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DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS IN AFRICA.

by

JULIUS LEWIN.

Summary of lecture on May 4th.

African leaders want to put an end to the "misery-go-round" in their countries now that they have achieved independence. They want to break the old circle of poverty, lack of skill, and ill-health in which their people found themselves caught.

Accordingly, the question African political leaders have to face is not whether they can work a parliamentary system on the Westminster model, but what type of political system will bring rapid economic progress.

Africans wanted to raise their standard of living more than they wanted democratic institutions.

Hence their readiness to follow a leader with a magnetic personality who undertook to modernise the economy of his country.

The degree of democracy which a country can afford to maintain depends on the rate of economic and social progress which it sets itself.

If the new states have to choose between democracy and economic growth without democracy, they will, I predict, be inclined to choose the latter.

In any event, African governments have to take the initiative far more than western governments in providing what is required.

They cannot rely on private enterprise, which is usually non-existent owing to the absence of a strong middle class. Development means social change and in order to ensure that economic development occurs, public enterprise must pave the way for social change; for instance, through speeding up educational processes.

It must, however, be realized that democracy exists in a variety of forms and to different degrees all over the world.

Very few countries have really practised democracy with success on the Westminster model or even on the lines of Washington.

The 20 Latin American republics, for instance, were neither full democracies nor complete dictatorships, but something in between these two poles.

Britain had been fortunate in the conditions under which parliamentary instutions emerged and began to work in the 19th Century.

Economic growth and the accumulation of capital for further investment took place long before the franchise was extended to ordinary working people.

First the development of commerce and later the industrial revolution allowed the rise of a strong middle class. This class first won political rights for itself, reflecting its economic power, and then, in order to preserve the existing political system, enlarged it to include other classes.

The parliamentary system, including the legal rights of a loyal Opposition, worked well in Britain because the people shared a common culture, a common

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lanquage and a common religion. They could safely afford to bicker because they were agreed on the fundamentals of their common society.

This high degree of unity was lacking in the new African states. That is why the prospects of political democracy were not bright there.

This does not necessarily mean dictatorship. A presidential system allowing some scope for democratic institutions may well be preferred.

Africa needed sympathy, understanding and constructive help.

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