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MISZELLEN - MÉLANGES

ENGLAND UND DER SCHWEIZERISCHE WIDERSTANDSWILLE 1939/40

Von EDGAR BONJOUR

Das lebhafteste Interesse Grossbritanniens an der Schweiz während des Zweiten Weltkriegs ist in seinen verschiedenen Aspekten erforscht.¹ Man weiss, wie genau England den eidgenössischen Widerstandswillen, die Stimmungsschwankungen in den Behörden und im Volk verfolgte, wie kritisch es sich gegenüber der Politik von Bundesrat Marcel Pilet-Golaz verhielt, wie es aus Misstrauen gegenüber dessen Haltung den direkten Kontakt mit der schweizerischen Heeresleitung suchte und auf General Guisans festen Willen zur Verteidigung mit den Waffen baute. Weniger bekannt ist die Einstellung des offiziellen England gegenüber der Schweiz der Vorkriegszeit und des Kriegsausbruchs, speziell zum damaligen Vorsteher des Eidgenössischen Politischen Departements, Giuseppe Motta. Während England an Mottas Widerstandsbereitschaft nie zweifelte, hielt es Pilet-Golaz im turbulenten Sommer 1940 für kapitulationsreif. Dazu seien hier nur wenige Stellen aus der britischen diplomatischen Korrespondenz wiedergegeben. Sie stammen aus den Federn zweier bedeutender Diplomaten, George Warners, des britischen Gesandten in Bern 1935–1938, und seines Nachfolgers David V. Kelly 1940–1942. Die Originale der nachstehend abgedruckten Relationen und Telegramme liegen im Londoner Public Record Office und tragen die Signatur F.O. 371/24 530.

Warner an Halifax

Bern, Ende Dezember 1939

Early in the year there were discussions between His Majesty's Government and the French Government as to the action to be taken in the event of a violation of Swiss neutrality. On the 1st February the French Government expressed the wish to be assured that an invasion of Switzerland would be regarded by His Majesty's Government as being on the same footing as an invasion of Holland. His Majesty's Ambassador at Paris was instructed on the 18th February to reply that His Majesty's Government would view a German attack on Switzerland as clear evidence of an attempt by Germany to dominate Europe by force. His Majesty's Government were therefore ready to undertake, if Germany invaded Switzerland and France thereupon declared war on Germany, that Great Britain would go to the assistance of France ... The announcement in the press of the 24th March that England and France had exchanged written declarations as to military assistance to Switzerland, Holland and Belgium in the event of a German attack was not publicly welcomed, and the press emphasised that Switzerland is a neutral State, and that if Great Britain and France had chosen to make some arrangement to support Switzerland in their own interests, it was entirely their own affair. The Swiss

1 EDGAR BONJOUR, *Grossbritannien und die Schweiz im Zweiten Weltkrieg*, in: «Die Schweiz und Europa» Bd. III. Basel 1973. S. 101ff. – *Grossbritannien und die Schweiz am Ende des Zweiten Weltkriegs*, in: «Die Schweiz und Europa» Bd. IV. Basel 1976. S. 173ff.

Minister in Paris subsequently sounded the Quai d'Orsay, and was told that France regarded herself as bound by the convention of 1815. The French Military Attaché at Berne made a similar communication to the General Staff, who expressed the hope that no official démarche would be made. I had previously suggested to the French Ambassador that an official démarche on his part was inadvisable ...²

M. Motta showed throughout the year the greatest optimism and professed it to the eve of the outbreak of war. He told me in February that he thought that Herr Hitler would not start a war which could not be successful and which would destroy all he had achieved, and that he was hopeful that the year would pass off without any serious event occurring. In April he used much the same language. On the 29th August he expressed the view that, as Herr Hitler has hesitated, he would not disregard all the appeals addressed to him and throw the world into appalling chaos. His misplaced optimism may have been due to an exaggerated view of the importance of the attitude of Italy, which he said he felt sure, would remain neutral. His opinion on this important point has so far proved correct. – He expressed to me on a number of occasions since the Munich settlement and again quite recently his admiration of the policy pursued by the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State. It must not, however, be forgotten that he is the exponent of the foreign policy of a small State surrounded by Great Powers, and that the maintenance of traditional neutrality and the avoidance of entanglements is his dominant consideration. With this he combines great admiration of Italian culture and has a devout Catholic attachment to the Church of Rome. M. Motta, who is 68, has for some time been in indifferent health, which has become worse, and the question has arisen whether he can continue to act much longer as head of the Political Department.

Warner an Halifax

Bern, 28. Dezember 1939

I called on M. Motta on the 27th instant at his house to take leave of him as he is not sufficiently well to go to the Political Department. M. Motta particularly asked me to assure your Lordship and the Prime Minister of the admiration which he feels for the policy which you have pursued, and his confidence that the war will end in the complete victory of the Allies. He spoke in terms of horror of the Russian attack on Finland, and expressed his great admiration of the defence which the Finns are putting up. The Federal Council have been so moved by this outrage on a small people and by the heroic resistance put up that they have decided to give 100'000 francs to the Swiss Red Cross to help the Finnish sick and wounded. M. Motta told me confidentially that he had it from every good source that when Count Ciano met Herr von Ribbentrop at Salzburg the latter remarked that Kings were quite out of date and asked why Signor Mussolini allowed the King of Italy to exercise such strong anti-German influence. This tactless utterance, M. Motta said, caused great offence to Signor Mussolini and Count Ciano. M. Motta said that the feeling in Italy amongst the young men of the educated classes against Germany is so strong that he regards it as out of question for Italy to enter the war on the side of Germany. The neutrality of Italy is, he observed, of the greatest importance for Switzerland as, so long as it continues, Switzerland is unlikely to be involved in the war. M. Motta mentioned with some anxiety the war trade negotiations now in progress. I said I felt sure that the Federal Council could rely on His Majesty's Government and the French Government treating Switzerland with all consideration, but we are at war

2 EDGAR BONJOUR, *Geschichte der schweizerischen Neutralität*. Bd. III, 5. Aufl. Basel 1976. S. 349ff.

and it is unfortunately impossible to avoid some injury to the interests of neutrals. I understood that some concessions had been made by His Majesty's Government in the matter of the orders placed by United Kingdom firms in Switzerland prior to the war. M. Motta looked very ill and walked with great difficulty, but he told me that the Federal Council are very anxious that he should continue to direct the Federal Political Department as long as possible. He expressed the hope that M. Thurnheer would be a worthy successor to M. Paravicini in London.³ I said I was sure that he can count on a most friendly reception. M. Motta was so good as to express his regret of my departure and to thank me for the sympathy which I have shown towards Switzerland and the interest which I have taken in Swiss problems and institutions during my five years' residence in this country.

Kelly an Halifax

Bern, 30. Januar 1940

When ... M. Motta was present at my reception by the President⁴, he did not confine himself to the most cordial statement which I reported about his relations with all the members and representatives of His Majesty's Government, whom he had known. He also, as I was preparing to leave, launched into a eulogy of a recent speech by the Prime Minister in such emphatic unneutral terms that the President smilingly interrupted him, doubtless because two Swiss officials were standing by. From all I have heard, the admiration M. Motta then expressed was sincere and can be reconciled, with occasions on which he took a divergent course, by reference to his passionate belief in his own spiritual conception of European politics, to which I have briefly alluded. This, his unyielding opposition to the Soviet Union and to their admission into the League was due to his conviction that the Soviet Union did not, and could not, talk the political language of Europe, and that this admission could only introduce a fresh source of desintegration. Similarly, his embarrassing attitude about sanctions seems to have been due not merely to his view of obvious Swiss interests, in which he was supported by the majority of his compatriots, but also to his belief (very natural in his circumstances), that the Italian nation, despite temporary aberrations, was a vital factor in the moral unity of Europe as he conceived it, and that the opening of an irremediable break between Italy on the one hand and France and Great Britain on the other must inevitably open the gates for still more serious aggressions nearer home. He differed, not in his judgment on the actual case, but in his fear that the attempt to cope with one evil bring in its train much greater evils. That his own compatriots fully believed in M. Motta's sincerity when he based his political actions on religious grounds was emphasised to me by M. Wetter⁵, Federal Councillor for Finances, during a visit I paid him the day before yesterday. M. Wetter, himself a Protestant, said that the Swiss people of all denominations (except, of course, the Socialists), had taken great pride in M. Motta's proclamation of his religious standpoint and his public identification of the Swiss Confederation therewith ... The funeral cortège⁶, headed by the Government, followed by the entire Diplomatic Body, made a wide circuit through what appeared to be the entire population of Berne lining the streets this morning, and at the church the President delivered a long oration, of which salient points of interest

3 Walter Thurnheer, schweizerischer Gesandter in London 1940-1944. - Charles Paravicini, schweizerischer Gesandter in London 1920-1939.

4 Marcel Pilet-Golaz, Vorsteher des Eidgenössischen Politischen Departements, Bundespräsident des Jahres 1940.

5 Ernst Wetter, Vorsteher des Eidgenössischen Finanz- und Zolldepartements 1939-1943.

6 Am 23. Januar 1940 war Giuseppe Motta gestorben.

were a very warm reference to Italy and a bitter one to "the poison of Russian bolshevism". I am informed that, in alluding to Italy in this connexion, M. Pilet-Golaz had specially in mind the success with which M. Motta (largely through his relations with the Vatican) had in recent years partially killed the Italian irredentist claims to the Ticino.

Foreign Office an Kelly

London, 3. Mai 1940

... We are gravely concerned at the possibility of Swiss Government being bullied into allowing enemy occupation or passage of enemy troops without effective resistance. This would have serious military consequences for us and we must do all we can to strengthen their will to resist. Unless you see strong objection, please take the earliest opportunity of impressing on Swiss Government once more the disastrous consequences of submission, since should Germany win the war it is certain that Switzerland would be partitioned and never regain her independence. Even if her independence were expressly guaranteed by Germany and Italy, no reliance whatever could of course be placed on promises from such a quarter.

Kelly an das Foreign Office

Bern, 20. Mai 1940

The President today told me he did not consider danger to Switzerland immediate and that England was in more danger but it might become immediate if the French left the frontier unguarded or if the Italians joined in the war or if Hitler decided and was able to stop his Northern campaign. He said the French had not a very large force on the Swiss frontier and he was distressed about the changes in the command in the middle of the battle. He believed the Italians were more afraid of the Germans than we realised and that they had no wish to see them in Switzerland. He repeated his assurance that the Swiss would fight to defend their neutrality and I was glad to hear this as there are some obvious indications of demoralisation and especially of anxiety to cultivate Italy as a potential saviour.

Bern, 15. Juni 1940

If by military coup d'Etat is meant action by the Swiss Army this is entirely new to me and contrary to our impression that the Army is much more ready to resist than high political circles ... It seems apparently that the moral of most of the Federal Council is much lower than that of the Army, that an agreement to the German demands even affecting Swiss neutrality is possible at any time.

Bern, 8. August 1940

... President on August 5th made long statement to me which amounted to saying that the defence of Switzerland would now be futile and merely cause useless ruin. He gave me the impression without actually saying so that he would oppose armed resistance to invasion. These statements suggest the contrast between the attitude of the Army and Federal Council which unfortunately corresponds to the widespread impression in Switzerland. Please repeat to the War Office.