

Zeitschrift: Helvetia : magazine of the Swiss Society of New Zealand
Herausgeber: Swiss Society of New Zealand
Band: 10 (1944-1945)
Heft: 4

Artikel: Switzerland's neutrality and present trade relations
Autor: [s.n.]
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-942750>

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

Download PDF: 23.02.2026

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

The assurances given in your cable of your further faithful endeavours for maintaining an independent, free and humane Switzerland are deeply appreciated. Such will also remain the aim of the Swiss people in New Zealand who realise that thereby the respect of foreign nations for Switzerland, as well as the Swiss people at home and abroad, can best be retained.

In conclusion, I also have the pleasure of reciprocating your kind wishes for a happy New Year, in the name of all compatriots in New Zealand.

I have the honour to be, Monsieur le Conseiller Federal,

Yours faithfully,

W. Schmid

Consul of Switzerland.

SWITZERLAND'S NEUTRALITY AND PRESENT TRADE RELATIONS.

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS:

This statement was prepared for "The Dominion" of Wellington by the Swiss Consul and published there in full on the 9th of January, 1945. The article was also placed at the disposal of 40 odd New Zealand newspapers and was widely publicised, mostly however in a greatly abbreviated form, and we think that our fellow-countrymen in New Zealand should know the full text. This is the reason for publishing it in this month's "HELVETIA". Further, we are pleased to say that shortly after the press campaign of a number of American newspapers, against the commercial policy of Switzerland as a neutral, had been made known in the New Zealand Press, it was learned from the Swiss Radio that the United States Department of State (Foreign Office) in Washington had made a statement over the U.S. radio network to the effect that the United States did not intend to change its traditional friendly policy towards Switzerland whose services as Protecting Power of the United States in Japan, Germany and elsewhere were fully appreciated by the U.S. Government. It also emphasised that the traditional bonds of friendship between the Swiss and American peoples were firmly based upon similar democratic ideals. In conclusion, the U.S. Department of State observed that as a belligerent America naturally would like to see Switzerland curb as much as possible her exports to the countries with which the U.S. were at war. Since then it was further learned from the Swiss radio that transport communications between Switzerland and Marseille as well as between Switzerland and the Spanish border have been re-established, although probably not yet satisfactorily.

From a message published in "The Dominion" on January 5, dated Washington, January 3, 1945, it appears that a new press campaign has been started overseas in order to make neutral countries stop trade with Germany, especially as regards merchandise which might be of any help to the latter's war effort. This time Switzerland is the target, whereas in similar previous press campaigns in Allied Nations newspapers, Switzerland was never cited, neither did any official declarations refer to her, and it was therefore generally assumed in Switzerland at the time that such actions were not meant for her. The Federal authorities, however, did not share this optimism. In a speech which the President of the Swiss Confederation made in May 1944, he declared that surprises in this connection were still possible, and it was to be expected that Switzerland's turn would also come. This speech had a double purpose; first of all it wanted to show that our attitude is absolutely correct and that we have scrupulously observed all our duties as a neutral as they are defined by international agreements and by the universal principles of human rights; on the other hand the President wanted to make it clear that if pressure should be brought to bear on us, or if any suggestion should be made which might threaten the basis of our economy, we would know how to defend our right to

exist, and our neutrality. "We have never tried to infringe on the rights of others", the speaker declared, "we only defend our vital rights which form the basis of our political and economic life, and which are sanctioned by the rights of man. We are not going to give them up." In Switzerland, this speech made in May, 1944, was well received.

According to the Swiss radio news broadcast for Australia and New Zealand, on January 6th, the reaction in Switzerland to the apparent present press campaign overseas against Swiss neutrality is completely in line with the speech of last May of the President of the Swiss Confederation. The Swiss Government, however, has not as yet had an opportunity to make a statement in the matter, because, so far, it has not received any official note in reference to the reported remarks of the United States Secretary of State, that allied supplies to Switzerland have been cut off. It is only reported from Government sources in Berne that in matters of foreign trade relations, the Swiss authorities are at present negotiating with Washington, London, Paris and Berlin.

Foreign countries must realise that the neutrality policy of Switzerland was, is and will be a vital necessity for the independence of the country, especially so on account of her internal constitution. If the Swiss, a nation of three different cultures, had not had the wisdom to remain neutral for twelve generations, there would probably be no independent Switzerland today, because the country would have succumbed to tension from within or to pressure from without. Acquiescence in the demands made upon Switzerland as reported in the present press campaign, would have the effect of undermining Swiss neutrality, which is permanent and absolute, and cannot be compared with that of states, whose neutrality fluctuates according to the fortunes of war. In view of its permanent character, Swiss neutrality has been formally recognised on different occasions by the great European powers and by the League of Nations as being in the interest of peace on the European continent, and has thereby become an institution of international law.

We admit that it is understandable that the practice of the policy of neutrality in a conflict like the present one can hardly expect to meet with enthusiastic and sympathetic approval from people at war. People at war, people who suffer and bleed, have a hard time to understand why others should stand aside and they readily suspect them of selfishness and cupidity. But Swiss neutrality has never been passive, on the contrary, Switzerland plays an indispensable and charitable role which could only be assumed by a country whose neutrality is permanent without restrictions, and without the least mental reserve. Nor does Swiss neutrality in any way influence the traditional belief of the people in democratic government and a democratic way of life. In spite of tremendous pressure in the past, the Swiss people have never weakened in their democratic attitude and at the hour of the greatest danger, when none could have come to our rescue, we did not sell our honour.

At the beginning of this war, it was the definite will and intention of the Swiss people to maintain trade with both sides of the belligerents in pre-war proportions. When, however, Switzerland became completely encircled by one side of the belligerents, reasons of self-preservation obviously compelled her to trade mostly with those countries to whom she had immediate access. Nevertheless, even when all roads from Switzerland to the outer world led through German-occupied territory, trade with Allied Nation countries never stopped - as evidenced for instance by the quantity of Swiss watches with which New Zealand could be supplied. After United Nation troops had reached the Swiss borders, in the summer of 1944, trade arrangements were concluded almost immediately with Great Britain and U.S.A. for the purpose of increasing mutual trade. In fact, according to very recent Swiss radio news broadcasts, Swiss exports to Germany have at present reached minimum levels, and future exports to Germany will depend on how German exports are delivered to Switzerland. But it must again be stressed here how much, even to this day, we are dependent on German exports of coal and iron to keep our industries working. If, on the other hand, Swiss exports to United Nation countries have not increased as hoped, Switzerland cannot be held responsible for the causes of such delay. At present the chief obstacle in the way of Swiss exports to United Nation countries is the denial

of transport facilities through France for Swiss exports and the application of import restrictions in certain Allied Nation countries. If, as reported in the press, Allied supplies to Switzerland have now also been cut off, then certainly a grave state of affairs for the Swiss people has arisen.

Switzerland, a country of 4,250,000 inhabitants, is intensely industrial, but has no domestic sources of raw materials of any consequence, and is not self-supporting in foodstuffs. Without exports, she can feed only half her population, and without imports of raw materials and many foodstuffs, unemployment and food shortage on a wide scale must result.

As regards the alleged export from Switzerland to Germany of war materials, first of all the statement must be made, that in terms of international law exports of such merchandise from neutral countries to belligerent countries are not forbidden. In other words, the meaning of "economic neutrality" is unknown to international law. In the course of this war, the Swiss Government, however, has been most cautious in its international trade policy and has always kept both camps of the belligerents informed of its trade negotiations with either of them. In order to safeguard Swiss industries from the accusation of exporting arms and machinery which can be used in actual warfare, it also has forbidden business houses to make contracts with foreign governments or their representatives. Unilateral declarations to foreign governments binding contractors to import or export goods are also banned. Further, since October 1, 1944, there has been complete prohibition of the export from Switzerland of war materials, including specifically ball-bearings, aircraft and submarine parts and any similar products.

The Swiss radio also stated that Switzerland has always fully complied with the requirements of existing international conventions as regards railway traffic through Switzerland of goods or persons between the Italian and German borders, which subject was likewise mentioned in the reported press campaign. Neither has Switzerland ever allowed on her territory military traffic from Germany to Italy or vice versa.

In reply to the further unofficially made demands to Switzerland in the current press campaign that she should take militant and satisfactory steps to halt the use of the country as a base for German financial transactions with the outside world, and for the concealment of National-Socialist assets, it must be pointed out that Switzerland has not only become a shelter for refugees from all over Europe, but also an asylum for foreign capital from many countries, not only Germany. Specifically on the subject of the transfer of German funds in Switzerland to overseas countries, the Association of Swiss Banks recently stated that no Swiss banks have ever carried out or collaborated in the transfer abroad of funds of National-Socialist leaders. In this connection, it is also noteworthy that the Swiss Government has made it clear, that asylum cannot be granted to persons who have manifested an unfriendly attitude towards Switzerland, nor to those who have committed actions contrary to the laws of war, or whose past bears witness to conceptions incompatible with the fundamental traditions of law and humanity.

* * * * *

THE NEW PRESIDENT OF THE INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS.

The International Committee of the Red Cross has appointed Professor Carl J. Burckhardt as its president. In this office he will succeed Professor Max Huber who has been president of the committee since 1928 and has now intimated his intention of resigning these duties at the end of 1944. Professor Burckhardt has therefore taken over his new mandate on January 1, 1945.

Professor Burckhardt is well known in Switzerland and abroad for his literary, scientific and diplomatic activity. Born in Basel in 1891 as the son of Karl Christoph Burckhardt, he graduated from the University of Zurich. From 1918 to 1922 he was attached to the staff of the Swiss Legation at Vienna. In 1923, Gustave Ador, who was President of the International Committee of the Red Cross at the time, entrusted him with the work of organizing the repatriation of Greek prisoners of war from Turkey. After his return to Switzerland, he once