

Problems of democratic reconstruction as seen by a Swiss

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World War, we solemnly pledged ourselves before the whole world to defend our neutrality by force of arms. During both world conflicts, the respect of our foreign policy depended upon whether we were ready, at all times, to keep mobilized a large part of our army, a part sufficiently important to have our neutrality respected. Thus, owing to our army's special task, there is a marked difference between military service in peace and in war time. This is why we call the latter "active service." This means that we must not only have enough soldiers ready for all eventualities, but that we must continuously improve our equipment and keep on with the intensive training of all ranks. When active service lasts a long time, this is no easy thing. Troops do not have to fight, and yet they must always be ready to fight. They run the risk of taking things less seriously and of becoming neglectful in their efforts. However, until now, we have been able to master all signs of discouragement. On the one hand, the social side of the question has been solved; it now creates no more difficulties. On the other hand, we see so much real suffering on our frontiers that every man understands why he has to stand there and hold out. But more important is that every Confederate possesses such thorough political maturity that he is able to act on his own consideration of things and not merely on a general frame of mind. After five years of active service, we not only have a better armament, but a stricter discipline and a firmer attitude.

The protection of neutrality is only possible if we possess a defensive organization which is considered to be militarily effective by the great powers. An ordinary police force is not enough. Effective defence is only possible if the army is backed up by the whole people and if all material means are put at its disposal. We reply to total warfare by total defence. In our democracy every citizen is required to take an active part in the building up of the State, he therefore is equally responsible for its defence. Thus, we demand of every citizen a political and military watchfulness which is made possible by collaboration in numerous practical matters. In war time, the government, which has been elected by the people, is given full powers and entire liberty of action, so that it can protect the army against any political manoeuvres or attacks from a fifth column. Economic preparations must allow us, if necessary, to exist without imports. Social measures binding the individual to the State are strengthened, so that the citizen can fulfil his duty without being worried by financial considerations. The army itself is developed and trained according to the technical and tactical evolution of war, so that it is ready to face a well trained aggressor. All our political, economic and military preparations tend to demonstrate to the great powers that an attack on our little country would not pay. The whole world must know that freedom and independence are our foremost aim. We are a peace-loving people, and we are ready to serve peace with all our strength; but, should our freedom and independence be threatened, we would not be frightened by war. We would stand up in their defence. Neither are we ready to make, in exchange for fallacious advantages, any kind of political or economic concessions which might sooner or later deprive us of our independence. During the present conflict, especially since 1940, we have often heard bitter criticism and derogating insinuations concerning the ability of small nations to defend themselves. It is a fact that certain powers have not

been up to the mark in this respect during this war. Had they been better aware of realities and had they possessed better trained and equipped armies, they might have resisted much longer and thus influenced the whole course of hostilities. However, the heroic resistance of some small nations during the last four years and the numerous liberation movements which came to light during last summer have shown that even small States possess a certain power of resistance, provided this power is properly organized and led. We can say that we have organized our defence with a view to facing any attack by land or by air, and that we will always remain capable of defending our freedom and independence.

PROBLEMS OF DEMOCRATIC RECONSTRUCTION AS SEEN BY A SWISS.

Under the auspices of the London Group of the Nouvelle Société Helvétique, an opportunity was afforded our Swiss Colony to hear this topic expounded with authority by one of our eminent compatriots, Dr. Hans Zbinden. This distinguished writer and philosopher had come over on a short visit with the Delegation of Swiss Editors and Publishers, and those who gathered at the Dorchester Hotel on Thursday, 12th July, were deeply impressed by his great learning and the sincerity of his exposition of the problems confronting the future of democracy.

The speaker was introduced to his audience by Mr. A. F. Suter, President of the London Group of the N.S.H. and Dr. Zbinden made it clear at the outset that the views he expressed were entirely his own, and not necessarily representative of Swiss opinion as a whole.

We were reminded that whilst military operations have ceased, the fight for Europe still lies ahead; a great battle remains to be fought and won, that of the moral rehabilitation of our Continent, based on true and lasting democratic principles. Five years of strife have given new values to the essence of democracy, of which the greatest, freedom, in all its aspects, has acquired a fresher and more dramatic meaning to men of to-day. One is instinctively led to think first of economic reconstruction, but restoration of moral and spiritual standards is just as urgent. The guarantee of success in this direction lies in a conscious choice of those entrusted with the leadership of nations. This in itself is the essence of democracy, and the speaker recalled an opinion of Bernard Shaw voiced twenty years ago to a group of Swiss students to whom he said "The future of democracy resides in a good selection of responsible men."

In times of crisis, as if by a miracle, great leaders are invariably discovered; such men always exist in normal times too, and must be found. But society in its valuation of the best has undergone many changes in the course of years. In the 17th Century "l'honnête homme" was considered the best, to be displaced in the 18th Century by "l'homme de bon sens," and subsequently by the "nationalist" and in the present days the "mass man" or the man in the street, as we know him. The advent of the totalitarian State precipitated this levelling down, in which the speaker sees one of the chief dangers to democracy.

Dr. Zbinden went on to deal with modern education in relation to democracy; here too, he asserted,

we are witnessing a tendency, the repercussion of which, if not arrested, will do harm to our social structure. He sees the danger in too much technical and scientific training at the expense of the cultural values. Through excess of learning of a purely scientific character, the mind becomes alien to the realities of life and loses reverence for the human values; the result is what someone defined as "specialised ignorance." Our own Pestalozzi was aware of this when he observed that technical, scientific or artistic training becomes a danger when imparted to those unfit to receive it or to use it constructively.

Cultural values, the speaker affirmed, are not taken seriously nowadays; true there is a greater demand for books, but this is no criterion, and the fact remains that personal culture is no longer an aim in itself. The remedy lies in a reform of our methods of education, to provide more room for the teaching of the moral and cultural values. Better no school at all, stated the speaker, if the spirit of individual initiative is not taught in them, and he quoted Flaubert "le génie n'est pas rare, mais ce qu'il faut avoir c'est la conscience." The speaker sees a further threat to democracy in the abuse of controls, centralisation, and over-planning; they each lead to new chaos, and create a situation in which the individual will to participate in the life of the nation and accept responsibility is destroyed. It must be one of the chief concerns of every high thinking man to give his whole-hearted co-operation to the peace-time purposes of democracy and emulate our great Vinet when he said "C'est pour servir que nous sommes libres."

The needs of the moment create an international solidarity of all sane forces, and Switzerland has her moral responsibility and her part to play in this post-war reconstruction of democracy. Five years of isolation have engendered at home a certain fatigue and economically and spiritually the atmosphere is somewhat stuffy; especially as regards the young generation, Switzerland is in need of fresh air. The notion of material security first must give way to a new appreciation of the higher spiritual values of national life. From the humanitarian work which Switzerland pursued during the war years, she must now turn to a humanistic fight for national revival. The leaders of Swiss conscience must give the nation its directives.

It is felt at home that Federalism as we know it, offers a sure basis for a new European structure. Small States—and Neutral at that—are not over-popular nowadays, and yet small entities will always have their part to play. They feel the urge to increase in vital spirit what they lack in vital space.

Nations will choose their leaders among the better organisers, the most specialised or the more ruthless, but a fighting humanism, a feeling of conscience allied to an ideal of justice, is a sounder and more solid basis on which to rebuild. This, the speaker concluded, Switzerland can offer as her contribution towards reconstruction of democracy.

Dr. Zbinden answered with erudition various questions put to him by members of his audience, and the meeting was brought to a close by the Chairman, Mr. A. F. Suter, and the Swiss Minister, Mr. P. Ruegger, who, in some well-chosen words, both expressed to the lecturer the gratitude of those present for his eloquent and spirited address.

M.R.

NOUVELLE SOCIÉTÉ HELVÉTIQUE.

We are pleased to announce that the S.S.E. in Berne has sent to London a copy of the famous film "MARIE LOUISE," a film which depicts the life of French refugee children in Switzerland during the war. Marie Louise, the little heroine, has been placed with a family in the Canton Berne, where she is very happy and it is most amusing to listen to the ease and fluency of a conversation carried on in French and Bärner-tüütsch simultaneously.

The film has had an excellent reception in Lisbon and elsewhere in Europe; it is a non-propaganda reel, but gives a very clear conception of the benefit these children have derived from their stay in our country, and of their gratitude. The film is supplied with English sub-titles.

Arrangements are now being made to show the film in London during September next, and all details will be made public in due course.

The Committee.

CITY SWISS CLUB.

Monthly Meeting.

The Monthly Meeting of the City Swiss Club took place on Tuesday, July 3rd, at Brown's Hotel, and was preceded by a dinner.

About eighty Members and Guests were present. Mr. Bon, the President welcomed Monsieur Ruegger, the Swiss Minister and expressed his pleasure at seeing amongst the guests, Monsieur Escher, Counsellor of Legation and successor to Monsieur Girardet.

After the agenda had been dealt with, Mr. C. Wüthrich, M.I.E.E. read a paper on "Celtic Numismatics in Switzerland," dealing with various aspects of pre-historic and pre-Roman evolution in our country, and the coins which were then minted and/or in use, by the tribes.

This highly interesting subject was presented in a very attractive manner by the speaker, who was ably assisted by Mr. Fer showing a number of lantern slides, also a few of the actual coins were shown. Following the suggestion of some of the members this lecture will be published shortly in the "Swiss Observer."

The President warmly thanked Mr. Wüthrich for his excellent address, which, judging from the applause rendered was highly appreciated by the members. Monsieur Ruegger, also extended thanks to the lecturer for having presented an interesting subject in a masterful and attractive manner.

Close of the Meeting 9 o'clock.

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OUR NEXT ISSUE.

We hope to go to press again on Friday, August 31st, 1945, and take this opportunity of thanking the following subscribers for their enlarged subscription: P. Bornand, A. F. Gubeli, W. Beckmann, A. Grau, H. Epprecht, Ch. Fer, A. Kunzler, P. Moll, M. A. Oboussier, Miss E. Tschäetli, F. Haegler, W. O. Marbach, E. Schefer, W. C. Bosshardt, N. V. Sowden, A. F. Frickart, H. J. Morff, J. H. Berger, P. Lequint, J. Heimerdinger, Swiss Y.M.C.A.