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Autor: [s.n.]
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SWISS BENEVOLENT SOCIETY in New Zealand



Groupe New Zealand of the N.H.G.

AUCKLAND,
1st. OCTOBER, 1940.

+++++++ 6th YEAR: VOL. 1.

PRESENT CONDITIONS IN SWITZERLAND.

For 4 months we have not received any Swiss newspapers and with the exception of the radio broadcasts from Switzerland to Australia and New Zealand, very little news has reached us on happenings in Switzerland since the second half of June. On the other hand the news in the New Zealand Press was rather a source of anxiety. The radio broadcast of last Sunday, October 6, therefore came like a godsend, and during the course of this week newspapers from Switzerland have arrived in great piles.

The perusing of the dozen and more illustrated Swiss newspapers of July and August surely was refreshing. These pictures from home are the same as they ever were. The face of our people and the aspect of our country with its picturesque towns and villages have remained the same. The many recent pictures of activities such as national fairs and exhibitions (Lausanne, Lugano, Locarno), historic anniversaries, national and regional wrestling contests, the usual sporting contests (cycling, football, mountaineering, swimming, military), premières of newly produced Swiss films including the production of a perfumed film (the production of perfumed films is a Swiss invention conveying to the audience the scent of the objects seen on the screen), are re-assuring. In short, Switzerland is the same to which we have ever been accustomed. It is true, the scores of photographs of military manoeuvres (the greater part of the army is still mobilised), of local defence bodies formed by boys and sexagenarians, armed with all kinds of rifles, of women's auxiliary troops, etc. bring home to us the story of Switzerland's defence. But it is a matter of pride to learn from such illustrations and their text that the Swiss people are still prepared to defend their country, come what may.

Turning to the daily newspapers, the most important historical document which recently has been published, no doubt is the speech of the President of Switzerland, Mr. Pilet-Golaz, which he made on June 25, 1940, in the name of the Swiss Federal Council. A translation of the official text of this speech is reprinted in this issue. This important historical speech outlines the political problems with which Switzerland is confronted at the present juncture, and also reflects the opinion of the Federal Council of what must be done in order to save the country's independence. This speech no doubt has been commented upon in a number of New Zealand newspapers in too pessimistic a manner, and it is interesting to read what an American journalist of the great American press association "The Associated Press" has to say on conditions in Switzerland at the end of August. His remarks are quoted in quotation marks :

1.) "Switzerland is the only democracy which has survived on the European Continent. The Swiss people love their small

" confederate state and they have by no means the desire to exchange it for foreign control or a totalitarian regime."

There is nothing I can find in all the newspapers of August and September which are at my disposal which would contradict this statement. No doubt, people in Switzerland are aware of the fact, that the time for an internal rebirth has also come for the Swiss democracy, and at the present time the country is flooded with a mass of reform proposals. Last Sunday Radio Switzerland has given us an idea within what limits such reforms must be expected. The Swiss Federal Council still has to report to Parliament on its activities. Thus the basic democratic system will be carried out as before. The principles of Swiss democracy will be as before: political independence, founded on the unalterable will of self-defence; liberty, based on order and discipline; neutrality and friendly relations with foreign countries; conservation of our federalistic traditions (cantons); private initiative in commerce and industry. Reforms are especially necessary in such social matter as family; unemployment and labour; land; the inter-relation between capital and labour; and in party politics.

2.) "The old traditional political parties unanimously have closed their ranks behind the Federal Council."

3.) "In foreign circles in Switzerland the opinion exists that the Axis Powers will leave the country as it is as the guardian of the Alpine passes."

The following statement of the American journalist in my opinion characterises the present mentality of the Swiss people regarding the independence of their country:

4.) "Most military experts believe that Switzerland, if invaded, would not only fight on one or all fronts, but she would even fight well."

The Swiss press of the last few weeks is full of such statements, from the Commander-in-Chief down to simple soldiers, and I refer the reader to what General Guisan told 600 Swiss officers, which on the Swiss National Anniversary Day (1st. of August) were assembled on the Ruetli, further to statements of the Swiss Association of Non-Commissioned Officers, and to many individual demonstrations of this kind, as for instance the one of a military patrol, who on the Swiss National Anniversary Day has sent the following message to the Commander-in-Chief through carrier-pigeons from an altitude of 14000 feet of ice and snow:

"On the first of August 1940 in 14000 feet altitude to General Guisan. From the peak of the Tête Blanche the men of the patrol of the Mountain Brigade, Bat. 10, renew the oath of 1291 and swear to defend our country to the last drop of blood." Every true Swiss at home has firmly set his mind to this end.

To the allegations made, that the small Swiss army would have no chance to fight against the armies of great Powers, the Swiss Commander-in-Chief and other military experts recently have answered, that in our mountains the modern weapons, with which during the past few months other countries have been subdued, cannot be applied so effectively. Here the outcome of an encounter to a great extent depends on the personal efficiency and deeds of the individual soldiers. But even the prospect of defeat cannot subdue the unalterable will of the Swiss people to defend their country, realising that a people who have not the will to defend their country at any cost and under any circumstances, have no right to exist.

In the following statements the American journalist again reverts to his opinion on present-day Switzerland :

5.) "Economically Switzerland is under pressure. Certain foodstuffs have been rationed even before the war started. Coal and petrol are rationed as well. Prices are rising further. In war-torn Europe there are no more tourists and many hotels had to close down. Switzerland is depending on the importation of

" foodstuffs and fuel; and exports for a livelihood. She has no sea port and her only link with the outer world leads through France (now for the purposes of trading declared enemy territory by Britain), or through Germany or Italy. Switzerland therefore had to negotiate with these countries, and with Germany a Clearing and Trade Treaty, valid until June 1941, has already been concluded. In this treaty Germany guarantees Switzerland the supply of coal and iron."

With Great Britain the negotiations have not been concluded as yet. It is planned to direct imports and exports to and from Switzerland via Lisbon, and it is expected that negotiations will soon bring about the desired results.

In the face of the economic difficulties, with which Switzerland is confronted, it will be understood that the Swiss Government, as an act of self-preservation for the whole country, cannot tolerate in press, assemblies and meetings, any hostile criticism of foreign countries. Therefore, -

6.) "A censorship of the press has been introduced. Newspaper issues have been prohibited or confiscated. The Government warns newspapers against commenting on and sensationally headlining news, which may create difficulties with foreign countries."

The activities of the Communist Party have been prohibited. On the other side the Government is trying to come to an understanding with the newly appearing national front. Whether the latter will be able to gain importance is entirely up to the Swiss people. So far these parties have proved a failure. The democratic tradition has been rooted deep in the minds of the Swiss people, by a regime 600 years old. We may have confidence!

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OFFICIAL TEXT OF A SPEECH MADE BY THE PRESIDENT
OF THE SWISS CONFEDERATION, ON JUNE 25, 1940.

In the name of the Swiss Federal Council President Pilet-Golaz on the 25th June 1940 made the following statement over the three Swiss National Radio Stations in French, which was afterwards repeated in German by Federal Councillor Etter, and in Italian by Federal Councillor Celio. The complete official statement of the Federal Council follows here in English translation:
Compatriots!

Probably you have already been wondering why I have remained silent for fully 7 weeks. Did the Federal Council really have nothing to say in face of the events which reeled off on the world screen like a tragic film? The Federal Council had to think, to make provisions, take decisions and act. It could not make speeches. Speech-making is too popular among us. Talking cannot change the course of events by an inch.

If the Federal Council is addressing the Swiss people again today, it is because a tremendous event has occurred, which will have far-reaching consequences. France has just concluded an armistice with Germany and Italy. Whatever may be the sadness which fills the heart of every Christian confronted with so much desolation and loss of life, it is nevertheless a great relief to us Swiss people to know that our great neighbours have now entered the path of peace: These neighbours with whom we have such close spiritual and economic links, these neighbours who figuratively meet on the peaks of our heaven-scaling mountains and whose culture has been enriching us for centuries, just as the streams descending from the Gotthard Ranges have been fertilising their plains.

This re-assurance -- the word may be the right expression for it -- is natural, human, especially to unobtrusive neutrals who so far have been spared in every respect. We cannot, however, allow ourselves to be deceived by it. To give ourselves up to illusions of a state of carefree happiness would be dangerous. The difficult present will be followed by too difficult a future to allow us to fall back indifferently into the past. An armistice does not yet mean peace, and our part of the world remains in a state of alarm.