

TODAY and TOMORROW

By WALTER LIPPMANN

A Tragedy in the Making

THAT the President's position has become very difficult is so evident to all experienced observers in Washington that not even his friendliest supporters deny it. He is at a point where he stands a better than even chance of wrecking himself, his party, and his whole program, both domestic and foreign. For this he is himself responsible, though it is the country, and very possibly the world, which may have to suffer the consequences. Mr. Roosevelt is following a course of personal conduct which, if carried any further, will almost certainly paralyze the operation of the government and illustrate once more the weakness of democracy.

The root of the trouble is that Mr. Roosevelt is unable to make up his mind whether he means to be a national statesman or a factional politician. He is trying to be both. It cannot be done. And in the end he will forfeit his national leadership and he will be defeated in his factional enterprises.

During the past thirty days, that is, since the convening of Congress, he has laid out a program of national defense and a foreign policy designed to prevent war which can be carried out only if he has the broadest kind of national support. He has followed it up at once by a series of specific actions in domestic politics which have divided his party, have divided him from Congress, and have brought him to a position, so far as his political influence is concerned, which begins to look extraordinarily like that of Wilson at the end of his administration, and of Hoover at the end of his.

But whereas Wilson had to struggle with the aftermath of a world war and Hoover with the effects of a world-wide depression, the President has provoked his own difficulties and almost daily he aggravates them.

The beginning of his present troubles was the ill-fated decision of last summer to purge the Democratic party of the Senators who had shown some independence, particularly in regard to the Supreme Court. The purge failed completely. The voters would have none of it. But Mr. Roosevelt has refused to accept the result and to abide by it. One of his very first acts after Congress met was to appoint to his Cabinet Mr. Harry Hopkins, the man who, as former head of the W. P. A., represents to every one of the Senators who were to be purged the power which threatened them with political destruction.

Mr. Roosevelt's next move was to insist stubbornly and unco-operatively on a deficiency appropriation for W. P. A. which, in the eyes of Congress and of a large part of his own party, symbolized the President's determination to accept no important reform in the system of relief. His next move was to challenge one of the most respected figures in American public life, Senator Glass of Virginia, on a judicial appointment. Had the President had his way in this, it would have been regarded as meaning that the political position of Senator Glass in the state of Virginia was to be attacked by the use of Presidential patronage.

The personal merits of Mr. Hopkins, the complicated question of whether the W. P. A. will need next June to have \$150,000,000 more than have been appropriated, the personal qualifications of Judge Roberts, of Virginia, the abstract question of Senatorial courtesy—all these things are beside the point. The fact is that the President's actions are re-

garded by Congress as an attempt to carry on the purge after the purge had been defeated by the Democratic voters in the primaries and by the people generally in the November election.

On top of all that came the appointment of Mr. Thomas Amle to the Interstate Commerce Commission. Now Mr. Amle is by his own profession in his official biography "active in the movement for new political alignments." That means that he wants, or has wanted until he became interested in a good job, to break up the Democratic party, and then to organize on the ruins some sort of very radical Farmer-Labor party. Taken in conjunction with the purge of last summer and the attempt to continue it this winter, the Amle appointment is bound to be regarded by the Democrats in Congress as evidence that the President is trying to rule by ruining their party.

All these things together have precipitated a situation where the controlling issue in Washington is not the national defense and the national interest, but the life and death of the President's political party and the political existence of the most prominent politicians in it.

The effect on the Republican opposition is as demoralizing as it is on the Democrats. For though the Republicans made gains in November which indicate that they are likely to win in 1940, the Republican party has by no means recovered from the disasters of the past eight years. It is not yet ready to assume the responsibilities for the national government. It has no program. It is not really united. And it has as yet few well known and seasoned leaders.

They could no doubt be developed in the next two years if conditions were such that the party could win in 1940 only if it were united on a program under positive leadership. But the disruption of the Democrats offers the Republicans an altogether too easy opportunity to win, too easy for their own good or for the good of the country. Their present policy is to let the President destroy the Democrats. Their only tactics are to fish in the troubled waters. The fishing is very good.

For they find themselves in a situation where they can ignore the great tradition of their party, the tradition of Theodore Roosevelt, Elihu Root and Charles Evans Hughes—to name only Republicans who are not involved in the present struggle. And what the Republicans are headed for at the present time is something very much like 1920, with their party controlled by their politicians rather than by their nationally-minded leaders. They are under no inducement to make the effort of deserving to win; they have much too good a chance to win by capitalizing the disruption of the Democrats.

The President alone can avert a general political disintegration in which the country will suffer because its two parties are demoralized. He has not much time to lose. Unless he can rise above factionalism, above his grudges, above his minor purposes, unless he can change the climate by displaying an enlightened magnanimity, the United States will have for more than two years to come a government incapable of governing.