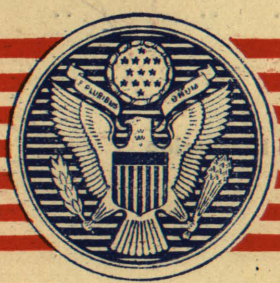


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ARMY TALKS



Democracy in America



Restricted

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EUROPEAN THEATER OF OPERATIONS, UNITED STATES ARMY

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Democracy in America	3
Illustration	..	..	..	..	..	..	8-9
Preparation	..	..	..	..	..	..	13-14
Questions for the Discussion	..	..	..	..	..	..	15

ARMY TALKS :—The PURPOSE of ARMY TALKS is to help American officers and enlisted personnel become better-informed men and women and therefore better soldiers.

ARMY TALKS are designed to stimulate discussion and thought, and, by their very nature, thus may often be controversial in content. They are not to promote or to propagandize any particular causes, beliefs or theories. Rather, they draw upon all suitable sources for fact and comment, in the American tradition, with each individual retaining his American right and heritage so far as his own opinion is concerned.

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ARMY TALKS

EUROPEAN THEATER OF OPERATIONS

DEMOCRACY IN AMERICA

THE Declaration of Independence laid down the American principle of democracy, that: "Governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, that whenever any form of Government becomes destructive of these ends (life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness), it is the right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness.

"Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shown, that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed."

So we began our life as an independent nation by saying that although we can never expect any government to be perfect, yet the government must answer to the people, and in the last analysis the people must have the final say. Our history has proved that the Declaration correctly stated, in its old - fashioned

language, the attitude of the Americans down to the present day.

We have never been 100 per cent satisfied with our Government, but we have never doubted our power, once our minds are made up, to make our Government obey the will of the people. That is the main point of democracy.

Various Meanings of Democracy

The word democracy is used in many ways, and there is no harm in giving a word several meanings provided we do not confuse our own minds. "Government by the people" is one meaning, and we have many examples of this kind of democracy, in small town-meetings, in farmers' county committees, and in all sorts of private societies that are small enough to do business in open meeting.

Another important meaning is based on the statement of the Declaration of Independence that all men are created equal. We believe that the law should treat rich and poor alike, and that all children should have an equal chance to make the best of themselves. In a general way, too, we say that a man is "democratic" if he is friendly to all kinds of people. These are all true forms of democracy, but in order to avoid confusion we have to remember that first of all democracy is

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a form of government, in which no powers are regarded as just unless they are "derived from the consent of the governed."

The democratic form of our National Government comes first because if we had a dictator and a Gestapo, none of the other kinds of democracy would be allowed. The other elements of democracy come second but they are important because only people who practice democracy in everyday life are likely to be able to work a national democracy with satisfaction.

National Democracy

There are two main features in national democracy, the system of elections and freedom of discussion. Hitler has had elections, which he naturally won hands down, but the voting was under the eye of the secret police, and discussion was not free.

This is the real difference between a democratic government and a dictator. It is not a question of how powerful the government is but of the legal forms for obtaining the consent of the governed. The dictator gets almost unanimous consent by shooting or locking up all those who venture to criticize, until the day when someone shoots him or locks him up.

It is important not to despise our own attempts at democratic government and call it dictatorial, or to say "we might as well be under Hitler," when all people mean is that they don't like their rations in wartime. The Nazi propaganda spreads that kind of talk for the purpose of weakening the nations that it wants to conquer.

Free Elections

In the United States, elections are as free as the people want them to be. There is some corruption and buying of votes. In some places the ballot is not absolutely secret, and a man may suffer if he votes "wrong." But the

people can reform these local conditions any time they make up their minds to do it, and they have often done so.

In the nation as a whole, nobody doubts that the party in power is really appealing to the voters for reelection, and we take it for granted that if the election goes against it, the party in power will step down.

A defeated President does not call on the Army to defend the White House against his successful opponent.

The American people expect the loser to be a good sport. Moreover we consider the point so important that even if the count is very close and the courts have to decide the winner, we do not start a civil war about it. The consent of the governed necessarily means that the loser does the consenting, because in the long run it is better to take a political defeat than to start shooting and lose the democratic form of government.

Who Votes

Not all the people of the nation are allowed to have a vote in an election. Nobody asks the consent of young people under 21, or of aliens who have not been naturalized or of people who have no "legal residence." Some people are excluded from voting because of race or poverty.

It is only in the past thirty years that women have been given a chance to vote. So the greatest vote ever cast for a winning Presidential candidate was less than 28 million, out of a population of about 130 million people.

Does that mean that America is not a democracy? All it means is that we are not a 100 per cent perfect democracy. We have gradually extended the right to vote. Each generation of Americans has changed the laws so as to get as wide a democratic base as it thought practical, but most Americans are not interested in theoretical perfection.

As it stands now, our system represents the will of the people as well as most people think necessary, and it will no doubt be improved as time goes on. The important point to notice is that the limitations of our democracy do not make it at all the same as dictatorship.

Free Discussion

The other main feature of national democracy is free discussion. In this department, too, we are never likely to be 100 per cent perfect, but we manage to have free discussion for practical purposes most of the time.

The chief practical obstacle to free discussion is that we are such a big country. If you wanted to express your opinion by sending just one postcard to all the Americans over 21 years old it would cost you three quarters of a million dollars to buy the postcards.

Radio time costs a lot of money, and you can't get two minutes on a newsreel just for the asking. Big newspapers take a big investment, so it is not easy to start a new one merely because you have something to say. These limitations are not the fault of anyone, and we have to be contented with as many kinds of free speech as circumstances allow.

On a national scale, we undoubtedly have free criticism of the Government, and the heads of the Government are free to answer back. Newspapers are allowed to go to great lengths, even to using material from the German short-wave, and to proposing a military dictatorship after the war.

Public officials can be attacked in ways that would be criminal libel if used on private persons. The American people are slow to suppress any expression of political opinion, because they believe in their own common sense and their own right to listen to anything that goes on.

If the Government should be too strict with fifth columnist talkers it might want to go on and suppress honest but awkward criticism, and then democracy would begin to fold up. If you are in London you can go to Hyde Park and see how the English let all sorts of people get up on soap-boxes and talk, because they know it is a good healthy way to keep democracy well ventilated.

Let Them All Talk

English people have amused themselves all through the war listening to Lord Haw-Haw on the radio, just because they knew he was a traitor and wanted to see what he would try next.

All this is entirely different from the way they do in Axis countries, where people are jailed or shot for talking against the Dictator, or for listening to the Allied radio.

One of the big ceremonies of democracy in America is the semi-annual dinner of the Gridiron Club, a society of Washington newspaper men. The newspaper men put on a show composed mainly of skits unmercifully ridiculing the Government, and they invite the President of the United States to come and sit right in front of the stage. All the Ambassadors of foreign countries are invited to come and sit at the head table and watch the President being roasted, and the President is expected to laugh at the toughest points.

All in Fun

It is all in good fun, but it is not just funny. The people who see this ceremony go away with a solemn feeling of reverence for the democracy that calmly expects the head of the Government to be a good sport. Try to imagine Mussolini or Hitler smiling while being ragged by the cleverest newspaper men in Rome or Berlin.

Aside from the national systems of

political discussion such as the newspapers and radio, there is the final court of judgment which is the opinion of the people themselves. In general, Americans feel free to talk with their friends about politics as well as about baseball or anything else, and especially during a campaign people talk and argue, working out what they think and deciding how to vote.

Personal Freedom

No one, of course, is absolutely free to do or say what he likes without consequences. A man can make friends or enemies by political talk, and most people have to get along with other people. There are times when a man may think best to keep quiet and just vote, and the errors in straw vote predictions sometimes show two or three per cent who prudently talked one way and then voted the other.

The amount of freedom is closely connected with the amount of employment; a man who thinks he could easily get another job feels pretty much at liberty to say what he pleases. This, in fact, is the main connection between full employment, social security, and all the conditions of freedom from fear, and the democratic process.

The chief condition for free discussion is not to have a Gestapo, but after that everything that gives us the sense of not being caught in a trap releases our freedom to discuss and to operate a democratic form of government.

Education and Opportunity

The school system has long been regarded as one of the foundations of democracy, simply because knowing how to read helps one to understand what is going on at a distance. We now know that good schools are also the principal means of giving everyone a fair chance in life.

The old days when most Americans

learned their trade on the farm or in small shops are gone. Today it is important to learn something of science and mathematics in order to be successful in a mechanical job. Even farming has a lot of book-learning attached to it, and for everyone it is an advantage to know as much as possible of the geography and history that are governing our lives.

The people do not have to decide all the little details of government, but they do have to decide on the main outlines of policy that may lead to prosperity or depression, and 20 years later perhaps to peace or war. The job of statesmen and political leaders is to put the questions to the people so that they will know what they are discussing and what they are voting about in an election. But the people can never afford to trust the Lord to give them always leaders who can make the issues clear.

The Need for Questions

The people themselves must always be discussing and asking questions, and the better educated the people are, the better the chance of getting a clear decision that represents their real desires. The more clearly the people know what they want, the more likely they are to find political candidates who will make sense.

The foundations of free discussion, therefore, in a country that has no Gestapo, are education and plenty of jobs, with enough provision for old age or accident so that most of the citizens are not afraid of anything.

Most Americans believe that no one, unless he has committed a crime, ought to have to live in constant fear. There is a proper place for argument about ways and means, because people are not all agreed on how to prevent unemployment, or even on the best way to provide insurance.

But most people are not ordinarily

going to give their main attention to discussing the affairs of the nation, which generally come up for a big argument only once in four years. Most of life is really made up of local affairs.

Large numbers of Americans who take an interest in political questions are interested in town or county or State governments. In addition, a vast amount of work that might be done by governments is actually done by private organizations of all sorts. People govern themselves in clubs, in churches, in labor union locals, and lodges, as well as in school districts and municipalities.

All these organizations are part of the democratic way of life. In them we find leaders and followers, committees and steam-rollers, deals and log-rolling, propaganda and argument, and all the elements of human nature in full cry. By belonging to such organizations, millions of people learn how to get along in democratic ways, they learn that nothing is ever perfect, but that many good and useful things can be worked out in practice.

The Wrong Way to Cure Corruption

It is important that people should know by personal experience the way human nature behaves, so that they do not throw their liberties away in disgust because of the faults of democracy, but instead go ahead with the job of making it work.

It was Mussolini who said that democracy was a rotting corpse. Democracy in Italy was corrupt and ineffective enough to justify powerful efforts for reform, but was it correct to cure the disease by killing the patient?

In disgust at the faults of their own democracy, the Italians threw away the right of free discussion and of free elections, and turned the whole show over to the Duce. The results were

not encouraging, and now they have to start over, after many of their most intelligent democratic leaders have been killed and try to build a democratic system that will work.

The story of Italy shows that the people of a country can be wrong, and can ruin themselves thoroughly. But it seems to be clear that so long as a country holds on to free speech and free elections, the people will find out their own mistakes before it is too late, and will not suffer so much in the long run.

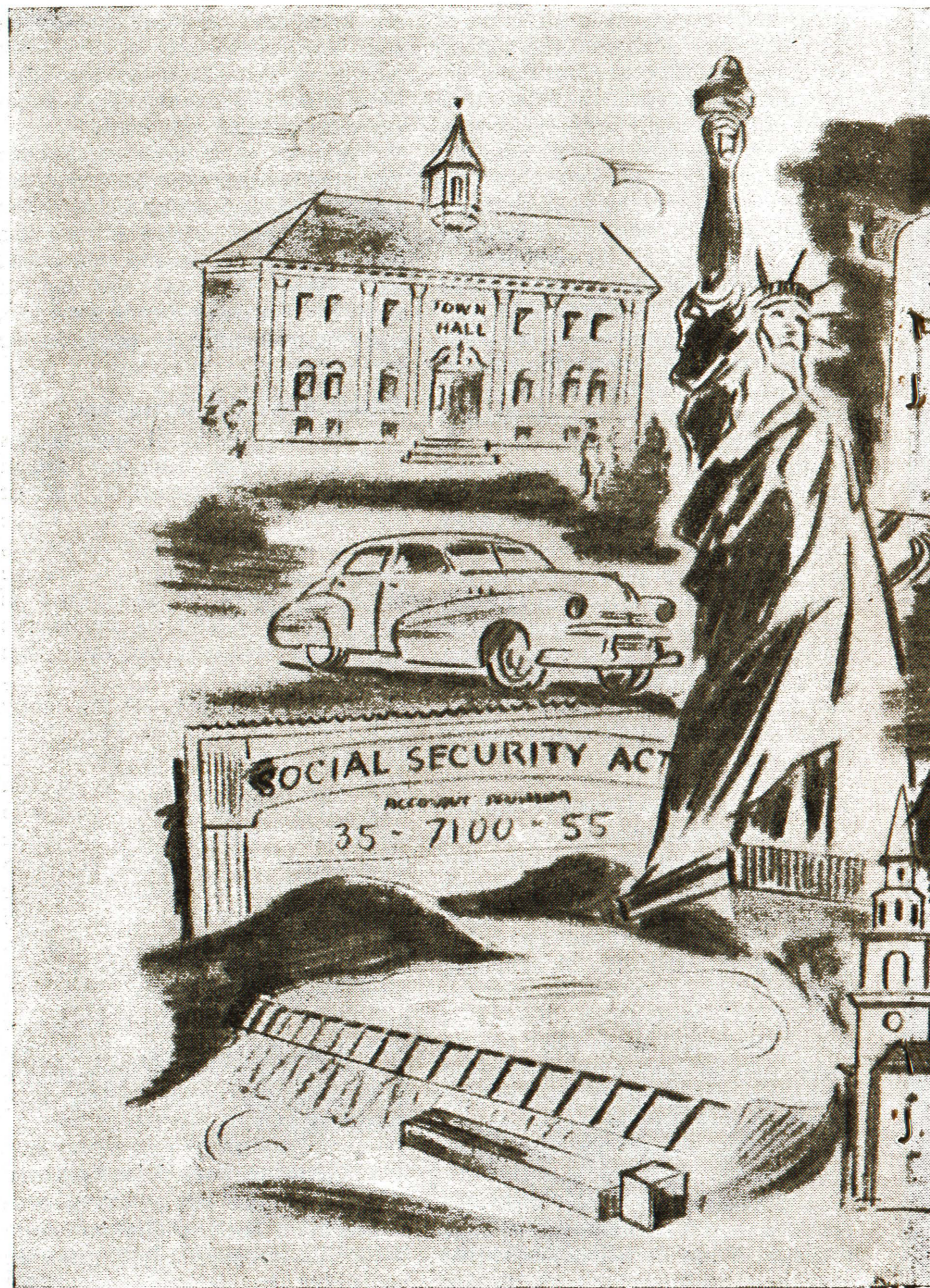
Representative Government

Aside from the small organizations in which people actually govern themselves, the methods of indirect government are important. Large organizations, and especially the nation, must be governed indirectly, and the day-by-day work of government is bound to be carried on by officials who make decisions on their own responsibility.

The people cannot run the Army and Navy, or even the Post Office. But the government is legally the servant of the people. On election day, the party in power "points to the record," meaning that it pleads with its boss, the people, to let it keep the job. Between elections, sensible politicians naturally try to "keep their ear to the ground"; that is, they try to get any complaints, and meet them either by changing their policies or by argument. This is why politicians watch the unofficial polls of public opinion, and carefully analyze the letters that come in from their constituents.

The Question Period in England

There are also various official ways of keeping a National Government in touch with its people. In England the Parliament has a regular question period, when the Prime Minister and





other Cabinet Members have to answer for their various departments. The Members of Parliament put their questions in advance, so that the Cabinet can come prepared with statistics or other facts, or can have a chance to report that a condition is already corrected.

Any citizen can write to his Member of Parliament and complain that a soldier was mistreated in the guard-house, or that metal scrap is being dumped for fill, or that he wants a Second Front. If the Member thinks there is something in it he can bring it up, and the Cabinet must answer.

The Opposition members have the special job of hunting for questions to embarrass the "Government," i.e., the Administration. Often the questions and answers are printed in the newspapers, and if the people are interested they may raise a storm, and even force the Cabinet to resign, as happened after the European collapse in 1940.

The Investigation Committee

In the United States we do not have a regular question period, though the heads of government agencies have to appear before appropriate committees of Congress and answer whatever questions the committee members may ask. Congressmen and Senators often make speeches criticizing the Administration, and if they are backed by public interest in the question, may force the Administration to answer.

Probably the most effective institution for holding the Government responsible is the investigating committee. A Senate, or House Committee, has power to call anyone before it, whether he is a private citizen, a soldier, or a civil official, and dig out the facts about what is going on. Its conclusions may be quite wrong, but they may be right, and, in any case, this system of examination keeps the public servants

from thinking they can do as they please without being held responsible.

When Woodrow Wilson was President, he tried to introduce some of the features of parliamentary government, as they are found in almost all democratic countries except the United States. He wanted the President and Cabinet to appear regularly before Congress, to explain their work and answer questions. He was not able to get this system established because of being engaged in the war, but the President now usually goes before Congress to read his messages instead of sending them to be read as the custom was before Wilson's time.

The President, and some other high officials, have also established a custom of holding press conferences, at which the newspaper men can ask embarrassing questions. Sometimes the answers are "off the record"—confidential information given so that newspapers will not bark up the wrong tree. Sometimes the President can be directly quoted, at other times the gist of what he said is attributed to "a White House spokesman" or to "informed circles."

There are necessarily some secrets in Government, especially in wartime or when war is threatening, but even though the newspapers usually keep secrets that are entrusted to them, no President could use this device to get away with actions that were intended to hurt the public interest. The press conference is therefore a real instrument of democratic control.

Federal Government in America

When the United States of America was first established, it was a sort of League of Nations, rather than a Government. The Articles of Confederation left to the thirteen States the right to make their own tariff laws, print their own money, and dicker with foreign countries. They

could contribute to the central Government or not, as they pleased.

This system broke down, and the Constitution was adopted "to form a more perfect union," which meant strengthening the central Government by giving it the power to tax, to control interstate and foreign trade, to control the national money, and to handle all foreign affairs. That is why the Constitution does not sound like the Declaration of Independence.

How the Constitution Grew

The original Constitution was first of all intended to strengthen the nation, at the expense of the sovereign powers of the States, because of fear of depression at home and attacks from Europe. It also was intended to prevent too much interference by the common people. In its original form it was not particularly democratic. Since that time the Constitution has grown with the nation. The national government has become stronger and at the same time more democratic.

At the very beginning, the first ten amendments which we call the "Bill of Rights" had to be added in order to have the people accept the Constitution at all. These represent the influence of the Declaration of Independence. The people had fought for liberty, and insisted on having it written into the law.

The Electoral College came next. It was supposed to be a free assembly of the most influential citizens who would talk things over and pick out a President and Vice President. The people quickly turned the Electoral College into a rubber stamp, and no Elector would now dare to use his judgment after being chosen.

The Electoral system is awkward, and has the drawback that under certain conditions a minority of the voters can get a majority of electoral votes. But this cannot happen when the people are

strongly enough set on one candidate to give him a good majority. There is an advantage in the fact that whoever is elected usually gets a sweep of the electoral votes, which gives the country a feeling of confidence in their own decision.

The admission of 35 new states strengthened the Federal Government by the very fact that they all had to apply for membership and submit their constitutions for approval. The result of the war of 1861-5 settled the principle that no state can resign from the Union.

The many economic problems of a growing country, and the new public services that have appeared because of modern science and invention, necessarily caused the Federal Government to grow, as all national governments have grown in the past hundred years. At the same time the influence of the people over its government has gone on growing.

Steady Increase of Democracy

In 1913 women were given the vote by a Constitutional Amendment, and Senators, who had before then been chosen by state legislatures, were obliged by another Amendment to appeal to the direct vote of the people. Later came the radio, which allows all the people to listen to the President and to his chief opponents, instead of depending on newspaper reports of speeches. The public opinion polls, and the growing habit of writing to Washington, help to keep the public officials in a proper state of uncertainty about the next election.

Altogether, our Government, like the British and the other democracies, has grown more powerful and more democratic at the same time. There is no guarantee that progress will continue in the same direction, nor any reason to suppose that progress is now finished. Our past history indicates

that each generation makes such changes as it sees fit.

During the past 20 years, many people, including Mussolini and Hitler, have proclaimed that democracy was on trial for its life. It is worth while understanding in what ways this was correct.

According to Nazi theory, the best and strongest must survive, and so, they said, the efficient, youthful, vital dictatorships had to wipe out the rotten, corrupt, and dying democracies. We do not admit that might makes right, and we believe the little countries of Western Europe were better countries than Germany, even though the Germans were able to overwhelm them with tanks and planes.

But the young Nazis believe might makes right, and the United Nations are teaching them that on that basis we are right and they are wrong.

Are Our Enemies More Efficient ?

But even though might does not make right, there is some virtue in a nation being able to meet danger and organize itself to live through the crisis. Efficiency is worth something, and we know our democratic countries are slow-moving compared with a dictatorship that can decide everything without argument.

Do you remember how Mussolini made the trains run on time ? There was a real question, for a while, whether democratic countries could do a good enough job of managing their affairs to be worth keeping. How have we come out ?

England took the brunt of it in 1940. England seemed to be hopelessly worn out, inefficient, unable to make up her mind, the dying heart of a dying Empire. By 1942, with millions of her men in the Armed Forces, and all the obstacles of being actually under fire, England was producing more war material per head of population than

any country in the world, democratic or otherwise.

Most Americans, even if they are stationed in England, have no notion of the efficiency of British war production, which is hidden away in secret factories in unexpected places. It is immense and still increasing.

The Fairy Tale is Busted

We know in our own country how we started with unpreparedness and confusion, and then pulled ourselves together into a tremendous production of ships and planes and guns. The same thing has happened in Australia and New Zealand.

The fairy tale of German and Italian efficiency is busted. The Germans are good engineers, but the British and Americans are better. The Germans are good organizers in the short run, but in the long run their campaigns have failed, their government of captured territory has fallen to pieces, their theories of the use of air power have proved wrong, and their submarine campaign came too late to win the war.

As the British Prime Minister told us recently, Britain made plenty of mistakes but God mercifully provided that the Nazis always made worse ones. That is merely a way of saying that democracy with all of its faults seems to get into less fatal troubles than the fascist dictatorships. As an instrument for getting what the people really want, our system of free argument seems to be as effective as any.

We are passing the test of military survival, and have good hopes of meeting the test of reorganization after the fighting stops. The common American belief, on which nearly all Americans agree, is that even though we can never find perfect answers to all our problems, we can come as near as humanly possible by continuing our familiar habit of free elections and free discussions.

Preparation

Reasons for Topic : Any examination of the democratic way of life forces even the most casual reader to demand of himself such questions as : In what ways can democracy in the United States be improved? Who is to blame if we have poor government in the United States? Should we in the U.S. Army discuss the strength and weakness of our government? These are questions which should be asked, and more important still, should be answered. They are the bulwarks of good discussion, and they are likewise the bastions of good democracy. If they do not make men think, which is primary, and later act, they become indicators of the perils in which democracy may be at present existing.

No topic could be selected at this time which needs less justification than the subject of this issue. Whatever part, whether small or large, we as individuals have taken in our democratic form of government, we can never know too much about it, or give it too much thoughtful consideration. The author has for a number of years made it his particular business to know about the democracy and to write about it in a cogent, straightforward manner. Here, in a steady but provocative style, he has enumerated the ideas which lay behind the building of the American government, and the way they function in the American electorate. He has indicated the foundation stones, he has examined the edifice, and he has with equal candor pointed out the cracks and leaks in the democratic form of government in the United States today.

Preparation for Discussion : There are many approaches which can be made to the material, but all are contingent upon a basic understanding of the topic. Therefore, ARMY TALKS should receive the careful attention of the discussion leader. It is suggested that this issue of ARMY TALKS

be read through rapidly and then studied in detail. Outlined notes are the obvious method of correlating and assessing the points to be followed.

Divisions for Discussion : It may be that the discussion will get off to a hard-hitting rapid start, that will disregard any attempted demarcations. But the discussion leader will be wise to establish a number of points from which to lead. The subject headings of the article offer advantageous periods, and the leader will undoubtedly desire to add his own. An historical approach may prove advisable. Some such periods as the following are suggested : How was the democratic form of government established in the United States ? Why has it been amended during the years since the writing of the Constitution ? Has the Constitution proved a feasible and workable vehicle of government ? Have the American people shouldered the responsibilities of their government ? And have they felt free to criticize the government while doing so ? Moreover, how does the American form of democracy compare with the British ? Such periods, which are only suggestive, may tend to bring the discussion of the group along a developing and extending line of thought.

Presentation of Topic : This is a topic which must be discussed frequently and vehemently if the very core and sinew of democracy is to be maintained. As in all discussion groups it is suggested that the discussion leader assume an objective, and completely tolerant attitude towards the topic, and allow the discussion to follow its own course. There are vast areas of indifference and ignorance in the minds of many Americans in connection with the entire history and comprehension of democracy. It is the purpose of this issue of ARMY TALKS to awaken understanding and stimulate awareness of the individual's role in maintaining a living, functioning democracy. Certainly it is essential that we know our own form of government today better than we have ever known it before, with all of its potential greatness, and with its possibilities of weakness. Consequently, let us approach this subject with vigor, with candor, and our native shrewdness. Let us assemble the facts, and govern our discussion by them. Let us label opinion, when indulged in, as such.

QUESTIONS FOR THE DISCUSSION

Q. : What is your conception of the meaning of democracy ? What is the main responsibility incumbent upon every citizen living in a democracy ?

Q. : Has anyone lived in a locality where his vote was not secret ? What effect did that have on your freedom to vote ?

Q. : Has anyone any experience of a place where a man could not discuss politics or working conditions ? Or where meetings were not allowed ? When should the police forbid or break up meetings in streets or parks ?

Q. : What effect does it have on your feeling of freedom when you believe you could leave your job and get as much pay somewhere else ? Or when you feel that if you lost your job you could not get another ?

Q. : Have you ever known a case of railroading in a criminal trial ? Have you ever known any locality where criminals were usually able to escape punishment ? Have you sat on a jury ? What effect on liberty do you think there is if the courts are good or bad ? What do you know about criminal law and methods of trial in Germany and Italy ? In England ? Discuss the case of the boy who was whipped by order of a local British Court, and the behavior of the higher courts and the newspapers.

The initial talk should be brief and provocative, and planned to draw out the interest of the men. Discussion is intended for everyman's participation ; it should be guided without being dominated.

Lectures, brains-trusts, and informal talk sessions on this and allied topics can be organized, and become an important part of the complete program. It is suggested that Special Service and Education Officers communicate with the Regional Secretaries of the Central Advisory Council for Adult Education in H.M. Forces.

It is further suggested that discussion leaders make constant use of Vol. I No. 1 of ARMY TALKS, the Handbook for Discussion Leaders. Gradually leaders will discover genuine satisfaction in conducting a discussion group. It is an aim which demands the best efforts of everyone who attempts to achieve it.

