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HELVETIA



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SWISS BENEVOLENT SOCIETY
in New Zealand

Group New Zealand of the N.H.G.

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AS OTHERS SEE US.

A number of notable articles have appeared in English dailies, perhaps not very interesting to our readers but instructive in so far as they show the lines or light in which the particular writer wishes the English people to judge us.

The "Yorkshire Post", May 26th, publishes under the heading "The Land of the Red Cross" a contribution which we reproduce in full though many of the statements are common knowledge:

"Switzerland stands out as a democratic oasis amid the Axis-made desert of Europe. This Alpine Confederation occupies a unique and difficult position in this war-wracked world. In August, 1941, Switzerland celebrated the 650th anniversary of the Confederation. Its deed of 1291 A.D. aimed at the "protection of external freedom and independence and maintenance of internal order and justice." On the 1941 occasion the Swiss reaffirmed their determination to remain neutral and their inflexible resolve to defend the country's integrity against any aggressor. They deem it their mission to alleviate suffering and hardship, and fulfil their humane tasks to the best of their ability in this emergency. And when peace comes they look forward to resuming their policy of promoting reconciliation and understanding between nations.

Though a neutral Switzerland has felt the full economic impact of this war. The country's current importance derives from four factors. It is a living link between opposing belligerents. It still provides a measure of protection to victims of Axis persecution. It still believes in and practices democracy. Lastly, it occupies a key position on the road between Germany and Italy and controls the twin strategic passes, the Gotthard and the Simplon.

This Alpine democracy is a major factor in international diplomacy. About a year ago (May 1st, 1942) it took over the protection of British interests in Japan from Argentina. Today, it is acting for Britain as Protecting Power in all enemy countries. The Swiss Legation in Washington is looking after Axis interests in the United States in so far as they are compatible with American law, and is guardian of Axis properties in this country. In Italy it represents no fewer than fourteen of the United Nations, and in Germany, thirteen of the Axis opponents. All this entails additional work, and extra staff. War conditions have obliged the Swiss Government to set up a new division for Foreign Interests in the Political Department at Berne. Through Swiss hands also passes the great bulk of all correspondence relating to affairs between belligerents of one camp and those of the other. Finally, exchange of civilians and wounded prisoners of war between the opposing parties is largely conducted by the Swiss. This involves a surprisingly large volume of correspondence.

By virtue of her geographical position Switzerland is compelled to give some indirect aid to the Axis. Thus, German and Italian products are permitted to pass through the Simplon and Gotthard tunnels between the Axis Powers. But the Swiss have firmly refused to permit the Axis to ship either troops or munitions over their railways. And this is sorely taxing the route operating through the Austrian-Italian Brenner Pass.

The exigencies of this war have given birth to the Swiss merchant marine. By virtue of the Federal Council's decree of April 9th, 1941, on the constitution of a merchant navy, three shipping companies were set up. By the end of the year, this inland State had seven ships, aggregating 392,000 tons gross, four of which totalling 193,000 tons were chartered by the Government from private concerns. Her difficult geographical location led Switzerland to enter into a new trade agreement with Germany in July, 1941. The Third Reich agreed to deliver coal, iron, petrol, Diesel and lubricating oils in limited amounts, sugar, seed potatoes, etc. It laid down that of the 240,000 tons of steel Switzerland gets from Germany 78,000 tons are to be earmarked for the execution of its orders - largely machine tools and other equipment. In return, Switzerland agreed to furnish Germany cattle for breeding and slaughter, and fruits and dairy products.

In the light of this agreement the British Board of Economic Warfare felt compelled to withdraw facilities for passage of materials for Swiss industries through the blockade. It agreed, however, to grant reasonable facilities for the passage of limited amounts of food, fodder and certain other products for purely domestic consumption.

Germany dare not add one more adversary to her long list by invading Switzerland. She will face formidable topographical obstacles in the first place. Secondly, she will be up against well-trained and superbly armed Swiss mountain troops. Above all, there is the ever-present possibility of the Swiss destroying the two key tunnels in the event of Nazi aggression. Today, Switzerland has 525,000 men under arms. There are strong fortifications for the defence of St. Gotthard Pass and at St. Maurice and Martigny in the Rhone Valley, and the fortress troops total 21,000. The infantry is armed with Swiss repeating rifles and machine-guns and light guns, while special infantry guns and trench mortars are being introduced. The field artillery is provided with a Q.F., shielded Krupp 77mm. and field howitzers of 120mm., while the heavy artillery has guns of 120mm. and howitzers of 155mm.

Switzerland is experiencing great economic difficulties. Many of her industries are receiving only 40 per cent. and some barely 20 per cent. of their normal raw material requirements. The Federal Government is controlling and restricting the use of copper, steel and even cement, and has launched a salvage campaign for collecting non-ferrous metal scrap. The country is facing export difficulties, too, due to closure of many markets and transport difficulties.

One of the largest producers and exporters of milk and cheese in the world in peace time, Switzerland has had to ration these and many other foods besides. Textiles and shoes are on ration cards, while the use of petrol has been drastically cut. The same is true of electricity and gas.

In the first three years of war cost of living index went up 42 per cent. Despite the difficult economic situation, there is relatively little unemployment. The Army and public works sponsored by the Government absorbed the bulk of those previously idle.

This land of the Red Cross is doing invaluable humanitarian work - feeding the famished children of Occupied Europe and directing the activities of the International Red Cross. Despite obvious disadvantages to the Allies arising

from her neutrality, on balance it looks as though Switzerland's neutrality is to the good of both the belligerents and humanity as a whole."

From another article contributed by Marquis Childs to the "Daily Mail", May 28th, and entitled "The Swiss Pick up the Pieces", we pick out the pieces that make very good reading matter and are real news to many of us:

"Other people make wars and the Swiss pick up the pieces. Of the 4,300,000 inhabitants of the beleaguered island that is Switzerland today, at least one-third must be engaged, directly or indirectly, in good works for a broken and battered world.

The role of hopeful bystander and general coatholder in the face of a fight is, as the Swiss discover daily, a thankless one.

Take, for example, the case of M. Brossard. M. Brossard was a Swiss businessman in Japan. After Pearl Harbour, the Swiss Legation in Tokio drafted M. Brossard and other available Swiss to help with the job of rounding up and safely chaperoning out of the country Americans, British, and other citizens whose Governments had gone to war with the Japanese.

M. Brossard's specific assignment was to go to Formosa, officially seal up the American consulate there, collect various stray "enemy aliens" on the way and bring them back to Tokio to await repatriation.

When the ship docked in Yokohama, the Americans and the British were safe enough, but M. Brossard had disappeared and there was a rather untidy mess in his stateroom.

"So sorry" said the smiling Japanese. "M. Brossard jumped overboard."

Although shepherding diplomats and aliens back to their respective homelands is one of the most troublesome tasks that have fallen to the Swiss, it is far from being the most important one.

Up at least until the occupation of all France, the Swiss had managed to get some food and medical supplies into the most desperate areas, such as Greece and Yugoslavia. They have even managed to bring French, Belgian, and Dutch children into Switzerland for a three months' rehabilitation period.

Swiss nurses and doctors have gone into dangerously infected war zones to do what they could.

But most important of all, Switzerland, through the International Red Cross Committee at Geneva, is a connecting link between those loneliest of men, the war prisoners, and home.

In the Central Information Bureau for Prisoners of War in Geneva more than 12,000,000 index cards covering the records of 1,600,000 prisoners are on file. On an average day 60,000 letters come in to be sent on.

Inspecting prison camps is simple, easy work compared to the job of playing nursemaid to aggrieved and sensitive diplomats. The responsibility for the safe passage and the well-being of more than 3,000 Axis diplomats and nationals in North and South America was an assignment to try the patience of Job.

More than 500, rounded up in South and Central America, arrived in New Orleans one day last April, prepared to go by train to New York to catch the Swedish liner Drottningholm on its first exchange voyage.

They were told at the dock to take only small hand luggage necessary for the train journey. Their trunks would meet them at the pier in New York. But arrangements for the safe crossing of the Drottningholm collapsed when the Germans refused to give it safe conduct. An indefinite delay was in prospect. What to do with some 500 Germans, Italians, Japanese, Hungarians and assorted minor aliens?

They simply could not be turned loose. Finally, their special train was stopped in Cincinnati and they were taken to the Gibson Hotel and confined on the seventh, eighth, ninth and tenth floors.

Hastily, several members of the staff of the Swiss Legation in Washington were sent to Cincinnati to be governesses, chaperons, guardians, and counsellors to the stranded diplomats, their wives, and their young.

It was a nightmare that went on for 11 days. Where, they demanded in 14 languages, was their baggage? Why weren't they allowed out for exercise? "Even condemned prisoners in the death cell are granted an hour's walk a day."

They spend a great deal of their time telling their official guardians, who were required by diplomatic courtesy to listen, what they thought of the United States, of the Western Hemisphere, of democracies, and, yes, of Switzerland.

Repeatedly, stories came out that the German and Italian diplomats from Washington quartered in the Greenbrier at White Sulphur Springs, West Virginia, had come to fisticuffs.

Though the Greenbrier is rated as one of America's finest hotels, the Axis diplomats never stopped nagging the Swiss about the food. At each meal they were given a menu from which they could choose a wide variety of dishes, yet griping went on.

Finally, the Swiss found a cure. All right, this was what they could do, they said. They'd cable over to Berne three typical menus, for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Then from Bad Nauheim, in Germany, where the American diplomats were interned, they would get three typical menus and have them cabled to Washington.

The Axis diplomats could then have exactly the same fare as was being served at Bad Nauheim.

This put an end to all complaints

It is the business of relief that has enrolled the greatest number of Swiss. For a considerable period 10,000 children of various nationalities were brought in to stay for three months at a time.

Being great believers in the home, the Swiss tried, when the language difference was not too great a barrier, to put them with individual families.

Because it was obviously impossible for the Yugoslavian children to learn enough French, German, or English in three months to get along in Swiss homes, they were cared for in one of the big hotels at St. Moritz high in the Alps.

There they had the same view and the same ski and toboggan runs, if not quite the same cuisine, that were formerly reserved for the wealthy and the privileged.

St. Moritz today is a changed place. The Grand Hotel, once given over to the Barbara Huttons and the Prince Mdivanis, is now a training centre for the nurses who go out into war-torn Europe.

They come from all over Switzerland for an intensive course preparatory to assignments in Greece, in Crete, in Albania - everywhere that the scourge of war has been most hideous.

Each time the headlines report a new move in the war, it means more work for Europe's professional neutral.

The Allied victories in Africa and the rout of Rommel's Africa Corps mean a tide of new index cards, German and Italian, in Geneva; new lists of prisoners, more correspondence flowing through the last link between the two worlds that are at war.

If it keeps up, say the Swiss, all of Switzerland, not just a third or a half, will be doing war work.

Being umpire in a global war is rapidly becoming a full-time job."

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SUNDRY NEWS FROM SWITZERLAND.

Switzerland is busy with preparations for the general parliamentary election which takes place on October 30th and 31st. The electoral campaign is on the whole a very calm one. It is not expected that any fundamental changes will take place. Three states councillors have already been re-elected, as there were no opposing candidates, namely, the two representatives of the Canton of Vaud and Mr. Wenk, representative of the City of Basle. For the 197 seats in the National Council, approximately 1,000 candidates are being listed. 38 national councillors are retiring and are therefore not running for re-election.

The governments of the Cantons of Geneva and Vaud have declared that the list for the parliamentary election presented by the Workers Parties of the two cantons are unacceptable in as far as they include names of candidates who formerly belonged to the forbidden political organization led by Mr. Leon Nicole. Nicole's party was forbidden for its Communistic tendencies and its adherents are therefore ineligible for parliamentary election.

The National Council reaffirmed the prohibition of the Communist Party which was enacted by the government shortly after the outbreak of the war. A petition for the removal of the ban of the Communist Party was turned down by a great majority.

The Italian Legation in Bern stated that it had received from Pope Pius XII through the intermediary of the Papal Nuntius in Bern a large sum of money for the assistance of Italian refugees in Switzerland.

A funeral ceremony was held on October 5th, in the picturesque Ragaz, Graubuenden, for the 14 members of the crews of flying fortresses which crashed on Swiss soil on October 1st. Representatives of the American Legation in Bern attended the ceremonies. The fliers were buried in a common grave. A detachment of the Swiss Army rendered them the last honors, and fired the honor salute.

The electors of the City of Lucerne have adopted by 3151 to 4022 a law according to which a citizen who is over 65 years of age can no longer be a member of the City Council or executive branch of the city's government.

Details of the sinking of the Swiss ship "Maloja" in Corsican waters on September 7th, reveal that of the crew of 25 on board when the ship went down, 3 Portuguese lost their lives and a Dutchman and a Swiss were injured. The injured men are in hospital care in Corsica. The remaining members of the crew are reported to be in Algiers. It is not yet known who torpedoed the "Maloja".