

Switzerland and democracy [continuation]

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SWITZERLAND AND DEMOCRACY.

By WILLIAM E. RAPPARD.

In the "Fortnightly Review."

(Continuation).

That change and that reaction, it would seem, were due fundamentally to the policies of ever-increasing state intervention, especially in the economic sphere, which democracy had itself fostered. The Constitution of 1848 had been the expression of an individualistic democracy which treasured economic liberalism no less highly than political liberalism. The people were to be the sole masters of the state and the state was to interfere as little as possible with the freedom of the people. Such had been the philosophy of the founders of the present régime.

Having become the sole masters of the State, the people, however, had not failed to use their newly acquired powers for purposes and by methods which had been openly deprecated in 1848. Not content to maintain the State as the guarantor of their security, they sought to make of it the instrument of their economic well-being. They accordingly more and more enlarged its functions, added to its budget and increased its powers, so that the great governmental machinery it has become to-day is necessarily more and more escaping their direct control.

Thus political liberalism is being threatened by economic interventionism, and the rights of democracy itself encroached upon by the claims of its bureaucratic offspring.

In the era of economic liberalism which ended in 1874, the political parties were mainly the exponents of political ideals. In the social era which has succeeded it, especially since the World War, the federal government having become one of the principal distributors of the national income, the parties not unnaturally have tended to multiply and come to represent material interests more than political ideals. This has led to a weakening of the influence of democracy as exercised through parliamentary channels.

On the other hand, the ever-heavier duties imposed on the government, called upon to carry out policies of material welfare, have obliged it to assume powers which the people themselves can neither hope nor wish to control. In these days of managed currencies of regulated foreign trade, of controlled exchanges, of subsidized agriculture, of State-relieved unemployment and of State-conducted propaganda and counter-propaganda, democracy can no longer play the part of the almighty sovereign for which its liberal parents had destined it.

The Swiss people, without perhaps fully realizing the true reason of their increasingly limited direct influence over their own political destinies, have been content to grant their chosen rulers the ever wider powers without which they obviously could not face the increased responsibilities placed upon them. Is it to be said, therefore, that Switzerland, has become untrue to her democratic ideals, and is headed for the haven of dictatorship? Not at all.

Under the rule of her democratic institutions — and indeed impelled by the oft-expressed will of her people — the Swiss Government, like other governments to-day, is committed to economic policies which call for a revision of past political methods and institutions. More or less consciously realizing that these methods and institutions are survivals of a more liberal age, but unable as yet to formulate a new constitutional programme, the Swiss people has agreed to "wait and see." Meanwhile they are tolerant of what, under less compelling circumstances, they would deem intolerable violations of their democratic traditions. They are even submitting, nay often welcoming, police measures which tend to limit some of their hardly won constitutional rights, because they deem them necessary to combat subterranean revolutionary propaganda, subsidized from outside. Their love of political liberty is none the less sincere because they refuse to sacrifice it to those who claim its protection in order the more promptly and the more effectively to abolish it.

Paradoxical as it may sound, the enactment of specific anti-communist laws in several Swiss cantons cannot be understood except as the expression of a profound hatred of political violence and of a deep-rooted love of political freedom. In no way should they be considered as concessions to the spirit of neighbouring dictatorships. Indeed, perhaps the most significant fact to be noted in any discussion of Switzerland's attitude *vis-à-vis* democracy to-day is her fundamental and well-nigh unanimous opposition to Fascism and all its doctrines.

Fascism is primarily political authority vested in one individual leader. The Swiss people have ever been hostile to one-man rule. Even before their conversion to modern democracy, they were republicans and the executive branch of their cantonal governments was always constituted by a council and never by a president or a

governor. In 1848, the federal constitutional committee which proposed the bicameral legislative system, adopted in conscious imitation of the American Senate and House of Representatives, also considered the possibility of setting up some executive office similar to that of the President of the United States. It promptly dismissed the suggestion, however, and declared in its report:

"The committee does not think of proposing the creation of an office so contrary to the ideas and habits of the Swiss people who might see therein evidence of a monarchical or dictatorial tendency. In Switzerland we are attached to councils. Our democratic feeling revolts against any exclusive personal preëminence."

There is no reason to believe that Swiss opinion has appreciably changed in this respect in the course of the last century.

Besides the exclusive authority of one leader, fascism is the denial of all constitutional liberties of the individual. Now, the love of personal freedom not less than that of political equality has characterized the evolution of Switzerland ever since 1830. It is hard to imagine that a people whose national spirit had even for centuries before been inspired by the ideals of William Tell, the hero of popular rights in the face of autocratic oppression, could to-day consent to sacrifice them on the altars of the newly established religion of the state.

Finally, fascism means complete national unity, achieved at the expense of all regional diversity and autonomy. Here again the antithesis is absolute between the centralized dictatorships and the Helvetic Confederation, whose cantons differ radically one from another in language, religious faith and history and are all jealous of the local autonomy.

When the Swiss discuss among themselves the future of their democratic institutions, as they frequently do in these troubled times, it is never with the intention of abolishing, but always with a view to improving them. The fascist and the communist fringes, whose numbers and influence are negligible in the country and whose combined representatives in the federal legislature can be counted on the fingers of one hand, take no part in these discussions.

The true problem which to-day confronts the Swiss, like all other civilized peoples, is the old question as to the best combination under modern circumstances of freedom and order. To this problem, thus formulated, neither the Communists nor the Fascists have any solution to offer. Both sacrifice freedom and both tend to set up an order which the Swiss people deem tolerable only in a prison.

The real solution would appear to lie in the direction of unburdening the state of those functions over which democracy can exercise no effective control and of so concentrating authority in the hands of a democratically chosen and democratically controlled government as to allow it effectively to carry out those duties of which no economic reform can relieve it.

Switzerland is too profoundly attached to political liberty not to love democracy. But she is too small, too weak and too poor to afford inefficiency. To make democracy efficient and efficiency democratic is therefore the task of tomorrow.

THE END.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS.

Wednesday, October 13th — Swiss Mercantile Society — Monthly Meeting — followed by a lantern-lecture on "What's Happening in China," by Mr. O. M. Green, M.A., at Swiss House, 34/35, Fitzroy Square, W.

Friday, October 15th — Nouvelle Société Helvétique — Monthly Meeting, at the "Foyer Suisse," 15, Upper Bedford Place, W.C.1. Supper at 3/- to be served at 6.30 sharp, to be followed by a causerie by Henry C. Balsler, Esq., Barrister-at-Law, on: "The Inns of Court."

Saturday, October 16th — Annual Banquet — Swiss Mercantile Society — at the Trocadero Restaurant, Piccadilly, W.

Tuesday, October 19th — Swiss Mercantile College — Dance, at the Royal Hotel, Southampton Row, W.C.1, from 8 p.m. till midnight.

Tuesday, October 19th, at 8.15 p.m. — "La Suisse qui chante." Special Concert arranged by the New Helvetic Society and the Swiss Orchestral Society, at Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1.

Tuesday, October 26th, at 6.30 for 7 o'clock — Swiss Rifle Team — Farewell Dinner to M. W. de Bourg, Counsellor of Legation, at Pagan's Restaurant, Great Portland Street, W. (See announcement).

Friday, November 26th — City Swiss Club — Annual Banquet and Ball — at the Grosvenor House, Park Lane, W.1.

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Réunion de couture, mardi 12 octobre à 3h. au Foyer Suisse, 15, Upper Bedford Place.

Le Pasteur Emery reçoit le Mercredi de 11 heures à midi 30, à l'église, 79, Endell Street, W.C.2. S'adresser à lui pour tous les actes pastoraux. (téléphone : Museum 3100, domicile : Foyer Suisse, 12, Upper Bedford Place, W.C.1.)

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(Deutschsprachige Gemeinde).

St. Anne's Church, 9, Gresham Street, E.C.2.
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Sonntag, den 10. Oktober 1937.

11 Uhr morgens, Gottesdienst.

7 Uhr abends, Gottesdienst.

8 Uhr, Chorprobe.

TAUFE.

Am 3. Oktober wurde getauft : Elisabeth Martha Eichenberger, geb. am 24. Juli 1937, Tochter des Friedrich Jakob von Beinwil as See (Aargau) und der Elise geb. Heym von Marktleuten (Bayern).

Anfragen wegen Religions-bezw. Confirmandenstunden und Amtshandlungen sind erbeten an den Pfarrer der Gemeinde : C. Th. Hahn, 43, Priory Road, Bedford Park, W. 4 (Telephon : Chiswick 4156). Sprechstunden : Dienstag 12-2 Uhr in der Kirche.