N.S.H. meetings

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COMMUNIQUES FROM SWISS LEGATION.

Convention between the Swiss Confederation and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland for relief from double taxation with respect to taxes on the estates of deceased persons.

This Convention has been signed the 12th of June, by the Swiss Minister, M. Armin Daeniker, and by the Principal Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, the Right Honourable Selwyn Lloyd. The Convention has now to be ratified by the two Parliaments and shall enter into force on the date of the exchange of instruments of ratification.

The Swiss Legation (18, Montagu Place, London, W.1) will be glad to answer any enquiries about the implication of this Convention.

* * *

Non-nationalised Swiss real estates in Rumania.

The Government of Rumania have agreed, in the Agreement of 13th February, 1953, with buying the non-nationalised Swiss real estates in Rumania.

The owners of such estates who have not yet taken advantage of this possibility should announce their real estates to the " Commission des indemnités de nationalisation, 5, Gurtengasse, Berne ", not later than 31st August, 1956. Announcements made after this date will not be taken into consideration.

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N.S.H. MEETINGS.

The London Group of the Nouvelle Société Helvétique, after a prolonged period of rest, has kept its members and friends particularly busy and well entertained these last six weeks or so. A few days after Mr. J. Kunz's talk on the work of Pro Juventute, fully reported in the Swiss Observer, the group entertained Monsieur Olivier Reverdin to lunch on the 12th of May at the Bush House Restaurant. As the City Swiss Club had invited him over from Geneva as chief guest and speaker the night before, the N.S.H. lunch was held in a restricted circle of friends, who wished to honour M. Reverdin particularly as President of the Commission des Suisses à l'étranger and former President of the whole N.S.H. organisation in Switzerland. He had come back from a visit to Rio de Janeiro much impressed by the wonderful club-house the small Swiss Colony there had built for itself, and he was equally surprised to discover how lamentably our Colony in London has failed in this respect. However, the knowledge of our efforts for a girls' home made some amends for it in his and other people's mind. M. Reverdin revealed himself in a short discussion following the lunch as a determined advocate of the abolition of military tax and assured us of his understanding of our irritation caused by it.

Dr. W. BALSIGER.

On the 22nd of June Dr. Werner Balsiger, formerly the first director of the Swiss federal police, talked to an Open Meeting of the N.S.H. at the Swiss Club Schweizerbund in Berndeutsch on the organisation, functions and experiences of this small police force. Based on a new law of 1935, the so called " Spitzelgesetz ", was established only in 1936 to combat the growing menace of Fascist, National-Socialist as well as communist influences in the immediate pre-war years. The Fronten-Paper " Das Signal " reached a circulation of 84,000 in 1941, a Swiss Society for Authoritarian Democracy was formed, the Nazis kept complete lists of sympathisers and dangerous opponents in the Federation, the Cantons and Communes and parties. Communists tried

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to win over the trade-unions movement. The Gestapo and others followed refugees for observation and kidnapping into Switzerland. Under the existing legislation it was often difficult to distinguish between espionage and permitted information. Several Swiss in military service were executed, but it was more difficult to deal with foreign spies not subject to Swiss military discipline. The Nazis often worked with false denunciations, the Communists were fonder of the method of agents provocateurs. In June, 1940, ten saboteurs with gelignite, revolvers, etc., were smuggled into Switzerland from Germany to blow up our aerodromes. All wore the same Nazi boots ! Thanks to the watchfulness of a railway controller nine were caught, of whom two were Swiss. Since the war the greatest affair was the attack on the Rumanian Legation in February, 1955, by a number of uprooted youngsters whose prosecution has only just been started.

The greatest handicap for the Federal police is the fact that it has to combat all abuses of democratic freedom by means which are not undemocratic. It cannot employ arbitrary methods of arrest and questioning under duress. It has not even any overriding authority over the cantonal police forces. It is composed of only 22 men who have to rely on the voluntary co-operation of the cantonal and local police. Money and women do not always play the important part in espionage commonly ascribed to them, especially not with communists who are often moved by genuine misguidedness or fear for their families. The Allies also carried on very active espionage, during the second world-war more than during the first. The Communists aimed at a Cold Revolution the same as succeeded in Czechoslovakia, especially by infiltration of the trade-unions and the civil-service — by the ice-berg tactics of concealed attack. Only thanks to firm loyalty and idealism of the populace were these dangers combated successfully by the Federal police. Of 92,000 civil servants in Switzerland barely ten had to be discharged owing to doubtful loyalty.

REGIERUNGSRAT ZSCHOKKE.

On the 1st of June the N.S.H. had a further visitor from Switzerland as guest-speaker, whom they did not wish to miss hearing despite the short interval since the previous meeting. It was Regierungsrat Dr. Peter Zschokke of Basle-Stadt, it's former director of finance and present director of Education. He spoke in Basle-" dytch " on the dangers and developments of centralism in Switzerland. The power of the Federation has gained too much in the present century at the expense of the Cantons, according to the view of the last-ditch " Liberals " of Basle, who are evidently using their appellation in the sense of freedom from interference in existing group privileges, and not in the sense of freedom of the individual and progressive thought. If sovereignty means freedom to do as one pleases, " ohne dass mer eim drieschnörre cha ", then the Cantons are sovereign only in name nowadays. Especially without full powers of finance the old cantonal sovereignty no longer exists. Although import duties and indirect taxes belong to the perquisites of the Federation it tries to hold on to the direct " Wehrsteuer " as well, which was purely an emergency measure since the war whose justification is gone. A great blow against the principle of Cantonal sovereignty was according to the lecturer the unification of criminal law on a federal basis, the enforcement of uniform concepts of crime and punishment in cantons with the most varying needs and traditions of justice. Even the freedom of migraton and settlement (Niederlassungsfreiheit) guaranteed by the Federal Constitution has worked out, not as an advance, but as a means of shallow egalitarianism, of uprooting of more than half the population and of overdeveloping the towns at the expense of the countryside. Only in some respects where centralisation has obviously become indispensable, such as in the development of roads and the running of railways like the Rhätische Bahn it has not been applied sufficiently. The speaker's ideas naturally provoked a lively discussion and strong dissension ! But the evening was nevertheless considered one of the most successful of the N.S.H., not least thanks to the active participation of our Minister himself in the discussion. The hospitality of the Bush House Restaurant also helps in creating the right atmosphere.

The next and last meeting of the N.S.H. before the holidays will be held on the 10th of July to celebrate the group's 40th anniversary. Professor Arnold Lätt, the Secretary-director of the group after the first world-war and the first editor of the Swiss Observer, has been invited over to the celebration. The chief purpose of the meeting will be to discuss present problems of the Swiss abroad preparatory to the next Auslandschweizertagung.

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