

Zeitschrift: The Swiss observer : the journal of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK
Herausgeber: Federation of Swiss Societies in the United Kingdom
Band: - (1939)
Heft: 910

Artikel: The meaning of democracy : Reginald Lennard
Autor: [s.n.]
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-691322>

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

Download PDF: 04.04.2026

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

SWITZERLAND IN THE EUROPEAN CRISIS.

The disappearance, or to give it the proper name, the rape of Czecho-Slovakia has deeply stirred our people at home.

Although genuine sympathy was felt for a young nation, which was overrun by a mighty neighbour, — in spite of the previous assurances given, — public opinion felt that Czecho-Slovakia ought to have resisted invasion in the hour when its very existence was at stake. —

There is not the remotest doubt in my mind, that Switzerland will fight, whenever and by whomever her liberty, integrity and independence is challenged.

Switzerland does not own her independence to any green table conference, but to many hard fought battles. Our ancestors have at no time refused to fight when their liberties and their rights were threatened or violated.

And as it was centuries ago, so it will be today, our present generation will fight when attacked. We are a peace loving nation, but the arms with which we so ardently practice throughout the year will not be laid down in the case of a threat or an invasion. We shall use these arms in order to defend ourselves, without asking from which side the attack is coming, or who will be the aggressor.

We have not only to defend the independence of our beautiful country, but also the liberties and the rights of our population, ideals which are well worth fighting for and even dying for.

The Swiss have been for centuries the first soldiers in Europe, they have shown their worth on all the battle fields of this continent. As in the past so also to-day they would fight an aggressor to the last. A nation, which lays down its arms without a fight, when her independence is at stake, will find no friends.

Wrecked cities and devastated villages can be rebuilt, but not lost liberties nor a lost fatherland. History has proved over and over again, that a nation, which has not the courage to sacrifice the life of its citizens for its most sacred inheritance, and lays down its arms in a panicky despair, will cease to exist for ever. Our own history has taught us this. True enough the old Confederation in its internal strife and disagreements broke down over 100 years ago. But in the battles of Neuenegg, at Grauholz, Schindellegi, Rothenturm and in Nidwalden our national honour was saved and restored. Through the blood which has been shed on these battlefields, through defeat and through its sufferings our country has awakened to a new national life, and has become a united and strong state.

We Swiss not only will but can defend our country; in spite of our smallness we are strong if we take advantage of our natural fortifications, and if we know how to put at the disposal of our defence the great spiritual, financial and economic forces. We have every reason to have confidence in our military preparedness. Even admitted that we are in the middle of rearmament, Switzerland can to-day not be simply overrun even by a strongly superior aggressor. It should not be forgotten, that owing to the grouping of belligerent nations in a possible war, an aggressor can only use one part of his forces against us, whilst its main forces will be massed on other fronts. —

Much is still to be done, but this is also the case with our neighbours. News regarding stupendous forces by certain nations must be treated with suspicion, they are mostly propagated in order to frighten other countries.

With confidence in our own strength, we can look calmly into the future, recent precautions and measures have proved, that our military authorities are well awake.

The development of the international situation, however, makes it imperative, that we use all our energy in order to hasten and to strengthen the defence of our country. Weaknesses in several branches of our defence should be remedied with greater speed. The erection of new frontier fortifications, the building of Alpine roads and improvements in railway communications can brook no delay.

Special attention must be paid to our Air Defence and to the building of aeroplanes, these are the weakest points in our military organisations.

Great efforts are made at present in Switzerland to overcome these deficiencies, and I have no doubt, that, if time will be our ally, we shall become masters of the situation.

Whatever fate has in store for our own country, and we may pray in all earnestness that the horror of war will not be inflicted on it, nor on any other nation, this one thing is certain, that Switzerland will fight to the bitter end, with courage and determination to defend, and hold

★ SWISS NATIONAL EXHIBITION

ZURICH

MAY 6—

OCT. 29, 1939

ASK FOR THE ILLUSTRATED

SWISS NATIONAL EXHIBITION FOLDER

INFORMATION from the Swiss Railways & State Travel Bureau, 11-B Regent Street, London, S.W.1. Phone: WHItehall 9851.

what our forefathers have left to us in sacred trust; let there be no doubt about this, and when the time should come, may God grant us strength to fight the biggest and sturdiest battle in the history of our beloved land.

ST.

DR. A. LATT IN LONDON.

Visits of prominent people from our home country are of a rare occurrence, and it is to be regretted, that the importance of such visits to the various Swiss Colonies abroad, has not yet been realised at home.

Whilst some of our sister colonies are frequently visited, either by the head of their respective countries or by important politicians, industrialists, professors, etc., we, once in a blue moon, have one of our "big noises" pay us a flying visit, and they seem to be in such a hurry to return "back home," that often the Colony has no opportunity to get in touch with them.

Numerous attempts have been made especially by the City Swiss Club, to induce members, either of the Federal or Cantonal governments, to pay us an occasional visit, in order to give us first hand information about the happenings and doings at home, but, — alas — all in vain.

The visit of Dr. Latt, President of the "Auslandschweizer Kommission" has been therefore greatly appreciated, he is, of course, an old and faithful friend of the Colony, and the many services he had rendered and is still rendering to the N.S.H. and our country during his *sejour* in London, some 22 years ago, have not been forgotten.

A reception and little dinner Party was held at the Hotel Foyer Suisse, which was attended by over fifty members of the Colony and personal friends of Dr. Latt.

This party was followed by a lecture given at the Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C. (small Hall) and was attended by about 150 of our countrymen. Monsieur C. R. Paravicini, the Swiss Minister, was in the Chair, Messieurs Girardet and de Rham, of the Swiss Legation, were present and a large number of well-known personalities in the Colony attended, amongst them Messrs. Walser, Wutrich, Gattiker, L. Chapuis, Sommer, Pfendler, Sigerist, Deutsch, Bessire, Beyli, Pradervand, Beckmann, Joss, Boos, Zimmermann, Gambazzi, etc., etc.

The Swiss Press attended in *corpo*, viz.: Dr. Kessler (Neue Zürcher Zeitung); Dr. Egli, (Bund); M. G. Keller (Basler Nachrichten and Schweiz. Depeschens Agentur); Mlle. Du Bois (La Suisse); and M. Stauffer (Swiss Observer).

M. A. F. Suter, President of the Nouvelle Société Helvétique (London Group) on behalf of the Society paid a cordial welcome to Dr. Latt, Monsieur Paravicini, later on associated himself with the tribute paid to the lecturer.

We hope to be able to publish the excellent lecture, entitled "Switzerland and the present European Crisis" in a subsequent issue of this paper, for the benefit of those who were unable to be present.

The N.S.H. is to be thanked for having given the Colony an opportunity to hear Dr. Latt, whom we wish to congratulate on having given us a most competent *compte-rendue* about a subject which is very much in everybody's mind just now.

The lecture was followed by a very interesting general discussion.

THE VISIT OF DR. A. LATT TO LIVERPOOL.

True to his time table Dr. Latt reached Liverpool on the 18th instant and arrived early enough for us to show him some of the sights of Liverpool, such as the noble Anglican Cathedral,

● See our Country at Work and Play—our Arts and Crafts and Nationhood.

● This truly wonderful Exhibition, staged in a park-like setting along the shore of the Lake at Zurich itself, must not be missed.

which is likely to be the outstanding architectural achievement of our time.

As the day was fine, we also made a crossing of the Mersey a sight familiar to him from former visits 22 years ago, but an experience to be repeated, for its never failing interest. He saw the funnels of the new Mauretania in the dock at Birkenhead belching out smoke a sure sign that she will shortly be ready for her trials.

The Swiss Club had arranged a modest dinner at Reece's Bank Café in the evening and there he met some old friends and many new ones to whom he gave an address dealing especially with the implications of Swiss Neutrality and providing us all with the possibility of meeting criticism of the type of "he who is not for us is against us" so apt to be the prevailing mood in times of stress. We all feel grateful to him for the trouble he has taken to visit us.

Amongst the 37 people present were a number of our girls who delighted us when they sang Swiss songs in their vigorous fresh voices.

Mr. and Mrs. Davidson were there but Mrs. Macquarie was absent owing to an unfortunate accident which kept her in bed. — But she was determined to be Dr. Latt's hostess and so he saw her later in her home. Indeed it would have been disappointing if Dr. Latt had not seen both our ladies who look after the girls in such an admirable way.

I think Dr. Latt can have no doubt of the pleasure his visit has been to us.

E.M.

THE MEANING OF DEMOCRACY.

REGINALD LENNARD,

Fellow of Wadham College, Oxford.

(The Hibbert Journal.)

The dictators of Germany and Italy, in expressing their scorn of Democracy, commonly speak of the "Democracies of the West." And in considering the meaning of Democracy we may take as a starting-point those words of Lincoln which have long been employed as a brief description of it among the English-speaking peoples. Democracy, we say, is "Government of the People, by the People, for the People." An old phrase, battered by careless use; but there is more in it than appears at first sight. *Es ist eine alte Geschichte, doch bleibt sie immer neu.* And the first thought which the old phrase suggests, when we turn to it in the present discontents, is the significance of its emphasis upon the "People." In the ideal of Democracy those subject to the law of a State are a People — one People — and they must be treated as such. Slavery is incompatible with Democracy; and the principles of Democracy are violated if the State treats as aliens or outcasts any class of persons from whom it exacts obedience. Against the principles of the totalitarian states and their persecution of Jews and Communists and Christians, Democracy sets a spirit of toleration. Government by the People means that the will of the majority must prevail; but it means also that that will should be conditioned by fellow-feeling for all minorities, by recognition of the fact that they too are a part of the People, by the "political sense" which refrains from outraging them or destroying their will to remain loyal fellow-citizens of the majority. Not all who profess and call themselves democrats appreciate all that this implies. For it implies that all class-war is undemocratic, whether the class assailed is large or small, and whether its members be Jews or Gentiles, rich or poor. And it implies not only that all minorities should be treated as part of the People, but also that it is their duty to behave as such, and not cling to privileges which mark them off from their fellows, nor let clanishness grow stronger than good citizenship. If class-war is a contradiction of Democracy, it is none the less true that Democracy is favourable to the social progress which leads towards a classless society.

"Government of the People." The old phrase leaves "the People" undefined. It says nothing about their belonging to a particular race, nothing about their being inhabitants of a particular territory, nothing even about their historic identity. We infer that these things, though obviously important, are yet not essential. The essential thing is just that those subjected to a particular Government are in fact one People, able to live in loyal fellow-citizenship one with another. That perhaps is the real truth contained, along with much that is vague and puzzling, in the doctrine of Rousseau that it is the existence of a "General Will" which makes a "Sovereign People." But if true Democracy implies this deep harmony and a sense of unity so firmly rooted that men can, as we say, "agree to differ" without the unity of the People being impaired, then it follows that Democracy does not require the continuance of political unions on grounds of geography, or race, or history, if the harmony and the sense of unity are in fact wanting. We may agree with Burke that political unions are not like mere business partnerships "to be taken up for a little temporary interest and to be dissolved by the fancy of the parties." But, as with the union of husband and wife in marriage, so also in regard to political states, the more deeply we feel that a real union of hearts is necessary, the more we are bound to recognise that legal unions should not as such be indissoluble. The principles of Democracy were not violated by the American Declaration of Independence, nor by the severance of Norway and Sweden, or by the creation of the Irish Free State; and those principles are not in themselves necessarily opposed to the severance of the Sudeten Germans from Czechoslovakia. But to the believer in Democracy the case for the Sudeten Germans rested not on the racial contrast between them and the Czechs, but on the absence of a common will. There is racial diversity in Switzerland, but Switzerland provides the finest example in the world of a People whose common will and sense of unity transcends the differences of race and language and religion.

It is only on the grounds of fundamental principles that we can really explain the attitude of Democracy to the grave issues of Peace and War. The thought of war is loathsome to all men of good will; and if we say that the cause of Democracy is the cause of Peace we may seem to be claiming a monopoly in humane feelings and common sense for those who believe in Democracy. But though the love of Peace is strong in the hearts of many whose social and political outlook is far from being democratic, and though in the ardour of youth or impatient old age some sincere believers in the democratic ideal may at times appear strangely bellicose, Democracy is none the less more essentially pacific than other political creeds. Based on a belief in reason, reaching its decisions by free discussion, settling differences at the ballot box, and treating minorities with consideration, so that men may in the deepest sense of the words "agree to differ," Democracy necessarily implies the use of peaceful methods in domestic politics. Naturally it works in the same way in international affairs. The believer in Democracy does not deny that totalitarian methods may sometimes win quicker returns, but he distrusts the politics of impatience and coercion, doubts the value and stability of the best such means can achieve, and is passionately convinced that no external or material success is worth the sacrifice of freedom. Whatever its object, whatever its chances of victory, an ideological crusade would be alien to the spirit of Democracy. Every war is a war against Democracy. More than that. The outbreak of hostilities is itself a defeat for Democracy. In war "Government for the People" can no longer be "Government by the People." Commands take the place of discussion. On the field of battle the less wise decision instantly made, issued as an order, and obeyed without question, is always preferable to a wiser decision attained at the cost of protracted discussion. All war is totalitarian in method. And in modern warfare the whole country becomes a field of battle. Free choice disappears from farm and factory. The Press is muzzled, since secrets must not be revealed to the enemy. Youth, because of that very adaptability which makes its freedom of choice so glorious and full of hope, is reduced to the level of the old man in his decrepitude, of whom it is said "another shall gird thee and carry thee whither thou wouldst not." In wartime it is the old and the rich who manage to retain some vestige of freedom.

To those who do not understand Democracy the attitude of democratic states towards war is puzzling. Their intense reluctance to take up arms seems pusillanimous; and when war comes and the people who shrank from it display that "deliberate valour," which is

"firm and unmoved
With dread of death to flight or foul retreat,"

a baffled enemy seeks for an explanation of the contrast in the hypothesis of perfidy. But in fact there is no contradiction. It is just because Peace is so precious to Democracy that Demo-

cracies show this unbending determination in war, for the outbreak of war is itself a stinging outrage to the democratic ideal and as such steels the will to endure. Democratic states have a power of endurance unattainable by nations whose ardour feeds upon emotion and whose political impatience makes them dependent upon the gratification provided by rapid success.

But the peace which is precious to Democracy is something more than avoidance of war. In the political life of a democratic people, freedom of discussion and free criticism of governments are essential; but when international relations are strained and nations are suspicious of one another, much has to be done in secret, and Democracy is impaired. When preparation for possible war is a main concern of the state, the spirit of war which makes this necessary is already in many ways undermining the bases of democratic government. Democracy is on the defensive, and even in retreat, under such conditions. But it belongs to Democracy to advance. For after all we are only on the road to Democracy. "Government by the People, for the People" is a phrase which may serve to describe very roughly the form and method of government in this country and in some other countries. But the phrase really points beyond forms of government to a social ideal. It implies an educated people and it implies a concentration of government upon social welfare and all that we mean by advancing civilisation. But education and social welfare cannot advance very far if the thoughts and resources of the nation are absorbed by a race in armaments. For that reason, too, the peace which Democracy needs is more than avoidance of war. If the world is to become, in President Wilson's words, "safe for democracy," it must become, in the fullest sense, what his successor has described as "a world of neighbours." It is part of the faith and hope of Democracy that that ideal is not unattainable and that the attaining of it should be the aim of us all.

CITY SWISS CLUB.

Messieurs les membres sont avisés que
L'ASSEMBLEE MENSUELLE
aura lieu Mardi le 2 mai au Restaurant PAGANI,
42, Great Portland Street, W.1. et sera précédée
d'un souper à 7h. 15 précises (prix 5/-).

ORDRE DU JOUR:

Procès-verbal.	Démotions.
Admissions.	Divers.

Pour faciliter les arrangements, les participants sont priés de bien vouloir s'inscrire au plus tôt auprès de Monsieur P. F. Boehringer, 23, Leonard Street, E.C.2. (Téléphone: Clerkenwell 2321/2).
Le Comité

MISCELLANEOUS ADVERTISEMENTS

SWISS FAMILY, near Rickmansworth, requires Nursery Governess for two children, aged 5 and 7, German-Swiss speaking essential. £3. 0. 0. per month. Write Box No. 6, c/o Swiss Observer, 23, Leonard Street, E.C.2.

CONVALESCENT and holiday children are received and personally taken care of in the Kinderheim "Sunnehüsi" Romiti near Vitznau (1200 m. above s.l.). Canton Lucerne. Under the personal direction of a fully qualified matron. Inclusive terms Frs. 5.— to Frs. 6.— per day. German, French and English spoken.

ENGLISH COURSES by teacher of languages, also pension. C. Kaiser-Jay, 1293, London Road, Norbury, S.W.16.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS.

Thursday, April 27th, at 7 p.m. — Swiss Y. M. C. A. — Bible Study — at Westgate House, 28-29, Bedford Place, W.C.1. "All young Swiss invited."

Tuesday, May 2nd — City Swiss Club — Monthly Meeting — (preceded by dinner at 7 p.m. sharp) at Pagan's Restaurant, Great Portland Street, W.1.

Wednesday, May 3rd, at 7.30 p.m. — Société de Secours Mutuels — Monthly Meeting — at 74, Charlotte Street, W.1.

Sunday, May 21st, at 4.30 p.m. — Swiss Y. M. C. A. — Anniversary — (Tea will be served — Ladies and Gentlemen are cordially invited) at Westgate House, 28-29, Bedford Place, W.C.1.

Saturday, June 3rd, at 2.45 p.m. — Swiss Sports and Garden Party — at Herne Hill Athletic Grounds, Bunbage Road, S.E.24.

SWISS BANK CORPORATION,

(A Company limited by Shares incorporated in Switzerland)

99, GRESHAM STREET, E.C.2.

and 11c, REGENT STREET, S.W. 1.

Capital Paid up s.f. 160,000,000
Reserves - - s.f. 32,000,000
Deposits - - s.f. 1,218,000,000

All Descriptions of Banking and Foreign Exchange Business Transacted

:: Correspondents in all ::
:: parts of the World. ::

Telephone Numbers:
MUSEUM 4302 (Visitors)
MUSEUM 7055 (Office)
Telegrams: SOUFFLE
WESDO, LONDON

Established
OVEF
50 Years.

"Ben faranno i Paganis
Parlatoria C. zin. Dante
"Venir se ne doe gli
tra' miei Meschini."
Dante. Inferno. C. xxvii.

PAGANI'S RESTAURANT

GREAT PORTLAND STREET, LONDON, W. 1.

:: LINDA MESCHINI } Sole Proprietors. ::
ARTHUR MESCHINI }

Drink delicious "Ovaltine"
at every meal—for Health!

Divine Services.

EGLISE SUISSE (1762).

(Langue française).

79, Endell Street, Shaftesbury Avenue, W.C.2.
(Near New Oxford Street.)

Dimanche 23 avril 1939:

11h. Culte M. M. Pradervand.

11h. Ecole du dimanche.

7h. Culte M. M. Pradervand.

8h. Répétition du Choeur mixte.

MARIAGE

Le 14 avril, Michel Perreten, de Lauenen (Berne) et Gwen Jackson, de Sheffield.

Pour l'instruction religieuse et les actes pastoraux, prière de s'adresser au pasteur, M. M. Pradervand, 65, Mount View Road, N.4. (Téléphone Mountview 5003) Heure de réception à l'église le mercredi de 11-12h.30.

SCHWEIZERKIRCHE

(Deutschsprachige Gemeinde).

St. Anne's Church, 9, Gresham Street, E.C.2.
(Near General Post Office, St. Paul's and Aldersgate Street Tube Stations (Central London and Metropolitan).

Sonntag, den 23. April.

11 Uhr morgens, Gottesdienst, Pfr. E. Bommeli.

7 Uhr abends, Gottesdienst, Pfr. E. Bommeli.

Mittwoch Nachmittag: Schwyzerchränzli von 2.30 an, 15, Bedford Way (Zwänglose Zusammenkunft der jungen Schweizerinnen im Foyer Suisse, wozu alle Schweizerinnen freundlich eingeladen sind).

Anfragen wegen Religions — bzw. Konfirmanden Unterricht sind erbeten an Herrn Pfarrer E. Bommeli. Sprechstunden: Jeden Dienstag von 12-2 Uhr in der Kirche, Jeden Mittwoch von 5-6 Uhr im Foyer Suisse, 15, Bedford Way, W.C.1.

Printed and Published by THE FREDERICK PRINTING CO., LTD., 110, BUNBAGE ROAD, S.E.24, LONDON, E.C.2.