

Some of Switzerland's present problems

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SOME OF SWITZERLAND'S PRESENT PROBLEMS.

By GOTTFRIED KELLER.

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Swiss Telegraph Agency; President of the Foreign
Press Association in London.)

October 17, 1941.

Switzerland recently celebrated the 650th anniversary of her existence. This anniversary may not have received much attention in the countries engaged in war, yet for the Swiss it was an occasion of great importance, if only because it made them conscious again of their own history, and above all of the development of those democratic institutions and ideals for the defence of which they would even now go to war if attacked. Very often we Swiss are told that our country could in many respects serve as a model for federations of peoples who, though speaking different languages, are resolved to form strong communities, able not only to live, but also to defend themselves. We Swiss are not very conscious of this; indeed we are apt to be very critical of the way in which our laws are administered, probably much more critical than is generally believed by our friends abroad.

It is of course impossible to say anything about Switzerland's present position without at least touching on the principle of neutrality which governs her whole foreign policy. In spite of innumerable difficulties, absolute and strict neutrality has been found by our authorities to be the only guiding principle by which the country can be steered through the present troubled waters. It may be useful, however, to point out that neutrality as we understand and practice it does not mean, for example, that the individual should not have the right to form his own opinion and utter it within reason. Our neutrality is thus a neutrality of the State and one of its guiding political principles. It is not, to use a negative definition and a modern technical term, a neutrality built on totalitarian lines. The Swiss are most anxious to preserve their liberty of opinion.

At the same time a certain moderation has become necessary. Not to invite trouble by talking too much or too loudly has, I gather, become a fairly common practice. Yet, as soon as there is the slightest indication that certain influential groups are ready to adapt themselves to ways of thinking and acting alien to our own, there is at once a public reaction which cannot possibly be overlooked either by those few who would be ready to adapt themselves or even by those who would like to see the whole of Switzerland more accommodating. Thus public opinion and public reaction are, as experience has shown during the present war, still strong enough to act as a safety valve.

It would be idle to deny that attempts have been made from outside to change our conception of neutrality and shape it on totalitarian principles. Totalitarian neutrality could of course be more easily manipulated by those who have repeatedly tried by hints in their Press and by broadcasts to convince us that totalitarian neutrality alone can save the country. Switzerland, this small neutral island with just over four million inhabitants who still consider political events in the light of their own principles, is thus in a very difficult position. To under-rate these difficulties would be rendering a disservice to the country, which is trying very hard, not to say desperately, to maintain those of its institutions that can be saved. The Swiss Press still maintains its freedom of opinion in a very high degree. Attempts have been made to muzzle it, yet it has been able to maintain its independence.

It is common knowledge that Swiss neutrality is armed. It is common knowledge, too, that though the war operations have moved far from our frontiers, these are guarded day and night by a force of between 200,000 and 250,000 men. This number could be doubled at a moment's notice, as a result of a system which probably works faster than that of any country in the world. I have often been asked whether Switzerland would defend herself to-day if she were attacked. My answer has always been a most emphatic yes. The C.-in-C. of the Swiss armed forces, General Guisan, in his memorable order of the day enjoined every Swiss soldier to disobey any command the civil authorities might ever issue not to defend the country against an aggressor. This order of the day still holds good. The Swiss plans of defence had to be revised after the fall of France, and to-day new defensive positions are still being constructed.

The economic and industrial position of the country is bad, but it cannot be expected to be otherwise. Our industries largely depend on export and import. Both have suffered very considerably through the war. Yet there are not many unemployed, for the State keeps those who have lost their jobs - let me quote as an example the innumerable waiters and hotel employees of our numerous holiday resorts - in military service where they receive a reasonable pay until they find positions in civil life.

There has lately been a tremendous drive to make greater use of the fertile soil of the country. Every available piece of ground has been ploughed, flower gardens have been sacrificed so that more potatoes, vegetables and other foodstuffs should be grown. As the "Times" correspondent in Geneva stated in one of his dispatches, steps have been taken to double the area under cultivation. At present this area is 440,000 acres, which feeds half the population, and it is estimated that another 300,000 or 400,000 acres can be added. This doubling of the acreage is no mean achievement.

The war has also caused a retrogression in travelling methods. First, the petrol shortage has forced the Swiss to give up their cars; only doctors and diplomats may now run them, but they, too, are fairly strictly rationed. Many people then took to the "old grey mare," until fodder shortage forced them to take to the bicycle. Now rubber shortage has compelled many to store away their bicycles, and the Government has lately decreed that there should be no bicycle joy-riding on Sundays in order to prolong the lifetime of the tyres. The railways and trams are thus having a busy time and are just beginning to run on a profit basis which they had failed to achieve for years past.

As in the last war, the Swiss have once more become a sea-going nation.

A word about our relations with the U.S.S.R. Like the Dutch, we have never officially recognised the Soviet Government, and have thus no diplomatic representatives and no official relations. It is not my business to argue whether this attitude of the Swiss Government is wise or not. It may be said, however, that there are many influential people in Switzerland who would favour the establishment of normal relations. In the spring of this year a Swiss trade delegation went to Moscow, and soon the two countries announced that an agreement for trade exchange had been concluded. Under this agreement Switzerland was to export to the U.S.S.R. electrical implements, generators, tools and similar instruments and machines; Russia was to provide Switzerland with grain, oil products and cotton. In the first year both sides were to

exchange goods to the value of £6,300,000, and in the second this sum was to be raised to £8,500,000. The war which has since broken out between Germany and the U.S.S.R. has of course brought these newly established trade relations to nought, and the political question of recognition or non-recognition will now be shelved until some more opportune time. All this, however, does not prevent the U.S.S.R. from sending newspaper or news agency representatives to Switzerland. Thus the Tass Agency has a correspondent in Geneva, who no doubt makes a close study of the Press of the countries surrounding Switzerland and sends home valuable material.

Much more could be said about Switzerland and her present position; these sketchy observations in no way claim to be all-embracing; they are but an outline of existing problems, which may help to create a better understanding of the position of my country.

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SWISS NEWS SUMMARY.

On the 28th October Radio Schwarzenburg announced that the Swiss Federal Council had passed the ordinary preliminary state budget for 1942 to Parliament. The revenues amount to Sw.Frs. 391,000,000 and expenditure to Sw.Frs. 479,000,000 so that the budget shows a deficit of Sw.Frs. 108,700,000. This is the usual budget for the ordinary administration. It does not include credits for measures resulting from the decree of 30th August, 1939, which gives special powers to the Council. In this way it does not include credits for military defence and for the provision of labour according to the decision of April 6th, 1939.

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A new federal loan of 300-400 million francs will shortly be issued. As there is still a great demand for investments a good reception is already assured, although the rate of interest will hardly reach 4%.

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The Finance Department announced in the sitting of the Federal Council of the 14th November that more than Frs. 300,000,000 had been subscribed to the $3\frac{1}{4}\%$ 35 year loan and about Frs. 280,000,000 to the $2\frac{1}{2}\%$ five-year loan.

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At the Swiss Federal Council's meeting on the 3rd November President Wetter made a statement on the purchase tax. He said Switzerland was the only country which had no such tax up till now, but the income from other taxes was so low that this tax would be necessary for the welfare of the State. The war profits tax would be increased for the whole of 1941, in order to bring the revenue to Frs. 45,000,000 for 1941 and Frs. 100,000,000 for 1942.

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The Federal Statistical Department has just published a compilation which shows that for the year 1938 the income of the Swiss population amounted to 8,202 million frs. or 1960 frs. per head of the inhabitants. The highest income year was 1929 with 9,470 millions, the lowest 1935 with 7,430 millions. Of the total income of 1938, just about half (4,157 millions) was nett income of dependent producers (employed), 2,227 millions derived from interest on capital and the remaining 1,818 millions from the mixed income from independent producers (employers).

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Favoured by the beautiful autumn weather the crop of sugar beet is now being gathered in the Swiss plains. The cultivation covered roughly about 10,000 acres, compared with 9,275 of last year. According to estimates about 10,800 railway trucks of 10 tons each and about 9,000 cart loads of beet will reach the only sugar refinery at Aarburg. Although the crop did not come quite up to expectation, the beet, however, gives an increased sugar content which is on an average of between 16-17.5%. This gives the grower a welcome increase in price for his product.

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At the end of October the Federal Council decided to subsidise the action for assistance to the necessitous population. According to that decision the Confederation bears one third of the costs born by the cantons and communes. The assistance is given in the nature of fuel, tickets to purchase goods at