

Neutrality and solidarity

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NEUTRALITY AND SOLIDARITY

A meeting of the Interparliamentary Union took place in Lausanne in April, at which 300 parliamentarians from 42 countries attended. The meeting was concerned with the preparations for the 52nd conference, which is to take place in Belgrade in September. At the opening session at the Palais de Beaulieu on 15th April the Municipal President of Lausanne, Monsieur G. A. Chevallaz, welcomed the delegates, and Federal Councillor Wahlen, the Swiss Foreign Minister, was the main speaker. He brought greetings from the Government and referred to the close ties which had always existed between the organisation and Switzerland. During the first decades of its existence the Union had had its headquarters in Berne, and after ten years of moving around Europe it had returned to Switzerland in 1921 and was now settled in Geneva, a centre of gravity in international activities.

The Federal Councillor praised the Union for trying to keep in step with modern developments and trends and he referred to the problems of the developing countries which figured on the agenda of the meeting. The speaker then talked about the various Swiss institutions and their connection with political events outside his country. He stressed Switzerland's renunciation of power politics and steady refusal to annex territories when opportunities were favourable, but he also reminded the M.P.s that nevertheless there had been serious upheavals in the course of Swiss history. But Switzerland had always been willing to subordinate all other endeavours to the defence of her freedom. He then enlarged on the federalistic structure of the Swiss State and its armed neutrality. This had proved to be not only the protection of Swiss independence, but also a guarantee for internal solidarity. Switzerland's neutrality and her foreign policy had not only never harmed any other State in Europe, but had, many times, even been beneficial.

Federal Councillor Wahlen said that Switzerland had not joined the United Nations, but was a very active member of their Specialized Agencies. This meant that the Confederation was available for special services which it could not undertake if it were committed to take sides in conflicts and critical situations.

After drawing attention to the great enterprise of Technical Assistance, a service which was undertaken by the Swiss Government and People as a duty of solidarity of the highest order, the speaker alluded to Switzerland's position with regard to the Council of Europe, the European Free Trade Association and the Common Market.

Federal Councillor Wahlen concluded: "We are aware that we have had to fight our way through many errors and tangles, through temporary dissension and even through civil wars in order to achieve what we consider today our firm and inviolable possession. We are also aware that our internal order deviates from the ideal picture which we treasure, and we know that unremitting efforts are needed to get nearer to it.

"In a world full of tension, a world which gets smaller every day and richer in contacts, it is imperative more than ever within and beyond national boundaries to further understanding and appreciation of the diverse cultures, languages and traditions. We must learn not only to tolerate them, but to respect them. It is our responsibility to build peace in the only safe way, that is from the bottom upwards. It is my warm wish that this meeting of the Interparliamentary Union may help to bring us nearer to this aim."

(Based on reports received by courtesy of the Agence Télégraphique Suisse.)

TYPHOID AT ZERMATT

Typhoid epidemic checked

According to the Swiss Federal Health Office, a branch of the Government Department for home affairs, the danger of infection is now no greater in Switzerland than in other countries. The statement is based on the fact that, apart from Zermatt, there is no other centre of infection and because no cases of secondary infection have occurred.

Cancellation of hotel bookings

The Swiss Hotel Association has expressed regret that many tourists from abroad, particularly from Britain, have suffered as a result of the typhoid epidemic in Zermatt. The Central Committee meeting in Basle said that many travel agents had cancelled hotel bookings in several parts of Switzerland. The Association suggested that members should renounce all claims against cancelled bookings and reimburse deposits.

Compensation and free holiday for typhoid victims

The Swiss Hotel Association and the Swiss National Tourist Office in close co-operation with the Federal and Cantonal Authorities and the Commune of Zermatt have been preparing a special scheme of compensation on a considerable scale. At a special Press Conference, to be held in Berne within the next few days, full details will be made known.

At this conference the Zermatt authorities will inform in detail of their plans for a comprehensive remedial programme. The military and civil authorities charged with the investigation will at the same time make their report.

A special commission of experts will be supplied with the necessary funds by the Commune of Zermatt, the Canton of Valais and the Federal Government. The commission will advise on the compensation to be paid for medical expenses and other costs connected with the illness. In addition, all persons, living in Switzerland and abroad, who contracted typhoid in Zermatt, will be invited by the organisations connected with Swiss tourism to a two or three weeks holiday in Switzerland at a resort of their choice. The Swiss National Tourist Office and the Swiss Hotel Association will be responsible for this scheme. The Commune, the Tourist Office and the Hotel Association of Zermatt, the Valais Tourist Office, the Swiss Association of Tourist Directors, the Swiss Federal Railways, the Swiss Post Office, Swissair, the Swiss Private Railways and the Swiss Tourist Federation have spontaneously consented to co-operate in the organisation and with financial assistance.

The offer is not limited to guests only, but also applies to the patients who were employed in Zermatt.

(Swiss National Tourist Office, 18th April 1963.)