

H.S.H. Lecture

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N. S. H. LECTURE.

II.

How do our political parties react to the tendencies revealed in the Fronten? The Liberal-Democratic party, for instance. You know, you have heard, that some people look upon them as they do on the Socialists. They are, one is told, the party which excels in all those compromises which, to some people to-day, have a distasteful smell. They are to others, the unbelievers, because, although they pretend to hold religious tradition in esteem, they do not really care for it, as is shown by the fact, I argue now the case of their opponents in the Fronten, and to a certain extent in the camp of the young Catholic Conservatives, that they form the biggest contingents of the Freemasons, which some people in Switzerland, for reasons which have nothing to do whatever with Swiss politics, but are purely of foreign origin, consider nowadays as the very incarnation of lack of patriotism. If we come down to facts, the situation might be described as this: The Liberal-Democratic party are, of course, responsible to a certain, even a great, extent, for everything which has happened in the political, financial and economic field, together with the Catholic Conservatives, the peasants and the various smaller groups, who have had from time to time, or permanently, their representatives in the government. Most people thought, till the crisis began, that they were doing quite well. They had a great many achievements to their credit. We had done not too badly during the war. We had some troubles immediately after the war, but we recovered again. As a whole, we had been for decades economically in ascendancy. It is absurd to argue the other way round. When the crisis began, people began to think the fault might be with the government. This somewhat hasty conclusion is very typical for the population of a country which, having very few unfortunate experiences during the last century, had come to the point where it took steady economic and financial progress for granted. We have at times shown a keen interest in foreign politics. But we have been less eager to collect knowledge about the economic and financial happenings in the world, and this lack, I am very much afraid, has to a great extent made it possible that the crisis, when it came, took us by surprise.

One may argue that those who were in charge of our affairs should have given us a warning. I suppose some tried, and if they did not succeed in, or abstained from doing so, it was the *esprit de camaraderie* which prevented them! You cannot expect a Conservative to have the same views on economics as a Liberal with some faded Free Trade leanings — much less about education. But from the very moment that they sit together in the same government, they have to control their public utterances, and this infallibly creates that certain confidence in compromise which expresses itself best in the sentence, "We shall be able to pull through." The question, will they be able? causes to-day more anxiety than it did even some months ago, and I am told that the lightheartedness with which many politicians used then to talk about the youth movements has made place to a more searching mood. As things are, and in spite of all the more politically tinted enterprises of the Fronten, who, like their inspirers in Germany, seem to think that what matters most is to get rid of the old school of politicians, our economic troubles will be in the foreground, and mistakes committed in this sphere will make themselves felt immediately, and bring about more and more violent attacks.

I am not able to give you any figures tonight about the strength of those organised in the Fronten, but it is obvious that they still are a small minority which derives power rather from the facts of daily life, which are such that they might under certain circumstances be able to draw more people in their circle.

The not very clear economic programmes of some of the Fronten, who, as far as I can judge from here, when trying to bring about a Swiss Erneuerung, do not quite realise the appeal of what is Socialist in the Nazi movement to the great mass of impoverished Germans, makes it very difficult to deal with them. They have, however, in the political field already achieved one success, in so far as their extremism has, with the odium they put on it, rendered it quite impossible for those who think it advisable to admit the Socialists in power, and brought their schemes to an end. Now the Socialist party may have recently had some disappointments; the happenings in Germany and in Austria could not but react on the mind of their followers and sober some leaders, but it still represents an important factor of the Swiss population, and to think that, because it has been possible lately in Germany and in Austria to rob their friends of their political influence, we should, or we might, be able to do the same, seems to me to

be a very dangerous and shortsighted gamble. As things are, and if we want to keep up our traditions, we can only try to convince them and to win them over to the measures, those who stand behind the government parties, think the best to deal with the situation. I have seen lately that some of their leaders are prepared to give up the attitude they have adopted until now, when the question of our military expenses turned up in the National Council, and which, as you all know, is one of the strongest arguments against their participation in the Executive.

There are people who are not able to discriminate between an attitude which says "Yes" to the defensive preparedness, which is in conformity with our policy of neutrality, and is at the same time in sympathy with the very reasonable international endeavours to bring about some measure of disarmament, and one which is either aggressive, or, the other extreme, shortsighted anti-militaristic. The Swiss Socialists have never been able to come round to the first-mentioned attitude, which is in fact the one our government has adopted, and some of those who stand behind the government, and most of the Fronten have always been only too willing, and still are, to suspect everybody who, in the light of international politics, dares to talk about disarmament.

There has never been any question that Switzerland could indulge in one-sided disarmament, because we have still some very good reasons to think, as Monsieur Motta has put it once, that our neutrality will be more safely respected if it is protected by an efficient army, just as it was in 1914. But is the fact that the Socialists have not been willing up till now to admit it, a sufficiently overwhelming reason for keeping them out of the Federal Council? When the question again turned up in March the answer was "Yes." I suppose those who argued against their admission into the Federal Council knew the popular feeling. But, considering that after all the ideal which we wish to attain and to make a reality of, is the Volksstaat, and as the methods of the Dictatorships favoured by our neighbours in the South and North must be ruled out, it seems to me that we should again and again try to win the Socialist over.

To those who live in England this idea has nothing surprising in it. They have watched the formation of a National Government which excited men, who a short while ago were in opposite camps. Those who could not see their way to work with them, had to be content to form a minority Opposition, which even now, although they have made some progress since their *débâcle* in 1931, cannot hope — at least, I think so — to win the country over. The difficulties in Switzerland may be greater. Our Socialists are, or at least have been until quite recently, more doctrinaires than the Labour leaders, to whom thinking in compromises is not alien. But, somehow or other, the difficulty must be faced, and both sides will have to make concessions. The Socialists would have to give up their attitude towards our army, as quite recently the Dutch Socialists have done towards theirs; they would have to wipe out some of the rather dictatorial paragraphs of their programme, and the others would have to make an effort to forget, or to remember quietly, without any noisy emphasis.

With this, I mean, that as politics are the art of doing what is possible, it sometimes becomes necessary to forget the shortcomings of parties and of their leaders at a given moment. The Socialists have such shortcomings on record, but others have theirs, too. But I cannot help feeling that if it were possible, if not to win over the whole Socialist party to a policy of conciliation, which simply means the acceptance of compromises in the everyday task of government, at least to separate the more national minded from the extreme believers in utopias, it would be half the battle. Some Socialist leaders are known to have said that they would be prepared, if necessary, to fight against a Fascist invader. Thereupon some super-patriots — I daresay some of my friends amongst them — became excited and denounced this as very dangerous talk. They argued that, being prepared to go to war, just and only because one felt that one's class-war teaching might one day be in danger, was not the proper spirit. Now I think this is sentimental nonsense. If we have to face realities, why should Socialists not be allowed to say, as a sort of *reservatio mentalis*, of course, we fight only because, or if, the aggressor is Fascist. The fact is that from the very moment they submit themselves to the attitude of being prepared, provided such a contingency arose, they would then have to vote for the military budget. And that is, after all, what the other parties want.

Socialists who talk about the danger of the invasion from the North do nothing else than what the General Staff does, in a less noisy manner, when they prepare their plans based on cer-

tain assumptions, and these in their turn based on political information given to them from the Political Department, or what they pick up themselves. General Staffs in all countries have, as we all know, a liking for collecting their own political information and of thinking theirs better than that of the diplomats.

The German Socialist Bebel used to say, long before the war, that if it came to a war with Tsarist Russia, then despised by progressive-minded people throughout the whole world, he would not hesitate to take his rifle and to fight. German Socialists were nourished on that idea, and when the war came it worked beautifully. They rushed to the front, or their sons did — this is still true, although the Nazis will not admit it — and did their duty. So why should we not try to bring about an open compromise? Compromise there always is, in spite of the attacks of would-be Dictators against the so-called quibbles of politicians. The history of Soviet Russia is one long story of compromises between fervent-cold idealism and practical politics; the same goes for Fascist Italy. You have only to look at Mussolini's foreign policy, so infinitely more peaceful to-day than at the beginning of his career. The same goes for the Reich of Hitler. Why should not freedom-loving Swiss, without the help of Dictators, but of their own free will, find their own way, though sacrifices all round must be made and the question faced?

But now I must stop. The National Front has started a campaign for the total revision of the Federal Constitution, and there can be no doubt that they will easily gather the 50,000 signatures needed. The Federal Assembly will then have to decide formally upon the course to be taken, and there will be a plebiscite. As things are, it will probably take place in December. This will mean many months of fresh agitation. The old parties have not yet, as far as I can make sure, definitely decided what attitude to take up. But it is known that their young members have, from time to time, pronounced themselves in favour of revision. But the more prudent think that this is not the time for it. If you consider that, apart from the National Front and some other Fronten, who dream of the creation of a Corporation Parliament, nobody really knows what form Total Revision should take, you may be inclined to say that the decision was a rash one. As somebody put it the other day in an article: "They want us to pull down the house which protected us for decades, and they don't even know what to put in its place."

Before I finish, just one word about the Swiss political methods. I have seen various books, pamphlets and articles, and they all are, with very few exceptions, and I am not unjust when I say that the Fronten literature is rather of the exceptions, on a very high standard of political ethics. There is still hope left that we shall not resort to those direct, vulgar propaganda methods we have watched elsewhere.

I have tried to give you a picture of the currents and undercurrents of to-day's political life in Switzerland. If I have succeeded in bringing you to realise the great importance of present-day happenings, I shall be only too thankful. My own idea of a possible solution of the paralysing party struggle is, of course, influenced by what I have watched in England. Their application to Switzerland may not be possible. It has not been tried, anyhow. You probably know that Marx said the one place where revolution, as he understood it, the proletarian revolution, may be avoided, is England. Because in that country informed opinion as to social conditions, and suggestions based on that opinion, are so much in advance of any other country. I think Switzerland has, as a whole, in this century shown the same spirit. And parallels between England and Switzerland, in many ways quite irrelevant, are in this respect interesting. So that one is justified in saying that, if imitation must be, we might as well follow the example of this country, whose citizens know, as Baldwin put it not very long ago, and as the Swiss, too, know, what freedom means.

HOSPITAL SUNDAY FUND.

Sunday next is "Hospital Sunday," and we invite our readers to give generously to this Fund, as so many of our compatriots have benefited through having been admitted and cared for.