

Army reorganization

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d'un pareil édifice. Le Conseil d'Etat saint-gallois se retranche derrière la loi sur les cimetières, qui lui fournit un argument juridique très opportun. La discussion qui s'est élevée au Grand Conseil ne laisse aucun doute sur les sentiments de la population, qui voit, non sans raison, dans la construction projetée une véritable provocation. Le dernier mot appartient à la municipalité, compétente pour donner ou refuser son approbation aux plans qui lui sont soumis. Etant donné les réactions que l'on sait, il est à peu près certain qu'elle répondra négativement.

C'est une tradition de notre pays de s'associer volontiers aux témoignages de reconnaissance que des étrangers adressent, sur notre territoire, à leurs compatriotes morts au service de leur patrie et qui sont enterrés chez nous. De telles marques de gratitude sont, en elles-mêmes, hautement respectables, et la courtoisie nous fait un devoir de les entourer de bienveillance. Jusqu'à présent, les manifestations de cette espèce n'ont jamais justifié la moindre critique, parce que ceux qui les organisaient ont su faire preuve de tact. Une réunion au champ du repos, près d'un monument où l'on dépose des couronnes et devant lequel on prononce des discours, ne saurait porter ombrage à personne, pas plus d'ailleurs que les plaques commémoratives, discrètement apposées ici ou là, en l'honneur des soldats de telle ou telle nation.

Il fallait les Allemands pour provoquer un débat pénible autour du souvenir des morts de la grande guerre. On eût très bien compris qu'ils se préoccupassent de recueillir et de rassembler les ossements des leurs dans un mausolée commun. Mais le sens le plus élémentaire des convenances eût dû leur suggérer d'élever, dans un cimetière, un monument de proportions normales, comme on l'a fait en maints endroits. Au lieu de cela, ils ont conçu l'idée d'une immense bâtisse, qui se dresserait sur territoire suisse, près du lac de Constance et dominerait la contrée comme une forteresse. Il y a là un manque d'égards évident envers le peuple dont ces gens reçoivent l'hospitalité. Nos confédérés de la Suisse orientale redoutent de plus, et on les comprend sans peine, que ce lieu ne devienne un but de pèlerinages fréquents des nazistes séjournant en Suisse et de ceux d'outre-Rhin, avec cortèges, chants et harangues. Une pareille exploitation de la mémoire des soldats à des fins de propagande politique n'est nullement invraisemblable pour qui connaît les méthodes du Troisième Reich. Mais de quelque libéralisme que l'on veuille s'inspirer, elle n'est pas tolérable, pour un Etat souverain et neutre, comme est le nôtre jusqu'à nouvel avis.

Les autres colonies étrangères se rendent parfaitement compte de certaines nuances, sensibles aux esprits doués d'un peu de délicatesse. Nos voisins du nord, eux, n'ont pas saisi tout ce qu'il y a d'insolite et de déplacé dans leur initiative. Il sied donc de le leur expliquer assez nettement pour empêcher tout malentendu. C'est d'autant plus nécessaire que les auteurs du fâcheux projet n'ont pas agi sans ordres supérieurs: toute l'affaire a été montée en Allemagne même.

Mais nous ne sommes pas mûrs pour subir l'invasion, fût-ce sous cette forme déguisée. Peut-être le comprendra-t-on à Berlin? ...

Léon Savary.

(Tribune de Genève).

ARMY REORGANIZATION.

An Examination of the Swiss System.

By CAPT. J. R. J. MACNAMARA, M.P.

It is common in music-halls to make the standard joke about the Swiss Navy. There is no cause for any Briton, however, to joke about the Swiss Army. The Swiss have always been excellent fighters. Their mercenaries were for long the most famous and the most sought after in Europe. Ever since William Tell accomplished his famous feat with the arrow and the apple the Swiss have taken a particular pride in shooting. Nowadays they have their rifle clubs, and boys from the earliest possible ages may be seen bicycling after school hours out to a nearby range, there to be taught to interest themselves in and be proficient at the handling of a rifle.

Switzerland is a democratic country — as democratic a State, in fact, as any in the world. No Swiss, however, considers it incompatible with democracy that he should defend his heritage and prepare himself beforehand so that he may do it the more efficiently should a crisis ever arise. Virtually all Swiss then become soldiers, and they train for the defence of their fatherland. Their system is of great interest, because it is essentially a defensive system, the Swiss being a race who, like ourselves, have no aggressive intentions, but who are determined not to lose what they have built up in the course of history. It is also worth study by us, as it is efficient and produces the security required. Finally, although it demands hardness of its young men, it imposes no hardships on them by unduly interfering with their careers.

Roughly speaking, it is the national duty of every man between the ages of 19 and 48 to defend his country. For the whole of this period he is organized into a militia, what we might term a compulsory Territorial Army. Unlike the conscript standing armies of Europe, the Swiss Army does not demand a long period of full-time service at an age when young men are trying to get a footing in the professions of life. They serve full time only for from two to three months, according to their arm of the Service. After that they have to put in so many attendances a year, as does an English Territorial voluntarily. Once a year they must attend a refresher course, or what we should call annual training, for from seven to sixteen days, according to circumstances.

It will be seen that this imposes hardship on no one, and as it is compulsory all employers of labour have to co-operate and not only the patriotic ones, who thereby become penalized for their patriotism.

Up till the age of 32 a man is considered to be a front-line soldier. After that age he passes into what might be called partial reserve, into the Landwehr from the age of 33 to 40, and then into the Landsturm for the rest of his service.

The Army is organized into six divisions, most of which are apportioned stretches of the frontier to defend. The divisions are organized on modern lines. Some are mobile. The armament and equipment call for no comment, except for the presence of cyclist battalions and, perhaps, the great reliance nowadays placed on the machine-gun. There are also mountain brigades specially trained and equipped for service in what would seem to us almost impossible districts.

The officers are recruited in very much the same way as the men. More is expected of them. Their initial training is longer, as are their refresher courses during their service. It is interesting to note that the Swiss have an aversion to generals. They consider them a bar to progress — as I have already pointed out, the Swiss are very proud of their efficiency. They do not appoint them at all if it can be helped and prefer normally to promote them when an emergency arises, such as on the outbreak of a war. They believe they thus get the best men. Of course, it is a real citizen force, and the citizens like to feel that they are in control of it, as, in fact, they are. One may find that where one is staying the local commander responsible for that bit of frontier is the local bank manager, who in his spare time studies the military arts and makes himself proficient in them. His chief of staff, equally keen on the same hobby, may be the local chemist.

I am writing this article on the Swiss Army because we may be hearing a great deal about it in the near future, not because we expect an attack on Switzerland (although that is not out of the question), but as a basis for what may possibly have to happen in Britain. It would not be the first time that the Swiss system would have been taken as a model for others to copy. Britons would very rightly be suspicious of ideas savouring of future aggressive intentions. I do not believe, however, that the country is at present in a mood to turn down anything that, after careful consideration, it feels to be a necessity for its defence.

The Navy has always been a popular Service, for the public, rightly or wrongly, has felt that it is purely a defensive arm, a necessity if the seas are to be kept open for our food and our commerce. The Air Force is popular among its men for economic reasons, but the public are not quite so sure of it yet, although the tendency is to look upon it in much the same light as the Navy. The Territorials are popular, increasingly so every year, because the public know they are primarily for purely defensive purposes. There is an age-old suspicion of a standing army. Nowadays mothers fear their sons may get mixed up in foreign entanglements. Any form of national service would be more welcome if based on the Territorial rather than the Regular Army.

I shall discuss in a later article why attention may be turned to the Swiss system. To put it briefly, attention is bound to turn, if it is established that more numbers are required, to any system which gives security without expense and efficiency without waste of time. Furthermore, British character exudes the principle of self-defence, but not aggression.

There is a great psychological difference between something voluntary and something compulsory. It is true that volunteers may be better in spirit, but not necessarily so. It is arguable, however, that all are volunteers if a democracy merely voluntarily votes itself into doing something for the common good compulsory. Spirit is largely fanned by interest, and that is dependent on leadership. Where the psychological difference is most noticeable (and in our case most dangerous) is in the treatment meted out to volunteers as opposed to others. If men had to join they would get the equipment, and no pains would be spared in their training. As volunteers, however, they are not taken sufficiently seriously, to the great disservice of the nation.

(United Services Review.)

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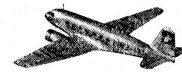
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