

The nine Swiss journalists

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THE NINE SWISS JOURNALISTS.

The last-minute volte-face of the French Government which prevented a party of nine representatives of Swiss papers from visiting this country has unleashed a string of furious articles in the English Press which obviously made not the slightest impression upon the Vichy authorities. The underlying facts are clearly stated in an official communiqué issued at Berne at the end of August and transmitted by Reuter as follows:

Some weeks ago a number of Swiss newspapers received an invitation from British quarters to nominate members of their editorial staffs to visit Britain for the purpose of study and information. A number of newspapers declared their willingness to accept this invitation.

An important factor in favour of accepting the invitation was the circumstance that a group of Swiss journalists had taken part, during the spring of 1941, in a visit to Germany, for the purpose of study, organized by German quarters.

The acceptance of an opportunity of a visit to Britain could not but conform to the fundamental principal of the Swiss Press — namely, equality in the presentation of news.

A group of nine Swiss journalists was to have left for London on August 26th. This plan could not be carried out because the French transit visas, already granted by the French Consular authorities in Switzerland, were rescinded and declared invalid by high authorities at Vichy.

The comment in the English papers has been unanimous though not so temperate as the one which we reprint from "*Time and Tide*," September 5th.

A party of Swiss journalists, representative of the leading papers of French and German speaking Switzerland, has been expected on a visit to this country at the invitation of the British Council. Their tour, however, has been cancelled, because the necessary transit visas for travel through unoccupied France, although duly granted by the French consular officials in Switzerland, were withdrawn at the last moment on instructions received from Vichy. Representations to Vichy through diplomatic channels were met with a refusal to restore the validity of the permits. Vichy's behaviour in this matter, which constitutes an act of grave discourtesy towards subjects of a friendly and neighbouring state, is certainly due to orders from Berlin.

The facts as they stand are proof enough that, in spite of the anti-British bias of the French authorities, they were not in the first place determined to obstruct the visit. But it is an essential part of Germany's policy to prevent the growth of contacts between the European mainland and the island that has become the focus-point of Europe's aspirations. There was a specific reason, moreover, for the desire to sabotage the project of a Swiss press mission. The voice of the Swiss press is heard and heeded, not in Switzerland alone, but also in unoccupied France and even to a very limited degree in Italy and Germany. It may well have occurred to the Germans that the Swiss journalists on their return might present a picture of Britain at war that would hardly tally with the one that German propaganda delights to paint. This must be prevented at all

costs. The enemy may have won an easy tactical victory, but the honours go to Switzerland.

We also reproduce a cutting from the "*World's Press News*," September 10th, which contains information probably news to our readers.

Swiss newspapers are protesting bitterly at the arbitrary action of the Vichy Government in refusing visas to enable Swiss journalists to accept an invitation to visit Britain. In their comments they call attention to the fraud of certain Swiss newspapers specially doctored in order to be able to enter France for sale.

"The disappointment of the Swiss Press about the unfriendly refusal of transit visas is noticeable in all circles," says *Volksrecht*. "Even though one has full understanding for the present situation in France and the French Government, nevertheless one can scarcely realise that France has even lost the liberty of independently deciding who is to travel through the unoccupied zone. The nine Swiss who were to make the trip were no enemies of France; on the contrary, like most Swiss, they were among the definite friends of our unhappy neighbour. The disappointment is all the greater.

"Up to the present, there has been no word of this incident in any French paper. There has obviously been an order to keep silent, just as, indeed, everything is ignored in the French Press that France talks about, and everything is publicised that does not interest France. Thus the French take, for example, a Swiss paper in order to discover what it has been forbidden to them to learn. But here, too, they are tricked without knowing it. For it will not strike the Frenchman purchasing, say, the *Journal de Genève*, the *Gazette de Lausanne*, or *La Suisse* that he is not buying the Swiss edition, but a special edition approved by the French censorship, in which everything is missing that Vichy does not want known. This subtle deception of the public opinion of France should be made impossible by Switzerland. Since Vichy returns our easy-going attitude with unfriendliness, as was only to be expected, our emphasised friendliness might well come to an end, too. It is the only way of being heard — and respected."

The *Berner Tagwacht* writes: "The Swiss Press is convinced that the Vichy measure is the result of foreign influence, and the whole affair is a small detail in the not yet completed history of the 'New Europe.' This is a nice sample for Switzerland of how countries in the New Europe could scarcely cough if they displeased the central authority."

The members of the delegation were chiefly editors of well-known Swiss dailies, such as the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, *Basler Nachrichten*, *Journal de Genève*, a catholic and a labour paper. Their stay was limited to a fortnight and rooms had been reserved by the British Council at the Dorchester. In our opinion the frustrated visit is of little consequence: our people at home command sufficient common sense and discernment to separate the corn from the husk. The tour was in the nature of a propaganda; as usual the Germans were first in the field and it seems to us that when arrangements were sanctioned over twelve months ago the Swiss authorities might have stipulated that a similar facility or privilege should be extended to the other side.