What other people say about us : Swiss neutrality

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WHAT OTHER PEOPLE SAY ABOUT US.

SWISS NEUTRALITY.

By " IGNIS "
(*World Review.*)

Swiss neutrality is a necessity for the balance of power in Europe — as long as this ambitious aim is still maintained by the Great Powers of Europe.

It is a vital necessity, not because it is a tradition, not because it helps hotel-keepers, not because it is nice to find a country on the continent where everybody is allowed to thank God for their blessings instead of a leader of some sort or the other.

Swiss neutrality is necessary because this small State watches over a great many of the most important Alpine passes. The old saying is —who holds the Veltlin, holds Lombardy; and who holds Lombardy, holds Italy. And there are many other important communications. There is the St. Bernhard, connecting the Rhone Valley with the Val d'Aosta, there is the Simplon, leading from Brig to Domodossola. Both are direct ways either into France or into Italy. Not to mention Germany. You can go direct from Brig or from any other sector of the Rhone Valley to Geneva, to the French frontier. You can threaten the flank of anybody going this way a little more northward. You can do a lot of things — if you possess this part of the Alps.

Then there are those famous and glittering lakes, the Lago Maggiore, Lago di Lugano, and Lago di Como, connected with the frosty north by many passes and ways. Whoever would think of using them for letting through armies instead of globe-trotters?

Possible Invaders.

The Swiss General Staff has, of course, to think of the possibility that one day a powerful invader may march through their territory. We read in certain papers that extremely dangerous expression " the *right* to march through." What is this " right?" It is the " right " to cross the territory of a neutral state if and when it is to one's own advantage. And when might it be advantageous to anybody to march through Switzerland? If France should think of attacking Germany or Germany should think of attacking France. The Swiss are afraid only of one of these possibilities. Students of post-war history to the fore — which is it?

Yes, an army which passed through Switzerland could avoid the fortifications known as the Maginot Line. Up to now the French General Staff have thought it advisable to leave the Franco-Swiss frontier undefended. I heard the opinion expressed in Switzerland that the French government *wanted* the aggressor army to pass through Switzerland — because that would bring in the whole world on the side of France.

However, times have changed, and the French are now thinking of extending their Maginot Line from the North right down to the Mediterranean — that is to say, they are thinking of closing the gap — and have presumably already started work.

So that would make an attack on Switzerland useless. But would it? To a certain extent only. It is clear, I think, that any army marching through Switzerland would have the chance of turning the flank of the present Maginot Line, and simply passing it by. Also, even a closed Maginot Line could be attacked via Switzerland with more chance of success than from the Rhine alone; Switzerland stretches deep into France, and the defence line would be much longer this way than merely in the Rhineland.

The same holds true, of course, should France think of attacking Germany. She could go a long way through Switzerland and right into Austria, for example, if she should choose to do so.

Switzerland the Key.

Whoever is the master of Switzerland is the predominant force in Europe. That, and that alone, brought the statesmen of Europe to think of preserving and securing the integrity of this little state in the heart of the continent. That was finally recognised in 1815, at the famous dancing Congress of Vienna, the first " Versailles." Even then the great Powers of Europe and the leading statesmen of all countries sat down together and tried to establish lasting peace. They failed. But the integrity of Switzerland was maintained through all the catastrophes which shook Europe during the more than one hundred and twenty years since its final establishment.

The neutrality of Switzerland has been recognised by all her neighbours. It has been firmly and solemnly reaffirmed during the last few years, especially on each occasion that one statesman or another was breaking his oath. He thought the time had come to reassure the others, that they mustn't be frightened, that he did not mean it, and that he was really only preserving and, so to speak, improving peace.

The Swiss have been watchful onlookers. Apparently, though grateful for these assurances, they have made up their minds to do something to establish their neutrality more firmly, on the basis of their own strength.

Strength of Switzerland.

It is a difficult task to make it clear to doubting souls that even a small country can be strong. We have experienced sad examples of small countries being thrown to the wolves. All these small countries were told over and over again that they could rely on help from outside; that they must not give way to threats, under any circumstances; help was ready. And afterwards — but everyone knows what happened afterwards.

The Swiss are in a different position. First, they are not directly threatened by anybody. And secondly, if there is a *de facto* threat from any side — they know what it is going to be.

Neutrality cannot be maintained by goodwill alone. It cannot be maintained by armed force either. It can only be preserved with both, good will on the part of everybody — together with the forces to remind anybody who might forget that it is a neutral territory, that the " right to march through " must lapse on the frontier of Switzerland.

That is the position. And there lie the problems. For there are problems for such a little country, with scanty natural resources, not too large a population (4,150,000), and no access to the sea. Of course, there are the mountains. They offer protection against military attack. They put a formidable obstacle in the way of aeroplanes. They are comparatively easy to defend.

There is another advantage. Switzerland has got only four cities with more than 100,000 inhabitants, and only one (Zürich) with more than a quarter of a million. That is an asset if one thinks of air attacks. Only 16.1 per cent. of the population live in towns of over 100,000 inhabitants, as compared with 39.2 per cent. in England and 30.2 per cent. in Germany.

But Switzerland has 1.131 miles of frontier to defend, of which 424 miles face Signor Mussolini and 320 miles Herr Hitler.

Signor Mussolini is now building a new air ferry (or cable way) to the top of the Theodul Pass (11,000 feet high) thus making it possible to pass the mountain chain between the Monte Rosa and the Matterhorn. That is very nice for tourists. But is is equally convenient for soldiers. It enables anybody to pass down from the mountains to the Rhone valley, avoiding, for example, the fortifications of the Simplon block, and making it impossible for the Swiss to blow up the great tunnel and so prevent an approaching enemy from marching right down to Brig.

Swiss defence.

The Swiss are clever and responsible enough to leave as little as possible to chance and not very much more to promises. Let us turn our eyes to the measures they are taking at this moment.

They have a militia system, under which everybody who is able to carry a gun has to join the colours for three months; that is one month more than a few years ago.

After the young man has passed his three months' military training he takes his uniform and his rifle home and keeps them there. Every year he has to undergo a short training course.

The Swiss have some aeroplanes and have spent quite a lot of money on arms. But they feel they have not done enough. True, they do not need mechanised forces as much as other countries: they have their mountains. But they have also got plains, and so they have acquired some tanks and armoured cars.

What they need most at the moment is, first, aeroplanes, secondly, guns and ammunition and, thirdly, men, men, men. While Herr Duttweiler, one of the leading Swiss political figures, with a Churchillian touch, proposes building up an air force of 1,000 planes, the spirit of compromise seems to tend towards some 500. Even this would mean at least double the present strength. Some orders have already gone to German aircraft factories, and it is said that the planes ordered there and to be delivered shortly are to have 1,100 h.p. engines, a speed of 334 m.p.h., and can reach 15,000 feet in 5 minutes.

Anti-aircraft batteries are an important factor for the protection of Switzerland's extensive industries. It is hoped soon to have 100 batteries, comprising 400 guns. Did I say hoped? It is *hoped* to have ten times as many.

Communications are to be strengthened, which means that Alpine roads are to be built, railways cut in the rocks — for example a second line parallel to the famous Gotthard line — and tunnels made, as is being done at the moment in Graubünden, the Canton where a kind of Romantch language is spoken, and Italian interests are active.

The question of the military personnel has been attacked by the Bundesrat, so that at long last the ancient democratic distrust of military men has been overcome and a centralised military leadership established. Up to now Switzerland has even abstained from the use of the word " General " and had it laid down in her Constitution that only in war time, or at least in time of general mobilisation, should a single man have entire military responsibility. That is now practically changed, and there is a man, who, while not having the name " general," has the power of one. And there is also a chief of staff. His name is Labhardt, and he is said to be an excellent soldier.

Still, even the best general can do little if he has not well-trained soldiers behind him. So there is a plan to raise the training time in the militia school (which can be compared with the Territorials) from 3 to 6 months, and the yearly training from 12 to 21 days. That is certainly not too much, for modern weapons.

If this new plan can be carried in parliament the Swiss will have some 25,000 men constantly with the colours. They also think of strengthening their specially trained and selected frontier guards to 5,000 men. That would give them 30.000 men in all to meet a sudden onslaught, and until the whole army is mobilised.

Then, and only then, when the spirit of independence and freedom characteristic of the Swiss is supported by the necessary means and organisation to make it effective, will it stand a chance against the heavy odds of to-day and to-morrow.

During the last crisis the Swiss government thought it wise not to take military precautionary measures, for which it was strongly reproached by leading politicians like Guggenbühl, a Conservative, who found the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* behind him, and by others, including liberals (" *Bund* " *and* " *Nationalzeitung* ") and trade-unionists. This shows how deeply rooted in the souls of the Swiss the spirit of independence is.

SWISS NATIONAL EXHIBITION.

By Jack Winslow.
(*The American Traveller's Gazette.*)
By courtesy of Thos. Cook & Son.

Every twenty-five years the Swiss take a sort of national inventory. They hold the Swiss National Exhibition. In addition to having a grand time, they put on an elegant show and exhibit to the rest of the world, as well as themselves, Switzerland's cultural and industrial achievements. Nineteen thirty-nine will see the country's largest and most elaborate Exhibition yet held. The time: May 6th-October 29th. The place: Zurich.

Zurich is Switzerland's largest city. It is also one of the most charming. The city overlooks a long lake that reaches to green hills, and beyond the green rollings hills are the snow peaked Glarus Alps. Emptying from the lake, the Limmat, river flows green and swiftly through the city, then past the old museum and the park and onward to join the Aare and finally the Rhine.

Zurich itself is an intriguing combination of the old and new. Along the tree-lined Bahnhofstrasse are fashionable shops, smart hotels, modern business buildings. But is is only a few steps to narrow cobble-stone streets, where the houses are quaint and huddled, and the present seems far away. Some of the guild houses go back to the 17th century. Yet these are mere fledglings compared to Zurich's most famous landmark, the Romanesque Grossmünster, a great cathedral begun in the eleventh century, with twin Gothic towers crowned with helmet-shaped tops. A statue of Charlemagne is perched on a ledge high on the side of one of the towers. From here old Charlemagne will enjoy a bird's eye view of the 1939 Swiss National Exhibition. Next May, these are some of the things he'll see.

* * *

The Exhibition will occupy two large park areas on opposite sides of the lake. On the right bank will be a number of displays stressing the importance of agriculture in Swiss economic life. Various sections are to be given over to market gardening, fruit and wine-growing and cattle raising. Here, too, will be a model Swiss Village. This little " Dörfli " will feature a peasant home, a barn and dairy where butter and cheese will be turned out continuously, as well as a number of restaurants and inns where the delicacies of the four language regions of Switzerland will be served.

Switzerland's democratic form of government seems to us quite ideal. But the Swiss apparently aren't quite satisfied. In the section