

Swiss spotlight

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SWISS SPOTLIGHT.

By PIERRE BÉGUIN.

"Switzerland and Nuclear Weapons."

Discussions regarding the possible endowment of the Swiss Army with tactical nuclear weapons continues to preoccupy the minds of the public and to arouse polemics. Last spring, a group of Left Wing politicians and ecclesiastics had already decided to launch a Popular Initiative, with the aim of introducing into the Federal Constitution an Article prohibiting the use by our Army of all atomic weapons. The immediate reaction of the Government was to let it be known that it had given instructions for this question to be studied and that it reserved its decision on the matter. At the same time the influential leaders of the Socialist Party and of the Trade Unions drew attention to the necessity of maintaining our national defence at a level which kept pace with circumstances and of not proceeding towards a unilateral disarmament, in view of the existing international tension.

The discussion has been revived as a result of two recent events: the more precise and detailed statement made by the Government to Parliament, and the position adopted by the Swiss Socialist Party at an Extraordinary Congress held in Lucerne.

In the matter of nuclear weapons the position of the Federal Government — as described before the Lower House by Mr. Paul Chaudet, the Head of the Military Department — is clear and definite. Mr. Chaudet asked that no attempt be made to restrict the liberty of choice and the propositions of the Government. The latter is aware that the studies now taking place will demand a lot of time. What it wanted was that no hasty decisions should be taken and that the people should wait until all the aspects of this complex problem had been elucidated. Together with the rest of the world the Swiss Government desires that atomic weapons should be prohibited and that this interdiction should become the subject of an international convention, binding on all countries, and subjecting them to effective control. But whilst waiting for such a convention to be concluded and taking into account the possibility that this may ultimately not take place, the Federal Government does not want to deprive Switzerland of means of defence which may prove to be necessary, through a hasty negative decision. Of course, it subscribes to all those arguments of a humanitarian and moral order which are put forward against the use of nuclear weapons. Our security, however, can only be assured through means of defence which are as efficacious as the means which might be used to attack us. More-

over, the Swiss Government cannot decide by itself in regard to such a matter. It is Parliament which possesses the necessary competency.

After this governmental declaration one wondered what decision would be taken by the Swiss Socialist Party assembled at an Extraordinary Congress. This Congress passed a resolution, among other things, to launch a Popular Initiative — which requires 50,000 signatures — having for its object the introduction into the Federal Constitution of an Article according to which all decisions taken by Parliament with a view to equipping the Swiss Army with nuclear weapons would be, obligatorily, submitted to the approval of all the citizens. Except for this decision the Swiss Socialist Party insisted at length on the necessity for promoting, as rapidly as possible, a progressive and controlled general disarmament. The taking up of this attitude constitutes a compromise between the two tendencies which have manifested themselves within the Socialist Party in regard to the question of the nuclear armament of the Swiss Army, one of them being opposed to any atomic equipment of our Army and wishing to have this interdiction introduced into the Constitution, while the other is more realistic and comes closer to the governmental views.

In short, the Swiss Socialist Party wishes for a general disarmament carried out in three stages: first, the prohibition of nuclear tests; second, the prohibition of nuclear weapons; and, third, a limitation of conventional weapons. However — as was stressed by the Socialist Congress — it is necessary that such disarmament should not be unilateral, more especially because of the pressure imposed on the West by the East.

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