

The women's auxiliary service

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rounds us with a new attitude. Only our involvement will help to repair the disorder provoked by the unconsciousness of men. I can see three main paths. The first would reside in direct action, accomplished in a modest and personal way. It would simply be to love the creation which has been given to us, to plant and to protect trees, to defend the lives of animals and to thank God for sun and rain. Secondly, we should contribute to alert public opinion, so that it may open its eyes on the beautiful domain which God has entrusted us. We can help and support all those who are attempting to steer upstream by using the mass media. Finally, we

should alert our political masters so that they may, by dint of laws and conservationist institutions, throw a dike on the present tide of destruction. It is in this way that we may hand down to our little children the joy of seeing the swallows come again in the spring and of listening to the song of the wind in the hedgerows.

Our sins have upset the order of creation. Yes Lord, but with you I will try to look at the lilies of the fields and the birds of the sky with new eyes, and especially with a new and concrete sense of urgency, so that other men, my brethren, *may live*, and live the true life of God's Children. *Amen!*

right of vote to make themselves useful at war! They had rendered indispensable services during the last war. In Switzerland alone, a force of 20,000 Voluntary Servicewomen had put up more than 3½ million days of service. Their presence had even conditioned victory in many of the harder struggles of the war, particularly in the case of the Battle of Britain and in the defence of Finland. So the idea of involving women in military life—in fact, the Frauen Hilfsdienst was now 30 years old—was not new.

Miss Weitzel's conceptions on defence went even further than the official guidelines on "Total Defence of the Land" currently being worked out. To her defence was *an every day duty and exercise*. One defended one's country by adopting a *positive attitude* towards the national values by which we lived and by being prepared to pay a sacrifice to defend them. But we needed to know clearly what in fact we were to defend. This was firstly our *independence*, and secondly our *freedom* (which really covered all that might be called the "freedom to be Swiss" and what it implied).

Defence was, in Miss Weitzel's mind, primarily a moral question. One defended one's country by accomplishing the tasks of every day as usefully to the community as possible and within the framework of values which made this community what it was. Swiss women could also participate in defence by joining a defence *organisation*, namely, the Women's Auxiliary Service. There were also two other corps in which women could also enrol, they were the Red Cross and Civil Defence.

Miss Weitzel then proceeded to describe the work of the Women's Auxiliary Corps. It was not intended, she stressed, to replace the ordinary tasks of a male army. The female volunteers of the Service did not in any way accomplish the tasks which befitted a young man's muscularity and hardiness. The volunteers of the Auxiliary Service were given jobs suitable for them, and indeed there was a variety of fields within defence in which feminine qualities and specialities could be profitably put to use. Volunteers could choose between one of many assignments. They could become ambulance drivers or telegraphists; they could join the administration of the army in the field, or the communica-

THE WOMEN'S AUXILIARY SERVICE

The last monthly meeting of the Nouvelle Société Helvétique gave the opportunity to members of hearing one of the most prominent women of Switzerland, Miss Andrée Weitzel. Miss Weitzel is well known as head of the Women's Auxiliary Service (Frauen Hilfsdienst) as well as for her involvement in the Nouvelle Société Helvétique, the Commission for the Swiss Abroad and other official bodies. Many Swiss ladies who are now in their late thirties, have seen or heard her campaign in their secondary school days in favour of the Women's Auxiliary Service. Her last propaganda effort in this realm was a film on the life of a Voluntary Corps recruit, *Barbara*, which has been seen by hundreds of thousands of Swiss girls and has received a positive comment in the Swiss Press. But Miss Weitzel's talk to the N.S.H. had nothing propagandistic about it. She had come to speak to us in a purely private capacity and her purpose was to inform us on an original and refreshing subject.

Mrs. Mariann Meier, President of London's N.S.H. group, had to convey apologies for absence from many Embassy officials—who are usually N.S.H. regulars—as they had been invited to Buckingham Palace that evening. But despite these regretted absences, an encouraging attendance turned up to listen to such a distinguished speaker.

Miss Weitzel began her exposé by setting down its aim clearly: she would not talk on Swiss women, nor on women, nor on defence, but she would talk on the *position* of Swiss women with respect to National Defence and the Auxiliary Service.

Miss Weitzel introduced her subject by describing the changing nature of armed conflicts and by outlining the role which woman had to play in the society of today. She explained that the principal differences between modern

warfare and the battles of earlier times lay in the infinitely greater distance between the foes. What was once the close clash of clubs and swords has been depersonalised and stretched by the range of a gun or a rocket. War has indeed become terribly mechanical and impersonal. But as an immediate consequence of this, the geographical scope of its devastation has been multiplied. The old armies used to limit their looting to the villages and fields that lay in their way, but the rest of the countries they traversed remained relatively uninvolved.

On the other hand, the ravages of the modern invader affect a whole country. In Miss Weitzel's words, war has become more "*horizontal*". It has also become "*vertical*" in that there is no more definite front, no clear line of demarcation between friend and foe, but only a general and confused contact, established either by the physical means of rockets and strategic bombers, which can strike both warring parties at any time, or by the psychological means of beamed propaganda and political action. The notion of "defence" must, therefore, be more widely and vividly understood than ever before. Far more is at stake. If Switzerland should ever be involved in a war again, then the *whole population* and not just the males of fighting age, will be involved. It is in this context that the defensive role of women must be examined. There are reasons to believe that future wars will have an ideological character and that their belligerents will not be fighting over the ownership of their soil only, but also over *values*.

Miss Weitzel mentioned the increasing role of woman in modern society and recalled the necessarily increased awareness and patriotic responsibility which this involved. But women should not have to wait to be given the

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tions services of the air warning system. These were just a few examples.

Volunteers accomplished a three-week training course and served annual two-weekly repetition courses for seven years. There were particular and accepted motives for exemption from normal military duty, such as marriage or child-birth, but in the main, this service, once assumed, had to be taken as seriously as normal masculine national service. Female auxiliary volunteers enjoyed the same rights as the soldiers and the military code was the same for both.

There were inevitable difficulties in recruitment. Of the 40,000 Swiss girls who reached the age of 20 in any one year, only a few hundred enrolled in the Auxiliary Service. The figure fell to 300 in lean years and rose to over a thousand in the better years. This dearth (and actual diminution) in enrollees was a normal sign of the times and Miss Weitzel was sure that many more girls would join the Service the day the international situation began to threaten the country. Girls wishing to serve had to satisfy a few basic requirements: They had to be over 19 and under 40, they had to be physically fit and had to present clean moral and judicial records.

The Auxiliary Service could be an extremely enriching experience. Miss Weitzel said that the young girls who joined it and performed their two-

weekly stints experienced a feeling which was very rare among Swiss women: *they felt that they belonged to their country.* They broke away from the closed horizon of their homes and their material worries to become *part of a whole.* The traditional denial of the right of vote to Swiss women had indeed not helped them in developing such solidary feelings, but this situation would tend to change with the current political liberation of Swiss women. Miss Weitzel added that the practice of female voluntary service had very concrete consequences in every day life. For example, the subject of national service in Switzerland is an exclusively masculine preserve. When old army mates gather, they will inevitably reminisce on their old and joint experiences and their poor wives will not be able to take part. With the onset of voluntary service, military life no longer remains a world closed to women. On the contrary, it becomes a ground which they can share in common with their men and on which they can even initiate their children. Finally, the Womens Auxiliary Service gives a chance to its enrollees to know Switzerland and to learn how their compatriots live.

Miss Weitzel ended her exposé by turning to fundamentals. Her considered view was that our national safety was not secure in the present international set-up and that it was there-

fore necessary to *be prepared* for an emergency which we hoped and prayed would never arise. To a query from a member of her audience on the contradiction of Christian ethics with the purpose of military service, she answered with the image of a happy father who takes a Sunday walk with his family and whose child is suddenly snatched away from him by a prowler. "A Christian father would be the first to run after the man!" she said. The Little Red Book was surprisingly not brought forward at the ensuing discussion, but, as I had the opportunity to learn at the City Swiss Club's Annual Ball two days later, Miss Weitzel, although approving the general intent of the book, disagreed with the extravagance of some of its representations as well as with the unequal translations into the three languages.

The exposé which we were given to hear at the Nouvelle Société Helvétique's November meeting on an original subject was not only interesting and eloquently delivered in French, it radiated with the idealism of a personality dedicated to the preservation of what is best in the Swiss edifice.

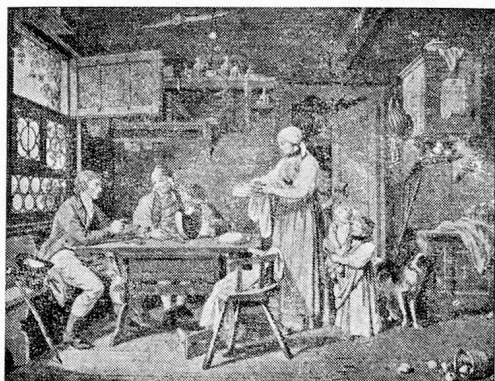
I ought not to conclude without saying that, contrary to the imagery carried by her profession, Miss Weitzel is *not* an autocratic and military figure, but a most charming and definitely feminine person . . .

(PMB)

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