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# COMMENT

## WHY THE BONJOUR REPORT?

The publication of the Bonjour Report can be considered as a highlight in the history of publishing. Indeed, governments commission reports every day. In England, one has only to visit Her Majesty's Stationery Office to find such a wealth of official literature that one wonders why the Bonjour Report should ever have been considered as such a remarkable publication. However, the Bonjour Report cannot be compared to a white or a blue paper designed to explain the mechanism of government or the meaning of a new law to the ordinary citizen. A government publication has a specifically pragmatic aim and serves the government, the Bonjour Report, on the other hand, has no practical use whatever and has been published for the sake of historical curiosity. It is an officially sanctioned quest into the past for the general interest of all those who are alive to Switzerland's destiny. One can only praise the Federal Council for having taken the decision to commission the report back in 1962.

The Federal Council then asked a Basle history professor, Professor Edgar Bonjour, to make an extensive study of Swiss foreign policy during the second world war, to bring to light the influence of the decisions in defence and home policies on Switzerland's foreign policy and to reveal in detail the role and conceptions of the people who led the country during those troubled times. This report was intended to provide an explanation to events that had never been clearly understood before.

To help him in his task, the Federal Council authorised Professor Bonjour to search into the Federal Ar-

chives in Berne, thus exempting him from the law which rules that personal records may only be published 50 years after the recorded events so as to protect the personalities involved. This was one good reason why such an inquest into the past couldn't have done without an official blessing from the outset.

For seven years, the professor waded through a profusion of files and documents in the Federal Archives in Berne, in the Political Archives in Bonn and elsewhere. He began by making an extensive study of the first world war and the pre-war years, the results of which have been published. He then started on his journey through the six years of the war and presented his manuscript to the Federal Council for approbation. This was duly granted and the unaltered text was sent to the publishing firm of Helbing and Lichtenhahn in Basle. The completed, ponderous work uses up three tomes, one of which has already been published and is currently a best-seller. Two or three papers have reproduced large extracts of the report, which well deserves to be described more in detail in these pages at some later stage.

Professor Bonjour was extremely meticulous in his task. He compared information from all the available sources and asked all his oral witnesses to sign their declaration. The work which he has now brought to light is probably the most unbiased, the most complete and scientific study of war-time history ever attempted. The reason for such a study, as we have seen, resided in plain, honourable interest. Switzerland is remarkably short of war-time memories and competent retrospects. Also, due to the special circumstances of war, the decisions of Government were by no means as open as they are today and many of the political facts of these days were confined to the archives. A number of reports on limited problems (such as the handling of refugees in the war or the situation of the Press) have indeed been published, but the Bonjour Report brings many new facts to light and offers a comprehensive political picture. One of the main set of records which were hitherto available were the reports by the Reich's Ambassador in Berne. Since they were strongly biased against Switzerland, they could not be considered as a true presentation of Swiss war-time history and this was one more reason for correcting the picture.

The Bonjour Report scathes some leading figures pretty badly. One of them is the Swiss war-time Minister in Berlin, whose incredibly blunted political judgment prevented him from seeing the reality of Nazism and induced him to send over-optimistic reports to the Political Department in Berne, which in turn inspired unwarranted optimism to his boss, Federal Councillor Giuseppe Motta, who saw the danger come almost too late. (He died two months after the beginning of the war). A Swiss official who comes off with

banners flying is Walter Stucki, the Swiss Minister in Paris, who saw the war coming well in advance and whose foresight lead to the smooth repatriation of the Swiss Colony. The harassed life of the succeeding head of the Political Department and President of the Confederation in 1940, Marcel Pilet-Golaz, is described in detail. His secret interview with the Swiss fascist leaders and the subsequent national uproar is analysed carefully.

All this makes thrilling reading. It dispels some of the doubts that were still left on these crucial years, breaks down legends and shows our leaders as they really were. All in all, this monumental work should be hailed as an exercise in national clarification and honesty.

(PMB)

# SWISS NEWS

## PROFESSOR BONJOUR WILL SUPERVISE THE TRANSLATION OF HIS REPORT INTO FRENCH

Professor Bonjour, who is bilingual, has said in a recent interview that he would like to supervise the translation of his work into French. He added that he had accepted the job of writing the report on two conditions. These were that he should have complete access to all federal and cantonal records, and that no one should attempt to influence him. The report was at first only intended for the Federal Council, the question of its publication was considered much later. Professor Bonjour also confessed that he had sometimes been discouraged by the mountains of documents that lay before him.

## ANOTHER AIR DISASTER

The Wuerlingen disaster was still present in everybody's mind when a Handley Page "Jet Stream" belonging to a private German carrier, the "Bavaria" airline, crashed less than a mile away from the Graubunden airfield of Samedan. The plane was piloted by the owner of the company, who also acted as its head pilot, and had, apparently, some trouble with one engine. As is usually the case, the enquirers were faced with much conflicting evidence but now believe that, following the failure of one engine, the pilot had attempted to make an improvised landing. His crippled craft had lost altitude faster than he had expected, hitting trees and then a high-voltage line before ploughing in a tract of land called "Alp Champesch", killing all eleven occupants. The pilot had come to Samedan from Munich with his family for the winter holidays. His four young daughters and the two children of another passenger perished in the crash.

(ATS)