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MR GNAEGI VINDICATES SWISS DEFENCE

Federal Councillor Rudolf Gnaegi, Head of the Military Department, delivered an important speech on Army policy at the Annual General Meeting of the Society of Officers which was held at the end of June in Basle.

Mr Gnaegi took the opportunity to reassert the country's official defence policy and of outlining a future Government white paper on the subject.

The Speaker stressed that a small neutral country was pledged to have a strong Army and rely on its own strength. Permanent neutrality required constant vigilance. The present situation in Europe and that in east-west relations should not be a reason for shelving the country's weapons as the formidable armoury existing in the world today could still be used one day. Switzerland should be prepared for any sudden emergency.

Mr Gnaegi concentrated a great part of his speech to the growing dissent of the young, who were not only questioning the relevance of the Swiss Army, but also the country's institution. According to Mr Gnaegi, the only way to reverse this trend is by increasing efforts at the public of the Army's purpose. It was necessary to convince the people that the Army was still necessary, that it was not the affair of a small military and reactionary minority, and that Swiss values were worth defending. The Army was therefore an instrument of peace deserving the full support of every citizen.

The end of Mr Gnaegi's speech was devoted to the growing requirements of the Army in modern equipment. The sophistication of new weapons will require more and more funds. Although recent budgets have granted increasing priority to civilian expenditure, the Army will soon be compelled to claim a wider share of the budget if it is to fulfill its mission. Mr Gnaegi added that Switzerland's basic policy was to maintain a strong army and demonstrate the country's strength as this was the only way that we could act towards peace.

In another development, General Staff Colonel Heinrich Wagner, outgoing president of the Society of Officers, suggested in a military review and a Basle daily that special anti-subversion forces should be set up in Switzerland. He claimed that various left-wing organisations were actively preparing to undermine the established order and that troops should be trained in street fighting. One of the organisations named, the Swiss Council for Peace, immediately countered with a declaration saying that Colonel Wagner's position reflected the "insecurity prevailing in military circles".

From the Swiss Observer