

Switzerland will, can and must defend her neutrality

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SWITZERLAND WILL, CAN AND MUST DEFEND
HER NEUTRALITY.

Is there any need for a renewed discussion of Swiss neutrality? This neutrality is traditional. It is, indeed, an organic necessity for this country. Switzerland has succeeded in creating one strong united nation consisting of three different races, speaking four different languages, French, German, Italian and Romansch. Her Federal Constitution enables each of the twenty-five cantons to adhere to its own peculiar culture, language, religious and social customs. As is but natural, each of the twenty-five states has given up part of its supreme power in favour of the Federal State, which has undertaken to protect the common heritage. Races differing vastly from each other thus live side by side in peace and freedom. These "United States", if it is permissible to use this term, were not founded in one day. The first league between the three first cantons was formed in 1291, while the present Federal Constitution was inaugurated in the 19th. century. So lengthy a process of consolidation has, of necessity, produced rare solidarity. Whoever grasps the significance and the importance of this amazing evolution will readily understand that the Swiss nation has no wish to take part in foreign political activity, of whatever kind it may be. It has no claims to make with regard to any other people, and it brooks no foreign interference in its own affairs.

This neutrality has at different times been recognized by the Powers: first on the occasion of the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648, then in Vienna and Paris in 1814 and 1815, and more recently still by the League of Nations. Again, at the outbreak of the present conflict, the English, French, German and Italian governments declared that they would respect Swiss neutrality at all times and under all circumstances. It may be as well to lay stress on the fact that this neutrality is recognized and not guaranteed. Switzerland does not grant any foreign powers the competency to interfere in her home or foreign policy. She herself guarantees and safeguards her own neutrality.

In order to be able to keep up this strict neutrality, Switzerland has organized an army capable of successfully carrying on a defensive war.

On August 13th, 1939, before hostilities in Europe had started, Col. Henri Guisan, then commander of the first Army-Corps, now General and Commander-in-Chief of the Swiss Army, made a speech on the occasion of the special festival at the Swiss National Exhibition in honour of Swiss subjects from abroad, some passages of which may interest our readers: "Switzerland can, will, and must defend herself.

She will do so: because she wishes to exist and to keep that which history has bestowed on her, i.e. a free and honoured country. Because, being profoundly attached to ancient customs

and traditions, she wishes to live her own life. Because she is a well balanced state, which will in two years' time be 650 years old. Because the foundations of the state are as firm as her mountains and rocks. This unswerving determination is demonstrated by the civic organisation of the army, the enormous sacrifices made for national defence during the past years with the consent of the people, the methods of and the extension of the period of instruction, and by the voluntary work done by our military societies, the D.A.P., the social work of the army, etc.

She can do so: thanks to the adaptation of her statutes and her military apparatus to modern requirements. Thanks to the configuration of the soil in this country (forests, lakes, defiles, &c.) which increases difficulties for an attack and does not allow invaders to make use of their superiority as to tanks and heavy artillery. Thanks to the thorough instruction of our troops and the modern equipment with which they are supplied, such as machine guns and pieces of artillery against tanks. Thanks to the fact that the age of service has been extended to 60 and that civilians have their share in passive defence, thus setting more men free for service at the front. And also because an enemy would not only have an army to face, but an entire nation, firmly resolved to defend itself, down to the last man and woman. Swiss women, indeed, would not fail to give an example of courage and fortitude, as they did in the stirring times of 1914 to 1918.

She must do so, not only to defend the integrity of the soil, the sacred heritage of our forefathers, and to remain worthy of a glorious past, but also because our neutrality has its special mission, the custody of the Alps, where the great roads of the continent of Europe meet. If these crossroads were not well guarded, they would be likely to excite greed and covetousness.

It may be affirmed that absolute neutrality and a strong army are two inseparable terms. Neutrality, as has rightly been said, is neither renunciation nor abdication. It is, on the contrary, the spirit of utmost resistance for the defense of our personality against every attempt at invasion, wherever it may come from. A country has the army that its politics require. The alpha and the omega of our politics is to safeguard our independence and to have our neutrality respected. A country also has the army it deserves. Our army is an institution peculiar to our country; its unsuspected strength lies in the fact that it is based on the right of every free man to bear arms and not on conscription. For a Swiss the gun on his shoulder is what the sword at his side formerly was for a knight. Between his periodical courses of instruction, our soldier is, so to say, "off duty" at home with his arms and his baggage! He remains mobilized, as one of our officers so well expressed it, in his mind, his heart and his intelligence. Being called to arms regularly, our soldiers know that civil and military life complement each other and go to the making of a man and a citizen. Whether they work in the fields, in the office, in the studio or the barracks, they are working for their country and their freedom. This is the national moral education which is the precursor of the moral mobilization of the country.

I have spoken of the material preparation, but the essential factor is moral preparation. At the base of every army there is the individual soldier. Neither motorized columns, nor aviation, nor tanks are decisive factors. In every war the decisive factor still is the soldier, the trooper, the man who has the mastery over his arms and who is sure of himself morally and physically.

A town may be destroyed, but it is not lost as long as there are a few machine-guns left and a few men to feed them. The moral character of our army is the moral character of our whole nation, for the army is the nation, the nation is the army. My wish for you is that during your stay in Switzerland you may see one of our army-corps marching past their chief, no matter whether they be militia or territorials, or even frontier troops, fathers in the ranks side by side with their sons, every eye on the alert! In the eyes fixed on their chief you may read the resolution of men who are ready to sacrifice themselves, you may judge of their moral attitude.

The Swiss military apparatus of to-day is such that an invader would have a hard time of it, and that he would certainly lose the gain he had counted on.

My compatriots from abroad, may this short sketch strengthen your confidence in our national defense, may you take away with you the sure knowledge that we are ready. We will always keep our flag hoisted, proud and free, and will never lower it. "

Does this mean that Switzerland is selfishly self-centred and takes no interest in the fate of other nations? Certainly not.

On November 20th 1815, the Powers recognized the fact that "the neutrality and inviolability of Switzerland, and its independence of all foreign influence are in the real interest of the politics of the whole of Europe."

Moreover, Switzerland considers herself bound by her neutrality to undertake the responsibility for special philanthropic work. In the first days of September, for instance, the Swiss government opened a credit of 200,000 Swiss francs for the International Red Cross Society, in order to enable it to accomplish the task assigned to it by the new European war. The Red Cross Society has opened a central agency for Prisoners of War at Geneva, to which, as in 1914 to 1918, news concerning prisoners taken in the different countries may be sent. It is also concerned with the repatriation of members of ambulance corps who have fallen into the hands of the enemy, and with the protection of civilians of hostile nationality living in countries that are at war. It has appealed to the various governments to appoint safe zones for the protection of civilians. And finally it has sent delegates, all of them Swiss subjects, to Germany, Poland, France and England, in order to establish connections with the respective governments.

Switzerland, an island of peace and quiet, safely guarded by a well equipped army, ready for every sacrifice, can thus, thanks to its neutrality, render appreciable services to other nations.

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APPEAL TO THE SWISS PEOPLE IN NEW ZEALAND.

From the Swiss in Taranaki, Waikato, Manawatu and elsewhere, has come an appropriate appeal :

The Swiss people in New Zealand realise their duty to help the New Zealand Red Cross and to contribute to the comfort of New Zealand soldiers; they realise too, that something should be done in favour of the mobilised Swiss soldiers. From Taranaki, where the Swiss element is most numerous, came the suggestion to contribute the proceeds of the next Annual Swiss Ball at Manaia (usually very good results) to the New Zealand Red Cross. We hope that this splendid plan will be carried out. For the benefit of the New Zealand soldiers we have ample opportunities to contribute to local organisations, and give them our full support, and we hope that the Swiss in New Zealand will do their part generously.

As far as donations to the mobilised Swiss soldiers, given in the name of the Swiss people in New Zealand, are concerned, I would point out the following :

The Swiss army, of course, supplies the mobilised Swiss soldiers with everything in the line of ordinary food and clothing, as well as with the necessary sanitary and hygienic requisites. Further than that there are, however, many things which will add to the comfort of soldiers, such as additional woollen underwear, woollen socks, woollen gloves, pullovers, shawls, chocolate, cigarettes, tobacco and all kinds of tit-bits and what-nots.

Swiss news and pictures are now reaching us here in New Zealand, with tales of the wonderful Christmas parties, which, not so long ago, were arranged for all mobilised Swiss soldiers, following the slogan: "For every Swiss soldier a Christmas gift." Patriotic undertakings on such a huge scale can be carried out, of course, only with the generous support of the whole nation at home and abroad.