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A Swiss View of Security

Talk given by Ambassador A. Weitnauer,
Secretary General of the Federal Political Department,
at Wilton Park, on November 8, 1976

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As I am sure you will agree, the topic of my little talk is very difficult indeed. The notion of security has manifold aspects. There are dozens of ways in which I could try to approach it. Because this is so, I shall limit myself to a few remarks of a general nature which prompt my own thinking on the matter. I have not myself reached any definitive conclusions; this is perhaps typical of the subject and one of the reasons why it is so thrilling and so stimulating.

My country - Switzerland - is usually referred to as a haven of peace and security. I might be tempted, therefore, to choose the easy way and concentrate my reflections on how Switzerland reached that happy state. I would then have to tell you about the highlights of our history, our internal quarrels and how they finally stopped, about the successful assertion of our independence towards the outside world and, in the end, the universal recognition of Switzerland's crowning glory: her permanent and armed neutrality. But this would be, as I see it, indulging in smugness and self-satisfaction, not really conducive to a convincing analysis of the innermost nature of security.

So let me rather give way to a bit of over-simplification by dealing with our theme according to the following three criteria: political security, economic and social security and - to conclude with the most important of them all - just feeling secure as a human being.

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Political security has to do with the behaviour of states and peoples, their peacefulness or aggressiveness. It has to do, too, with autocracy and democracy as forms of government. An autocracy is likely to make the world feel insecure; a saturated democracy radiates, more often than not, just the opposite feeling. A sense of mission is evinced more frequently by an autocracy than by a democracy. It adds further impetus to a forceful foreign policy and might enhance - depending on the kind of mission it stands for - a general feeling of insecurity.

In extolling the virtues of democracy, I have in mind what Guglielmo Ferrero had to say about power. In a democratic country, government and parliament are elected and political decisions made according to fundamental laws accepted by everybody. The majority has the right to rule, the minority the right to oppose, awaiting its turn to win a majority and govern itself. This gives both the rulers and the ruled a feeling of security; it makes them feel assured and peaceful in the exercise of power and the acceptance of it. The ruling few in an autocracy do not feel equally secure. That is why they tend to overreact in order to preserve power. This usually has an unfavourable impact on the individual life of the citizens of such a country, on their desire to develop their personality in freedom and harmony.

On the face of it the cure seems to be "to make the world safe for democracy" (you all remember President Wilson's famous phrase). But quite apart from the fact that democracy cannot be introduced by force, it is impossible to overlook that, in this world of ours, democracies are few and autocracies are many. It is not by chance that this should be so. Looking back in history, an autocratic form of government was the rule, and there were almost no exceptions. A high degree of political civilization, developed over many centuries, was necessary to make this very sophisticated system of a modern, western-style democracy possible. It is, in a

way, a political luxury article. Its workings are complex and difficult. Still, democracy has deep roots in our part of the world, and its inconveniences are accepted - more or less grudgingly - by the individual citizen, because it secures him a treasure of priceless value: individual freedom. If the exercise of freedom goes with a keen consciousness of the many responsibilities and sometimes sacrifices it implies, then indeed democracy can claim to be one of the most outstanding creations of mankind.

Autocracy, however, has solid foundations in human nature, too. Man is so made that he not only wishes to exercise authority, he is also ready to submit to it. It is a "more or less" proposition and has to do, as the case may be, with history, tradition, temperament. That is why autocracy is certainly not about to die out on this earth. And the conclusion is obvious that, in this one world of today, autocracies and democracies are compelled to coexist peacefully and even to cooperate more and more for the common welfare of mankind. The paradoxical aspect of this is that they will never be able to accept each other's creed as equally valid. It is a war of religion modern-style - a bloodless war, "devoutly to be wished".

Let me now turn to the second aspect of insecurity I intend to treat: insecurity in the economic and social field. The contrast between the rich and the poor, just as conspicuous today in most parts of the world as it ever was, is the very essence of it. It is true that some Western democracies have gone a long way towards closing the gap between the two. But social justice is still only an aim for many of them. Its achievement is not made any easier by the continued existence of an exaggerated class consciousness, about which I shall have a word to say later.

Insecurity bred by tensions on the domestic scene of certain countries is bad; but the worldwide conflict between North and South is undoubtedly worse. There they are: the rich countries of the industrial world on the one hand, and more than a hundred developing countries, mostly poor or very poor, on the other. And the gap between them is widening. Over the last thirty years or so there has certainly been considerable progress in the development of the ex-colonial countries. But the bitter feelings they manifest are not altogether without foundation. Although the situation is not quite as clear-cut as is represented to us, although there are immense differences in stages of development, let alone the colossal fortunes recently amassed by the oil producing countries, the state of antagonism existing between the two parts of the world is constantly growing. The rich in the North feel insecure about their wealth, dependent as they are on the raw materials produced by the underdeveloped South. This feeling is entirely reciprocal, although for just the opposite reasons. The developing countries have many fundamental questions to ask. Can they count on stable and remunerative prices for their raw materials? Or on a continuous flow of technical and financial aid to build up their infant industries? And what are they to expect from the so-called socialist countries, whose interest in them seems to be political at least as much as economic?

To sum up what I had to say under this second heading: the world cannot be a secure place as long as all parts of it do not prosper equally. There is willingness to help on the part of those who have; but it is not as strong and steadfast as it should be. At the receiving end, full recognition is not always shown of the simple fact that any kind of development has to start at the beginning, presupposes immense knowledge not to be acquired overnight and, consequently, cannot do without some measure of modesty and boundless patience.

Again I feel - as I do about the relations between autocracies and democracies - that a policy of confrontation will not help. I am a great believer in the instrument of negotiation. It should be substituted increasingly for the violent and mostly empty pronouncements which have not exactly furthered the great cause of development aid so far. Negotiation means talking to one another, man to man, not just to the gallery. Inevitably, a human relationship will develop between the negotiators, possibly a friendship, and they will have at least one interest in common: the success of the negotiation. All this will bring about a change of climate, an improvement in the general atmosphere, which is fondly to be hoped for in this intricate and irksome field of development cooperation.

I attach particular importance to my last subject: feeling secure as a human being. The modern world with all it implies has made man feel insecure to the highest degree. In the Western world, despite variations from country to country and individual to individual, he can afford much more than his fathers and grandfathers ever dreamt of. Technical civilization has made available to him an enormous variety of amusements of all kinds. Increasing material resources have spurred him on to ever higher ambitions. More money and less work, to be granted on the spot, here and now, seem to be a matter of course. The sky is the limit to the cravings of modern man.

And still people are not happy and they do not feel secure. They have lost the sense of belonging which was a dominant characteristic of former generations. Families have broken up into the smallest possible fragments. People live in the same huge apartment building and they have never spoken to their neighbours. Loneliness is wide-spread. All this is not natural and not healthy. Look at any living organism nature has created, the human body for instance. The various vital organs are securely embedded in the place where they belong, held by strong muscles, fed by the blood

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stream, controlled by the nervous system. That is how the heart performs its duty as a heart and the brain as a brain. Modern human beings seem to be intent on being all over the place at the same time. In the process, they lose the bonds of nature only to be more firmly bound by the shackles of their own making. Such are the blessings of the modern world.

I am far from rejecting its scientific achievements. I am, rather, proud of them and rejoice in them as a citizen of this earth in the last quarter of the 20th century. But I also feel that opportunity should not induce disorder or possession of wealth indiscipline. What strikes me most and really frightens me are two things: limitless ambitions pursued by so many with a certain insolence on the one hand, ever deepening ignorance on the other. There is, obviously, a close connection between the two. If one only knew more about the workings of nature, of the human mind, the teachings of history and the laws of the economy, one could not be so extravagant in one's claims or so stupid in one's pretensions. And the world - our world - would not be like a steaming pot just about to boil over. The continued existence of such a situation might well make life on this earth unbearable in the end.

I know full well that the justification usually put forward is a superficial philosophy of egalitarianism. I for one feel deeply about the necessity of giving all human beings an equal start in life. But what should count in the restructuring of human society is merit and merit alone. What is gained has to be earned, has to be earned by hard work, the accumulation of knowledge and an acute sense of responsibility. To maintain class privileges in our age seems to me difficult to justify. Just think of the immense harm it does in ill-feeling, unwillingness to talk to the other man, to understand and sympathize with his point of view. The task we are faced with of building a better world cannot be achieved without the close and friendly cooperation of all men of goodwill.

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But something even more fundamental has to be considered if human beings are to recover their peace of mind and a feeling of security. There are limits to equality. Differences between human beings will remain in any human community, no matter how well organized and carefully balanced it is. Nature bestows its gifts as it pleases, lavishing great qualities on some and denying most to others. And then there is this miraculous element called fate. Some are simply luckier than others, and all are not lucky in the same field. So the moment comes even for the most gifted and the most ambitious to accept their individual destiny as it is. A French statesman and philosopher of the early 18th century, Henry François d'Aguesseau, said: "Le plus précieux et le plus rare de tous les biens est l'amour de son état. Il n'y a rien que l'homme connaisse moins que le bonheur de sa condition." If this was true two or three hundred years ago, it is even truer today. There is a lot of talk about integration in the economic field. But what is needed even more is a process of reintegration in human society, allotting his place to everyone, contenting everyone in the fullest sense of the term. Restlessness and insecurity will then remain limited to just "human nature", doing away with all those additional tensions and pretensions modern civilization has brought in its wake.

Only in a relaxed atmosphere of human contentment can we approach, with any chance of success, the huge problems of our age. So, not altogether surprisingly, this short and very incomplete analysis of the notion of security brings me back to essential human values. If this is a Swiss view of security which you are prepared to accept, so much the better.

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