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SWISS REARMAMENT PROBLEMS.

By PIERRE BÉGUIN.

Just after the war it was hoped that Switzerland's military expenditure could be cut down considerably. During the war we had been spending about one and a half thousand million francs on national defence, and it was pretty generally expected that once hostilities ceased in Europe this sum could be reduced to 300 million francs, or in other words cut down by eighty per cent. This was all right in theory but didn't work out like this in practice. What actually happened was that during the last few years Switzerland spent about 400 million francs on national defence, and this was only a minimum budget, which barely allowed for the maintenance of arms and equipment and normal military training of personnel.

Last year the Swiss War Minister and the Swiss General Staff stated that this allocation was inadequate and would have to be increased if the national defence was to be brought into line with modern conditions. The 1950 military budget was therefore made up to 465 million francs.

But this increase is only one stage in what looks like being a long journey. Very recently the Swiss War Minister announced that he intended asking Parliament for a supplementary estimate of 1,400 million francs to be paid off over a period of five years and to be used essentially for the purchase of jet planes and tanks. No decision has yet been taken on this matter because Parliament has not yet been presented with a detailed plan, but there is little doubt that in view of the present international situation the credit will be voted.

But a new difficulty has just arisen which we cannot help feeling is serious and alarming. It is that the British Government has just forbidden the export of armaments to any country which is not a member of the Atlantic Pact. Clearly, the countries which the British Government wished to prevent from getting British war material are first and foremost the Soviet Union and its Eastern European satellites, but the measure also affects Neutral countries like Switzerland. And it so happens that the Swiss military

authorities had given preference to British aeroplanes and British tanks, out of the various types which had been offered them.

As a result Swiss national defence has been dealt a heavy blow. It has been suggested that one of the intentions of the British Government when it restricted the export of war material was to put pressure on Switzerland to abandon her policy of neutrality and co-operate in the defence of the West. If this is true the attempt will fail. Switzerland sees no reason to modify her present policy, and considers she is doing her duty by shouldering very heavy financial burdens for the defence of her territory and her national independence — financial burdens proportionately heavier than many other Continental countries say *they* are able to bear.

What is much more likely is, that Great Britain is anxious to make up for the delay which she sees in the organisation of her own national defence as well as in that of her allies. If diplomatic representations do not succeed in getting Great Britain to raise the ban on the export of British war material, Switzerland will find herself in a difficult position, for unless she finds other countries willing to supply her she will have to manufacture her own aeroplanes and tanks.

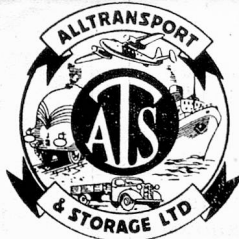
This would not be impossible; Swiss industry can do the job. But the preliminary work of turning peace factories into war factories would take a lot of time so that it would be at least two years before Switzerland was turning out planes and tanks in any useful numbers. Another thing is that Swiss war production would be very costly, because we could only manufacture on a comparatively small scale — there could be no question of production on a huge scale. And finally, it is by no means certain that Switzerland would find it easy to get the raw materials which only the great powers can supply, because probably these great powers would want to keep them for their own military needs.

Whatever the difficulties are there seems to be no other way out. Which all goes to show that neutrality is not a privilege, but that in some respects at least it is a responsibility which has to be faced up to.

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