

The Diplomatic Position of Switzerland [Forsetzung folgt]

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THE DIPLOMATIC POSITION OF SWITZERLAND.

(Continuation).

Is Neutrality Still Possible?

Is neutrality still conceivable in the world of today? Could it preserve the country, if another European war were to break out? Is it in the interest of the peace of the Continent?

In the past, Swiss neutrality was always bound up with the principle of European equilibrium. Now this equilibrium is broken; Central Europe is no longer a natural center of gravity, it has become a frontier, across which two antagonistic worlds are watching each other, arms in hand. Facing such a situation, Napoleon I would have repeated to the Swiss what he told them, when they tried to make him recognize their neutrality: — "In your relation to me, your neutrality is a word without any sense." It is a fact, that during his reign neutrality was unable to resist the hegemony of a single Power over Europe. But the Europe of today is not subjected by a single Power, although it is running such a risk. And a sort of equilibrium that is no longer merely European, but a world-wide balance of two groups of Powers has established itself, a counterbalance of two ideological forces, which compensate each other more or less. However, Switzerland has held her position, which she had consolidated in the times of European equilibrium, and has maintained it not only throughout the recent wars, but also in these post-war years, while standing between the two opposing groups of Powers. This fact permits us to believe, that neutrality is as fully justified today, as it was yesterday. The Confederation, therefore, sees no valid reason for a modification of the traditional course of her policy. Neutrality cannot be an attitude that is dictated by opportunism. If Switzerland would abandon it today, she would expose herself to the justified reproaches of the other countries.

On the other hand, neutrality retains its full value for the Confederation herself, by allowing her to avoid any prejudice of future developments in the midst of a confused world, which seeks to find its bearings, and in which the relations between great States are still based more on force than on justice.

There is also a psychological factor that should be taken into account. Neutrality is inscribed in the Swiss Constitution. Thus the government cannot ignore it without appealing to the nation's Referendum on the subject — which is the regular procedure, according to Swiss institutions. Now, it is improbable that the nation would abandon an institution, to which she is as much attached as to her independence. That may be an element of sentimentality, but it proceeds from the sound idea that neutrality — like our "Federalism" — is one of the surest guarantees of our interior peace. This was true during the era of European equilibrium, when Switzerland sustained the centrifugal attraction of her neighbours. It is still true today because Switzerland like many other European countries, also yielded in some degree to the centrifugal attraction of two ideologies, of two different conceptions of the world.

Finally, Switzerland's mission as the controller of the crossways of the great transversal routes of Europe has lost nothing of its importance as long as

the Continent is not under the total domination of one single group of Powers.

If another war should break out in Europe, the possession of these cross-roads could tempt one or the other of the belligerents. But each of them would certainly have the same advantage, if neither party would run the risk of seeing a strategic position of such importance fall into the hands of his enemy. Efficiently guarded by the Swiss themselves, the intersection of the Trans-European routes can remain neutral in the obvious interest of both parties, as long as Switzerland is not occupied by one or the other group of belligerents.

It is not less certain that, in the case of war, pressure would be exerted upon Switzerland, just as in the last two world-wars, attempting to convince her of the necessity of her military intervention by arguing, that every nation must contribute her share to defeat the instigators of war. The doctrine of the crime against human rights is apt to take root in International Law. But it is still rather vague, and Switzerland might be led to ask herself, on which side the warmongers are to be found.

In the era of the League of Nations, Switzerland constantly refused to participate in military and even in economic sanctions. She has no valid reason to modify her attitude, for International Law has not made such progress between the League of Nations and the UNO, that it could give the Confederation all the reassurance, that would be necessary for such a weighty decision. On the contrary, everything combines to induce her to keep faith with her neutrality. But under one condition — viz. to be prepared today, as yesterday, to defend it against all and every aggressor. Machiavelli's phrase is still true today: "Rome and Sparta maintained their liberty during several

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centuries by their national militias, and the Swiss are so free today only because they are well armed themselves."

The Participation of Switzerland In International Relations.

The preceding statements and considerations do not signify, that Switzerland seeks to keep aloof from international politics, particularly from the efforts undertaken to ensure peace in Europe.

Quite the contrary. Since the war ended, she has missed no opportunity of manifesting her desire, to multiply her contacts with the other countries and to co-operate with them. But, once again she did it in her own manner, obviously influenced by the discord of the two opposing forces, which appear like a constant contradiction, viz. her instinctive tendency to fall back upon herself and, on the other hand, her very strong sense of human solidarity and interest in international co-operation.

In this post-war world, which has ceased to fight, but which has not yet found the much needed peace, Switzerland makes her way with some reserve, which may occasionally give superficial observers the impression, that she is not animated by a sincere desire to co-operate.

However, she wants to co-operate. But something keeps her from pledging herself definitely. It is her desire, to observe the rules of her neutrality scrupulously. After the first world-war, already, Switzerland hesitated to participate in certain political actions of the League of Nations. In 1920 she did not authorize the passage of international troops — who were to aid Poland — across Swiss territory.

Later on, during the Ethiopian War, she did not apply the economic sanctions, decreed by the League against Italy. And when everybody discussed general disarmament, she did not conceal her scepticism, and waited for others to take the first steps. Finally, in 1938 Switzerland, which had in 1920 admitted the principle of a differential neutrality, obtained the approbation of the Council of the League of Nations to the resumption of her traditional concept of neutrality.

In 1945 the Confederation showed even less eagerness to join the Organization of the United Nations, which offers no possibility of a recognition of her neutrality. She was not invited to the Conference of San Francisco; however, she neither asked to be invited, nor did she seek admission to the Organization.

The Swiss Government did, in fact, not presume that the guiding principles of the UNO could permit the Confederation to become a member, without renouncing at least a part of her neutrality. Under these circumstances the Federal Council (Swiss Government) preferred to adopt an attitude of expectation and abstention.

At the same time, moreover, the Swiss Government manifested, by their interest in many international, non-political organizations, that they never intended to withdraw into their tents and wait for better days.

On the contrary, they stated very clearly that the Confederation is prepared to aid co-operation between the nations, insofar as her neutrality is not compromised. This attitude permits Switzerland to take an assiduous part in a whole series of peaceful activities which she does not renounce, as her desire, to remain neutral in a war, implies her still more obvious interest in the maintenance of peace.

In this spirit the Swiss Government have, since 1945, concluded 86 commercial agreements with 23 States. And in the same spirit they collaborate in the Marshall Plan, while continuing to develop good relations with the countries that do not adhere to it. Nor do plans for Customs Unions between European Countries trouble her, as they do not prevent the Confederation from keeping satisfactory economic relations with the participating countries. To join such a Union herself would be a different matter. In a Europe, that is exhausted by the war, Switzerland avoids commitments which would oblige her to make military sacrifices. She knows, that she would render no one a service by giving up a financial and economic policy, the results of which are satisfactory, in order to assume commitments, which would exceed her capacities and would end by placing her in line with other impoverished countries.

(To be continued.)



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