

Zeitschrift: Helvetia : magazine of the Swiss Society of New Zealand
Herausgeber: Swiss Society of New Zealand
Band: 16 (1951)
Heft: [4]

Rubrik: Switzerland as seen by foreigners

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: 08.01.2026

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

as a demonstration of Swiss industry in all the various aspects of its high-class production, achieved a general propaganda effect which should certainly not be underestimated.

The next Industries Fair will take place from 3rd to 13th May, 1952.

SWITZERLAND AS SEEN BY FOREIGNERS

A German newspaper, "Schwaebische Landeszeitung," publishes a long article in which it says that small Switzerland, for the last year, has been working very hard for the reorganisation of her army. New plans have been made to defend the country, not only the alps but the entire territory, and it is why a special effort is made to develop the mechanisation of the army, as well as to reinforce the artillery, the fighting planes and anti-tank weapons. Switzerland realises that the best arms against tanks are the tanks themselves, but they find it difficult to import them, as delivery delays are as much as 24 months. It is why they will start to produce them themselves, in spite of the cost being tremendously high.

Switzerland has never left the slightest doubt that she will defend her neutrality and her independence under any circumstances. Nature and civil engineering have made out of the country a single fortification, which, even with the modern armaments, would be nearly impregnable. But if an enemy could penetrate into the country, its efforts would be useless, as all the bridges, roads, tunnels, railways and alpine passes are thoroughly mined and would be out of commission. Even the plains are well protected by all kinds of forts. Attacking Switzerland would not be a military promenade.

An American newspaper writes: "While the largest part of the world, inclusive of the United States of America, is sailing towards Socialism, one could cite a small European country as a striking example of democratic government, private economy, and individual initiative. A study of the world economy shows that no country is in such a strong position as Switzerland. She is the only one in the world that has her currency covered by 100 per cent. of gold. Indeed, the gold reserve per head is three times as much as in the U.S.A. Switzerland has no governmental programme for free trade. She is really a republic as 600 years ago, and keeps her frontiers open for imports and exports. She is the only capital exporting country in Europe. How was it possible, one would ask, for Switzerland to remain neutral, surrounded as she was by belligerents, whereas the U.S.A., which is more than 3000 miles away, was dragged into two European wars, and possibly soon in the third one? Switzerland works under a free private economical system, while her Socialist competitors are ruled by regulations, ordinance, import and export control plans and programmes. The U.S.A. would do well to study the Swiss case as an enlightening example."

The German paper "Weserkurier" of the 14th of February, makes a survey of the agriculture, architecture, folklore and tourist trade of the Canton of Tessin, and stresses the contrast between the South of Switzerland and the country north of the Gotthard. It concludes: "Happy Switzerland, where one can enjoy in the same day, winter in the high mountains and summer round the blue, warm lakes."

The "Welt am Sonntag" paper, published in Hamburg on February 25th, calls Zurich the town of the pacifists. The Swiss metropolis is advantageously situated and is a meeting place of Europe, where one

can find modern architecture side by side with colourful narrow streets of the middle age. It is a real consolation that this jewel of the European crown still exists amongst the numerous destructions caused by the war.

The Dutch newspaper "De Gelderlander" explains the high standard of living in Switzerland: "The Swiss have acquired prosperity through the confidence they have in their own power. This, a foreigner cannot always understand. Since the last war nearly all the European countries had to go through inflation, which destroyed the people's confidence in money. The consequence is that most people are now living above their income and do not see why they should make economies. But in Switzerland the mentality has remained the same as it used to be in the Netherlands before the war. The Swiss are now perhaps the only thrifty nation in Europe. Even the simplest worker, who is, however, protected by various social laws and is entitled to the old age pension, is bringing each week part of his salary to the savings bank. Workers of other countries will be of the opinion that perhaps the Swiss worker economises too much and makes too many sacrifices. But in doing this the Swiss saves, in the long run, capital in the hope that his children will have the benefit of it. This attitude favours the will to remain neutral. Neutrality is not only a principle of the Government, but also an unshakeable conviction of the people. In any case the past has shown that Switzerland is right. Even Hitler was afraid to attack the well-trained Swiss Army consisting of 850,000 men. Forty per cent. of the Swiss Budget is spent on military defence, and last year one and a half million Swiss francs were voted for armament. This is the insurance policy that the country has to pay to secure its neutrality and independence. The Swiss know what they want and are conscious of their strength. This is an example for other European countries.

The Austrian newspaper "Die Presse," of February 24th, speaks about the Swiss five-year plan of re-armament, and says: "The monstrous programme which represents a heavy burden even for rich Switzerland, proves how earnestly the Swiss are willing to defend their country. The distribution of this heavy burden amongst the various groups of taxpayers caused some debates, but everyone is conscious that there is no sacrifice too big for freedom. One realises that Switzerland might be surrounded, as was the case in the last war, by one single Power, but the Swiss have decided to defend their fortified country with all their means and against any menace, to the last man."

The French newspaper "L'Aurore" regrets that Switzerland remains neutral, and says: "We think only favourably of Switzerland. We have praised her with pleasure many times. How could we not admire that democracy which functions almost ideally? How could we not applaud when she sacrifices 45 per cent. of her Budget for national defence? How could we not laud Federal Councillor Kobelt, who is making a peerless army amongst those of the other European States? We profess an absolute confidence in the resistance of the Helvetians. The actual President of the Confederation would show himself just as firm against an invader as did Numa Droz before Bismarck in the time of the Wohlgemuth affair, and if it should be so, the mobilisation would be effected with perfection as in 1914, under General Wille, or in 1939, under General Guisan. Our courageous neighbours, well trained, well disciplined, would fight with the same spirit as their valiant ancestors several centuries ago in Morgarten or in Morat. But only the result counts. Today the danger is deadlier than in the time of Leopold of Austria, and of Charles le Temeraire. The other day at the Parliament, one extremist reproached the Federal Council for intensifying the military effort in order to make Switzerland an advanced position post of the Atlantic Army. Please the

Gods that this reproach were justified! Alas, this is not the case. Switzerland remains neutral without restriction, and sticks to that principle, which is, moreover, constitutional. In case the "typhoon" should rage one would assist at this extravagant adventure; the allied contingents formed somewhere or another would laboriously try to stop the invasion, whilst 500,000 of the best soldiers of Europe would placidly wait to be attacked in their turn. Is it seriously thought in the Parliament in Bern that after the whole world were reduced to servitude, Switzerland would be left alone like an article in a museum as the Dean of the Democracy? Of course not; it is why that for the very safety of Switzerland, the Swiss Government should reconsider the situation."

SWITZERLAND'S HELP TO WAR-DAMAGED COUNTRIES

Address by Prof. Dr. Carl Ludwig, President
of the "Schweizer Europahilfe."

Our Association has, in its articles, adopted as its aim the study and discussion of questions of political economy and statistics on a scientific basis and also the promotion of economic and statistical knowledge. Some of you, therefore, may quite likely have wondered how your Executive Committee came to allow a talk to be given in your circle on Switzerland's help to foreign countries—that is to say, on a subject which has nothing to do with statistics, and is only connected with political economy in so far as the latter was substantially used in financing the relief work.

You may also perhaps think that Swiss help of foreign countries is a subject which has largely lost its topical interest, as there has after all been a decided all-round improvement in the countries hit by the war, so that there would appear to be no reason for continuing such help.

There are two answers to the first objection: one is the fact that Switzerland's help to war-damaged countries, in addition to its primary, charitable character, is also of outstanding political importance, as during the actual war this work was particularly well suited to making the neutrality of our country comprehensible to other States, and in the post-war period it has contributed substantially to the maintenance and strengthening of Switzerland's position in spite of her remaining outside the United Nations. These two results have also been of some benefit to the Swiss economy.

It should also be remembered that Switzerland's help to foreign countries did not end with relief to war victims, but was completed in a most effective fashion by the assistance which our country gave to a whole series of States which had suffered from the war, by granting them important trade credits for economic reconstruction; the idea behind this assistance was the same as that which the United States later put into effect—on a much greater scale—in the Marshall Plan.

This evening, however, I should like to leave these political and economic aspects entirely in the background. My true task, as I see it, is first of all to remind you very briefly of the charitable work done in Switzerland for war victims during and after the war, and, following on that, to speak of the new problems in that connection which have arisen for our country as a result of present-day conditions in the outside world. That will suffice to show how unfounded is—unfortunately—the view, that the time has now come to wind up Swiss action in aid of foreign countries.

This is a subject which should in my estimation be discussed without hesitation by an association interested

in political economy. For, just as the sole justification of the State lies in its quality as an indispensable organiser of the life of the community, economics too are not an end in themselves but merely have an auxiliary function to perform. In the centre of all activities and events stands neither organisation nor business, but the living human being.

If private help to war victims started in many forms in Switzerland very shortly after the outbreak of the Second World War, that was in accordance with a tradition of our country which is very much older than the recognition of its neutrality by the Powers—a tradition which goes back for centuries and has always found living expression again whenever a new emergency has arisen. May I remind you of the granting of asylum to those who were persecuted for their religion and politics at the time of the counter-reformation, and again in the 18th and 19th centuries; of the internment of defeated troops at the time of the Baden rising of 1849, the Italian war of Liberation in 1859, and the Franco-Prussian war; of the founding of the International Red Cross Committee by Henri Dunant in the year 1863, and, finally, of Swiss care for civilian war victims, for instance the help given in the war of 1870 to our old friend Strasburg, where a Swiss relief committee took more than 2500 old men, women and sick people out of the besieged city and brought them to our land. This tradition was expressed by the Federal Council during the First World War in a message to the Federated Assembly, in the following words:—

"It is one of the privileges of a neutral country to raise the voice of humanity amid the fearful strife of nations, and to help to alleviate the distress caused by war."

In the First World War, Swiss relief work assumed proportions greater than anything previously experienced. As soon as war broke out, several foreign governments entrusted the protection of their nationals to the Federal Council, and during the course of the war this representation of foreign interests was continually extended. Our country then dealt with the repatriation of civilian internees and the care of evacuees. From the end of October, 1914, to the middle of May, 1915, over 20,000 French, German, Austrian and Hungarian nationals who had been detained by the enemy, returned home through Switzerland. The care of evacuees assumed an even greater importance. In the summer of 1915, 70,000 deportees from France passed through our country; in addition, there was the return transport of army doctors and medical personnel, who had been detained in enemy territory contrary to the Geneva Convention; and, above all, there was the exchange of the seriously injured and the hospitalisation of invalid prisoners of war. From the spring of 1916 until the end of the war, Switzerland sheltered 68,000 internees, partly in hotels, and partly in sanatoria and hospitals.

To this State assistance was added the help of private organisations and the entirely personal help given by individuals. It could be said, indeed, that the whole Swiss nation at that time was caring for those in distress—through active collaboration in some work or other, by taking delicate children into their own homes, by gifts of money or by some other manifestation of a philanthropic attitude.

The end of the First World War was by no means the end of private charitable activity. On the contrary, help for child war victims increased still further, and the aid given within our frontiers was most helpfully supplemented by means of relief work carried out abroad, the sending of charitable gifts to distressed areas, and the establishment of relief committees for districts which had suffered particularly severely, especially the relief committee for Vienna, to which gifts flowed from all parts of the country.

Swiss relief activities received a new impetus with the coming into existence of the dictator-States, political persecutions, the persecution of the Jews, and the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War. In 1933, refugees