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HOME AFFAIRS.

by PIERRE BÉGUIN.

At the present moment no one can affirm with certitude that the experimental explosions of nuclear bombs, which are taking place on the Pacific Islands or in the steppes of Asia, are dangerous for mankind. Certain scientists — whose objectivity is unquestionable — maintain that these experiments may have the most harmful consequences for the population of the world. Other scientists — whose intellectual honesty is just as assured — claim that such experiments are less dangerous than is thought, in the sense that we are still a long way off from having attained that degree of radio-activity which might prove injurious to the inhabitants of the earth.

Thus, this question which is of an essentially scientific order is subject to controversy. On thing, however, is certain, and that is that world public opinion is growing more and more anxious about it. And manifestations in favour of an interruption or even of an interdiction of such experiments are growing more and more numerous.

A remarkable reserve has been observed, up to the present, in regard to this matter in Switzerland. It is true that resolutions have been passed by certain political organisations, which, it must be confessed, belong to a very characteristic ideological tendency. These have been supported by important spheres of the population. But, at the same time, they have awakened a certain mistrust, as they appeared to be conceived expressly for the purpose of giving support to one of the two big political blocs, between which it is so difficult to establish a balance.

Recently, however, we have noted a very distinct

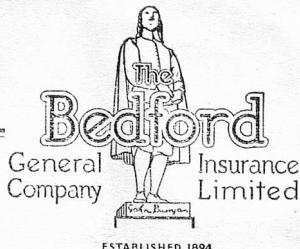
evolution in this domain. The other day, M. Max Petitpierre, the Head of the Federal Political Department, proposed publicly that a conference should be convened, consisting of scientists belonging to the most divers countries, who would be charged with the task of declaring, after a careful study of the matter, whether, yes or no, nuclear experiments are dangerous to mankind. His proposal was clear and definite. Either these scientists will reply in the negative, and world public opinion will be tranquillised, or they will reply in the affirmative, in which case it will prove necessary to institute safeguarding measures, in such an authoritative way that the Powers concerned will no longer be able to escape from their responsibilities.

This was not an isolated manifestation. A few days later the Swiss Society for Natural Science — a body of scientists which is absolutely free from any political preoccupations — put forward identical anxieties and offered its good offices for the convocation of an international scientific conference, to be charged with the task of defining the dangers to world health resulting from tests carried out with atomic bombs.

And, on a more modest plane, the Grand Council of the Canton of Vaud, that is to say one of our twenty-five small regional Governments, passed a Resolution in the same sense. We shall abstain from exaggerating the influence which could be exercised by a political body of this kind on the solution of a world problem. But what seems characteristic to us is the fact that it has proved possible to start within, so to speak, the bosom of this authority, a debate on this subject, from which considerations of a general political nature were completely absent and where it was solely a question of humanitarian considerations.

Not so long ago anyone who advocated the interruption of atomic experiments found himself being reproached with taking the part of that international bloc which is, or which claims to be, the weakest in the domain of nuclear power, or on the contrary he was accused of wanting to weaken that international bloc which, very apparently, draws the essential part of its military strength from the possession of numerous atomic bombs. Today the situation has changed completely. It is now possible to speak of this problem in an atmosphere of total objectivity. One may raise the question of this problem and make energetic demands for its solution without being exposed to the suspicion of being associated with any political manoeuvre. This is a matter for rejoicing, as now we can hope that an effective solution will be found.

It is our personal opinion that Switzerland should take the initiative in this matter. Her neutrality in no way prohibits her from offering her good offices. On the contrary it makes it a duty for Switzerland to assemble those conditions in which an objective and impartial scientific opinion can be given validly. Our Swiss scientists have offered their good offices. We allow ourselves to think that our Government ought to associate itself with this offer, to take it up for its own account and to convene the most eminent of the specialists in the domain of nuclear science in order that they should have the opportunity of exchanging views, of engaging in discussions, and of arriving at conclusions in common. And, even if such conclusions should prove to be un-



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favourable to those who found their security on their atomic "advance", no one will be able to reproach us for having taken the initiative for such a meeting. For one thing, it is always good for the truth to be spoken. And for another, the health and the security of mankind are of primary importance, coming before all political calculations, before equilibrium of power. Neutral Switzerland has the right, and doubtless also the duty, to recall this fact in all circumstances.

HOME AFFAIRS.

by MAX NEF.

In a country like Switzerland, where the people not only elect their Authorities but also have the last word to say in practical matters, the development of the internal political life of the land is determined to a very high degree by the political sense of discernment possessed by the citizen who is entitled to vote. Thus, it was recognised quite early in our history that it was an important duty for our schools to give the future citizen a thorough knowledge of the structure and the functioning of our way of governing the country.

In this respect, however, there exists one difficulty: obligatory schooling ends when the child is 13-16 years old, but the young man only obtains his right to vote when he is twenty years of age. In the meanwhile a good deal of the civic knowledge acquired is lost, in view of the fact that — in most cases, anyway — it is not refreshed periodically in the ordinary daily life. It is therefore very desirable that, during those years which come immediately after leaving school, the civic education of young people should be strengthened and continued.

For those young people who after leaving the public schools attend secondary and higher educational establishments, this takes place within the normal curriculum of the schools, whilst the remainder learn about their civic duties in the technical schools and continuation classes which are organised by private or public initiative.

The efforts made to provide young Swiss with a further civic education after they have left school have recently been promoted considerably by the so-called Pedagogical Tests for Recruits. These tests, or examinations, take place in all the Schools for Recruits, thus extending to all young men who are capable of bearing arms, in their 20th year — the year in which they obtain their right to vote. Formerly, only the young man's knowledge was examined in these Pedagogical Tests for Recruits. Today, however, endeavours are being made to ascertain what the young citizen intends to do with his knowledge and whether he is capable of applying it consciously to what is happening in his surrounding world.

These tests are conducted in the form of informal talks between the examiners and a group of from four to six recruits, composed, as far as possible, of young men having similar trades or professions, educational standard and social standing. The starting point for the conversation consists generally of some current event, mostly of a political or economic nature. Proceeding from this subject connections are then established with the four spheres of statecraft, economics, geography and Swiss history. Less weight is laid on the possession of a great deal of knowledge than on the fact that what the young man knows is

firmly established in his mind, that he is capable of putting forward the reasons for the opinions which he has expressed, and that he understands how to make use of the knowledge he possesses in his everyday life.

Experience has shown that, as a rule, the skilled workers and artisans come off better in these tests than the young men who have completed their studies in a college. It is true that the latter mostly possess more comprehensive knowledge, but it is often less exact. Moreover, in many cases, they are less apt to know how to start making good use of their knowledge than are the young craftsmen who, as a result of their professional activities, have already gained some experience of life.

The Pedagogical Tests for Recruits have already led to a very satisfactory improvement in the civic education of the younger generation; for one thing, many a young man, in anticipation of these tests, maintains his knowledge alive, or else proceeds to refresh it at the right moment. Moreover, these examinations serve to show many a young man how important it is to possess civic knowledge and to cultivate a political sense of thinking and judging.

In the schools themselves it is being realised, more and more, that civic education is not so much a special subject for study as a principle of instruction, and that civic knowledge should be conveyed in *every* class and in *every* school grade. Many a school has modernised its curriculum in accordance with the knowledge gained as a result of the Tests for Recruits — an indication of the usefulness of this institution.



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