

Switzerland and the war in Israel

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SWITZERLAND AND THE WAR IN ISRAEL

A letter has been received from a reader who considered it unjust that a "most partisan" attitude was taken by the Editor in her article on 23rd June. He found it "out of place" in the "accepted organ of the Swiss Colony . . ." The Editor would like to point out that the article in question was based on news, information statements and articles received from Switzerland, and that the report reflected a true picture of happenings, events and majority opinion in Switzerland.

The writer, Mr. L. C. Jacomelli, also questioned Switzerland's neutrality and then goes on:

"No mention is made of the true sufferers in the conflict, the Arab refugees in their thousands. It would seem more human and certainly more Christian to say these are needier of Swiss concern understanding, financial and material assistance."

As we announced before the last issue went to press, the Federal Council donated one million francs for the victims of the Near-East conflict which includes Arabs as well as Jews. More Communes have given money for the "Pro Israel" funds, and some made contributions to benefit suffering people from Arab countries, too; Winterthur gave 10,000 francs each to "Pro Israel" and the International Red Cross Committee. Apart from official gifts, Winterthur collected Fr.3,815 from admission tickets for a solidarity demonstration, Fr.6,800.— by way of gifts during the evening and Fr.3,110.— from the sale of oranges. As in other towns, all expenses were carried by donors, and the full amounts could be paid in.

Central Switzerland collected 75,000 francs, the "Komödie" Theatre in Basle gave a matinee which resulted in over 4,000 francs, the school children of Interlaken sold sandwiches which brought in over 3,000 francs. These are only a few examples of individual efforts. On 15th June, "Israel Day" took place, and though details are not yet available, the sums gathered are considerable. It is fairly safe, for instance, to say that in the town of Berne alone, 100,000 francs were collected. The authorities have declared that all sums sent by taxpayers will be deductible from their tax payments, and there is no gift duty on money given to "Pro Israel". In Basle, specially, the results of "Israel Day" were most gratifying. Already the day before, the fund stood at 150,000 francs. All the bells of the town pealed on the eve of the special day, and in spite of bad rain, the two fountains in the Inner Town were soon full of coins. 30,000 carnations were sold. Most shops had agreed to hand over 5% of the day's takings. The inmates of the Basle *Strafanstalt* collected Fr.270.—.

The work of the Red Cross goes on and increases in extent. Some thirty delegates have been sent to the Near East, and two operational bases have been installed, one in Nicosia, the other in Beirut. They deal also with the exchange of prisoners, re-uniting of families and help to the civilian population. By the middle of June already, some 32,000 messages were transmitted between prisoners of war and their families. Red Cross aircraft are used for the transport of medical material, food and injured soldiers. The Swiss Red Cross continues with gifts of clothing, blankets, medicines, blood plasma and money to the International Red Cross Committee. Appeals for more blood donors are made regularly.

Alarmed by reports of Israel atrocities, coming from Arab sources, the International Red Cross Committee found itself compelled to go out and investigate. The Director-General himself was able to deny the reports,

and the IRC Delegation stated that the Israeli authorities were carrying out campaigns, assisted by the Red Cross, to find Arab soldiers in the desert. The state of the civilian population, too, was improving.

The Federal Political Department has promised UNRWA (United Nations help for refugees) which has been looking after the civilian population in the district for years, Switzerland's continued support. Fr. 150,000 were donated towards UNRWA's humanitarian activities.

The price of oil and petrol has been put up in Switzerland, heating and diesel fuel by first 15 and later by a further 10 francs per ton, and petrol by 1 cent a litre.

Protests were voiced by the "Schweiz. Israelitischer Gemeinbund" against the "Centre d'Information Arabe" for anti-Israel propaganda. This is not the first time the League had had to be warned by the Swiss authorities.

On 22nd June, a number of Swiss personalities, headed by National Councillor Bringolf, Schaffhausen, have asked the Federal Council to start a humanitarian action for the saving of Jews who enjoy no protection or rights, as many Jews are in great distress and danger. The short war has once more led to persecution of the Jews.

Switzerland has been asked to look after British interests in Syria, American concerns in Algeria and Israeli interests in Hungary.

During the Championships 1967 of the Swiss Air Force, held at Duebendorf, Brigadier Fritz Gerber, Commandant of Airfields, addressed a meeting. He reviewed the war in the Near East and referred to the lessons a small country like Switzerland could draw from it, especially as regards aerial defence. In his opinion, Switzerland's state of preparedness in case of aggression was reasonably good. The "Mirage" planes had proved their worth in Israel.

The Israeli Vice-President of the Knesseth said in Zurich at a meeting on 16th June that Israel's Secret Weapon was her sense of self-preservation.

(By courtesy of Agence
Télégraphique Suisse.)

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The following letter was sent to us by one of our subscribers, Mr. Pierre Savoie who asked us to publish it.

"The splendid article 'Neutrality means Solidarity', declaring its sympathy and support for Israel, will meet the approval of all readers of the "Swiss Observer".

"Palestine was part of the Turkish Empire before World War I, and under British administration in 1920 by a League of Nations mandate. When the mandate expired, on 14th May 1948, Israel was proclaimed an independent republic, and the Jewish State of Palestine was born, although the majority of adherents to Judaism remain scattered throughout the World. Fighting soon broke out between the new State and neighbouring countries. The Israel-Arab armistice of 1949 partitioned Palestine, Egypt administering the Gaza Strip and Jordan administering the territory north-west of the Dead Sea, which includes the Old City of Jerusalem with its Christian shrines.

"The rapid development of the State of Israel is astonishing and without precedent. The exploration of its resources has been of the spiritual order which has its roots in the divine promise of Moses at the beginning of Jewish history.

"Switzerland has been built up on Freedom — the strongest bond that unite all Swiss — and it is quite natural that our sympathy and support go to this small country struggling for its existence and the right to live."