

Behind the scenes

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Objektyp: **Article**

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

Band (Jahr): **- (1951)**

Heft 1156

PDF erstellt am: **29.04.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-691147>

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BEHIND THE SCENES.**The Swiss Armament Discussions.**

By Dr. HERMANN BÖSCHENSTEIN.

It is hardly surprising that lively discussions on armament are taking place in our Democracy. Switzerland is now engaged in carrying out an extraordinary armament programme, at one go — so to speak — which amounts financially to an ordinary Army Budget for three years. One third of this sum is to be earmarked for the purchase of tanks. And, at this particular moment, a Militia Colonel and Commander of a Regiment, Nicholas Jacquet, who is also a Member of Parliament, takes it upon himself to produce a pamphlet of some 80 pages on the subject of tank attacks and anti-tank defence.

Colonel Jacquet is opposed to such a large appropriation for tanks and suggests that greater attention be paid to artillery anti-tank defence and skilful use of the terrain. His book has been very carefully prepared. It has, however, aroused considerable displeasure among other ranking officers, particularly among the "career" officers and the Military Department, and is looked upon as being an unwarrantable interference right in the middle of parliamentary discussions, on the part of an officer and politician known to have sound national views. Moreover, the Commission set up by the National Council — that is the Lower Chamber — has already decided to ask the Military Department to have the entire tank question examined afresh. The matter will not be settled off hand and careful studies will be made before any final decision is taken with regard to the granting of credits amounting to several hundred million francs. Colonel Jacquet has suggested a number of other weapons for anti-tank defence and has also drawn attention to certain deficiencies in training and arms equipment.

What is important in all these discussions is the fact that, apart from a small minority of Communists who contest the necessity for any extraordinary efforts in the way of armament, the great majority of the Swiss people and their representatives in Parliament, are well aware of the necessity for fresh sacrifices, which they are willing and ready to make.

This reminds one of the American neo-isolationist, who remarked that it would never do to under-estimate the importance of helping Europe, although it was imperative that one should think of the U.S.A. first and see to it that they were fully armed as soon as possible. They would then be in a position to engage in a useful policy with regard to Europe and to take an active part in forming a World Policy. Thus, with us also it is not a dispute regarding the object in view, but merely regarding the methods used in order to

achieve it. In our case, this means that everyone is willing to shoulder the burden of additional service and taxation for the purpose of strengthening our National Defence. This seems only natural to the younger generation, but the older people remember how, during the period between the two wars, the important Social-Democratic Party was officially opposed to National Defence, until Hitler destroyed the Democratic parties in Germany. They then realised that the very existence of a free and independent Switzerland was at stake.

There are other questions pertaining to National Defence which are being argued over, as for instance that of the expediency of preparing and training Partisan Groups in this country.

Colonel Corps Commander Gonard, who commands the 3rd Army Corps and is a distinguished General Staff officer, expressed the opinion when speaking recently at a meeting of officers, that the value of Partisan Groups had been greatly exaggerated. He declared that only the regular Army should fight. Partisans, if any, should only consist of those members of the Army who had got isolated and continued to fight. Switzerland must observe strictly International regulations and agreements and not do anything which might bring dreadful sufferings and retaliation on the civilian population. Of course, the Home Guards, organised during the last war, are considered members of the regular Army — they wear uniforms, are armed and are easily recognisable.

All these matters are being discussed vigorously, but as soon as the competent authorities have come to a decision, the opponents of a large tank force will accept defeat in a truly democratic spirit. In a country where military service is obligatory and general, the Army needs the closest co-operation from the entire population. Here, officers of every rank come from the people and they never consider themselves as belonging to a special cast or class. It is quite in order, here, for senior officers to take part in such discussions, and the fact of their doing so will in no way harm their career. The new armament programme is not yet firmly settled in all its outlines, but as soon as it has been finally discussed and decided upon by the National Defence Commission, the Swiss Cabinet, the various parliamentary commissions and the two Chambers, then it will be possible to carry it out, without any fear of serious obstacles arising from the earlier discussions.

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