

Democracy

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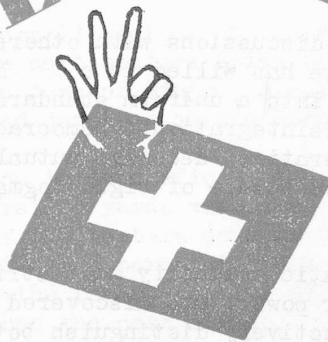
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DEMOCRACY.

(The original of this article has appeared in the "Schweiz Industrieblatt", of November 6th, 1943, from the pen of Walter Diethelm, Wabern.)

We often hear it said nowadays that after the war we cannot simply start again where we left off in 1939. What is to be altered: whether these people all want to alter the same things and alter them in the same way, whether they want to alter themselves or only the others is not made clear. But one thing will be agreed by the large majority of our people: The democratic construction of our State must not be shaken and in that case we must also uphold certain fundamental principles.

Democracy means government of the people by the people. It is the kind of order selected by the people and governs the relations of each citizen to the other and to the community. The realisation of Democratic Government requires:

1. Respect for the rights of the individual by the community; that is to say the granting to him of the utmost freedom for spiritual and material development within the frame of the laws.
2. Voluntary submission by the individual to the laws approved by the community, and voluntary sacrifice by the individual for the benefit of the community.
3. The Constitution is the expression of the will of the people concerning their way of life. It is the mirror of the attitude of the people, the product of a healthy blending of tradition, actuality and anticipation for the future. The Constitution is a plant which has its root in the past, is fed in the soil of the present and is kindled by the light of the future. It must be respected by each generation and protected from the vicissitudes of momentary whims. It should only contain general principles and not details as to the way in which the principles should be applied.
4. The government elected by the people must see to it that the principles laid down in the constitution are observed by all, including themselves.
5. Each member of the community is jointly responsible for the continuance of the State. The young are to be educated in this sense. The elected members of the government are to be respected, but it is the proud right of the citizen to exercise control. Each citizen, even the highest, must be able to accept the truth.
6. Each citizen must realize that man is imperfect and that also his communal creation, the State, must be imperfect to the extent to which the citizens themselves are imperfect. From this arises the demand that each who wishes a more perfect order should first examine himself critically and make himself more perfect.

7. The citizen must in all discussions with others bear in mind that individuals are different. Nature has willed it so. No system will succeed to mould each citizen permanently into a uniform standard of perfection. The result would sooner or later be disintegration. Democracy demands from citizens not enforced, but voluntary co-operation, decency, mutual understanding and willingness to compromise. Let us beware of rigid dogmatizers and fanatics of any creed whatever.

8. The members of a democratic community must strictly watch that other members who may harbour thirst for power, are discovered and neutralized in good time. The people must instinctively distinguish between a citizen who is ready to co-operate in an elected government, and an autocrat intent upon giving free rein to his impulse. Democracy gives to its elected governors not power, but responsibility.

9. The most important thing in the State is Man, and the most important thing in man is his soul. Consequently, those measures which relate to the promotion of spiritual values should have first place. Actually it is the body, or the material side which stands in the foreground.

How should the economy in a democracy be organised? Surely in this way that to each individual the utmost spiritual and material development within the written and unwritten laws is vouchsafed, but in no case so that the State should control to the smallest detail the life of the citizen according to "scientific methods".

There is today in many circles a current against the man who earns his living by his own efforts. And yet, it is just this man, "large" or "small", who is the real fighter, who has to bear the consequences of his own actions or omissions, and who gives to the life of the community constantly a new impulse. Of course, he must not think of himself alone, but, in his own interest, all his actions and deliberations must be consistent with the welfare of the community.

This class, which includes the business man, the farmer, the doctor, the lawyer, the artist, in fact all except the functionaries of the State, constitutes the opposing force against the tendency to inflate the State apparatus. This class also includes employees who are independent of the apparatus of the State. If the national economy were to be organised on the lines of a State, or State-co-operative, then no system, however well meant, could prevent the simultaneous transfer of State functions as well as economic functions upon one and the same person, and the originally free community in which the Executive Government and Legislative control were neatly separated, would, perhaps slowly, but all the more surely, become a bureaucracy in which there would be State employees but no longer any free citizens.

Inherent in the democracy, there is apparently a certain heaviness which gets on the nerves of the impatient ones, especially in eruptive times. As against that, there is no other system which, for decades ahead, offers so much protection against mistakes of individuals and, consequently, against catastrophes which can throw whole nations into misery.

THE BOMBING OF SCHAFFHAUSEN.

Our readers will have read in the local newspapers about the unfortunate bombing, by mistake, of the Swiss town of Schaffhausen by American bombers on the 1st of April. Some more details have now come to hand. Part one of this article will inform readers of the circumstances of the bombing and the actual damage done, whereas part two is a reprint of an article which appeared in the "New York Herald Tribune" by Walter Lippman, one of America's leading columnists and commentators, who knows Switzerland very well.

Part I.

Forty persons were killed and more than fifty seriously wounded when thirty American four-motored bombers in three waves swooped out of a cloud formation