

Proportional representation

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The private soldier has 12 francs a week at his disposal. He is lucky in that beer and cigarettes are not only plentiful but cheap — much cheaper than in England at present. These two commodities are, indeed, about the sole exceptions in the universally high cost of living.

The soldier has advantages in cheap canteen prices when he wants, for example, a cup of tea or coffee. Here again the Y.M.C.A. has been instrumental in working out a system of milk rationing which, while, of course, conforming to all Swiss regulations, reacts to the benefit of the soldier consumer. The troops are quite well supplied with radio sets, with full opportunities for listening to B.B.C. programmes or any others they may select. Many excellent wireless sets have been received with gratitude from Swiss donors.

The dismal routine in the évadé centres is occasionally relieved by rotation visits to Adelboden. These last about one month. During that time hotel amenities are enjoyed and skiing facilities are available. Excellent Swiss instructors are already converting tyros into quite proficient performers. Ski tests such as the second and third class ski tests in Great Britain, the Swiss gold and silver tests, have been passed by 23 officers and 32 other ranks. There is also a small detachment of officers and men at Arosa, where first-class skiing and gymnastics instruction has been organised.

With regard to the important matter of sustenance, the British soldier in general has an ampler ration scale than soldiers of Continental armies. Accordingly he sometimes finds the food ration small in size, but, in fairness, it must be said that the quality everywhere is admitted to be excellent:

There was much gratification when the International Red Cross authorities managed to divert to Switzerland parcels from home addressed to prisoner-of-war camps in Italy. Soldiers were also able to receive quantities of back mail.

A second and much smaller class of British and Empire troops now in Switzerland is that of the internees. They may have baled out of aircraft or be members of crews whose machines were obliged to make emergency landings here. Or, again, as infantrymen they may have retreated to the Swiss border and crossed it in the chaos that followed the fall of France. Soldiers such as these, in accordance with international usage, are debarred from leaving Switzerland until the close of hostilities, and must, theoretically at least, be kept under constant military guard.

The Swiss Government, however, has so far desisted from placing the internees in camps and much latitude is accorded them, for which the internees are duly grateful.

The évadés are free to leave this neutral country as soon as the frontier opens.

PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION.

Electoral Reform was discussed in the House of Commons on Thursday, February 3rd when various references to the system of Proportional Representation were interposed by members. As the "Proporz" is the medium by which most of our Federal, cantonal and municipal magistrates are chosen by the people opinions of English parliamentarians offer interesting though not instructive reading. Here are a few:

Mr. Greenwood (Labour) would prefer to keep the two-party system. Complication of parties did tend to confuse political issues and the strength of our system lay primarily in the two parties. Those outside them should make up their minds under which umbrella they were going to shelter.

Proportional misrepresentation would be a national disaster. It would result in a good deal of misrepresentation and the establishment of groups whose interest would be narrow and out of relation to the broad sweep of national problems. It could not be an ideal situation to take a still picture of the population on election day and say that it represented the mind of the nation.

Sir P. Harris (Liberal) profoundly resented the fact that Mr. Greenwood had put forward the undemocratic idea that electors should be forced to vote for one party or another, and that minorities had no right of representation.

Sir R. Young (Labour) preferred P.R. Wherever it had been tried it had been in the main successful — in Northern Ireland, Tasmania, South Africa, Belgium, Finland, and Sweden. Most remarkable of all was the fact that the Government had proposed P.R. for India. In this country it would encourage electors to vote, it would make a coupon election impossible, and it would be far less expensive than the present system.

Col. A. Evans (Unionist) said as to P.R. it was interesting to note that in Wales in the last General Election Liberals of all shades polled over 196,000 votes and obtained 10 seats, while Conservatives with 204,000 votes returned only six members. In spite of that unfortunate experience, the Conservatives were still violently opposed to proportional representation. There was sufficient log-rolling already. The success of our Parliamentary system was mainly due to its party basis.

Mr. Roberts (Liberal) said that there was an increasing gulf between the House of Commons and the general public. The power of the party caucus was overwhelming and it led to a sense of frustration, a belief that the vested interests of trade unions and big business were arranging the issues. Proportional representation could, he thought, remedy this, giving an opportunity of seeing the type of member within a party that the public liked. Something had to be done to improve the constitution.

OUR NEXT ISSUE.

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