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EASTERN EUROPE AND SWITZERLAND. A Brilliant N.S.H. Lecture.

Once again the Nouvelle Société Helvétique has enabled the Colony to hear the views and observations of a prominent Swiss visitor in England on a subject-matter of intense present interest: the world behind the Iron Curtain and the gap torn into it by Yugoslavia. The speaker was Dr. E. Zellweger, who for five years from 1945 to 1950 was Swiss Minister at Belgrade. As such he had, of course, the best opportunity to observe the conditions and events behind the Iron Curtain and to witness from the closest possible quarter the process of alienation between Yugoslavia and Moscow. He saw how, after Yalta, a phase of open expansion of the Soviet domain under a thin democratic disguise set in, how the Cominform was established as the chief instrument for ensuring obedience to Moscow, how trade-unions, co-operatives, youth-leagues and Soviet-cells were made use of for imposing this highly efficient power machinery upon one country after another.

The break between Yugoslavia and the U.S.S.R. was brought about by many factors, but to a special degree by the economic exploitation exercised by the Soviets through the medium of the well-known mixed trading corporations, half national — half Russian. The presidents and even the vice-presidents of these organisations, set up in all satellite countries for managing the most important national industries and trades, are nationals of the countries concerned. But

the general-managers are usually Russian and furnished with full overriding powers to do as Moscow thinks fit. The blatant abuse of this power for the exploitation of the satellites, to draw tribute from them under the guise of a beneficial joint arrangement, has contributed much to Tito's stubborn defence of Yugoslavia's independence and economic interests against this new form of a tyrannous overlordship.

Dr. Zellweger believes that this break is final and that it cannot be healed, although Tito remains a convinced Communist. Thus Yugoslavia had, despite its Communist beliefs, to turn West-ward for its trade and supplies, in the process of which it also learnt to appreciate Western ideals of personal freedom the better. Yugoslavia has for instance never disgraced the history of its revolution by any of the obviously staged Court proceedings against unfortunate victims of Communist persecution from whom confessions are extorted by the most fiendish methods. Peaceful neutral Switzerland, whom not ever Communists could suspect of aggressive designs, has gained the respect of Yugoslavs for its products and technical progress in a very special degree. The Swiss exhibits at the Industries Fair in Zagreb of 1946 drew enormous crowds of admirers.

Warmly applauded by the large audience for his fascinating account of things behind the Iron Curtain, Dr. E. Zellweger was plied with questions until a late hour.

Dr. E.

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