

The diplomatic position of Switzerland

[Fortsetzung folgt]

Autor(en): **[s.n.]**

Objektyp: **Article**

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

Band (Jahr): **- (1953)**

Heft 1203

PDF erstellt am: **15.05.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-689545>

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THE DIPLOMATIC POSITION OF SWITZERLAND.

(Continuation).

In the light of ancient and of recent events, neutrality thus appears as a principle of sound home policy, which we could not abandon without endangering even the future of the Confederation.

Nevertheless, neutrality does not find its only justification in internal problems, but also in the necessities of foreign policy, especially since it has been recognized by international treaties.

In order to make this aspect of the question quite clear, it is necessary to emphasize some paradoxical points in the situation of Switzerland. Geographically it forms an enclave between more powerful neighbours, it is cut off from all direct access to seaports and, entrenched as it is in its mountains, it is easily inclined to rely on itself alone. Yet Switzerland is, at the same time, one of the countries whose relations with the outside world are the most developed.

It is also paradoxical to compare the situation of Switzerland with that of the United Kingdom. And yet it is not absurd to do so. Switzerland, which is essentially continental, just as Great Britain is entirely surrounded by the sea, yet possesses one of the most international economies existing.

In every country foreign policy has a double objective: political and economic. In the case of Switzerland the economic aspect takes precedence, as the Confederation is neutral and does not manifest any expansionist tendency. Moreover, the development of her international trade is an essential factor in the life of her people. The poverty of the soil and subsoil obliges us to export manufactured goods, in order to enable us to buy abroad all that we need. Foreign trade is an essential element of our prosperity. As the famous economist André Siegfried wrote in his book "La Suisse, Démocratie Témoin":

"Deprive Switzerland of this foreign activity or trade, and you will have nothing left but a small mountainous country, reduced to a mediocre standard of living"

Since the war the foreign commerce of Switzerland has, by the pressure of circumstances, undergone an important change. In 1913 as much as 74.4 per cent of Swiss exports were absorbed by Europe. Two world-wars have by impoverishing Europe changed this proportion, so that Switzerland is the longer the more obliged to trade with oversea countries. Thus the proportion of Swiss exports to overseas has risen from 26 to 44 per cent. Similar to England, the Confederation is now driven by continental poverty to seek markets in overseas, whereby her solidarity with the old Continent has diminished, apparently. The obvious interest of Switzerland is to remain neutral, in order to keep her doors open to the world and even to show some reticence, at times, towards certain endeavours to set up a continental order.

However, neutrality has not only an economic significance for this country. It has a political meaning also, which becomes apparent on the continental level this time.

Geographically Switzerland is situated in the heart of Europe. The first thing that strikes one when

studying the map of the Continent, is how remote it is from the seaports. Having no free access to the sea, she can only keep up her contacts with oversea countries by practicing a good-neighbour policy, viz. that of neutrality.

But Switzerland is not only the geographic center of Europe. She is also situated at the crossroads of the great north-south and east-west transversal traffic, i. e. the open gateway in the rocky Alps, by which Northern Europe communicates with Mediterranean Europe. From its earliest beginnings Switzerland has been the guardian of this gateway which has not lost any of its importance by the piercing of the Gotthard and Simplon tunnels.

Ever since there was a European equilibrium, this position has given this country a strategical importance of the first order. But this very fact necessarily prevented Switzerland — at the risk of becoming a permanent battlefield — from participating in systems of alliances, since the era of great European States has succeeded to the scattered smaller States of the Middle Ages. Not one of the great States would have tolerated a hostile Switzerland, or one that was allied to another Power. Since then her neutrality has been the actual pledge of her independence.

On the other hand this neutrality would neither have been recognised nor respected by the Powers, if they had not found it to be a real advantage to do so. It suited each of them, that the turning disc or pivot of Europe should remain free from any foreign influence.

So let us not deceive ourselves. Idealism plays a small part in the actions of men. If the Congress of Vienna, in 1815, found that Swiss neutrality is in the interest of Europe, and if the Council of the League of Nations declared that it was in the interest of general peace, it was not done for the simple pleasure of taking an amiable attitude towards the Confederation. Both of these declarations correspond to one and the same political reality.

Neutrality and the Army.

When considered as a factor of continental peace, the principle of Swiss neutrality can only be justified if it gives the other nations full guaranties. However, such an institution would be very fragile if it were founded only upon the respect of treaties. The events of recent years have shown us, to what degree nations, that are engaged in adventurous warfare, can trifle with the rules of international law. One can very well



imagine that, in a European war, one or the other Power may be tempted to occupy Switzerland, either in order to lay hold on the routes of communication, or to forestall a similar movement on the part of the adversary. Such a temptation could be especially great at a time, when the Powers would be under the impression, that Switzerland is not ready to ensure the respect of her neutrality by means of her own forces. This leads me to the conclusion, that neutrality is worthless unless the entire population is prepared, if needs be, to defend it with arms in hand.

The Confederation makes every effort to be prepared for such action. During the last war she put up with military expenses, which were heavy in proportion to the number of inhabitants, and at present her Army leaders are untiringly endeavouring to increase their means of action and to adapt them to the exigencies of modern warfare. Is it not paradoxical to pretend that Switzerland is the most militarist country of Europe? At all events her so-called "militarism" has no aggressive tendencies. The Swiss Army can enter into action within several hours after the mobilization order has been given. But it would only do so for the defense of its national territory. It would surely lose much of its value on foreign ground. But on their own soil the Swiss soldiers are prepared to defend themselves with desperate energy against any aggressor.

During the last war the Confederation was several times put under pressure by a neighbour, who hoped to obtain concessions. Yet the Government and the Commander-in-Chief of the Army stubbornly held their ground, supported by a weighty argument. The main interest for a hostile army to occupy Swiss territory would have been, to gain the control of the north-south transversal routes of communication. But it was just on these routes that the Swiss Army was most strongly entrenched in her mountains. And it had the ultimate resort in case of invasion to dynamite the great tunnels and the technical constructions supporting and protecting these mountain railways, so that any traffic on these lines would have become impossible for many months. Such considerations were surely pondered by Hitler's general staff. In

spite of the relative weakness of our armed forces, their so-called "militarism" is still the best guaranty of neutrality.

The Attitude of Switzerland in War-Time.

We must now consider the question, if neutrality is an attitude of indifference — with which the Confederation was reproached during the two last world wars — or if it permits an active participation in the events in a perfectly peaceful form. The argument, that was chiefly brought forward, implied that neutrality was no longer possible in a conflict involving not only armies, but also philosophical conceptions of the State and of society. This question is important. If a new war would break out, this aspect of a conflict between two different "Weltanschauungen" would be even more stressed than hitherto.

Was Switzerland really disinterested in the events that happened around her territory in 1939-1945? Even if she had so desired, she could not have been. She felt too deeply the downbreak of the European equilibrium, she was too radically cut off from the bases of her civilization, and consequently unable to make a show of haughty indifference. But she understood her role in her own way thinking she was capable of accomplishing a more positive task by remaining neutral, than by allowing herself to be drawn into the war. At no time did she think: "These are affairs, which in no wise concern me."

With no thought of entering upon warfare, the Confederation endeavoured to act as a link between the two belligerent groups and to bring aid and provisions to the populations, which have suffered so terribly during the hostilities.

And Switzerland was able to give help, inasmuch as her government took upon itself, under critical conditions, the defense of the interests on enemy territory of 43 belligerent States. The Confederation also facilitated the exchange of diplomats, of other civilian persons and of prisoners of war. The scope of this enormous task led to the organization of large administrative services; and during the whole war, even after the armistice, millions of human beings had

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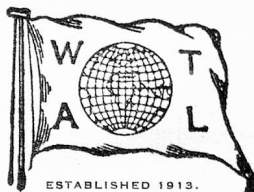
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In fact, it was more than aid that Switzerland was able to give, thanks to the considerable work of the Services of the International Red Cross and of a number of semi-official and private Institutions, which made great efforts to alleviate the sufferings to which the populations were exposed by warfare.

During the entire period of hostilities, then after the armistice and up to the present day a great number of Swiss citizens have devoted and are devoting their time and full activity to the cause of European solidarity, among whom there are men, whom Mr. André Siegfried in his recent book qualified as great international figures, of Swiss nationality.

It is easy, obviously, to oppose the concept of neutrality to that of solidarity, and to consider that the first excludes the second. I believe that Switzerland has, by her entire international activity of the last few years, proved that such an antithesis or exclusive opposition is not unavoidable.

(To be continued.)

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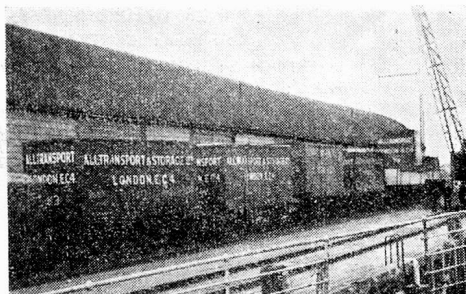
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FETE SUISSE 1953.

Thursday, May 7th is the date chosen this year for the traditional Fête suisse. Central Hall, Westminster, should be filled to capacity because the Programme is certainly one of the most attractive offered to the Colony.

The "JODLERKLUB WATTWIL" has gained quite a reputation inside as well as outside Switzerland, and the Head of the Swiss Radio was telling me the other day that their performance was one he had really enjoyed immensely. . . and he is a very spoiled gentleman! They are not just jodlers but with the support of their own "Laendlerkapelle" and "bellringers" they give a show both artistic and amusing which is also very unusual. I understand that some surprise items might be expected!

To support them the "Corale Unione Ticinese" will bring us the sunshine of their lovely land; it will be the echo of all the festivities which are taking place to celebrate the anniversary of the entry of the Ticino into the Swiss Confederation. No manifestation is really complete without the appearance of the children. This year it will be those from the Sunday School of the Schweizer Kirche who expect everybody to come and watch them, refusing even to give their secret away before what will be for them THE Day. The "Romands" could not fail us; the success of the short production last year of the "Jeunesse de l'Eglise" encouraged them to do even better this year; special recordings have been flown to London to support them.

A fine evening it will be!

As in the past our Friend Mr. A. Schmid and Family have agreed to organize the Catering and from 5 p.m. until 6 as well as during the interval you will enjoy their home made delicatesses, there is no need to go hungry!

Our Guests from the Toggenburg will appear on the B.B.C. and will also give a Concert in the Main Hall in Folkestone. They are flying over and will have therefore a very busy 3 days here. Applications for seats have started early this time; if you have not got your tickets do not delay ordering them, bring your family, your friends, to enjoy this 78th Fête Suisse.

L.P.

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