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AN EDITOR SPEAKS.

By PIERRE BÉGUIN.

"The Swiss Reply to the Soviet Note".

In November, 1956, when the events which occurred in Hungary and in connection with the Suez Canal had produced an international tension of the utmost gravity, the Swiss Government launched an appeal to the Great Powers that their representatives should meet, should renew conversations and strive to find a peaceful issue for the conflict which was beginning to loom.

Some six weeks ago, when the Soviet Government launched its great "peace offensive" and proposed a meeting of the representatives of the principal countries, and this at a "summit" level, it remembered this Swiss initiative, already thirteen months old. It proceeded to send a Diplomatic Note to Berne, and suggested that the Federal Government should repeat its gesture.

There is nothing surprising about the Swiss reply. It is negative. In the present state of things, Switzerland will not take any initiative. She will not appeal again to the Powers. But, she would, of course, be ready to facilitate a meeting of this kind, should it be generally desired. She would be willing to place the Swiss territory at the disposal of the Powers, for such a purpose. She would offer her good offices for the organisation of a conference of this kind, on the condition — once more — that it be considered as being opportune by all those who might possibly take part in it.

No contradiction exists between the Swiss attitude of November 1956, and that of January, 1958. In November, 1956, the position tended towards becoming more inflexible. There was no longer any question of conversations. Contacts had been broken off. It was then that the Swiss Government launched its cry of alarm and proposed to the world, threatened by a new catastrophe, that it should grasp at a last chance of getting out of the crisis, by means of negotiations.

Now, in January, 1958, the situation is quite different. And, even if tension is real, it is not invested with the same degree of gravity. Conversations have not been interrupted. Notes are being exchanged. Talks are going on. Consultations are taking place for the purpose of finding out under what conditions and in what form, could such a meeting take place. Switzerland, always reserved, and, more particularly, reserving the putting into action of her moral credit for important occasions, has no reason for intervention. There is no *ultima ratio* to be sought for. There is no last chance to be offered.

But, there is something else. It was possible for Switzerland to suggest an international meeting at a time when no one was thinking of it, any longer, when everyone excluded such a possibility. Now that

one of the big international camps has made this suggestion, she could not be wedded to her own opinion and renew such a proposal on her own account, without producing the appearance of having given up the principle of impartiality and of giving her support to one of the camps, in particular. Her moral credit — which she owes to her serenity and her objectivity — might, as a result, be compromised for the future.

The Swiss Note, however, does not consist solely of a refusal. It contains a sentence which deserves serious attention being paid to it. Our Government, recalls the fact that peace would achieve great progress if "the fundamental principles in regard to which all the countries have proclaimed their agreement and which have also found expression in international documents, were to become realities". The terms employed in the Swiss Note possess a diplomatic style. But, the allusion is clear and we have the right to proceed with an interpretation.

These documents are the United Nations' Charter and the Charter of the Rights of Man. These conventions, which have been adhered to on a very large scale, have not been applied integrally. Nor have they always been observed. They contain essential principles, on which it would be possible to build up a lasting peace. What is needed, however, is that their provisions should mean the same thing to everyone, that they should not be a sacred obligation to some, possible future engagements for others, and, for still others, mere clauses of style.

As a matter of fact, the allusions made by the Swiss Government raise a problem of primary importance: that of the unity of the world. It is quite clear that peace cannot result from an adjustment of forces, from an economic or military balance. What it requires, more than anything else is the rigorous observation of certain elementary virtues, of the recognition — not only theoretical, but also practical — of some principles of life, of the life between the nations, and also of the life of the individuals within these nations. Without a general rallying around these truths and principles international arrangements can never be anything more than mere compromises, which are neither durable nor solid.

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