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OUR MILITARY EXEMPTION TAX (Militairsteuer)

(This article appeared in the "Basler Nachrichten" and is from the pen of its London Correspondent. The translation is ours).

The Correspondent wrote: A matter shall be discussed to-day which is considered by many a good Swiss abroad as a great injustice and which causes much bitter feeling towards the homeland. But the authorities at home must be well aware what the Swiss abroad thinks about this matter, for as we understand they must have heard about it on many occasions. Periodically it is also mentioned in Parliament and from time to time it is ventilated in the press. It is the matter of the military tax which has to be paid by the Swiss abroad and which is looked upon as an unjust burden and which estranges many good Swiss from the homeland. Particularly unjust is considered that part which demands the inclusion into the assessment of the so-called "prospect of reversion of property" and on which the appropriate tax has to be paid, although the Swiss abroad may never see or handle anything of it. The correspondent of the *Basler Nachrichten* has again recently learnt of a case in which a London Swiss received an assessment form from the Legation—which, of course, is only doing its duty—containing innumerable questions. Amongst these was the following:—What are the means of your parents? But to this gentleman in London the pecuniary circumstances of his people are absolutely unknown. Neither has he the faintest possibility of ascertaining such facts, which are required for such a request, either by letter or telegram, as letters and telegrams are censored and examined by various authorities. One can easily imagine what the reaction of the relatives in Switzerland would be on receiving a telegram containing the straight question: "What are your means and how much of it may I expect to get in time to come"? This London Swiss, therefore, is not in a position to determine the means of his relations in Switzerland.

Thereupon the official Swiss functionary abroad puts an amount which to him seems likely or possible, and on which the tax is demanded. If the Swiss abroad does not pay up his military Tax promptly, he receives registered letters threatening him with legal proceedings or refusal of renewal of passport, although he has quite enough other worries in order to keep his family decently during this war, rationing, firewatching, income tax, scarcity of housing accommodation and hundreds of other burdensome matters which are making his life anything but easy. These threats are sufficiently unpleasant in normal times. In times of increased difficulties and of hard struggle for existence, especially in the South of England, it may mean that the breadwinner runs the risk of not returning home at all, and if disabled, finds the attitude of the Swiss bureaucracy as absolutely unbearable, and begins to do that which is considered the historical right of the Swiss namely to grumble and to get up in arms about it. His ire is directed towards his homeland for which he does his best by his actions abroad to be a credit, and which is repaying his endeavours with a request for payment of an apparently paltry sum of money and threatening prosecution. In a case known to your correspondent, the military authorities at home went even so far as to fix a time limit for payment and at the same time threatening judicial recovery, because the

London Swiss reacted somewhat slowly upon the demand for payment made by the Legation.

It may be that these lines are written for the cat, but it may also be that the homeland does not at all take into account what it is sacrificing by this military tax in the way of goodwill on the part of the Swiss abroad. The writer does not know the sum which the Confederation obtains from the collection of this tax. But he knows, however, that the amount of goodwill which it is losing is infinitely greater than the amount which the authorities enter into their ledgers expressed in francs and centimes. The Swiss abroad are at the moment living a darned hard life in many of the belligerent countries. Is it, therefore, necessary that it be made harder by an antiquated and apparently unjust measure which is looked upon as an unjustifiable oppression and that the Swiss abroad, besides other difficulties has to argue with and fight his home authorities or their official representatives abroad.

When, a few months ago, the City Swiss Club entertained Professor Paul Keller to dinner, a London Swiss rose and in eloquent words expressed to the Swiss delegate the sentiments of the Swiss abroad and asked him to convey these words to Berne. At the annual meetings of the Swiss Societies and in the annual reports this vexatious question is constantly brought up, but never anything happens. When on the 1st of August beautiful words are transmitted over the radio of the close links existing between the homeland and its sons and daughters abroad, many a Swiss has laughed out loudly in bitter irony and has led the conversation on to the military tax. The sentiments of innumerable Swiss abroad have been expressed here exactly in the manner in which the correspondent of the *Basler Nachrichten* has had an opportunity to observe for the last ten years. Mincing matters here would have no sense.

The problem as seen from Switzerland may be insignificant, but for the Swiss abroad it is of the utmost importance. Why not meet them in this matter? Why make them embittered, cross and estranged? Why not listen to their constant complaints and find a remedy? Why risk that after the war, on account of a demand for military tax, many Swiss abroad may not be putting all their weight into the scale, even in a small way, to do everything in the interest and the development of the homeland, when it is a matter of rebuilding and re-establishing industrial and commercial relations and in reviving the tourist traffic. The collection of the military tax and the threatening and uncourtly letters from the representatives abroad create a lot of bad blood. That does not pay in the long run.

N.B.—The above complaint is nearly as old as Methuselah but it may be stated that since the outbreak of the present war the home authorities have exempted any Swiss in this country serving in the English forces from payment of future military taxes, though such service without the explicit sanction of the Swiss Government is not permissible under our Constitution. —(ED.—S.O.).

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