

Zeitschrift: Helvetia : magazine of the Swiss Society of New Zealand
Herausgeber: Swiss Society of New Zealand
Band: 14 (1949)
Heft: 6

Artikel: Freedom of trade
Autor: Chopard, Theo
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-942888>

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: 18.01.2026

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

At the moment Switzerland has the honour of receiving the Diplomatic Conference which is revising the International conventions of the Red Cross in Geneva. President is the leading delegate of the Swiss group, Mr. Max Petitpierre, Swiss Foreign Minister. Moreover, our Government it was which sent out the invitations to the others, something which it has already done.

The Conference is extremely important. It will, of course, not re-establish Peace on Earth nor will it do away with the antagonisms separating the east and west, for it has very different aims. It must take measures which will protect the greatest possible number of human lives in the tragic event of another war. Certain measures already exist, but did not go far enough, as was shown during the last war, mainly because fighting methods had changed so much, had become more brutal, and touched many more people than before. You have only to think of the terrible fate of the partisans who, after capture had no protection, to become convinced of the need for the revision of the previous Geneva conventions. The hideous fate of the civilians who spent years in concentration camps, is also a convincing argument. We must prevent horrors like these from ever happening again, and that is what the Geneva conference, called and presided over by Switzerland, is trying to do. One fine thing about it is that all countries are represented at this Conference, including the nations of eastern Europe and Asia. That shows a wish to establish and maintain once again, the rights of the human being, apart entirely from questions of ideology. Even during the war it used to be said that however fierce the warfare and the conflicts, there are certain minimum relations between the people which cannot be broken down, which must be maintained against all obstacles. Victims of war are always innocent. They must be protected, they must be able to contact their families, be properly treated, even in prisoner-of-war camps. On that point, the whole world must agree, however great their antagonisms.

Switzerland has always had an important role to play in this respect. Because Switzerland is a neutral country, because the International Red Cross Committee is made up entirely of Swiss citizens and sits in Geneva, it has a better chance of looking after war victims in other countries.

Sometimes a suggestion has been made that this work should be handed over to an International Organisation, say, along the lines of the United Nations. The idea seems attractive to some, but it seems hardly likely that it will take on. However powerful an international organisation may be, it always shows tendencies to belong to one group, or bloc, or another, if it must judge one of its members guilty of aggression. In such a case, it would have no means of intervening in the affairs of a country which had been banned by the whole world and against which all were struggling by common agreement. To carry out a suggestion like this would compromise the protection of prisoners-of-war, which we want on the contrary, to strengthen.

In this way, a neutral country, without any interest in the affairs of the big and powerful countries, can play an important and irreplaceable part. Its neutrality marks it out, and the task justifies its neutrality.

FREEDOM OF TRADE.
(By: Then. Chopard).
(Short Wave Swiss Service).

A number of Swiss papers have been talking lately about international agreements and trade relations. In the National News, Hermann Boschenstein says that Switzerland is more and more being faced with schemes that are not at all compatible with declarations of mutual assistance and collaboration made in various speeches. The old principles are no longer applied. Although France, like Switzerland, is struggling with the Eastern countries for the rights of her citizens who lived in the countries now nationalising their industries, yet France refuses to indemnify Swiss citizens whose possessions are affected by

nationalisation in France. In Germany, the Allies are carrying out an economic policy in regard to Switzerland which is in no way reasonable. The many international conferences being held about such matters could well give a false idea of the reality, since they encourage the idea that economic nationalism is dying while in fact, it is stronger than ever. The paper "Action" comes to two conclusions. Rather than to list the innumerable international economic agreements signed since the war, it would be more practical to list the number of them being carried out, effectively.

What has happened about the freedom of trade proclaimed at Havana? The World Trade Charter exists only on paper. Furthermore, the American Congress has not even ratified it. And how can all the measures taken overseas to put a brake on Swiss exports, for instance, be justified in the light of the principles laid down by the various international conferences? The relativity of the various international agreements is more than obvious. It is quite easy to see why Switzerland remains reserved about these matters, because, if she had formed her trade policy according to the principles set down by these agreements, she would be ruined today. Experience shows that circumstances are unfortunately stronger than principles. The Swiss Business Journal maintains that the classification non-essential, has become a weapon used by several countries these days. It is a weapon which is a dangerous threat to Swiss industry, which is largely founded on liberal principles. Certain countries are abusing those liberal principles to get rid of their non-essential products on us, but on the other hand, they shut the door on some Swiss products by calling them non-essential. This paper considers that if Switzerland is not given the right to sell her products freely, then other countries should not unload their products on her, products which she can also classify as non-essential.

As I see it, the lesson to be drawn from these quotations is that Switzerland wants to collaborate, and to help, but she refuses to be made a fool of.

SWISS FEDERALISM.

(Continued)

HOME COMMUNE.

Swiss citizenship is primarily communal. Every Swiss has a home commune. It is true that to obtain Swiss citizenship the consent of the Confederation must first be obtained. What really matters, however, is the decision of the commune to admit the new citizen. The commune is the cell in the organism of Swiss democracy. All public activity has its origin here, and it is in every sense of the word a school of citizenship. For here, in the local self-government of the communes, every citizen can take part in discussion and share in work. In the preamble to the bill of March 27th, 1943, the government of the Grisons said quite rightly: "The commune is the prototype of the democratic organisation. The small space of the commune is the given field of pure democracy; here every citizen co-operates in every decision and all governing bodies are elected by the people's vote. Here the individual can see the sources and the significance of every decision, here he can see for himself the consequences of what he has done." The free commune is from the outset a vital element of the Confederation. It is from the commune that the Confederation draws its strength, and it is here that we can see the difference between Switzerland and countries which govern by means of a centralized bureaucracy. In Switzerland, the national will grows from below upwards and even state institutions are modelled on those which have stood the test on a smaller scale.

The commune, however, presupposes the liberty of the individual citizen. In its main features, that liberty has been guaranteed for the whole of Switzerland by the Federal constitution, in particular by the Proclamation of Liberties. All Swiss citizens are equal before the law and the constitution has expressly