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NEWS AT RANDOM

Federal

The Defence Minister Mr. Kobelt, has warned Switzerland not to become phlegmatic about the existing "state of latent danger" and declared that the country's regular defence budget for next year would amount to 600 million francs (about £49 millions).

Speaking at Lucerne Mr. Kobelt also defended the mobile strategy which the Swiss Army intends to apply in the case of war, and tried to justify next year's defence burdens, which are over and above the current defence estimates of 1,464 million francs (about £119 millions). He said :

"It seems that the tendency of our people to agree to sacrifices for the sake of defence decreases in direct ratio to the increase in its wellbeing. . . What is neglected to-day in our preparations will be impossible to make up when the danger of war becomes imminent."

These views are in full conformity with Switzerland's idea of armed neutrality which has been emphasised by the Government in Berne ever since the short-lived post-war honeymoon between East and West had come to an end.

According to Mr. Kobelt defence materials, including construction, represented 5,800 million francs (about £483 millions). Once the current rearmament programme was concluded, he said, the Army would still require annually 135 million francs for training; 242 millions for weapons, munitions, vehicles, and aircraft; 132 millions for maintenance and construction; 14.5 millions for administrative purposes; 8 millions for improving fortifications; and a further 64.5 millions for miscellaneous items.

The Government has now publicly condemned five schools of thought on defence strategy. They are :

1. The idea that the Government should wait to acquire new material until further technical progress has been made is dismissed because "with this method no decision will ever be taken."

2. The criticism that Switzerland is imitating other armies by reproducing them on a pocket scale is

dismissed on the grounds that the smallness of the country requires sufficient stocks of foodstuffs, fuel, ammunition, and other defence materials which are bound to be costly at the outset.

3. The thesis that Switzerland should concentrate on setting up a home guard which in the case of enemy occupation could fight from underground is dismissed because this would reduce security to a minimum.

4. The "Hedgehog plan," according to which the Army should be broken up and concentrated at a certain number of fortified points, is rejected because once the forces are dispersed an aggressor could proceed by liquidating one stronghold after another.

5. The "Alpine fortress" idea is not even taken into consideration now because it would enable an invader to occupy the Swiss plains with their dense population centres and major resources and then concentrate on starving at his leisure the "alpine fortress." It is admitted that this approach was used during the war, when Switzerland was entirely encircled by German might, but the reason for this was that the forces and armaments then available would not have sufficed to hold an extended front.

"Our present aim," said Mr. Kobelt, "is rather to utilise to the utmost the ground which is favourable to us and to start defending ourselves as near to the frontiers as possible." This, however, required a numerically strong and mobile Army using modern and powerful equipment. Readiness to give one's life, he concluded, was not enough; financial sacrifices were also needed.

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