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CONGRESS ON TRIAL. By James MacGregor Burns. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1949.

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CONGRESS ON TRIAL. By James MacGregor Burns. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1949. Pp. xiv, 224. $3.00.

CONGRESS *on Trial* is a somewhat misleading title, for Professor Burns challenges the ability of our present political arrangements to meet the potential needs of the next half of the twentieth century. As a very brief resume of the "plot" will show, the reader is left with the definite conclusion that Congressional reform can be achieved only as a by-product of other more basic governmental changes, including a drastic sprucing-up of our present political party system. The author adds little of a practical nature to the solution of these fundamental problems. Thus it is not easy to subscribe to the friendly "jacket" testimonial by Max Lerner to the effect that "Congress on Trial is the best study thus far produced on the American legislative process." It can only be said that it is a helpful and respectable addition to the very fine recent works on Congress by Galloway, Chamberlain, Finletter, Walker and Kefauver.

The failures of this study are due primarily to the complicated and vexing nature of the subject matter, rather than to the inadequacies of the writer. Mr. Burns has worked in both the legislative and executive branches of the national government, served on the staff of the Hoover Commission, and has had first-hand experience with politics on a local level. He is at present Assistant Professor of Political Science at Williams College. Many parts of the volume indicate a capable maturity, but his subject is one that tends to put any writer "on trial."

The full thesis, and its chief inadequacies can be most effectively presented by a brief summary. The first half of the book is devoted to a full and, in spots, clever analysis of the shortcomings of Congress, and the causating factors involved. A realistic and almost dismal picture of the typical congressman is painted, showing his aim in life to be as simple a matter as reelection. The everyday burdens of our representatives, Burns proves, are so time-consuming that the typical Representative or Senator has precious little time left for his primary job—being a legislator. The important role of pressure politics is described, followed by a good treatment of the "Impotence of Party"—an account of the many factors which make for party disunity in Congress, diffuse and confuse party leadership, and make our two-party system a haphazard, undisciplined and ineffective vehicle for the formulation and expression of the popular will.

One theme running through this entire work, and this is quite normal, is a concern for majority rule: "In a Congress lacking sturdy party organization, many of the nation's pressure groups seem to enjoy greater representation than the majority of the voters." Other defects which thwart majority rule such as gerrymandering, unrepresentative committees, the

seniority rule, and the possibilities of obstructionism, are summarized by Burns in a chapter called "Houses of Misrepresentation." The critical first half of the book is completed by a study of three bills—the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, the Emergency Price Control Act of 1942, and the Missouri Valley Authority Bill—to substantiate the broad allegations made in the preceding chapters.

Before turning our attention to the solution of these difficult problems Burns devotes twenty pages to the role of Congress as "overseer" of the vast administrative system, and finds unpleasant results of a "rivalry between President and Congress for mastery of the huge bureaucracy of our administrative state." Again the major theme of Congress thwarting majority rule emerges: "The issue in the United States is whether the bureaucracy will be responsible mainly to the majority of the voters through the President, or mainly to organized minorities through key individuals and committees in Congress. Majority rule has suffered as a result of the division of administrative control between President and Congress." A set of fairly practical reforms is advanced to improve this situation.

The final sections of the book involving broad solutions are prefaced by chapters on the inability of Congress to meet future crises such as wars and depressions, and its ability to make presidential handling of these crises more difficult; and on the "modernization without basic reform" nature of previous congressional reforms, including the Reorganization Act of 1946. After listing the self-improvements that could fall within its power, Burns concludes that Congress "cannot reform itself," for the needed reform "can come about only as a part of far deeper changes in the organization of American politics, specifically in the party system."

Two basic solutions are then presented in full: the imposition of some type of "cabinet system," and the permanent strengthening and institutionalizing of the powers of the President. American proposals for adapting the cabinet system to our governmental machinery fall into two classes: the first would make the President and his Cabinet responsible to Congress by allowing Congress to oust the Executive and appoint a new one; and the second would set elections for the President and Congress at the same time—at regular intervals, or when a deadlock necessitated a special election. Burns rejects, with well-constructed reasoning, both proposals, and alleges that, after all, the stability of the English system lies not in its cabinet system, but in a political party structure that provides "leadership, responsibility, and efficiency."

Expanded, institutionalized presidential power is favored by Professor Burns as being vitally needed to supply "the element that democracy must have in order to survive—responsible leadership." The strong President's new role as "Chief of State" produces many advantages and can to a large

extent be controlled, but it leaves us with the potentialities for presidential "near-dictatorship" in domestic exigencies, and a one-man-made war in a world crisis. What indispensable control can alone effectively keep this power in check? "Party government"—"a condition where centralized and disciplined parties formulate national policy on key issues and use governmental machinery to carry out that policy."

At this point of climax the author of *Congress on Trial* finally moves into the realm of "if" and "maybe," and leaves us groping for the practical solutions for which we were hoping. It is not too difficult to put down on paper what ideal "party government" would look like in this country, but it is quite a different thing to present practical ways of achieving that goal. "The best hope for the future of American politics and government lies in a fruitful union between presidential power and party government," is the recipe for salvation provided by Mr. Burns. He gives us good reasons why he feels the recipe could work in this country; he adds the price we will have to pay for the end product; he indicates how, in a broad manner, it might be worked out; all he fails to provide is how it actually can or will be accomplished. In fact, the final over-all effect of his last chapter, "Toward Party Government," introduces an even more frustrating note in the conclusions that the party reform might do more harm than good "unless it was coupled with participation in everyday politics by average citizens on an unprecedented scale," which in turn involves broad political education, and action based on the resultant informed electorate.

Under the new "party government" and increased presidential power, prodded and shepherded by an aroused and active electorate, Congress would of necessity undergo the needed "drastic transformation," for the leaders would then crack the whip, the seniority rule and the filibuster would disappear, the Rules Committee would suddenly begin enforcing rules instead of circumventing them, and the separation of powers theory and "checks and balances" would simply have to make their exit bow from the American governmental stage. Only in this manner can adequate congressional reform become a reality. It is not to be expected in the immediate future, for achievement of "party government" is not considered to be imminent.

This book, it must be concluded, is strong on analysis and on theoretical solutions, but is extremely weak in the tough realm of practical remedies—realistic courses of action. The analysis and theoretic solutions have been put forth many times, although not always in such a well-organized and readable manner, but the title of the volume suggests a practical attack which suddenly falls flat. Congress cannot reform itself; only a revision of our party system can set the conditions for reform. How do we get it? By education and the resultant action of awakened people. "Americans can have party government if they will make the necessary effort and pay the

price." There is very little the American people cannot have if they will make the effort and pay the price. We are again involved in the same old vicious circle, and it may well be that this is as close as we can now come to a practical solution for these problems; but at least we can indict Burns and his book for leaving Congress on trial for a considerable segment of the indefinite future.

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AUTHORITY AND THE INDIVIDUAL. By Bertrand Russell. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1949. Pp. 80. $2.00.

BERTRAND RUSSELL might be called a triple "traitor." A traitor to the glorious traditions of his country, having mercilessly criticized British imperialism before and during World War I; a traitor to his class, having always sponsored the cause of the underdog, although he is a member of England's highest aristocracy; and, last but not least, a traitor to his profession, having always written in a clear style which is considered bad form among professional philosophers.

He has remained faithful to his reputation as a lucid writer in his latest work entitled *Authority and the Individual,* which is a collection of six recent lectures.

As he puts it himself, his chief concern is the fundamental problem of "how we can combine that degree of individual initiative which is necessary for progress with the degree of social cohesion that is necessary for survival." He sees the one and the other founded upon and prompted by "an instinctive mechanism" that has been operating in man ever since he has developed into a species that was no longer deriving its nourishment from the trees of the tropical jungles. It was the "dual mechanism of friendship within the tribe and hostility to all others." The entire history of human progress and civilization, on the one hand, and the much longer record of man's inhumanity to man on the other, are condensed in these few words.

Social cohesion, or, as he puts it in his concluding lecture, security and justice "require centralized governmental control, which must extend to the creation of a world government if it is to be effective. Progress, on the contrary, requires the utmost scope for personal initiative that is compatible with social order."

Russell sees the dangers inherent in a world government which, while on the one hand preventing the recurrence of suicidal wars, might on the other hand prove to be deadly to all personal initiative and to all progress.