

News at random

Objekttyp: **Group**

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

Band (Jahr): - **(1940)**

Heft 959

PDF erstellt am: **28.04.2024**

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Pour faciliter les arrangements, le Comité recommande aux participants de s'annoncer au plus tôt à Monsieur P. F. Boehringer, 23, Leonard Street, E.C.2. (Téléphone : Clerkenwell 2321/2).

mountaineers and artillerymen can teach him about sliding snow.

There are two such schools — one near Davos and the other on the Weissfluhjoch, a mountain near Davos, some 8,500 feet high. Both have laboratories and film rooms.

It is almost impossible to go far into Switzerland without going through a mountain pass, and many such passes have steep sides which hold snow almost all the year round.

Students in the avalanche schools learn where to shoot at an Alp side covered with snow to start an avalanche in a certain direction. They learn, too, how to help the snow along by artificial means if avalanches are not in season. They even receive instructions about how to start an avalanche of rocks and dirt when there is no snow available. Instruction also includes courses on how to ascertain the danger of natural avalanches and how to delay them until such time as the enemy appears.

"There's one thing about an avalanche," said one of the instructors, "no matter how modern and how well-equipped an invading army may be, they would find it difficult to fight an avalanche."

NEUTRALITY AND ITS CRITICS.

When a country is engaged in a deadly war, public opinion soon becomes critical of the position of neutrals. Deeply convinced of the righteousness of their cause, the belligerents cannot witness without impatience the attitude of those who wish to remain out of the conflict. They soon feel inclined to twist the meaning of the Gospel's words, and to say that those who are not with them are against them, or, worse still, that neutrality is the child of fear. Thanks to the fair-minded statements of the Prime Minister and to the moderating influence of the principal papers, these feelings have only seldom found expression since September last. There have been, however, during the last weeks, a few speeches and articles which may be considered as danger signals. We cannot, in the light of previous experience, rule out the possibility that an anti-neutral prejudice may develop in this country. Such a prejudice might do a great

deal of harm and affect the deep sympathy which exists between the Allied and Neutral peoples. The United States, Italy and Japan are not so directly concerned. The situation of the smaller States of Western Europe is far more critical and far more likely to be criticised.

The political régime adopted by these small States enjoyed a greater prestige in the nineteenth century than it does to-day, because, after the Napoleonic wars, neutrality was acknowledged as the necessary complement of the balance of power. The political system in Europe depended on the relative strength of the large States and on the non-interference of the small States. Peace was maintained, on several occasions, because the aggressive Power realised that war involved too many risks, especially as long as Great Britain acted as arbiter between the parties. Any breach of neutrality was strongly discouraged, since it disturbed the balance. Switzerland requested to be granted perpetual neutrality at the Congress of Vienna. Fifteen years later, neutrality was imposed upon the new independent Belgian kingdom by the delegates of the five big Powers gathered in London. It was considered at the time as a somewhat utopian device for preventing a European conflict. Its remarkable success silenced the critics. The same status was applied later, on several occasions, as the best means of ensuring the independence of small and peaceful nations, while providing a political barrier between powerful rivals.

How is it that this régime which was so much in favour up to the end of the last century, and contributed to localise the Franco-Prussian War in 1870, is now looked upon by many people as a mere device to shirk political and moral responsibilities? The violation of the Belgian frontier in 1914 is no doubt a contributory cause of this change of outlook, but the main reason is the substitution, in 1919, of a general international organisation for power-politics, and of the League of Nations for the balance of power.

For twenty years we have ceased to think in terms of *Real Politik*, and have fixed our attention on the Covenant, its sanctions, its regional pacts and its collective security. The failure of these new systems is too recent to allow us to readjust our judgment to the present state of affairs, which is, from the historian's point of view, a return to the nineteenth century policy, an attempt to restore the balance which has been seriously upset by recent developments. Neutrality is no longer considered by the general public as a natural guarantee of independence and security for the small European States, but as an abnormal régime which is no longer justified by modern circumstances. People may recognise that small and exposed countries cannot be expected to take part in the present conflict, but at the back of their mind lurks the suspicion that failure to do so is a confession of weakness. These critics do not even appreciate the heavy sacrifices made by the Neutrals in order to ensure their selfdefence. The larger these forces, the more reason there seems to be for their being enlisted in the service of the "common cause." Disappointed at the break-up of the new system, people are reluctant to acknowledge again the old system. After the signature of the Briand-Kellogg Pact in 1928, Mr. Stimson declared that neutrality was "obsolete." It is now cold-shouldered by many who believed that this pact was not worth the paper upon which it was written.

SCHWEIZERBUND (Swiss Club)

74, CHARLOTTE STREET, W.1.

Annual Dinner & Ball

FRIDAY, 19th APRIL, 1940.

In the Chair :
THE SWISS MINISTER.

Reception 7.30 p.m. Extension till 2 a.m.

Tickets 6/6 each.