Editorial

"OH, CONGRESS!"

Why is it that nine times out of ten these days a suggestion that Congress may relieve a bad situation is greeted with a resigned and sceptical "oh, Congress!" Half the time there goes along with the exclamation a look of amused pity for the simple-mindedness of the suggester.

Congress has no caste with a great body of people. It is a thing tolerated - something we have to put up with, like a smoky chimney - better than no chimney, perhaps, but a disappointing arrangement - not what we hoped or expected it to be.

What is the trouble? Certainly it is not idleness. Congress is busy - at times distressingly busy. Certainly it is not lack of ability. Whatever you may say of individuals there is a fairly high level of intelligence in both Senate and House.

But this industry and ability fail to function directly and simply. They are never centered on getting some definite piece ofnational business out of the way in the promptest and most efficient fashion. Compare the way Congress puts through a big undertaking with the way the Conference on the Limitation of Armament tackled and put through the job. It stated its case, found what it could agree on - agreed! Never once in the three months of the Conference was the objective confused - the

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only question was how much of the objective could be attained. Because all was not possible, the Conference did not fall back. It carried on, took what it could - agreed - adjourned. A good piece of business decently done.

But set Congress at such an objective, it proceeds at once to confuse the . Congress detests clearness - simplicity - the shortest line between two points. If we have them it proceeds promptly to destroy them. It can be depended upon to confuse - never to clarify.

And this is not an inability to think straight - to apply common sense. If it was their private business they were handling, nine-tenths of them would not waver. It is the mischievous habit of viewing nothing as a national interest - everything as a party interest. Politics are used to muddle and hinder every question that comes before Congress however obvious the solution may be. Leave the plainest problem - that is, plain to a common sense uncontaminated by political thinking - long enough in Congress and nobody knows what to think.

No body which continually muddles our minds is going to keep our respect. We resent the confusion, the uncertainty it injects into pressing problems that good sense tells us might be solved in a reasonable time if pressed with singleness of purpose. But there's the hitch - Congress has no singleness of purpose. It is two bodies intent on outwitting one another -

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in besmearing one another's achievements, however respectable; in proving when anything is accomplished that one and not the other is responsible, and therefore should be kept in or put in power.

Where there is confusion of thought there can be no sense of greatness working through the thing. Congress has ceased to make us feel any longer the bigness of the adventure of Democracy. In earlier days it was always to the front - the great experiment undertaken to bring freedom and joy and opportunity to all men. The struggles were over the best way of reaching the big end, how to place it more solidly, keep it more desirable. It was to realize the possibilities in the undertaking that the parties plainly fought. Now the parties fight for self-preservation and the fight has no illumination of disinterested purpose in it. Rarely does one get even a reminiscent gleam from Congress that it senses that its great business is to develop the scheme of Democracy - get constantly out of it more well-being for more people.

We resent this failure to understand that part of its business is to enlarge our faith in our undertaking. We still believe in our experiment, but we want a leadership that illumines it - kindles our devotion afresh - shows us a larger future in it. Congress does not do that. We preserve our faith in spite of Congress.

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How can one have pride in a body that habitually confuses where it is expected to clarify, which dulls faith it is expected to enlarge? Can it rightfully complain that we cry "oh, Congress!" when its name is mentioned so long as it persists in belittling itself by putting political before national business.

The pity of it is that we would so like to be proud of Congress. We really detest having merely to tolerate it. We would like to see it going at its business in a big impersonal way. We would like to see the fire of faith in its eye - the sense of singleness of purpose in its conduct. It's a pity we are obliged to do for ourselves what we would be so proud to have it help us do better than we feel we can do by ourselves - think straight - keep the faith.

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