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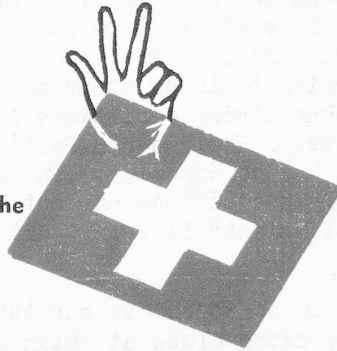
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HELVETIA



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SWISS BENEVOLENT SOCIETY
in New Zealand

Group New Zealand of the N.H.G.

WELLINGTON
DECEMBER, 1942.

No. 3, 8th Year.

NEW YEAR'S MESSAGE FROM THE SWISS CONSUL AT WELLINGTON.

On the threshold of the New Year I should like to extend to all my fellow countrymen in New Zealand, also in the name of my family, best wishes for their future. May they enjoy, as ever, the blessings of good health and the fruits of their daily work and toil.

For all those who are separated from their New Zealand-born sons and other relatives, who are fulfilling sacred duties on far-away battlefields, I hope that the longing for safe return of loved ones may soon be answered. I also know that on the occasion of the forthcoming New Year, the thoughts of all of us will, more than ever, be linked with our people at Home and our Homeland. We all hope that the stars of Good Fortune which have so kindly been reigning over them, will not cease to shine. On the other hand, we have good occasion to admire the courage and the staunch spirit of independence displayed by our own kith and kin in Switzerland in a world fraught with deadly danger. It is, then, the duty of all of us, as their representatives in this country, to be a true mirror of such faith and confidence.

DR. WALTER SCHMID.

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SWISS PEASANT HOLDS FAST TO FREE HERITAGE.

(Special to 'The Christian Science Monitor', Boston), 3/10/42.

The Swiss peasant to-day thinks he is a little bit different from other peasants of Europe. It is not because he is living in a relatively free country. It is not that he considers himself on a socially higher strata. It is just that Switzerland's farmers have been perhaps more closely associated with the advancement of democracy within their own state. If other states have gained democratic institutions, it has been largely due to the efforts of a different group within the country. In Switzerland, the freedom, individual independence and representative government is the result, primarily, of a peasant movement - of the peasants, by the peasants and for the peasants.

The shepherd on the slopes of the Jungfrau and the smith in the village of Alpnachstad - each has been taught that his is the oldest tradition of national and social independence of any peasantry in Europe. It has been passed down through generations that Switzerland started as a peasant movement towards freedom from the aristocratic system of domination set up by the Habsburgs. And almost any Swiss farmer can relate stories of how in many fierce battles, faced by overwhelming odds of armoured knights, peasants of Uri, Schwyz, Unterwalden and Bern gradually fought their way to freedom.

The reason they had advanced so far is found in their democratic principle. Hand in hand with their national independence goes the Swiss peasants' love of self-government. Each small farm community is a political unit, almost a state in itself.

The peasants are well represented in the Federal Government. The Peasant Party, "Bauern-, Buerger - und Gewerbe-Partei", is very strong. It was formed in 1918 after the general strike of the workers. At that time both the Workers' Party and the industrialists were trying to lower the price of agricultural products and subject the peasant to Balkan living conditions in order to be better able to compete with foreign products. The Peasant Party was formed by a young peasant who had up to then had no experience in politics outside the village meetings. The party immediately won success and put 32 representatives into the House of Representatives, "Nationalrat" in Bern, making it one of the largest parties.

In all Swiss social units freedom of speech is permitted. In many communities the farm lads have organised speaking clubs at which each member holds a talk on some subject which interests him. Rudolph Minger, leader and founder of the Peasant Party, got his first training in speaking and arranging his thoughts at such a club. His present clear style of speaking is due to this early training, though he still speaks slowly and with the heaviness of a man accustomed to physical hard labour.

It is this love of free thought and expression which particularly distinguishes the Swiss peasant. It often has been said that the Swiss peasant makes too much of his right of opposition and that he opposes the Federal Government on principle.

The Swiss peasant like every other class in Switzerland is firmly convinced of the rightness and justice of their federalistic principle of government. Where else in Europe can four different language groups and countless different "folk characters" and traditions live in peace together. To-day more than ever does the achievement of the Swiss stand out. In other parts of Europe peoples of different cultures bomb and destroy each other's houses and carry each other off to slavery. In Switzerland, a regiment of German speaking Bern peasant guards the Italian speaking Tessin in the South, while a regiment of French-speaking Vaudois guard Bern and a regiment of Italian speaking Tessiner guard Vaud.

Not only politically but also economically the Swiss peasants are organised in a democratic manner. Each peasant belongs to several co-operatives corresponding to the products he raises, such as the grain co-operative and the milk co-operative. In this co-operative he has the right to vote for economic measures and to elect officers. Co-operatives deal with problems of marketing and production.

Officers of the co-operatives elect officers of the "Union of Co-operatives", the next unit of economic organisation. The Union deals with the broader problems of marketing and production in co-operating with the Federal Government. When mass purchasing in foreign countries is necessary, the Union does this, as it can get better terms than the individual farmer. The Union likewise directs planting and feeding to correspond to the available feed and needs of the population.

This system of governing through a body which is in direct contact with the peasant and elected by him saves the Federal Council many a decree. Instead of making a law and getting the machinery of bureaucracy, the Federal Government suggests the measure to the Union and the Union puts it through with the least possible compulsion and friction. For such projects as clearing forest land for grain production and reclaiming swamp land government subsidies are given to peasants through the Union.

The highest economic organisation is the "Swiss Peasants Union". Its officers are elected by officers of the "Union of Co-operatives". The Peasant Union concerns itself with a thorough investigation of production and economic problems to supply a basis for governmental measures. Workers of this Union foresaw Switzerland's present food shortage and made an increase production plan long before the war.

Switzerland is a country of small freeholders. Eighty-five per cent of all Swiss farms are freely held, 15 per cent are rented. There are no large plantations where hundreds of farmhands work the land as in a big industry. Most of the work is done by the farmer and his family. Richer farmers have one or two farmhands. The job of being a farmhand is usually only a temporary one for a young man until he has acquired his own farm by marriage, inheritance or purchase or until he has learned another trade.

Just as strong as the impulse to freedom of the individual Swiss peasant is the instinct of mutual aid and community feeling, both essential for the maintenance of a truly free and independent national state. This impulse for mutual aid is furthered by the hard living conditions in the high Alps, where a peasant has to be ready to help his neighbour out of a snowdrift or his neighbour's family out of an avalanche.

Co-operation was in evidence among the first Swiss in their method of land holding. Besides their individual farms in the valleys, they possessed alpine meadows and forests in common.

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SUNDRY NEWS FROM SWITZERLAND.

An increase in the emoluments of Federal Councillors is proposed by the finance commission of the States Council. In future a Federal Councillor would be entitled to an annual salary of Frs. 35,000 and Frs. 5,000 representation expenses with an additional Frs. 3,000 for the President.

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Federal Councillor Kokelt of the Military Department issued a warning stating that "in this war of surprises no one can say that a situation will not develop which might threaten us. Military service has been cut to a minimum in view of economic needs, but it cannot be further reduced without impairing our preparedness."

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The immediate outlook for the supply of meat is somewhat gloomy. The ration has been halved and is now 500 grammes per month and hotels and restaurants have to observe three meatless days per week instead of two as hitherto.

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It seems almost a wonder, that after three years of world war we are still able to buy bread at a proportionately low price and without bread cards, although not white any longer. It is easily understandable that this fact has caused a great increase in bread consumption during these last years. The increase is from 170 grammes per head and day in August 1939 to an average of 260 grammes. This fact, however, is apt to conceal the difficulties in the importation of grain. These are causing great worries to the authorities. Until next year when the increased home production of grain makes itself felt, two thirds of the necessary wheat has to come from overseas. Before the war 100 kg. of wheat could be sent from a North or South American port to a destination in Switzerland for 8 to 9 frs., inclusive insurance and lighterage charges. Today the cost for the same service amounts to 30 frs. from New York and nearly 40 frs. from Buenos Aires. Argentine wheat costs today 48 frs. per 100 kg. i.e. two-and-a-half times more than the pre-war price. This price, however, prevails only when wheat can be brought direct to Genoa, but if it has to go by shuttle service via Lisbon to Genoa, then the price for 100 kg. La Plata wheat rises to 60 frs. If the price of bread were calculated on the basis of cost the 1 kg. loaf would have to be sold at 72 to 73 cts. Actually the price was 53 cts. until recently when a price increase of 5 cts. was introduced by an increase of 4 cts for white flour, the remainder was born by the Confederation and amounted to round 80 million frs. Should the war situation change in such a way that wheat could no longer be imported from the U.S.A., then not only would the price of bread have to be increased, but the problem of tonnage would become more acute, as the journey from New York to Europe is only half the distance of that from Buenos Aires.

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For the first time the intensified cultivation of potatoes has made it possible to provide the country with its own home production of potatoes from harvest to fresh harvesting. Already early potatoes have appeared on the market at the end of June at prices below last year's Italian price for earlies. This pleasing fact is in the first instance due to the result of the increased cultivation which from 48,000 ha. in 1940 rose to 63,000 ha. in 1941, and although there was only an average harvest, a total of 100,000 truck loads of 10 tons each was at the disposal of the country. Further, thanks to a number of wise measures on the part of the authorities, above all the compulsory storage of 3,000 truck loads, made it possible to supply deficiency districts without the need to import foreign potatoes. Even seed supplies were at hand until the arrival of seed potatoes from foreign countries with which agreements for such supplies were in existence.