

Zeitschrift: The Swiss observer : the journal of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK

Herausgeber: Federation of Swiss Societies in the United Kingdom

Band: - (1939)

Heft: 913

Artikel: What other people think of us : the political and military situation of Switzerland

Autor: [s.n.]

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-692266>

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: 14.01.2026

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

WHAT OTHER PEOPLE THINK OF US.

THE POLITICAL AND MILITARY SITUATION OF SWITZERLAND.

The events of Munich and afterwards have created a situation unique in the history of Europe. The revolutionary National Socialist Movement has won a position of political and military supremacy comparable only with that of Napoleon. Even experienced observers did not realise the revolutionary character of this powerful force. Thus the profound miscalculation could occur which took most of Hitler's declarations at their face value, for instance the racial principle, though never carried out in any respect either in letter or in spirit, and the principle of anti-Versailles, which was equally incompletely applied and only made understandable to hard-boiled politicians on the other side of the fence by hypnotic persuasion.

In this development Switzerland constitutes a threefold problem. Firstly, it is a thoroughly democratic country, one of the oldest and best-working democracies. Secondly, it is a wealthy country. Thirdly, it is the key to Italy and a wide door into France. That is quite enough to attract the attentions of such an enterprising neighbour as Hitler, particularly since there is now, from his point of view, a definite danger that Mussolini may awake to the risks of his Axis policy. Therefore, Hitler calculates, it may well happen that Mussolini will try to change sides before he has incurred the fate of Benes. A move by Hitler against Switzerland seems almost the only effective direct means to prevent this. He does not believe in Italy's military strength. But he thinks that her nuisance value against France in the Mediterranean and as interceptor of France's and Britain's vital lines of communication justifies an energetic action on the northern frontiers of his Fascist "allies."

These three aims — smashing the democratic system in a German-speaking nation, securing the wealth of the Swiss banks, and the occupation of a wide strip of Italian frontiers, can only be achieved by swift and unforeseen actions. These actions do not need better justification than the conquests in the Slav world: Switzerland still harbours a few hundred thousand German residents, a few thousand Swiss Nazis, and a democratic people. The trick is easy and well known. The democratic people are declared Bolsheviks and dominated by Jews, the German residents will call for help against the Bolsheviks, and the Swiss Nazis — though only a few lost sheep with doubtful personal records — will set up an independent government somewhere in the mountains and will declare Switzerland as part of Greater Germany, as she was some three or four hundred years ago.

No, our Nazi friends are never lacking in "justifications," and they will probably always find fools in all parts of the world to believe their stories. That does not matter. What matters is that if Switzerland goes under it will mean the final and unchallengeable hegemony of National Socialism in Europe. This prospect is not so remote as some optimists may be inclined to believe. There already exists a sort of standard work which mentions Switzerland as part of Greater Germany. The well-known publishing house of geographical works, Mittler & Son, in Berlin, has printed a handbook on *Air-Navigations*. The author of this remarkable work is Captain Sönichsen, and a man of no less importance than Air-Marshal Christiansen has written an introduction to it. The author demands quite reasonably that a flying officer should know his own country, and proceeds to define the geographical structure of Germany. He declares as part of Germany the Alps between Aare and Hungary, and includes the Upper Rhine, the Säntis Pass and the valleys of the Aare, Reuss and Upper Rhine. This is certainly not a mistake, since Captain Sönichsen happens to be a leading member of the Military Flying Schools in Berlin, and an expert on these matters. No wonder that the Swiss feel threatened, even if they only dare draw the conclusion that the author and those behind him are trying to cloud the knowledge of the German people concerning their frontiers, and to diminish their respect of foreign soil.

This thorough-going method of interference by written words has been constantly followed in Nazi pronouncements. They are usually clothed in the form of essays and articles on the question of "Neutrality" as such. Indeed, there is no neutrality for totalitarian ideology, nor is there neutrality for Nazi foreign policy. The revolutionary element rules out any form of disinterested tranquillity, any personal sphere of life. It is from these revolutionary sources that we see the justifications and claims drawn denouncing the very life and soul of Switzerland: neutrality. The *Berliner Börsenzeitung* undermines the conception of neutrality in its article of December 6th, 1938, under the typical headline "Crisis of Neutrality." The *Volkischer Beobachter* continues this preparatory propaganda attack on

★ SWISS NATIONAL EXHIBITION

ZURICH

MAY 6—

OCT. 29, 1939

- See our Country at Work and Play—our Arts and Crafts and Nationhood.
- This truly wonderful Exhibition, staged in a park-like setting along the shore of the Lake at Zurich itself, must not be missed.

ASK FOR THE ILLUSTRATED SWISS NATIONAL EXHIBITION FOLDER

INFORMATION from the Swiss Railways & State Travel Bureau, 11-B Regent Street, London, S.W.1. Phone: WHitehall 9851.

December 12th, 1938. The vague and hypocritical title of the *Berliner Börsenzeitung* has already been changed into a much more dangerous one: "Integral Neutrality." This is the old Nazi method: if the first comparatively careful step in an attack does not take effect immediately and decisively, they resort to the utmost ruthlessness.

The third, and now completely open, attack is launched in the January issue of Rosenberg's *National-Socialistische Monatshefte* (National Socialist Monthly). Here the Nazi expert on anti-Neutrality, Dr. E. H. Bockhoff, explains Hitler's conception in full. Under the title, "Neutrality and Democracy in the Twentieth Century," this most eloquent writer brings into line Neutrality and Democracy. His statements amount to the declaration that neutrality is a democratic conception, based on free speech, free assembly, and so on. Democracy, however, is a form of life which is not tolerable to Nazism. On the contrary, not only democracy but all its fruits and consequences are to be regarded as hostile. Indeed, neutrality is almost an absurdity. It can, however, be regarded as something which can be tolerated by Nazism, if and when the neutral State refrains from all comment on happenings, institutions and persons of the totalitarian régime. The neutrality of Switzerland is especially mentioned and is described as of a singular and special character. It was established as early as 1815, and was solemnly proclaimed by the signatories of the neutrality treaty: Austria-Hungary, France, Great Britain, Portugal, Prussia and Russia. Switzerland accepted its new status as a neutral State, and kept it faithfully even through such turbulent times as the World War.

Switzerland has only once limited its status as a neutral State: when it joined the League of Nations. And when the League collapsed it denounced the obligations under Article 16, and sent notes to the various Powers declaring that it was now again a completely and permanently neutral State. This note was also directed to Berlin, and was answered on June 21st, 1938, in rather ambiguous terms, recognising the will of the Swiss Government and drawing special attention to the fact that Switzerland's Government (Der Bundesrat) would have to observe very strictly its obligations as a neutral Power.

This was at the time when Hitler, as he has told us, was preparing the first step towards the rape of Czechoslovakia (not the liberation of the Sudeten Germans, be it well understood). He still had to be careful not to stir up too much suspicion regarding his real intentions. But the article in his "fashionable" monthly adds the necessary comment. It now explains in full what exactly has to be understood by these "obligations" of the Bundesrat. The commentator starts the famous lament of pessimistic Nazi *Weltanschauung*: everybody is hostile until Hitler's methods teach him the right way to be friendly, gentle and kind. It seems impossible, declares the author, that all these Swiss papers and speakers who denounced the actions of the Nazis during the September crisis can become neutral in case of war. This hate campaign in "peace" time has shown how the newspapers and the people of Switzerland will think in case of war. This makes it impossible for Nazism to regard Switzerland as a neutral country.

Here follows a lecture on genuine neutrality. If a country wants to be regarded as neutral the Nazis demand that the government should forbid any remarks critical to Nazism, for it is fully responsible for every word of every citizen. This would, of course, make a democratic form of life illusory. If, indeed, a government, and through the government the whole of a nation, were forced to take the responsibility for every spoken or written word, the only possible course would be to decide that there should be no opinions expressed, either spoken or written. In the end it would lead to complete domination such as the new form of "liberation" now applied to Czechoslovakia. The German and Italian Ministers at Bern recently made it clear that the Axis regarded the attitude of public opinion in Switzer-

land as not sufficiently friendly, and advised the Government to do something about it, i.e., to introduce a Press censorship to the advantage of the Axis. This official comment on the conception that Hitler and his men hold in regard to Switzerland and its neutral status makes it understandable that it should look to its own resources and try to build up a defence force as strong as possible.

The most far-reaching measure taken in consequence of this situation is the reorganisation of the Reserves. The age limited is to be fixed at 60. Everybody who is not sufficiently able-bodied for military service will be enlisted in the Reserves. Those who have done their military training and retraining service are also transformed into Reserve units. The Reserves, till now an unorganised mass of some 200,000 men, are to be organised in military units under military leadership. These Reserve units have to undertake various fixed tasks. Firstly, they have to take over the duties allotted in this country to the various branches of A.R.P. Then they are enlisted for First Aid and for Auxiliary Fire Service. Thirdly, they will have to do police duties of various sorts. In addition, they will now have to perform road services, veterinary services, engineering duties, installation and building tasks; even such remote necessities as outfitting, bakery, butchery, cooking and postal services will be covered by this institution. There is practically no section of public life which will not be taken over by this emergency organisation on military lines.

The whole group of people to be enlisted in this way is divided into four main defence lines. Firstly, those who have to join the colours immediately an emergency arises. Secondly, those who are not engaged in any vital industry or profession and can be called to the colours immediately afterwards. Thirdly, those whose profession is vital to the upkeep of national defence, but who are only engaged in administrative work, and therefore, should the need arise, can be replaced by others. Finally, there are the experts, technicians and so on, whose services are indispensable. Women are also regarded as liable for national service. We have to recognise the importance of these institutions which are imposed compulsorily (just as the army service is compulsory in Switzerland) in a democratic country by a democratic government on a democratic people. These duties are more and more regarded as privileges of a free people. The example of Nazi suppression in the conquered Czech State shows that Dictatorship, when victorious, deprives its victims of the right to bear arms. Once more in history the democratic movement and the national movement go hand in hand, or rather are moulded into one solid force.

The organisation of the country for the hour of danger would not be sufficient if it did not include elaborate precautions for the maintenance and efficiency of the military apparatus. Switzerland's excellent heavy industry is working at top speed in order to provide the necessary material. The country is not able to provide its industry with all the raw materials it needs even for armaments alone. There are practically no iron ores or other minerals, nor are the coal deposits very extensive. In order to escape, at least to some extent, the necessity of coal and oil imports, Switzerland has developed its electric power stations since the World War by using its huge waterfalls and rivers. But since these electric power stations are liable to destruction from air attack, the country has always developed its rolling stock and continues to do so. The import of coal, which before the war came mainly from Germany, has since been reorganised so that now Great Britain and France, as well as Belgium and Holland, rank high in the list.

This is particularly important since, in case of a European conflagration or even only an attempt to "protect" the Swiss, as the Czechs are now being protected against themselves, the people and government of Switzerland could obtain their necessary materials from the same

sources as before. It is important because it draws our attention to the fact that, whatever reason or pretext for an invasion of Swiss territory may be sought by the Neo-Napoleons, this little country cannot fight for its independence single-handed. It has to rely on substantial support from the democracies. Every Swiss citizen is a soldier, yet these few millions cannot resist a joint attack from the Axis Powers. All they can do is try to defend themselves for a few days, perhaps weeks. The position is easier on the southern frontier, where huge mountains protect the country and the few passes and tunnels can easily be blown up and blocked.

The position is much more difficult on the Nazi side. Open country has to be defended. There are a few thousand specially selected and trained men always stationed on the frontiers, special Frontier Guards. Only some 30,000 men stand behind them in peace time. To these we have to add, of course, ten times as many and more in case of mobilisation. But there is little time to lose should the need arise to defend the integrity and neutrality of the country. There are careful studies worked out by military experts considering the position in case of a sudden attack by mobilised forces. Specialised troops, tanks and so on, might cross the Rhine late one evening and try to break through the first defence lines of the Swiss in an attack in the early morning. That means that a surprise attack may well succeed in depriving the defenders of their natural frontier, the Rhine between Lake Constance and Basle. In such a case it is thought that it would be necessary to keep out the invaders, or rather to stop them near the frontiers, for at least six or seven days until general mobilisation could be effected. The small streets, many bridges across rivers, wide and narrow, constitute obstacles in the way of a mechanised force. The Swiss themselves have abstained from quantities of tanks and armoured cars, since they are only concerned with tactical and strategic defence, and want to make use of their hilly country, as well as to blow up all bridges, streets and roads leading into the interior should the need arise. They have, therefore, some advantage against the mechanised army of an invader, which would be bound to stick to roads and to use bridges.

It would be an impossible situation, however, if the sort of persuasion which has now become almost familiar to the heads of smaller countries should be applied. The Führer may well think it possible to invite some more heads of States to his presence, and threaten to bomb cities mercilessly unless a protectorate or some other form of suicide is adopted. In that case the nations of Switzerland, the old and holy democratic people of that brave little country high up in the mountains, will know how to act. Let us hope it will never come to that. But if it should come let us hope that not only will enemies be enemies but friends be friends.

IGNIS.
(Contemporary Review.)

EUROPEAN FOLKRAFT EXHIBITION IN LIVERPOOL.

The Union of Girl Guides consisting of over 100 societies in the Merseyside district have organised a European Folkcraft Exhibition and the Corporation of Liverpool has given them handsome apartments in the Walker Art Gallery for the Exhibition. The opening of the Exhibition took place on 4th May, 1939, by the Lord Mayor of Liverpool (Ald. Sir Sydne Jones) and a very pleasant function it proved to be. The exhibition will remain open almost to the end of May, so that thousands of Merseyside people will see it.

The Swiss Federal Railways in London had the good judgment to send an exhibit which compares favourably with that of other countries. But being a mere man just able to sow on a button if it is absolutely essential, I do not feel myself competent to give an opinion on delicate needlework and other similar handicraft. The above judgment is not mine but that of a lady of the Consular Corps, who was kind enough to examine and explain to me our exhibit and who is entitled to express an opinion. She was particularly struck with the work of a table top embroidery, which she thought was a work of merit. She did not know that it was Miss Livia Paravicini's nor the special occasion (her parent's silver wedding) which prompted this artistic effort. She knows it now.

If your eyes are tired of scrutinising so much delicate work, there are the pictures of the Gallery to look at and amongst these the splendid vision of the Alps by Giovanni Segantini in his picture "The Punishment of Luxury" which hangs on one of its walls.

As some of my friends remarked: We would go to Switzerland for our holidays if — that awkward "if" in the European situation which spoils so many plans.

Still the Swiss Federal Railways were probably right in supporting the Exhibition. It can only do good.

E.M.

1ST AUGUST FESTIVAL.

We are glad to inform our readers that the 1st August festival is going to be revived in London this year. Delegates of the different Swiss Societies met at Swiss House on Monday under the auspices of the Swiss Mercantile Society.

Delegates were in full agreement that this function should take place inside, and decided to have a typical National Swiss Rally.

We are greatly indebted to M. Paravicini, the Swiss Minister, who has kindly accepted the honorary Presidency.

Full details of this function will be published in due course, and we hope that every Swiss in London on the 1st August will make a point of being present. Admission will be free. There will be Swiss music, Swiss Songs, dancing; and a few surprises we hope in order to make it a most enjoyable evening. Every Swiss should consider it, not only a pleasure, but a duty to attend and celebrate this important National festival. In these days of international upheaval patriotism ought to be keenly displayed by every loyal citizen, and all our compatriots will no doubt take this opportunity of meeting each other, joining in a Swiss atmosphere for a few hours, and rejoice together that our country has been spared from the evils that have undermined or destroyed so many other peoples.

Please all take a note of 1st August at St. Pancras Town Hall, and look out for further details.

Bee.

A FAMOUS SWISS MINERAL WATER.

Our readers might be interested to hear that the well-known EPTINGER mineral water, which is so popular in our country, can now be obtained in this country. (See advert.)

Millions of bottles of this water are consumed every year by young and old, by natives and tourists from all over the World. The health-giving and curative properties of this natural "Eptinger" mineral water, endorsed by the medical profession, are especially helpful in eliminating stomach, kidney, bladder and rheumatic disorders. As a table water it is both pleasant and refreshing, also of great help to those suffering from digestive troubles.

"EPTINGER" MINERAL WATER

FROM THE MINERAL SPRINGS
— AT EPTINGEN, (Switzerland). —

Imported by S. H. HARTOG,
61, Wavendon Avenue,
Chiswick, London, W.4.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS.

Tuesday, 16th May, Union Chrétienne de langue française. Cauzerie — Introduction sur l'Evangile de Matthieu, par Monsieur le Pasteur M. Pradervand. Ladies invited. Foyer Suisse, 15, Bedford Way, W.C.1.

Thursday, May 18th at 7 p.m. — Swiss Y.M.C.A. — Lecture by Missionary J. R. Niklaus, on "The Holy Spirit." Acts 2. 1-14; at "Westgate House," 28/29, Bedford Place, W.C.1. "All young Swiss invited."

Friday, May 19th, at 8 o'clock (supper at 6.30 p.m.) — Nouvelle Société Helvétique — Monthly Meeting to be followed by a causerie on "Switzerland's Mission in Europe," by Dr. H. W. Egli, at the "Foyer Suisse," 15, Bedford Way, W.C.1.

Sunday, May 21st, at 4.30 p.m. — Swiss Y.M.C.A. — 51st Anniversary — (Tea will be served) — Ladies and Gentlemen are cordially invited at Westgate House, 28-29, Bedford Place, W.C.1.

Thursday, May 25th at 7 p.m. — Swiss Y.M.C.A. — Lecture by Missionary B. Segall, on "Can Religion be Defined," at "Westgate House," 28/29, Bedford Place, W.C.1. "All young Swiss invited."

Saturday, June 3rd, at 2.45 p.m. — Swiss Sports and Garden Party — at Herne Hill Athletic Grounds, Burbage Road, S.E.24.

Wednesday, June 7th at 7.30 p.m. — Société de Secours Mutuals — Monthly Meeting — at 74, Charlotte Street, W.1.

Thursday, June 15th — "70ème Fête Suisse," at Central Hall, Westminster.

SWISS BANK CORPORATION,

(A Company limited by Shares incorporated in Switzerland)

99, GRESHAM STREET, E.C.2.

and 11c, REGENT STREET, S.W.1.

Capital Paid up s.f. 160,000,000

Reserves - - s.f. 32,000,000

Deposits - - s.f. 1,218,000,000

All Descriptions of Banking and Foreign Exchange Business Transacted

: : Correspondents in all : :
: : parts of the World. : :

Telephone :
MUSEUM 2982

Telegrams :
Foyssuisse London

FOYER SUISSE

12 BEDFORD WAY,
RUSSELL SQUARE,
LONDON, W.C.1

Quiet position in centre of London.
Central heating and hot & cold water
throughout.

Continental cooking.

Management :
SCHWEIZER VERBAND VOLKSDIENST.

Drink delicious "Ovaltine"
at every meal — for Health!

Divine Services.

EGLISE SUISSE (1762).

(Langue française).

79, ENDELL STREET, SHAFTESBURY AVENUE, W.C.2.

(Near New Oxford Street.)

Dimanche 14 mai 1939 :

11h. Culte M. M. Pradervand.

11h. Ecole du dimanche.

7h. Culte M. M. Pradervand.

Jeudi 18 mai (Ascension), à 8 p.m., au Foyer Suisse, à l'occasion du passage de M. et Mme. Jacot et de Mme Dupont, missionnaires; Soirée d'adieux. Invitation à tous.

Dimanche 21 mai, 11h. Confirmation des catéchumènes.

Pour l'instruction religieuse et les actes pastoraux, prière de s'adresser au pasteur M. M. Pradervand, 65, Mount View Road, N.4. (Téléphone Mountview 5003) Heure de réception à l'église le mercredi de 11-12h.30.

SCHWEIZERKIRCHE

(Deutschsprachige Gemeinde).

St. ANNE'S CHURCH, 9, GRESHAM STREET, E.C.2.

(Near General Post Office, St. Paul's and Aldersgate Street Tube Stations (Central London and Metropolitan).

Sonntag, den 14. Mai :

11 Uhr morgens, Gottesdienst,

Pfr. E. Bommeli.

7 Uhr abends, Gottesdienst,

Pfr. E. Bommeli.

(Nach dem Abendgottesdienst, Probe des Kirchenchores.)

11 Uhr morgens, Sonntagschule, 186 Aldersgate. (Herr Fischer).

Mittwoch Nachmittag : Schwyzerchränzli von 3 Uhr an, im Foyer Suisse, 15 Bedford Way, W.C.1.

Anfragen wegen Religions — bzw. Konfirmanden Unterricht sind erbeten an Herrn Pfarrer E. Bommeli. Sprechstunden : Jeden Dienstag von 12-2 Uhr in der Kirche, Jeden Mittwoch von 5-6 Uhr im Foyer Suisse, 15, Bedford Way, W.C.1.

Printed and Published by THE FREDERICK PRINTING CO., LTD.
at 23, Leonard Street, London, E.C.2.