

Zeitschrift: The Swiss observer : the journal of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK
Herausgeber: Federation of Swiss Societies in the United Kingdom
Band: - (1970)
Heft: 1598

Artikel: Max Petitpierre speaks on neutrality
Autor: Petitpierre, Max
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-689747>

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

Download PDF: 13.08.2025

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

The Swiss Observer

FOUNDED IN 1919 BY PAUL F. BOEHRINGER

The Official Organ of the Swiss Colony in Great Britain

Vol. 56 No. 1598

FRIDAY, 14th AUGUST, 1970

MAX PETITPIERRE SPEAKS ON NEUTRALITY

Many people viewing Switzerland from the outside find, naturally enough, that her highly-prized neutrality is something difficult to understand. They fail to see how what appears as a principle of snug uninvolvedness and aloofness can be upgraded into the cornerstone of a foreign policy. The problem is age-old and men as politically aware as Paul Henri Spaak and Jean Rey have outspokenly expressed their mistrust of Swiss neutrality. Max Petitpierre, the man who has done more than anything else to vindicate this neutrality since the war and the leader of our foreign policy for 20 years has made a significant conference on this subject at the University of Berne, the text of which was reproduced in full in the "Gazette de Lausanne". The following is a digest of his conference.

Mr. Petitpierre began his exposition with the situation at the end of the war. Those were the days when the credit of Swiss neutrality had fallen at its lowest ebb. No wonder. After all, almost every country of Europe save two or three neutral countries had come ruined and battered out of the war. Switzerland had escaped unscathed and trim like a green lawn, having not participated in the war effort. It was understandable that she should have been viewed with some irony by those who had paid the price of peace. England and America were very cool towards Swiss neutrality at the end of the war. Italy, Germany, Austria were vanquished or occupied and their position had little weight at that particular time. Neither was France in amiable terms with her small neighbour. She had refused to accredit the Minister that was sent by Berne to Paris in 1945. There remained Russia. She had not forgotten that, of all the members of the League of Nations, Switzerland had been the only one to oppose the Russian entry 11 years beforehand. And earlier still, after the Lausanne conference of 1922, the criminal court of Vaud had acquitted the murderer of the Soviet delegate.

Switzerland had attempted to establish diplomatic relations in 1944 but this effort was rebuffed. None of the important powers present at the founding assembly of the United Nations had therefore any wish or interest in allowing Switzerland a special treatment and when they drew the United Nations Charter they did not even mention the case of Swiss neutrality explicitly. It naturally followed that an integrally neutral nation could not take part in a collective, political and defensive agreement as laid down in the U.N. Charter.

Paul Henri Spaak, Belgium's foreign minister, was the Chairman of the first General Assembly of the United Nations, held in New York in December 1945. Mr. Max Petitpierre saw him in Paris before the Assembly and put forward the Swiss point of view to him. Paul Henri Spaak has since become an outspoken opponent of neutrality (to which his own country has twice adhered with no success, in two wars) but at the time promised to read out a letter handed to him by Mr. Petitpierre in the General Assembly should the question of Swiss membership emerge in the debates. It did not and the letter, which clearly explained the Swiss position, was never published. This letter was reproduced with the article in "La Gazette de Lausanne" and clearly underlines that membership to the United Nations would have gone against the neutrality to which Switzerland had abided in 130 years of history and which was constitutionally laid down. In it, Mr. Petitpierre explained that the decision to adhere to the U.N. could not be taken by the Federal Chambers but had to be taken by both the Swiss people and the cantons and that they would most certainly reject any adhesion to the U.N. accepted at the sacrifice of the principle of integral neutrality. Thus it can be said that the Swiss policy of neutrality, which is still ruling today despite increased criticism and the recent adhesion to the Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty (seen by some as an abandonment of neutrality or a

relaxation of its principle) was initiated in 1945 under the inspiration of Mr. Max Petitpierre. It was he who, at that first General Assembly, attempted to devise and have adopted the scheme of a compensatory Swiss service to the United Nations in exchange of a membership free from the conditions of collective sanctions. Switzerland refused to take part in such sanctions in the name of her neutrality but remained prepared to support the Organisation by other means. This proposal however fell on infertile ground and, at a time when every country, including the other neutral countries, were filing for membership to the U.N., Switzerland stood firmly by her self-appointed course, going it alone.

She was not as lonely as all that, however, because the United Nations settled down in Geneva, which became the base of many of its subsidiary organisations, all of which received the support and membership of Switzerland.

Swiss neutrality can rightly be considered as something "special" insofar as it is more than a pragmatic attitude, the "freedom from alliances" advocated by the Swedes. It has actually got a distinct status in international law, and is a clause firmly anchored both in Swiss history and in the Federal Constitution. It is cherished like federalism and direct democracy and may rightly be held as our national ideology and a vital stone in the Swiss edifice. It was not put in doubt in 1945 when the majority of nations looked down on it mistrustfully and our foreign-political problem was to adapt this firmly established principle to the realities of a changing world.

What are these new realities? Besides a new fact—the creation, with the U.N., of a worldwide organisation for the promotion of lasting peace, three major changes have taken place in the world since the end of the war. The first was the creation of a Communist block, comprising a totalitarian Russia and the countries which she had

The Swiss Observer

Published Twice Monthly at
63/67 TABERNACLE STREET
LONDON E.C.2
Tel.: 01-253 2321

Telegrams: Paperwyse Stock London

HON. PRESIDENT: Robert J. Keller

EDITOR: Pierre-Michel Beguin

Advisory Council:

Gottfried Keller (Chairman)

O. F. Boehringer, J.P., (Hon. Sec.)

F. Burri, J. Eusebio, Dr. C. Jagmetti
(Press Attache Swiss Emb.)

A. Kunz, C. Nater, R. M. Suess

PREPAID SUBSCRIPTION RATES
(POST FREE)

UNITED KINGDOM

24 issues £2. 8.0

12 issues £1. 5.0

6 issues £ 13.0

SWITZERLAND & Elsewhere

24 issues Frs. 25 — or £2.10.0

12 issues Frs. 13 — or £1. 6.0

Swiss subscriptions may be paid into

Postcheck-Konto Basle 40—5718

Editor's telephone: 01-602 1378

liberated from Nazi Germany and was now keeping under her own tutelage. China too had emerged as a nominal member of the Communist bloc. The second change has been forced as a consequence of the first: by the emergence of a Communist menace, the nations of the West have grouped together in defensive alliance. But this was only a first and vital stage. To recover from the blow of the war, the countries of Europe had to co-operate economically and were, for the first time, linked in their common dependence (through the Marshal Plan) of America. Economic co-operation was embodied by such agreements as GATT, OEEC and OCDE and the European Coal and Steel Community. Finally, from economic co-operation became political. The Common Market then appears as the outcome of a development whose grain was sown in Moscow in 1948 and began as a security agreement in the face of a threatening Russia. The third and most far reaching transformation that has taken place since the war has been the emancipation of former colonies and the concurrent formation of a third world with nutritional and development problems.

Mr. Petitpierre finds that the principles of Swiss neutrality as reaffirmed at the end of the war are still efficient today. But there should be a distinction between wartime and peacetime neutrality. In wartime, the problem was easily resolved, since it only meant that Switzerland was not going to join or favour any particular camp. In peacetime the formula "to be with no one" could no longer apply and had to be transformed, without negating neutrality, into the motto "to be with everybody".

The three basic changes in the world's recent history have all achieved a most important result: they have made nations interdependent on each

other and have encouraged a world *solidarity*. This interdependence and the necessity for solidarity cannot be ignored. It was necessary that the right answer should be found within the concept of integral neutrality. This answer was in effect "to be with no one in war, to be with everybody in peace". The first term was a legal "must" written down in international law, the second term was an "obligation" formulated by the spirit and consistency of Swiss neutrality. Not to take sides in war was to be actively passive, just as war-wagers were actively aggressive; to be on everybody's side in peace was to acknowledge the necessity of a renewed solidarity between nations, and realistically, the only useful way of putting neutrality into effect.

As a result Switzerland has been willing to join every international effort of a specifically non-political and military nature and has been ready to mediate between conflicting parties. This she has done in the Korean and Algerian crises.

Regarding the problems of entry to the European Economic Community, it is not only a definite attachment to neutrality which prevents Switzerland from applying for membership. Neutrality in itself would have been a sufficient obstacle because the emerging United Europe are by no means to become neutral, and the traditionally neutral Swiss could potentially be carried away in wars and alliances not of their choosing. There are a host of technical problems which full membership would entail, but the real and quite human reasons which have inspired Switzerland's decision have been that the aims of the Treaty of Rome were unacceptable as they required an abdication of all the political values on which she was founded. This aspect of the problem is not related to the policy of neutrality as such and Mr. Petitpierre did not dwell on it. He only expressed the personal view that Europe should be built along the lines suggested by Louis Armand in his book "Le Pari Européen". There the author demonstrates that a common Europe can only be built first by sharing the institutions the least loaded with the past. It is far easier, for example, to share common industrial institutions as a first step than to attempt to found Europe on a common political system first. Switzerland joined the Council of Europe in 1962, at a time when it had already lost all political significance and was merely a technical assembly shorn of all real power. This decision had not even required a vote by the people. Although, in Max Petitpierre's view, the Council of Europe had lost much of its meaning at the present time as the nucleus of European Integration had shifted towards the EEC, the Council afforded Swiss parliamentarians the opportunity of meeting their colleagues of other countries and was therefore a very useful meeting place.

Mr. Petitpierre concluded by recalling all the help which Switzerland has been able to afford towards peace. The effectiveness of this help was due to the respect and credibility now enjoyed by her neutrality. Mr. Petitpierre was speaking for himself and his conference was a kind of testament after his 20 years as head of the Political Department. In spite of the many arguments militating in favour of a review of this position, there is no indication that it has been abandoned by those who hold the reins of power nor by the majority of those who understand what Swiss neutrality is all about. A conference in the big auditorium of the University of Berne by the most outstanding Swiss statesman of the post-war era will have clarified this for the students. They who listened to the "elder statesman" realised that he still stood by a policy of neutrality in which he had lead the country through the troubled post-war years; they also knew that nothing short of a national consensus will change this policy.

(PMB)

COMMENT

THE NEW GLOBE-TROTTERS

The practice of hospitality is one of the points on which the outlook between the establishment and the new-wave hippy way of life differs. It is one thing for a Svengali who dwells in a mud hut to offer hospitality to a lone traveller, and another for the bourgeois with a pride in his house. The hospitable savage will share a part of his rug with the stranger, the bourgeois will fret over his carpet or the free sofa in his living room. The standards between the two differ. In the same way, a Svengali will not object to having to sleep in the bath tub or on the garden lawn, should he be harboured in a bourgeois home. In fact, he wouldn't object to innocently sleeping in the same room, and bed, as the master and mistress of the house. Thus the virtue of hospitality appears easier to practice among Svengalis and poor people in general, because the trappings of a higher standard of living necessarily carry with them certain standards of behaviour. Having discovered the bedroom and the bed, civilised man feels that he cannot but accommodate his guests in a bedroom and a bed. Having discovered the mud hut and the dirt floor the Svengali feels, quiet rightly, that this is the best way of accommodating his guests.

The hippy, and the youths who adopt his style of life, have become perfect Svengalis in their understanding and use of hospitality with the important difference that most of them do not even own a mud hut.

This point of view can be illustrated by innumerable examples. A recent personal case was that of the 18-