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HOME NEWS

A Communist proposal in the Zurich municipal council to abolish the traditional grace in the municipal institutions has been rejected.

After having spent, during the last three years, Frs. 175,000 on the restoration of the Basle cathedral, the authorities now find it necessary to allocate a further sum of about Frs. 80,000 for repairs.

The property formerly occupied by the Grand-champ cement works and situated between the castle of Chillon and Villeneuve, is being acquired by the Vaudois cantonal authorities and will be converted into a public park.

The latest traffic regulations for the canton of Solothurn prohibit the use of public roads on Sundays by motor lorries and other mechanically propelled vehicles carrying goods. The speed limit on the open road has been reduced to 20 miles an hour for all vehicles.

Damage estimated at Frs. 113,000 has been caused by a fire which destroyed a barn at Wermatswil belonging to the farmer Henri Wgli; through the collapse of the roof four persons were injured, one of them fatally.

Prof. Dr. Fr. Siebenmann, a well-known ear specialist, died in Basle at the age of 76 after a painful and protracted illness.

Adrien Ritter from La Chaux-de-Fonds, a member of a Swiss labour deputation who were making a study of social institutions in Vienna, was drowned whilst inspecting, and disporting himself in a bathing establishment of the latter city.

No less than three pedestrians were knocked down, and more or less seriously injured, by an inexperienced motorist in one of the busiest streets—Freiestrasse—of Basle. The driver, in an endeavour to avoid an oncoming vehicle at a crossing, lost control of his engine and mounted the pavement.

NOTES AND GLEANINGS.

Switzerland and Disarmament.

The following interesting *exposé* has been contributed to the *Spectator* (March 24th) by M. Wm. Martin, whose articles on foreign politics in the *Journal de Genève* command such world-wide attention. We doubt, however, whether we all agree with our distinguished compatriot in his concluding statement as to the present security of Switzerland.

During the discussions at Geneva on the subject of disarmament, it is a notable fact that the Swiss delegates have generally been conspicuous by their absence or by their silence. This is surprising—the more so because Switzerland is an absolutely peaceful country—which her military system necessarily makes her. As regards disarmament she is an example and a model for other countries. This apparent anomaly is explained by the fact that the position of Switzerland is not—from this point of view—the same as that of the other countries. The latter, by the Treaty of Versailles, have undertaken to disarm, and have only made this engagement on one condition—the degree of their security. Switzerland, which is not a signatory to the Treaty of Versailles, has made no such engagement. On the other hand, an extensive section of her public opinion believes that she has done so, and that she would not be free to reduce her armaments even if she so desired.

It should be remembered that Switzerland was declared perpetually neutral by the Treaty of Vienna of 1815—a neutrality which was continued during the whole of the nineteenth century and throughout the World War. The Swiss people have come to regard this as the symbol of their independence, and they are deeply interested in it. Moreover, when in 1919 the question of her joining the League of Nations was raised, the Swiss Government took steps to make sure whether such membership would be compatible with the maintenance of perpetual neutrality.

At that time Germany was not a member of the League, which appeared in the eyes of a great many Swiss people as an alliance of the conquerors against the conquered. Public feeling was not too favourable to it. What could the League of Nations give to Switzerland which she did not already possess? By perpetual neutrality Switzerland could, in case of attack, rely upon the help of the guarantors. All that the Covenant promised Switzerland was a number of greater guarantees with the uncertainty of a system yet in the experimental stage. Public feeling in Switzerland was almost unanimous; they must not abandon the substance for the shadow and sacrifice neutrality for a pact the durability of which no one could foresee, and which could only be tested by practice.

It was on these conditions that the Federal Government demanded the recognition of Swiss neutrality at the Peace Conference. President Wilson and Lord Cecil, fearing that the least weakness in the plan of the pact would destroy the whole, refused absolutely, and the Supreme Council referred back the Swiss question to the Council of the League of Nations. When the Swiss delegates arrived in London in February, 1922, the situation was modified in their favour. President Wilson had himself introduced into the Treaty of Versailles an article declaring that international engagements concluded with a view to the maintenance of peace—such as the Monroe Doctrine—were not contrary to the Covenant of the League of Nations. On the other hand, in Article 435 of the Treaty of Versailles, the signatories to this Treaty had recognised that the perpetual neutrality of Switzerland aimed at the maintenance of peace. The juxtaposition of these two texts seemed to permit an assimilation of Swiss neutrality with the Monroe Doctrine, and its maintenance inside the League.

The Council of the League of Nations was not particularly favourable to this argument, but as it was clear that Switzerland would not enter the League of Nations if its perpetual neutrality were not confirmed, the Council on February 13th, 1920, came to a decision in London which accorded to Switzerland a special status in the League. By this decision Switzerland was exempt from participating in the military sanctions outside its frontiers. At the same time, it expressly provided that Switzerland is not exempt from participation in the economic sanctions which the League of Nations prescribe, nor from the defence of her own territory. It is upon these words that a section of our public opinion upholds the argument that Switzerland should herself defend her own territory in all circumstances, which would deprive her of the freedom to reduce her armaments. This argument played a great part in the local discussions between the Socialists—who demand a reduction of the military budget—and the *Bourgeois* party, who resist it. It would appear inadvisable to seek for more in the Declaration of London than it actually contains. Its object has been to state precisely, from the moment the Swiss people were relieved of certain obligations of the Covenant, that this exception must not be extended in a wider sense (*un sens extensif*) and that Switzerland was not exempt from certain other obligations, among which may be included the defence of her own territory. On this point the position of Switzerland does not differ from that of other members of the League, but is similar, and this is precisely its intention.

It could not be otherwise. If the Swiss people had undertaken to defend themselves alone against all aggression they would have assumed an obligation at variance with their perpetual neutrality. A nation of less than 4,000,000 people might have been obliged to resist alone any adversary in no matter what circumstances. That supposition is untenable. Further, the Declaration of London is not an International Treaty, but a simple decision of the League of Nations Council with which Switzerland has had no formal concern, and it is unthinkable that it might result for that country in a limitation of sovereignty so considerable as would be the prohibition to disarm. The Swiss Confederation is a sovereign and independent nation, which has the right to extend its armaments if it wishes to do so, which implies the right to reduce them.

Can we, then, suppress our Army? I do not think so. No member of the League of Nations can deprive himself of all means of defence. The Covenant imposes on all the States the duty of being in a position to participate in the sanctions which the Council prescribes: consequently, no State may deprive itself in advance of the possi-

bility of carrying out this engagement. When the Danish Socialist Government considered the suppression of the Army and of the Fleet, voices were at once raised to point out that such a measure would be incompatible with the position of a member of the League of Nations. Although Switzerland may have not participated in the sanctions outside her territory, she is not, in this connexion, in an exceptional situation; and she must be prepared to co-operate in the matter of her own defence. She cannot, therefore, deprive herself of every kind of military strength.

To sum up, I believe—contrary to a large section of Swiss public opinion—that this country is in the same position as the other members of the League, in that we cannot completely suppress our Army, but that we are free to determine for ourselves the basis of our own security and the limit of the armaments which we need.

It is incontestable that the security of the Swiss people is now greater than it was before the War. Two considerable Armies—those of Germany and Austria-Hungary—which hitherto were a menace to our frontiers, have disappeared. The Armies of two other countries—France and Italy—have been slightly reduced. As to guarantees of Law—the only refuge upon which small countries may count for their defence—these are considerably strengthened. Swiss neutrality was hitherto guaranteed by various great Powers. It is to-day assured by all the States-members of the League, for it is inconceivable that Switzerland could be involved in a war which was not for her a war of aggression, and which did not put into force, in her favour, all the sanctions of the Covenant.

The Basle Mission.

Every English paper has, during the last few days, in one way or another commented on this matter, which, in consequence of extraneous statements made at the recent shareholders' meeting of the Commonwealth Trust, has been complicated and deliberately obscured. We can sympathise with the directors of the English company in resisting the proposed return to the Basle Mission of their property with which they have become invested, but they are alienating these sympathies by their attitude and attempt to throw doubts on the integrity and disinterestedness of those English newspapers and public men who, guided by a sheer sense of justice and fairplay, have brought about a reconsideration of the case. The directors of the Commonwealth Trust have taken great pains in securing for their own garbled version the widest publicity by inserting in the *Times* a six column report of their speeches from which the provincial papers have taken their cue for their own comment. The following from the *Sheffield Daily Telegraph* (March 27th) is a case in point. The Basle Mission is nonchalantly called a German society with the evident intention of stirring up the feelings of its readers: the paper omits to refer to the large sums which the Basle Mission had been able to put aside for native education, etc.: it also conveniently overlooks the fact that the Commonwealth Trust during its ten years' activity has not been able to make any allocation in this direction.

"In the City this afternoon, the shareholders of the Commonwealth Trust, a public utility company administering trading stations, brickyards, and other properties in West Africa, will meet to consider the demand recently made by the Colonial Office that the trust should hand back these properties to the Basle Mission, a German missionary and trading society, with nominal headquarters in Switzerland. The mission's trading properties had been established in West Africa for many years and even after war broke out the British administration left the Germans in control of them for some time. Eventually, for the security of the Empire and in the interests of the natives, they were expropriated and given to the Commonwealth Trust, a body not organised primarily for profit, and with men like the Rev. F. Lenwood, Sir Michael Sadler, and Lord Meston on its advisory Board.

Now the Colonial Office has declared that for "reasons of State into which it is hardly necessary to enter," but which obviously arose at Locarno, the properties must be handed back, and that if the Trust will not relinquish them voluntarily the Government will compel it to do so.

To go into the merits of the proposed transaction or to discuss whether the trust is doing as well for the natives as the German pastors could do is not my business. I mention the matter to point out that on the principles which now actuate our Government much other property may