Way of Democracy

Speech

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WE LIVE at a time of antithesis, at a time of contradictory ideas. The Nazi dictatorship demonstrated to us all too strongly this kind of tyranny with all its abuses. Then came the collapse with all its consequences. And after the collapse came the democracy. Perhaps it was a little bit too emotional of character (Seid unschlungen, Millionen) and did not sufficiently show up in practice. And then came the German principles — principles as they were shown in the Bavarian constitution and in the Basic Law.

We have almost too great an abundance of liberties: parties may be formed regardless of the people of which they are composed; meetings may be held freely; we have freedom of speech and freedom of press and that to an extent scarcely known any more in democracies with century-old traditions. One often has the impression that the Germans are very able in laying down principles, that the danger exists, however, that they ride these principles to death. We are now again at this point. Not only the political parties but the government, too, watch with anxiety the first signs which can be seen here and there.

At this point, I must emphasize what has been said already: This development is not especially bad in Bavaria — on the contrary, I believe it is not as bad in Bavaria as in certain other places. This, however, shall not prevent us from watching these events very carefully. Certain people obviously cannot use these liberties properly. And so, let us say it very frankly, they must somehow and in some way be restricted. What can be done?

By virtue of the present laws you can scarcely do anything with police measures because then you would be blamed for employing arbitrary measures, and that opinion would not be quite wrong. Therefore restrictions must be provided by law. We don't have these laws at the moment. We will have to try to make them, for political parties as well as for public meetings, in the event that abuses spring up against democracy. I hope that these laws provide an opportunity for action and do not again lay down principles, leaving it to any authority to take the responsibility.

It has, furthermore, been said that eventually the case of self-defense of the state for the protection of democracy should be proclaimed. I have heard these words with slight dismay. One cannot say, "Oh, it's wonderful that there are so many democrats who want to protect democracy. Do you at this time of economic and social tension know who will be at the helm of affairs at the proper moment and whom the masses will follow? That you don't know. We know from the history of former centuries and from times not long past that for reasons not to be foreseen the economic and social tension may unload in quite another direction. One of today's speakers already has said, "Democracy needs democrats who are willing to defend democracy." One must only know what democracy really is.

If democracy is considered merely as a formal organization or as an institute to employ the formal rules of a game, then democracy can never be saved, built or led on. For, as the formal rules of a game can be used and misused, it simply depends whether these people are diligent enough to use it to their purpose and in their direction. Democracy is a matter of mental attitude.

If we do not succeed in thus convincing the people and that they must fight for this mental attitude or give up, then we will never be able to finish this mental fight for which continents have fallen in. Let us not deceive ourselves. On the one side is a mental attitude fighting for democracy; on the other side, however, is a strong power fighting for dictatorship — not only a brutal power but also a mental power for the dictatorship and totalitarian state.

Do not underestimate these mental powers behind them. If we do not succeed in activating the mental powers of the West for democracy, then you may call on as many police troops as you like, you may make as many laws as you like, you may use threats of force; the question is, against whom this force will be directed. Because then force will come from the masses who are pushed in a certain direction by a mental attitude. From this knowledge we must draw our consequences. Dr. Wilhelm Hoegner (Dr. Wilhelm Hoegner, minister of justice) has already made a modest proposition. If only we could arrive at a point where we are able to do things by joint effort and not fight each other because we believe that we can win a few thousands of votes that way!

In my opinion we must arrive at the point where we fight each other objectively, agreeing that we have the right to believe in different ways by which the goal may be reached. But we must learn to fight the opponent, who is also a democrat, in a fair and not odious way. I am even of the heretical conviction that in politics honesty is still the better principle than the opposite: the language is to be used to hide the thought.

Why don't you, ladies and gentlemen of this parliament, make the attempt to establish such a committee with the sole task of removing these obstacles. Do that and you will have achieved more for democracy than through police. Then the people and especially the young people will be convinced of a mental power which can compete with the other one, which will succeed if we are willing to go together on this way.

This speech, translated from the German, was delivered by Dr. Ehard at the end of the debate of the Bavarian state legislature in Munich Jan. 17 on neo-Nazistic symptoms in Germany.

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30