

Innere Gefahren der Demokratie

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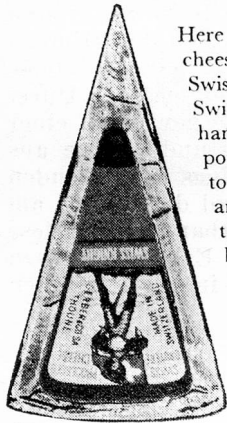
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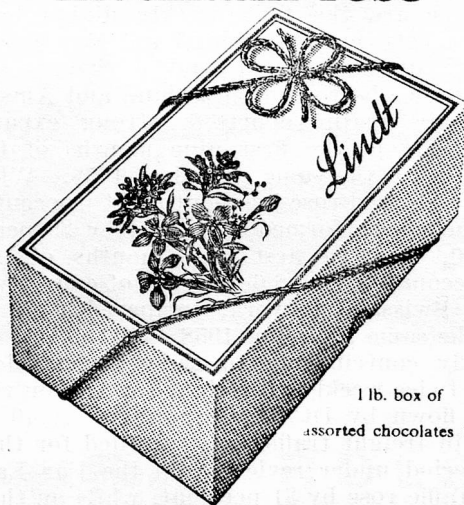
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"INNERE GEFAHREN DER DEMOKRATIE"

— was the title of a lecture given by Professor Dr. A. Zbinden of Berne at the meeting of Nouvelle Société Helvétique, on October 26th last, at the Swiss Hostels for Girls.

Opening the meeting, the president Mr. W. Renz, welcomed the guest of the evening and members and friends. He briefly reported about the Journée des Suisses de l'étranger which took place at Lausanne in August. Thereupon we sat back to attend to the interesting and indeed stimulating lecture.

One had to be wary to take democracy for granted, said professor Zbinden. Democracy was in fact surrounded by dangers. Even in a country like Switzerland the dangers of disruption were always there. Partly this was owing to the conditions of life today, and partly, on the other hand, to the "I don't care" attitude of many of its citizens. Thus it became incumbent upon us to examine the problems facing us. What was the future of democracy, what was the future of our liberty?

People were talking of the dangers threatening democracy from the outside. But we too often overlooked, or disregarded the inner causes of danger. There was, firstly, the general tendency to "Vermassung", for individuals to become welded into an amorphous mass. Then, large numbers of our people seemed to have lost their anchorage. They no longer had an inner halt, a rock on which to base their life and their judgements. Thus they became slaves to their emotions and were liable to be swept along by influences they would not take the trouble to fathom, influences they could not understand. Their inner life was open to every sort of attack that seemed to suit their emotional mood. A. de Trocqueville already drew attention to this crack in human armour. These conditions, when they afflict large numbers, were the underlying conditions for every dictatorship. Nor did we see the threatening dangers clearly, we had lost the warning scent.

The growth of the collective in many forms was a phenomenon of our age (as it has been many a time in the past history of mankind) which crippled both the outlook and the initiative of the individual personality. The individual found himself powerless against the demands and impositions of the all-powerful collective, be it the state or merely the mass. In the end he would submit to the ogre "mass" and become merged in it. Yet in his submission to it he was concerned mainly with his own security. Having lost his own, inner, security he looked to the mass as his defender and provider. He was not doing so out of consideration for his neighbour or society as a whole. On the contrary, mass-man was always claiming "his right" and hardly, if ever, was he ready to concede that he too had duties towards the others.

The same phenomenon could be noted in international affairs. In spite of all the "internationalism" to which lipservice was paid, Europe, for instance, was becoming "thorped", was becoming parish minded.

It was sometimes stated that modern industry with its mechanisation was leading to mass mentality. But was that so? Never in the past had there been such a variety of work to choose from, never were there so many trades and professions available.

Perhaps some jobs were of a routine nature, the same few operations all day long. But, then, that was no different when in days gone by everything had to be done by hand. No, this could not be the cause of the malady. When all was said there remained the fact that this mass mentality was nothing else than the collapse of the individuum. He had lost his inner measure of values.

Coming to politics we found that modern political institutions had to some extent assisted in creating the mass-type. The majority had become a semi-god. Yet, as Schiller said in Demetrius, majorities all powerful are dangerous. Often it was the minority which was right, had the right ideas and judgement. Thus democracy demanded that the minority should not only be heard but that their views should receive due consideration. But we also found that the mass-type of citizen refused to elect and to decide on his own estimation. Often he refused to elect or decide at all, leaving the responsibility to those who would. It was the same here as in other directions, people who had little or no inner resources of strength, no inner basis of life, were of course entirely dependent on outside stimuli. That was also the case in the use or misuse of the increased leisure modern times had given us. Mechanised leisure, mechanised entertainment, they were the results of our unreadiness for the pursuit of leisure. They filled the emptiness in mass-man's make-up.

Lastly, said the lecturer, there was the danger springing from the excessive demands of security. A modicum of security gave a feeling of independence and gave self-confidence. But we were nowadays faced with, what could only be called security mania, which did the opposite. The flight to the state was a symptom of it. The achievement of economic security might be the aim of democratic government but it was not the foundation of democracy. Democracy in the last instance, was a political philosophy; if applied it demanded the willing co-operation of all citizens and, at the same time, allowed them all actually and individually to take part in its work. But also, individuals must be willing and able to take on themselves the responsibilities of their decisions and choices and to do so by keeping their personal interest and emotions in perspective.

Well earned long applause told Professor Zbinden how highly the audience thought of his lecture.

JHB.

PERSONAL.

We deeply regret to announce the passing away, on Friday, November 13th, of Mrs. Margaret Grace Hangartner, the beloved wife of Mr. R. Hangartner, of 36, Bonnersfield Lane, Harrow.

We very much regret to announce the passing away on November 1st, at his home 15, Eccleston Street, London, S.W.1, of the Hon Neville Stafford Solomon, O.B.E., M.E.C., M.L.C., late Treasurer of the Bahamas, dearly beloved husband of Margaret Stafford Solomon, and brother of the late Sir Kenneth Solomon. C.B.E., Q.C., M.L.C., J.P., at the age of 85.

CITY SWISS CLUB.

The Annual Banquet and Ball of the City Swiss Club, which was held at the Dorchester Hotel on 20th November, will be fully reported in our issue of 18th December.



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