as to degree or methods of central government from the strong federal union of "Union Now" to the loose federation of a revived League of Nations, but one thing seems to be clearly evident; if any plan of international organization is to succeed there must be considerable recasting of past and current ideas of what constitutes "national honor" and sovereign rights. If every nation, or any one great nation, insists that the maintenance of large armed forces, the privilege of raising tariff barriers and the right to act as sole judge of its own actions are necessary requirements of its "national honor" and are its sovereign rights, then Mr. Streit's "Union Now" is impossible, and any future League of Nations is doomed to the same tragic failure as its predecessor.

In the end it would seem to be a matter of mere common sense. Just as within a village community it is impossible to grant complete freedom to individuals without endangering the general welfare, so, no less in the community of nations, sacrifices on the part of each nation of what may have been in the past considered necessary rights and privileges, will have to be made if the civilization which we have inherited is to survive us.

Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics, Iowa State College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts and the United States Department of Agriculture Cooperating. Extension Service, R. K. Bliss, director, Ames, Iowa. Distributed in furtherance of the Acts of Congress of May 8 and June 30, 1914.

Agricultural Experiment Station, Iowa State College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts, R. E. Buchanan, director, Ames, Iowa.