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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 Grandchamp 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 possibility 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 have 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

have to be transferred back to the Germans, and perhaps territories as well, and our taxpayers may have to indemnify the expropriated British possessors."

We also quote from *Truth* (March 28th) which puts the matter in its proper light :—

"In his letters to the *Times* Sir George Craik, the managing director of the Commonwealth Trust, Limited, shows an extraordinary inability to grasp the reason why the Cabinet has decided that the properties now held by the Trust must be restored to the rightful owners, the Basle Trading Co. He asks for an enquiry into allegations of enemy sympathies or associations which were made against employers of the Swiss mission during the war. He does not seem to understand that those allegations, even if substantiated and even if they afforded sufficient grounds for war-time measures of control, did not justify according to international law the permanent expropriation of the properties in neutral ownership in the Gold Coast and in India. The French Government frankly admitted this in the case of the properties in the Cameroons, and the British Government is in honour bound to follow that example. The alternative is to wait for an adverse judgment of the Hague Tribunal—a humiliation for this country which the patriotic directors of the Commonwealth Trust are apparently ready to face with equanimity.

Sir George Craik says he does not see what business it was of the Colonial Office to question the action of the board of the Commonwealth Trust in voting £2,500 out of surplus profits (not yet earned) for the benefit of Indian missions. He says this in spite of the fact that in order to secure control by the Government the constitution of the Trust as a company expressly empowers the Secretary for the Colonies or the Secretary for India to remove from office all or any of its directors.

With what seems to be obtuseness Sir George combines some degree of offensiveness in his references to Viscount Templetown and to those members of the House of Commons who have asked questions on the subject. He wants to know how their curiosity was "inspired," and talks impudently about members of Parliament as "representatives" of a foreign company. The idea that they may be animated by a sense of public duty and a belief that the good name of this country requires the righting of the wrong that was done, even though it means the end of the Commonwealth Trust—and the end of the managing directorship—is, apparently, beyond the comprehension of Sir George Craik."

The shareholders' meeting has also given rise to some questions in the House of Commons as will be seen from the Parliamentary reports in the *Times* (April 3rd) from which we quote herewith :

"*Colonel Wedgwood* asked Mr. Amery if he was aware that, at a special meeting of the Commonwealth Trust, allegations were made concerning the methods by which the policy of the Colonial Office on matters concerning the trust was arrived at ; and if he would call for a *verbatim* report of the proceedings.

Mr. W. Baker (Bristol E., Lab.) also asked if Mr. Amery was aware that during the extraordinary meeting of the Commonwealth Trust, attacks were made on certain members of Parliament and allegations were made about the methods of his Department ; and whether he would request the directors to forward to him a *verbatim* copy of the printed speeches, in order that copies might be laid upon the Table of the House for the information of members.

Mr. Amery.—I will ask the directors if they can furnish me with any fuller report of the speeches referred to than that which has already appeared in the Press. I shall then be in a position to judge whether such report contains sufficient additional matter of importance to justify my laying it upon the Table of the House.

Colonel Wedgwood further asked whether, in view of the proposal made by the Government to repay part of the capital of the Commonwealth Trust with some further compensation, Mr. Amery would inquire as to the expense incurred by the trust in taking the great hall at Winchester House for a meeting of 13 shareholders, and the cost of putting a six-column advertisement in the *Times* to record Mr. Lionel Curtis's speech.

Colonel Wedgwood also asked if Mr. Amery was aware that, during the extraordinary meeting of the Commonwealth Trust, certain shareholders moved an amendment to the official resolution of the directors urging the board of directors to cooperate with the Secretary of State and, subject to certain conditions, to give him every assistance in a friendly manner in carrying out the decision of the Cabinet, and that, apart from the personal vote of the directors themselves, the amendment was only lost by a majority of one vote of those present ; and whether he would call upon the directors to submit to him a certificate showing the number of shareholders, apart from the directors, present and voting at the meeting, coupled with a statement upon the proxies received from those who were unable to be present and to avail themselves of the information disclosed at the meeting.

Mr. Amery.—I do not think it necessary to make the suggested inquiries into the detailed administration of the company's affairs.

Colonel Wedgwood asked whether, seeing that the directors of this company were subject to the right hon. gentleman's approval, he was not therefore in a position of trust, so that he ought to be able to see whether the money of the trust was being wasted or not.—*Mr. Amery* replied that on major issues that was so, but he hardly thought that the trust would warrant his interference on detailed points.—*Sir F. Hall* (Dulwich, U.) asked whether, if any of these officers of the Commonwealth Trust lost their positions in consequence of the transfer, Mr. Amery would use his best endeavours to see that their interests were protected.—*Mr. Amery* : Most certainly.—*Mr. A. Hopkinson* asked whether, in view of the fact that Colonel Wedgwood had stated at the meeting that his only object was to get his money back, Mr. Amery could give Colonel Wedgwood the necessary assurance. (Laughter). —*Mr. Skelton* (Perth, U.) asked if Mr. Amery could say, in a word, what were the functions of the Commonwealth Trust.—*Mr. Amery* said that he was afraid that that word would be a very comprehensive one.

Lieut.-Com. Kenworthy.—Is the right hon. gentleman aware that a column of the *Times* costs about £75, and that the total amount spent on this publicity was £450, if it was paid for ? Is that the way the money should be expended by a company not making profits ?

Mr. Amery.—I do not know if that sum was spent.—*Mr. A. Hopkinson* : Is it not desirable that the shareholders should have an opportunity of knowing what the Colonial Office has done, and that therefore the expense was fully justified ? —*Colonel Wedgwood* : Is it not desirable that an account of what the Colonial Office has done should come from the right hon. gentleman who conducts the Colonial Office, rather than from an ex-official of the Colonial Office who does not ?—*Mr. Amery* : I hope to give that account.

In reply to *Mr. Dunnico* (Consett, Lab.), *Mr. Amery* said : I have no information as to the number of meetings held by the trustees of the Commonwealth Trust. No sums have been disbursed from the surplus profits of the trust on behalf of native welfare in West Africa.

Lieut.-Com. Kenworthy.—Would it not have been a good thing if this £450, expended on the *Times*, could have been given to the poor natives of West Africa ?"

Dr. Karl Bohny.

The *Times* (March 29th) published the following obituary notice :—

"Dr. Bohny was a native of Basel, and was for many years Professor of Medicine at the University there. He was also a medical officer in the Swiss Army, in which he held the rank of chief medical officer of a division. In 1905 he was elected a member of the directorate of the Swiss Red Cross, and in 1914 was appointed chief surgeon of the Red Cross, in which capacity he had to organise the medical service of the Swiss Army, and to create a centre for Swiss convalescent soldiers. Dr. Bohny was also in charge of the transport of War cripples through Switzerland, of the exchange of wounded between the Allied Powers and Germany, and of the establishment in Switzerland of hundreds of Allied and German interned officers and men. His good humour and kindness were highly appreciated by the Allied interned, especially by the British. For his work during the War Dr. Bohny was awarded several foreign orders. Since 1919 he had been President of the Swiss Red Cross. He also belonged to the League of Red Cross Societies, of which he was a Governor."

Patriotic Poetry.

The following from the *Daily Telegraph* (March 27th) shows that the delicate task of eliminating points of friction still existing as a result of the War and entrusted to Swiss statesmen is fraught with many vicissitudes :—

M. Calonder, the Swiss chairman (appointed by the League) of the mixed German-Polish Commission entrusted with the task of supervising the working of the 1922 Convention relating to the treatment of minorities in Upper Silesia, is just now the object of violent attacks in the Polish Press. The gravamen of the complaint against him, which may be brought up at Geneva, is that he recently prohibited the singing in the schools of the Polish part of Upper Silesia of a Polish patriotic song known as the "Rota."

In this song the Polish children exclaim, "No, we shall not leave the land which gave us birth !" M. Calonder holds that the song "might offend the national feelings of the German minority," and that "songs which express feelings of revenge, hatred, or contempt" towards another nation "cannot be reconciled with the spirit of the Geneva Convention." But it is very difficult to say what is and what is not legitimate in the poetic expression of patriotism, and such attempts at censorship are irksome.

A parallel case—this time with Germany on the other side—is the veto placed by the Coblenz High Commission on the singing by the Rhinelanders of the "Wacht am Rhein." Ten years after the war there should be enough mutual tolerance to remove all need for such petty restrictions."

An April Hoax.

From the *Daily Mail* (April 2nd) :—

"Switzerland was hoaxed this morning by a Lausanne newspaper which published an article from its Berne correspondent purporting to describe the secret departure from Berne last night of Mittelholzer, the Swiss airman, on an attempt to fly the Atlantic.

With a wealth of circumstantial detail, the story explained that the project had been kept a profound secret lest the German airmen now waiting in Ireland should get wind of the affair and steal a march on the Swiss.

Mittelholzer, whom the correspondent "accidentally discovered" taking a last frugal meal in a teetotal café in Berne, was represented as saying that he would not allow anybody to accompany him, but as the aeroplane was about to rise a mysterious personage rushed up and jumped into the cockpit.

The mysterious personage, so the story went, was Zoubkov, the husband of the ex-Kaiser's sister, who had chosen this method of rehabilitating himself in public opinion.

Scores of people who during the day telephoned to the authorities and to various aerodromes asking for news of Mittelholzer's progress had the mortification of being reminded that it was April Fool's Day."

A Swiss Consulate in Soho !

The *Observer* (April 1st) contains a long article dealing with the medley of nations in Soho and its amenities. In the course of his nocturnal peregrinations the writer seems to have discovered a "Swiss Consulate" in Charlotte Street, as may be gathered from the following extract :—

"The real Soho seems to have moved to the north. Charlotte Street has always been the centre of a foreign quarter. There is an old German school nearby, and the Swiss Consulate and the Swiss Club and many restaurants and many artists in eccentric attire ; and here, too, is one of the last café bars where half the people speak French or Italian."

We know the lure of the Swiss Club in that locality is very great and we doubt not that a consulate in close proximity would relieve the general anxiety for a prompt discharge of the military tax, but the official intimation of its opening has not yet reached us.

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