Swiss Nationalism and Liberty

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Nationalism is a political concept as old as human history. Its nature varies according to the countries and the times in which it finds expression; it can promote the preservation of individual well-being and the maintenance of peace, it can also become a peril leading to tyranny and the subordination of human rights to national power or the ambition of unscrupulous leaders. National passions, indeed, have been the cause, in our own times, of the almost complete extinction of democratic and humanitarian feelings.

But democracy and liberty need not be incompatible with nationalism. That this is so can be demonstrated by the example of Switzerland. The existence of a liberal nationalism in Switzerland has been achieved in spite of the many obstacles that might have vitiated its successful development. Actually, these obstacles, racial, linguistic, religious, have not only been overcome, they have, in fact, proved to be an asset for the establishment of a modern democratic State, peaceful, productive, free and united. In its very diversity lies its strength.

The problem of Switzerland's nationalism has attracted the attention of a prominent American scholar who is a specialist in the study of the nationalistic phenomena throughout the world. His latest book, published by George Allen & Unwin at 13/6 net, is entitled NATIONALISM AND LIBERTY — THE SWISS EXAMPLE by Hans Kohn.

The author, a Professor at Princeton University, New Jersey, is an American who, as he writes in his introduction, first visited Switzerland in 1921 and there felt at home more than in any other European country. He became befriended with Professor Hans Barth of the University of Zürich and Nationalrat Willy Bretscher, editor-in-chief of the *Neue Zürcher* Zeitung, and he seems to have acquired a deep insight into the Swiss character and Swiss institutions. To judge from his many references and quotations he also built up a more than superficial knowledge of Swiss history and literature.

Until the end of the 18th century, he writes, Switzerland could scarcely be called a nation. It was a loose alliance of small independent States, the cantons, each jealous of its exclusiveness. There was no common Swiss citizenship, no common monetary system, no liberty of trade among the cantons, no national post and no uniformity of weights and measures. The only thing they had in common was a fierce spirit of independence and a strong practical common sense.

It was the advent of Napoleon after the French Revolution and his direct interference in Swiss affairs that created the first impetus towards Swiss national unity. The 1798 constitution, drawn up by Peter Ochs of Basel and F. C. de Leharpe, a Vaudois, laid the foundations of modern Switzerland. But the Helvetic Republic, one and indivisible, as it was named, was of short duration. The century-old traditions of cantonal sovereignty were too strong and the methods employed too hasty to allow for success. The Napoleonic creation collapsed and was replaced, in 1802, by his Act of Mediation under which Switzerland became once more an alliance of sovereign cantons. At the same time the formerly subject-territories of Aargau, Thurgau, Tessin and Vaud were admitted as cantons with equal rights and so were the lands of Grisons and St. Gall.

The case of the Tessin is particularly interesting since it illustrates the fallacy of the theory held by later dictators that a common language should inevitably be the basis of national cohesion. By all natural ties — language, racial descent, geography and economic laws, — the people of Tessin formed part of Lombardy and no one would have been surprised had they elected to join the newly formed Cisalpine Republic. But by an overwhelming majority they rejected reunion with Lombardy and demanded to become free and equal members of the Swiss Confederation. It was at this juncture that they adopted the slogan "*Liberi e Svizzeri*".

After the downfall of Napoleon the Congress of Vienna in March 1815 and the subsequent Peace Treaty of Paris in November of the same year recognized and affirmed the perpetual neutrality of Switzerland and, with the admission of the Valais, Neuchâtel and Geneva as full members, restored Switzerland to its status of a compact and independent Confederation. Swiss nationalism became further strengthened through the revolutionary spirit of the 1830s. Within

the next twenty years it developed into the modern form of an enduring State based on individual rights and historical diversity.

The period between 1815 and 1848 was rich in talented highminded thinkers, writers and poets whose influence on the trend of Swiss history and the regeneration of national awareness cannot be too strongly emphasized. Swiss nationalism owes much to such noble and far-seeing minds as Pestalozzi Gotthelf, Burckhardt, Gottfried Keller, Furrer and Rüttimann (the two architects of the 1848 constitution) and many others among them Rossi and Zschokke who, though not Swiss-born, contributed effectively to the establishment of closer national ties and the idea of a common Fatherland.

The civil war of 1847 — the *Sonderbund* — which threatened the disruption of the Confederation was the last conflict in the struggle for national unity. Thanks to the wisdom and the statesmanship of the political leaders a peaceful settlement was achieved, a settlement which left no bitterness and culminated in the great constitution of 1848. This constitution, largely following the American model, in promoting the individual liberty of every citizen, assured a solid and lasting basis for the country's national existence. Time has proved how well the men of 1848 built.

Professor Kohn has produced a thoughtful and stimulating study, brilliantly written and very readable. It is both analytical and objective and shows a rare understanding of the subject and a sympathetic approach to the problem. We look on his book as a welcome and valuable addition to the literature on Switzerland's political development.

J.J.F.S.

NEW SWISSAIR FREIGHT SERVICE.

Swissair will operate a second weekly all-cargo service from Switzerland to New York via Manchester between October 30th and December 19th, 1956. The new flight will leave Zurich on Tuesdays at 23.30, Basle at 00.45 and Manchester at 04.00 on Wednesdays, arriving in New York the same day at 19.00.

In the reverse direction it will leave New York on Wednesdays at 23.30 and arrive in Zurich on Fridays at 01.45.

The service will be additional to the year-round weekly all-cargo flight leaving Zurich on Saturday evenings and New York on Sunday evenings. All services will be operated with DC-4 Skymaster aircraft.

OUR NEXT ISSUE.

Our next issue will be published on Friday, October 12th, 1956.

We take this opportunity of thanking the following subscribers for their kind and helpful donations over and above their subscription: V. Tenger, Laurence Moore, P. Jacomelli, A. Wehrli, H. Oswald, H. Waibel, A. Strittmatter, C. Pulfer.