

Zeitschrift: Helvetia : magazine of the Swiss Society of New Zealand
Herausgeber: Swiss Society of New Zealand
Band: 5 (1939-1940)
Heft: 4

Artikel: Foreign authorities voice opinion of Switzerland
Autor: [s.n.]
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-943246>

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HELVETIA



Monthly Publication of the
SWISS BENEVOLENT SOCIETY in New Zealand

Groupe New Zealand of the N.H.G.

AUCKLAND, N.Z.

5th YEAR : VOL. 4.

1st JANUARY, 1940.

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SEASON'S COMPLIMENTS

Our Consul, Dr. W. Schmid and his family extend to all our members and their relations a very happy and prosperous New Year.

The Committee of your Society joins the felicitations and extends hearty greetings and all best wishes. Let it be our prayer, that Switzerland remains immune from the ever increasing turmoil of war and that the coming year will bring peace, happiness and prosperity to this war torn world. The Swiss are a peace loving community, abhorring greed and selfishness which has been the cause of this international trouble.

Mr. and Mrs. W. Ungemuth extend their season's greetings and best wishes to all members of our society, especially to the many friends and acquaintances in the Waikato and Taranaki, who have made them so welcome during their visits to those districts.

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FOREIGN AUTHORITIES VOICE OPINION OF SWITZERLAND.

PARIS: The famous French Dramatic, Henry Bernstein, a staunch friend and regular visitor of Switzerland for over 50 years, writes: "The neutrality of Switzerland is by no means one of circumspection or of yielding. It is an expression of an ideal to assist the suffering and the weak, an expression of solidarity between all men. In this war the political as well as the economic neutrality is strictly maintained. It is expressed in every action, and no man or woman will listen to threats nor to promises, wherever voiced from; sooner would they be annihilated than open the door to an intruder. The Swiss have proved the value of their bravery time and again during the long history of Europe. Should their Fatherland be attacked, every man would willingly give his life to defend it. May God spare Switzerland such an unjust fate."

COPENHAGEN: The lively interest in the Swiss Defence measure is expressed by the leading Norwegian periodical "Trdns Tegn" under the apt heading "An Exemplary State." It says that of all the neutral countries, Switzerland makes the greatest sacrifices to ensure adequate protection and defence. The development of these defences had no panicky character, but was built up systematically during the past 20 years; the more modern and newest fighting weapons were already acquired several years ago.

The Swiss Army has always been composed of all classes of the people, and achieved with comparatively moderate means an efficiency second to none among small nations. Norway should employ a defence system similar to Switzerland, continues the paper, and it recommends the despatch of a Military commission to study the most efficient organisation of this small country.

MILAN: The "Popolo d'Italia" Mussolini's official organ, under a heading "Switzerland and its Neutrality", explains that our independence is the result of the geographical position and our history. The Peace Conference of the Viennese Congress and at Versailles confirmed the perpetual neutrality of Switzerland and all Europe recognised the interest and necessity of its maintenance. The paper remarks furthermore: "On January 6th, 1928, Mussolini fully explained to the Senate the fundamental interest of an independent, free and neutral Switzerland. The Confederation is a natural guardian of the important arteries across the Alps, the Jura, and the Rhine. Through this neutrality Switzerland had to perform many obligations, chief of which was unscrupulous justice in her relations with her neighbours."

In 1831, 1859, 1870, 1871 and 1914/18, the Swiss soldier watched his borders, and he took up the same duty on September 2nd, 1939. Switzerland will, can and must protect itself. Furthermore, the Confederation is the centre of a great humane institution; the Red Cross, inaugurated by a famous Swiss. In these times of trouble and strain it is necessary to visualise the usefulness of such a neutrality.

BUDAPEST: Some interesting extracts are published in the Hungarian newspaper "Nepszava". "Amongst the many small nations of Europe, Switzerland is at present in a particularly exposed position. Hemmed in by three large powers, Switzerland, as in the last war, must guard against becoming involved in the struggle. On the day war was declared, General Mobilisation was ordered, and of the four million inhabitants, no less than 500,000 men rushed to the frontiers; representing a highly efficient army, whose equipment demands highest respect."

This nation has every reason to sacrifice all to maintain independence and freedom, because the great prosperity upheld during the past economic crisis, is due solely to the fact that there has been no war for well over a century. Every Swiss knows that such conditions can only be brought about through peaceful policy. Why people should annihilate each other through national hate is incomprehensible to a Swiss. Notwithstanding that three-quarters of the Swiss population are German speaking, they elected unanimously, and with great enthusiasm, a French Swiss as Commanding General of the entire army. Switzerland is an outstanding example of the perfect harmony and brotherhood which can exist, and be maintained, between peoples of radically different temperaments and speech. A new nation developed, where language and other differences are bridged, and perhaps this represents the kernel of a new European organisation. In no other country is it so strongly realised that other nations have not yet found the same solution to overcome the language barrier. That this can be done the Swiss Confederation clearly proves. One can learn, in Switzerland, the real democracy, and the wonderful fruit it brings forth. Nothing is done without the consent of the citizen - for instance in the Capitol a vote was taken to rebuild some old quarters. In any other country such a measure would simply be discussed and decided upon by the city council - but there the procedure was as follows:-

Two weeks prior to the proposal every citizen received a booklet explaining the necessity for the expenditure, and the respective advantages gained thereby. The architect's plan was also mapped out, giving details of the proposed buildings, and including the full budget. This gave every man a personal interest in the project, and a feeling that he was assisting in the actual creation.

To propagate a totalitarian regime in such a country would be quite impossible, as the Swiss, who have been proudly independent for 600 years would never tolerate a dictator.

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CENTRAL INFORMATION BUREAU FOR PRISONERS OF
WAR ESTABLISHED BY INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS
AT GENEVA.

In accordance with its purpose and traditions the International Committee of the Red Cross at Geneva has again established a Central Information Bureau for Prisoners of War, same as it maintained during the World War of 1914-1918. At that time the offices were housed in Geneva's Musée Rath, which to-day bears a tablet to that effect. Due to a recent fire which caused heavy damage to this building (it contains a collection of plaster casts of antique sculptures on the ground floor and is used for various exhibitions otherwise) the authorities of Geneva have placed the "Salle du Conseil Général" formerly known as the "Palais Electoral" at the disposal of the International Red Cross as headquarters for its new Central Information Bureau.

While delegates have been sent to the nations at war to confer with their respective governments and Red Cross organisations, a large number of volunteers has already become available for this humanitarian enterprise. This staff is practically organised now and the duties awaiting it will be stupendous. To enable the International Committee of the Red Cross to start its work the Swiss Federal Council voted a credit of 200,000 Swiss Francs. Switzerland is strictly neutral and is spending over a million dollars a day to keep her army of 500,000 men at the front to safeguard her neutrality.

The following statistics from the last World War will suffice to give an approximate idea of the huge task accomplished by the International Red Cross in those days:

Records about French prisoners in Germany filled 500 volumes of 200 pages each, and German prisoners in France took up one and a half million slips. During the four-year duration of the war 120,000 persons came to Geneva to seek information regarding the whereabouts of relatives. Head of this magnificent charitable enterprise was the late Mr. Gustave Ador, President of Switzerland in 1919, assisted by a staff of 1,200 volunteers. Some 2,000-3,000 pieces of mail reached the Bureau daily, increasing in certain periods to 15,000 and even 18,000. Mail covered all nationalities at war, including Americans.

Prof. Max Huber, former president of the Permanent Court of Arbitration for international disputes at the Hague, has been at the head of the Central Committee of the International Red Cross since the death of Mr. Ador in 1928.

It will be remembered that the International Red Cross Society was founded by the late Jean Henri Dunant of Geneva. On June 14, 1859 Dunant happened to witness the battle of Solferino, where the allied forces of the French and Piedmontese met and overthrew the armies of Austria. The horrible conditions which prevailed on that battlefield prompted the Swiss philanthropist to write a book "Souvenir of Solferino". The ideas he advanced therein attracted world wide attention. With much hard work Dunant succeeded in his campaign for the establishment of a volunteer corps, drilled and instructed in the handling of stretchers, permanently organized and protected in its work on the battlefield by its absolute neutrality.