

La politique : pour les libertés démocratiques

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LA POLITIQUE.

Pour les libertés démocratiques.

Si d'autres sujets ont sollicité momentanément notre attention, nous ne perdons pas de vue pour autant le trop fameux arrêté du Conseil fédéral du 5 décembre 1938, "instaurant des mesures pour protéger la démocratie." Jusqu'à ce que cet arrêté draconien et liberticide ait été abrogé, et remplacé par des dispositions légales plus conformes à nos traditions et au respect des droits du citoyen, nous ne cesserons de protester contre une pareille tentative de limiter la liberté d'opinion.

On sait qu'un conseiller national, M. Pierre Rochat, député du canton de Vaud, et l'un des esprits indépendants du parlement, a déposé une interpellation à ce sujet. Comme les Chambres sont convoquées pour une session extraordinaire qui commencera le 30 janvier, il est fort possible que la question soit débattue à ce moment-là. La réponse que fera M. Baumann au nom du gouvernement ne manquera pas d'intérêt. Elle nous dira sans doute quelle interprétation le Conseil fédéral donne actuellement au fameux deuxième alinéa de l'article 2, qui promet la prison et l'amende à quiconque aura "publiquement et d'une manière systématique," "bafoué" les principes démocratiques qui sont à la base de la Confédération ou des cantons." Mais elle ne pourra pas — nul n'étant prophète — nous assurer de l'interprétation à laquelle recourra éventuellement un Conseil fédéral autrement composé que celui qui est au pouvoir. Les hommes passent, les textes de la loi demeurent.

Ce serait une duperie de s'incliner devant un texte dangereux par lui-même, en considérant que les magistrats en charge sont des hommes modérés, de grand bon sens, peu enclins à instruire des procès de tendance. Nous ne soupçonnons ni M. Baumann ni ses collègues de nourrir de mauvais desseins et de conspirer contre les libertés publiques. Qui nous assure cependant qu'un jour ou l'autre il n'y aura pas au Conseil fédéral des politiciens animés d'un tout autre esprit, et fort capables d'utiliser toutes les armes qui leur tomberaient sous la main pour brider l'opinion et restreindre, abusivement et arbitrairement, le droit à la critique? Ce sont choses qui se voient, en ce monde. Et ces potentats, en appliquant à leur façon le fameux article 2, se feraient un malin plaisir de dire qu'ils n'ont pas forgé pour la circonstance une loi d'exception, mais qu'ils se bornent à utiliser un texte rédigé et adopté par leurs prédécesseurs.

Etonnés par les répercussions, en Suisse romande, de leur coup de force, les auteurs de l'arrêté du 5 décembre s'efforcent maintenant d'en diminuer la portée. Leur intention n'a pas été, affirment-ils, d'attenter ni à la liberté de la presse, ni à l'une quelconque des libertés démocratiques.

cratiques. Il n'est pas question de poursuivre qui que ce soit en raison de ce qu'il aura dit ou écrit sur nos institutions ou sur leur fonctionnement. Dans ce domaine, la faculté d'exprimer des critiques, fût-ce sous forme mordante, reste en tacte. Mais lors, à quoi bon le paragraphe incriminé? Ou bien l'on n'en veut pas faire usage, et il est inutile. Ou bien il doit servir à quelque chose, et constitue réellement une menace à l'adresse de tous ceux qui se permettent une certaine indépendance de jugement, non seulement sur les élus du suffrage universel, mais même — et pourquoi pas? — sur les institutions. Bien que, personnellement, nous ne soyons pas adversaire du régime représentatif, nous admettons qu'un bon Suisse puisse être d'un avis opposé, et qu'il le dise, "publiquement et systématiquement." Or, l'article 2 fournit, à l'autorité qui le voudra, le moyen d'envoyer ce Suisse-là en prison!

Le danger créé par l'arrêté est d'autant plus grand que ce texte, très sommaire — il tient en huit articles — n'est accompagné d'aucune interprétation authentique et précise. Il laisse donc une large place aux exégèses les plus contradictoires. L'erreur fondamentale a été de recourir, pour "protéger" la démocratie, aux procédés en usage dans les pays totalitaires. La démocratie doit être défendue par la volonté collective de la nation, non par les gendarmes et les sentences des juges.

Léon Savary.
(Tribune de Genève.)

HOLIDAYS IN SWITZERLAND FOR THE YOUNG SWISS-ABROAD, AGED 12 TO 20 YEARS.

Every summer hundreds of children of Swiss-abroad, from almost every European country, travel in organised groups and under experienced conductorship to their Homeland for their holidays. In times of greatest economic difficulty and distress "Pro Juventute" took care principally of the afflicted and suffering Swiss children abroad. To-day this holiday programme has been extended, so as to enable also the children of the middle classes to visit the land of their fathers under "Pro Juventute's" protection and supervision, and to get to know their own folk and country.

And the Swiss in England? Is this great undertaking not worthy of arousing their interest too? Are not there too hundreds of Swiss children to be found to whom their Homeland is at best just some dreamlike legend, to whom a holiday in Switzerland would be of invaluable benefit, corporeally as well as spiritually? There can be no doubt as to the answer!

It is to be regretted that, up till now, no-one has shown the redeeming initiative to make the matter widely known by propaganda in the

various Swiss Societies, to set the stone rolling and get ready a first contingent of Swiss children from England. True, last year about two dozen children of the Swiss Sunday-school in London came to the Bernese Oberland and there set up a splendid camp; but this is a modest beginning only, where a small number of the children concerned alone can participate. It is decidedly not too soon if this matter were taken in hand now, on a big scale, in readiness for this summer.

Various possibilities present themselves for a stay in Switzerland.

1. The children find accommodation in Homes or Holiday-camps, at moderate prices, varying from 3 to 6 francs per day. The Swiss institution "Pro Juventute" undertakes every guarantee that the children shall be well cared for.
2. The children spend their holidays with relations in Switzerland.
3. For poor children "Pro Juventute" provides free accommodation in private families or in Homes.

All these children travel together, thereby getting the benefit of reduced fares, and during the journey out and back are under proper supervision. "Pro Juventute" sees to it that in Switzerland every child reaches its destination safely; its many years of experience and practical organisation are your guarantee.

The travelling costs are to be borne by the parents. For needy and less well-to-do children "Pro Juventute" bears these costs within the Swiss frontiers. Up to the frontier same should be covered by voluntary contributions made by the Swiss colonies abroad or by means of other supplies. This plan has worked very well in France, Germany, North Africa, etc., and should meet the case in England.

The duration of the stay in Switzerland should be 5 to 6 weeks.

Now, in order to ascertain what interest could be reckoned with for such an arrangement, applicable to the summer of the current year 1939, we would beg the various Swiss Societies to make diligent enquiries among their members and to inform the "Pro Juventute" institution, (Zurich, Seilergraben 1) by February 28th through the good offices of the Nouvelle Société Helvétique London Group:

1. How many children from their respective sphere of action would be interested in such a holiday programme, and
2. Their distribution over the three different stays enumerated.

These entries are to be without engagement and will merely serve the purpose of information and orientation, on the basis of which a definite plan could be evolved.

PRIMITIVE DEMOCRACY IN SWITZERLAND.

By SIR ERNEST SIMON.
(In the Political Quarterly.)

(Continued.)

But apart from all this experience of public work in which every inhabitant plays his part, those who have any capacity for public leadership do far more: for almost the whole administration of the affairs of the commune is done voluntarily by unpaid leaders. There are about forty administrative posts, divided at any one time between about twenty-five citizens. They administer the finances, including the preparation of the budget and of the annual accounts, the assessing and collection of the taxes, the police, fire brigade, education, health, relief of poverty, control of roads, paths and bridges, irrigation, hydro-electric plant, and many other things; in fact, the whole of the complex work necessary for carrying on even so small and simple a community as Blatten.

Occasionally, where the work takes a man away from his own job for half a day or more, he is paid at the fixed rate of 50 centimes per hour. Last year the amount so paid amounted to a total of 160 frs.; surely the cheapest administration in the world!

The President is the school teacher; he was elected at the surprisingly young age of twenty-four, and is now serving his third four-year term of office. He lives in the same type of house as the peasants; he is in the closest possible touch with them. Educated in the local school, he went for three years to the Cantonal Teachers' Training College. He has general control of the administration; he himself keeps the main accounts, which are somewhat complicated, and in the most perfect order. We had long discussions with him, and were much impressed by his public spirit, his common sense, and his ability. He would certainly be an outstanding member of the Manchester City Council.

None of the other four members of the executive is over forty years of age; it has in recent years been the custom in Blatten to elect young men to office, which they usually hold for two periods, or eight years. Generally they then retire, having done their share, and remain as ordinary but experienced members of the communal assembly. Not less than half the citizens have passed through the executive and have therefore held responsible office.

The assembly must be one of the best-informed and most responsible electorates in the world. A potential leader is tried out in some small job; his work is critically watched; if well done, he is gradually promoted. There is no hope for the tub-thumper. A candidate is judged, not by oratory, but by his personal character and practical work.

On the other hand, it seems to be the invariable rule that those who are capable of leadership are willing to give the necessary time and thought to the work at least for a period of years. It would seem that the problem of selecting the best leaders in a democracy is solved so far as Blatten is concerned.

There can be no doubt whatever that democracy works well in Blatten. The whole civilization is stable; people do not move, ideas do not change. The people know one another intimately; the problems are simple. Blatten offers a unique example of a small, stable and simple community, carrying on its affairs by the most completely democratic methods. Under these conditions, the voters of Blatten do undoubtedly judge wisely of men and measures, in a way which is utterly impossible in a modern industrial city of one million inhabitants.

Blatten is an example of Swiss democracy at its simplest. In other communes there are divisions of race and religion, but even in these cases a surprising degree of tolerance and friendly co-operation seems to exist. For instance, I visited a village called Murg on the day of a Catholic holiday. The Protestant President of the commune told me that the Protestants were also cele-

brating the holiday; it was a friendly rule in their commune that the members of each religion joined the others in all their celebrations! In some cantons, Catholics and Protestants go so far in mutual friendliness as to share the same church.

Many people hold that the English village was in the past the foundation of British democracy. To quote A. L. Smith: "Nowhere was the village community so real and so enduring a thing as it was in England for at least twelve centuries of its history. In every parish men met almost daily in humble but very real self-government, to be judged by their fellows or fined by them, or punished as bad characters, to settle the ploughing times and harvest times, the following and the grassing rules for the whole village." To these twelve centuries of discipline we owe the peculiar English capacity for self-government, the enormous English development of the voluntary principle in all manner of institutions and the aptitude for colonization. Our politics, our commercial enterprise, our Colonial Empire, are all due to the spirit of co-operation, the spirit of fair play, and give and take, the habit of working to a common purpose which tempered the hard and grim individuality of the national character."

The difference between the English village and Blatten is that the former was always subject to a lord; the latter has no lord whatever. The village members own the whole of the land; their democracy is complete, and should be an even better foundation for a national democracy than the English village can ever have been.

Every thoughtful person I met in Switzerland agreed that the commune was the very basis of Swiss democracy. The experience gained in these small councils has made the Swiss masters of art of living peacefully together: as Lord Bryce puts it, one can rely on "the good sense and good temper of the Swiss people as a whole." The smooth and effective working of the referendum in Switzerland is in striking contrast with the farce of the town's meeting in England. Swiss citizens are so well educated that there is