

Home affairs

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HOME AFFAIRS.

PIERRE BÉGUIN.

Within the last few days, some foreign newspapers took it upon themselves to announce, or to insinuate, in a sensational manner, that Switzerland, no doubt without having renounced from her traditional neutrality, was drawing gradually closer to the Western block, directed by the United States of America. This information caused a certain excitement here in our country also because it was based on four facts which had remained unknown to our public opinion, that is to say, because they were not announced by our official or our unofficial information services.

These four facts are exact, and no-one would think of denying them. It is true that our Ministry of War is preparing to send, at the end of this month, a delegation of superior officers to the other side of the Atlantic, where it will proceed to study the question of the acquisition of American war material, and, in particular, armoured tanks. It is also true that this decision was preceded by a Note from the Swiss Legation in Washington to the American Government. It is again true that the President of the Confederation, who is at the same time the Head of our Military Department received a visit from the American Under-Secretary for National Defense, and that the latter took the opportunity of assisting at the manoeuvres of some of the troops belonging to our army of militiamen. And finally, it is also true that the American representative at the Organisation of the Atlantic Pact recently met our Minister for Foreign Affairs and conversed with him.

This proved sufficient for certain newspaper correspondents to put together these four undisputable facts and to draw the conclusions which we mentioned at the beginning of this talk. Unquestionably, there would appear to have been quite a lot of intercourse between the Swiss and the American authorities in the military domain. At a time when people are apt to suspect the darkest intrigues lurking behind the most evident facts, an attempt has been made to see the indication of a spectacular evolution in respect of Swiss foreign politics.

As a matter of fact, in all this there is to be found no change in direction and nothing spectacular, so that sensation-mongers will be disappointed for all their pains.

It has been known for a long time past that Switzerland is anxious to add to her means of defense by the acquisition of armoured cars. This intention is so evident that it recently formed the subject of parliamentary discussions and even, in an indirect way, that of a popular referendum. It is also a well known fact that these tanks cannot be manufactured in Switzerland, and must therefore be obtained from abroad. Finally, it is generally known that some of these tanks have already been ordered in France and that the remainder will come to us from America and from Great Britain. Under these circumstances, the sending of a Commission for purposes of study, to America, would appear to be quite normal.

The fact that a preliminary agreement provides an undertaking on the part of Switzerland to only use these armoured vehicles herself, and not to re-export them elsewhere, is also absolutely normal. Switzerland, herself, when she sells war material makes a similar stipulation to her customers. It is only logical, therefore, that she should be ready to subscribe to analogous conditions when she is the purchaser and not the seller. And this was the object of the Note addressed by the Swiss Legation in Washington to the Government to which it is accredited.

And, finally, when foreign statesmen or high-ranking Government officials are passing through Switzerland, it is only natural that they should meet our supreme authorities and that we should, at their request, show them any of our institutions which they may desire to visit. It is a matter of the most elementary courtesy to receive them and to organise for their benefit visits which can be made periodically by their diplomatic representatives in this country, more especially, by their Military Attachés.

And that is to what is reduced the excitement of these recent events, in regard to which an attempt was made to render them more important and from which it was tried to draw hasty and audacious conclusions.

Our Government Authorities receive statesmen and diplomats from all countries. We buy war material, of which we have need, from those who are ready to deliver it to us. All this has nothing that is not perfectly normal about it. All this can be done and must be done within the framework of our traditional neutrality, and it is a distortion of facts if they are interpreted otherwise. No modification whatsoever has occurred in Swiss external policies. It is that of yesterday, and will be exactly the same to-morrow.

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