

Zeitschrift: Helvetia : magazine of the Swiss Society of New Zealand
Herausgeber: Swiss Society of New Zealand
Band: 25 (1962)
Heft: [8]

Artikel: Opportunity to look back : speech given by Dr. Rosetti, Consul General, at the 1st August celebration in Hamilton
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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-942402>

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Opportunity To Look Back

Speech given by Dr. Rosetti, Consul General, at the 1st August
Celebration in Hamilton

(Translated in English)

OUR attachment to our homeland is the reason for this gathering tonight to commemorate the foundation of the Swiss Confederation. This occasion will give us an opportunity to look back, not only look back and be proud of what our old Swiss did, but we will give a look also to the problems of the present and the future.

The first alliance between Uri, Schwyz and Unterwalden, from which the modern State of the Swiss Confederation developed in the last seven centuries, was entrusted to defend the rights of freedom and independence. Also today, without being threatened directly by war, we nevertheless are confronted with the problems arising from the historical and political change of Europe and the whole world. It is especially the unification of Europe which forces our country to take some very difficult decisions which we can only take when we remember the typically historical and political development of our State and if we continue to trust in the old principles of our foreign policy.

What were the reasons which brought to the first alliance and which gave to the Confederation the possibility of maintaining herself through all the political troubles of the last centuries? To answer this question we have to go back to the time shortly before and after the year 1200. In this period between the Kaiser and the Pope, a fight was going on for the political ruling of the whole of Europe. With their keen politics of bringing aid to the Kaiser, each of these three valleys had a Letter of Freedom from the Kaiser which fixed that the people of these countries had to recognise no other authority than the Kaiser himself.

At the same time also the mighty Counts of Hapsburg in the Aargau, took the opportunity of this fight to increase the importance of their House. Not only in building up the Dukedom of Austria, but to attain also the honour of kingdom.

In this period the Gothard Pass was opened giving a greater political, economic and military importance to the three communities at the northern foot of the Gotthard. That was the reason why the Hapsburgs, without respecting the Letters of Freedom, sent their administrators to this region. Having no help from the Kaiser, who had lost his fight against the Pope, the three communities had to resort to self-defence and this was the aim of the Confederation, sworn in August, 1291.

Very soon the young Confederation had to prove its strength in the wars against the attacking Hapsburgs. Their achievements brought them not only the respect but also the sympathy of the near townships,

which also tried to become more independent. So the former alliance of purely rural countries, by the admission of the townships of Zurich, Bern, Lucerne and Zug, became an economical and military strong confederation of states.

In the wars against Charles the Bold, Duke of Burgundy, and in the campaigns of Milan, we see the Confederation not only in defence of its old rights of freedom and independence but as a military force expanding its territory. In this period the enticement for the confederates to renounce the old principle of defending their freedom and to play the role of a big power, was very great. The Marignano catastrophe in 1515 brought the confederates again to reason. It was this fact that brought them to think about the scope of their first alliance and to adopt from this time more and more the policy of neutrality, as a result of which the basis of Swiss foreign policy was established.

The internal discussion during the period of reformation forced the confederates to keep quiet and out of the European troubles of this time. With that they created a state of neutrality which preserved the confederation from the damage of 30 years of war. At that time the neutrality was strongly discussed within and outside the country. Only the conclusion of the diet of February 2nd, 1638, ended discussions and speculation between the different parties by forbidding the passing of foreign troops through the territory of Switzerland. When the Dukedom of Burgundy was definitely occupied by King Ludwig XIV the diet declared in 1674, for the first time, the Confederation officially as a neutral State. At the same time a military defence of the border of the Confederation was organised to prevent any aggression from outside; so the concept of the armed neutrality was created—that means the will not to interfere in the policy of foreign countries and to defend the independence of the country from all attacks. Only the exact observance of the neutrality and the military readiness to defend Switzerland against all aggressors made it possible to persuade the foreign governments of the will of the Confederation to practise their policy of neutrality unconditionally. With that our policy had attained its aim and the old Confederation was preserved from war and occupation by foreign troops until the time of Napoleon.

Also during this period full of political troubles the neutrality of the Confederation was formally maintained. Only this fact made it possible that in the declaration of the Congress of Vienna of March 20th, 1815, mention was made to the recognition of the "permanent neutrality." This concept was repeated in the Declaration of Paris on November 20th of the same year, with which Austria, France, Great Britain, Portugal, Prussia and Russia recognised the neutrality of Switzerland and the inviolability of her territory and independence. In our days, in connection with the unification of Europe, the neutrality of Switzerland is being discussed again and it is worthwhile to remember

the content of this Declaration which says that the neutrality and inviolability of the territory and the independence of Switzerland from any foreign influence lies in the real interest of European policy. Today we have people who pretend that this statement is no more applicable, but the Swiss people and the Swiss Government are convinced that also in our modern time the neutrality has not lost its value and that it can be an element of contribution to the peaceful organisation of Europe and the world.

Previously Switzerland tried to give up partially her neutrality as she became a member of the League of Nations in 1920. From the conflict of the sanctions against Italy in 1935 it became evident that a policy of differential neutrality was practically, politically and psychologically insupportable. In 1938, the Federal Council succeeded in having from the Council of the League of Nations, once again, recognition of the integral neutrality of Switzerland. Without this clear situation it would have been very difficult, maybe impossible, to keep out of the second world war.

After the war, new international organisations were created and the task of unifying Europe was commenced. Switzerland is ready to participate in the peaceful organisation of a united Europe. We have not only declared that in words but also proved it with our participation in all international organisations which were created for the benefit of humanity. Although wishing for a unified Europe and being prepared to give our participation it is impossible for us to give up light-mindedly the old proven neutrality for a political idea the form and extension of which is not exactly determined and which has yet to prove the ability to achieve the end result.

The Swiss people are ready to take over the economical burden which will be the consequence of participation in this very important building-up of Europe. The people are also ready to renounce certain political rights, but they are not willing to give up the neutrality which is the basis of the maintenance of our State. Often Switzerland is reproached for hiding behind neutrality in order to make good business and not having the courage to take a clear stand in the important conflict between the ideologies. As far as these reproaches are concerned we can reject them, because we have always given our services for suffering humanity, without making any fuss. The neutrality of Switzerland does not mean a neutrality of mind of the citizens; each citizen has the right to make up his own mind on anything and to say openly what he thinks about the political situation inside and outside the country. We maintain and develop economical* relations with all countries whatever their political ideas may be, but we defend ourselves against interference in our own affairs by foreign Governments and foreign ideologies. That we do actually do this we proved before,

*and diplomatic

during and after the last war, as well as daily. It is very regrettable that countries which in such critical times had not the courage or force to defend themselves against foreign political influences, reproach us regarding our neutrality.

Our main task today is to persuade the Governments of all countries that Switzerland is always ready to maintain and defend her neutrality, when necessary, with arms, and that our policy of neutrality can be an element to maintain and strengthen the peace in Europe and in the whole world. I do not doubt that when the Swiss people and the Swiss Government are convinced of this necessity of the maintenance of our neutrality, we will be able to create the necessary comprehension which gives us the possibility to participate in the unification of Europe.

NEWS OF THE COLONY



Auckland Swiss Club

The celebration of our National Day in Auckland was a unique event. Entering the Hall, a most impressive drawing of our National Hero, "Wilhelm Tell," greeted you, together with a coloured mass display of flags of our 24 Cantons. Your eyes would wander along this forest of flags in search of your own County, and there it was too, welcoming you among all the others, giving you the warm feeling of also belonging to the community. The gay lampions, the soft candle lights in the decorated containers and the gallery of pictures from our Country gave the hall a cosy atmosphere so much appreciated by all the guests.

Our honoured guests, the Consul General of Switzerland, Dr Rossetti, and Mrs Rossetti, were greeted by our President, Mr H. Fitzi, and Mrs Fitzi. Also greeted was the President of the Swiss Society, Mr J. Steiner, from Taranaki, and the President of the Hamilton Swiss Club, Mr Biland, and Mrs Biland, accompanied with their son and daughter-in-law. Furthermore, we had the pleasure of greeting quite a number of friends from as far away as Taranaki. Among them were Mr and Mrs W. Schicker, from Inglewood, Mr and Mrs J. Hiestand, from Awatuna, with their two daughters now staying in Auckland, Mr and Mrs W. Schultz, formerly from Taranaki, and Mr Louis Kuriger, from Opunake.

About 8.30 p.m. Mr Franz Arnold Jnr., from Hamilton, began the programme with two items of "Alphornblasen" and, surprisingly, the melodious tunes sounded beautiful, even in the hall, carrying you away up to the lovely Alps and for a short time you would forget the hall and all. After singing the National Anthem, Mr Fitzi held the opening speech and greeted all compatriots in four languages, hoping that everybody would have a pleasant evening and also thanking the Committee members for all the work they had done in the preparation of this Day.