

Government and people on watch for security at home

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GOVERNMENT AND PEOPLE ON WATCH FOR SECURITY AT HOME.

A welcome statement made on behalf of the Swiss Government
by Federal Councillor von Steiger at Berne on April 16th, 1942.

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To the Swiss People, candour is the element of political life, suspicion its most dangerous poison. Conscious of its duty, the Government will take care to give reasonably wide scope to candour and to avoid all secretiveness. There is nothing to hide, neither in home nor in foreign politics. The federal chambers, the cantonal governments and the press are kept continually informed.

The Swiss Foreign Policy is like an open book. How could it be otherwise in view of the strict neutrality of the Federal Government? There are no secrets and no hide and seek business. Here also complete openness is the only correct state policy. That with it certain forms of courtesy have to be kept, is a matter of course and an old established custom. Probably nowhere is candour more necessary and secretiveness more dangerous than in the field of secret intrigues against the security of the state. Swiss citizens can rely on it that also in matters concerning the political police they will continually receive all the information which it is at all practicable to give. It must not be overlooked, however, that, in spite of the great ability and zeal of the staff, it is still an extraordinary difficult and delicate problem. Moreover, it is only since a comparatively short time that Switzerland possesses a political police and its necessity is really after all repugnant to us. In all the defence measures against disturbances of our public order, no matter where they come from, we continually find ourselves confronted with the fundamental problem of the safeguard of the freedom of public opinion. Where propaganda no longer means a mere personal, more or less theoretical, expression of views, without offensive aim, but is directed against internal security and against the state itself, it can no longer be tolerated. The security within must be put on a par with that from without. There is no sense in keeping the country safe from without with arms while security at home collapses. The state, no matter how small, loses its right of existence if it does not take care of its internal security.

We do not prosecute anyone who aims at bringing about changes in some of our state institutions in a constitutional way. No obstacle was put in the way of the so-called "Stalder-Initiative" which wanted to replace our present parliamentary order by some sort of "Tagsatzung". Mere "grumbling" is not liable to prosecution either.

What we cannot tolerate, however, and never will tolerate, is the advocacy of aims which are in opposition to the constitution, the forcing on of a constitutional change without or against the will of the people. We cannot

allow the illegal brushing aside or endangering of the constitutional order by a so-called "emancipation of the free people", not by means of reform but by revolution. There can be no feeble giving-in, nor can we make any concession here. Any such attempt must be nipped in the bud. More than one group or movement which originally pretended to propagate new ideas for the benefit of the people led in the end to treason and attacks against the state. Such movements endanger the security of the state both within and without. They do not, as they assert or misrepresent, bring about good relations with our neighbours, on the contrary they aggravate and poison them because they are based on falsehood and insincerity.

We are therefore always most anxious to draw the line clearly between the fair, free expression of political opinion (even when it contradicts Swiss views) and behaviour which is antagonistic to the state. It is not a Swiss custom to molest, insult or threaten anyone who thinks differently as long as he behaves decently and is not hostile to the state. It is cowardly to treat an opponent who happens to be in a minority as despicable because of his conviction and it is a punishable offence to annoy or insult a foreigner on account of his nationality or political views. As a free people we will protect and respect the freedom of opinion even when it does not happen to please us. But on the other hand we proceed with all rigour and severity against everything that is directed against the security of our country and against any underground manoeuvre threatening it. For our authorities the call is "beware of the beginnings". It is therefore unavoidable that the prohibition of organisations considered dangerous to the state sometimes hits young people who originally joined them in good faith and honest purpose but were carried away and misguided to such an extent that in the end they find themselves before the judge. The state cannot afford to be too lenient with such machinations. In cases of doubt it means first of all to protect the liberty of the state and not the passion of cells and groups or the wilfulness of the individual.

A word of caution is therefore addressed here to all those who from home are spreading false news abroad about Switzerland or about happenings connected with the war and who thereby, either out of sheer carelessness or evil intention, try to upset our neutrality and disturb our good relations with abroad. It is difficult to say who is the most objectionable, the Swiss who tries to blacken and defile his own country or the foreigner who abuses the hospitality of Switzerland. "No bird defouls its own nest" Federal Councillor Scheurer used to say! The blackguards and jail-birds who all the same still do it, unfortunately belong to the human race.

Switzerland will not let her irreproachable and strictly neutral attitude be disturbed by irresponsible slanderers.

Swiss who are stabbing their Country and its Government in the back should take note of this. Foreigners, who are taking advantage of the hospitality granted to them and then carry on dangerous intrigues ought not to complain when they are again taken to the frontier.

To meet the risk of danger from within, there must be an adequate protection of the state. The confidence which all States place in us and which has put us in a position of trust for many duties does not permit that things should be allowed to occur which would throw doubt on the absolute reliability and neutrality of Switzerland. Wherever we come across Swiss citizens who are guilty of such dangerous intrigues, we get hold of them, not because of their opinion or political views but because of their unclean and dubious behaviour. If their conduct is culpable, judicial proceedings are initiated. If on the other hand their conduct is reprehensible, without however being actually liable to prosecution, steps for redress are taken within the scope of other constitutional measures. This does not mean, however, that Swiss Citizens are to be restricted in any way in their views on the tremendous happenings which are taking place outside our own borders. They will follow their evolution with a clear vision. Economically they are indeed being affected thereby every day.

Switzerland means to maintain its independence and to be master of its own fate. The Swiss people must themselves work out and create whatever innovations might be called for by the present times - out of their own strength and of their own free will.

The Federal Council knew quite well why it suppressed the most extreme left and right organisations and groups. It was quite right in doing so.

SUNDRY NEWS FROM SWITZERLAND.

The "Initiative Pfaendler" which was voted upon by the people, on May 3rd, was rejected by a respectable majority 408,646 declining this constitutional change against 219,405 in favour. This initiative was originally launched by the secretariat of the "Landesring" (Duttweiler group) and had as its main object the reduction of the membership of the National Council to 139 Councillors by allowing one representative for every 30,000 voters instead of the existing ratio of 22,000. It also sought to eliminate a peculiarity in our somewhat complicated electoral system by disallowing the accumulation of votes recorded on the many party lists; contrary to the practice in this and most countries votes are not given to individuals but to candidates appearing on a multitude of lists issued by the political parties from which by cumulation the successful candidates emerge. Other reforms covered by this proposal were the restriction to twelve years of the occupancy of a seat in the National Council and the compulsion for its members to disclose their financial and business interests.

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The Federal Council proposed to the Federal Assembly the introduction of a bill to come into force on January 1st, 1943, wherein the canton of Tessin is to receive an annual subsidy of 225,000 frs. in favour of secondary and higher education in order to preserve its cultural and linguistic characteristics. The canton of Grisons is to receive an annual subsidy of 25,000 frs. for the like purpose to apply to the Italian speaking valleys of that canton. The government of the Grisons is, however, empowered to use part of that sum for the furtherance of the raeto-romansch language and culture. The federal subsidies up to now were 45,000 frs. for the Tessin and 4,500 frs. for the Grison valleys.

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A great number of belligerent nations on both sides have entrusted the safeguarding of their interests to Switzerland. To be able to fulfill this honourable as well as difficult task the Federal Council found it necessary to attach special divisions to the most important Legations as well as to the Federal Political Department in Bern, which divisions have the task to look after foreign interests. One of the most important of these special divisions is in Berlin, housed in the building of the American Embassy. A staff of about 100 linguists are occupied to represent the interests of the fifteen different States and their subjects living in Germany. From this centre Switzerland represents today to the best of her ability and strictly according to International law the interests of 35,000 Foreign subjects who are living in the German Reich and in countries controlled by it. The majority of these people are able to move about freely and are under the control of the protecting power. The subjects of States at war with Germany who are interned in civil internment camps are visited by and obtain the support of the Swiss representatives. Officials from the Swiss Legation together with Swiss doctors visit regularly the camps of British Prisoners of war in Germany, to observe the state of health of the inmates and to control the sanitary arrangements of these camps. They have an opportunity to converse unhindered with the prisoners and to receive their confidential complaints. To this individual task is added the administration of the properties of the protected States as well as the upkeep of Embassy and Legation buildings and their staffs. All these are duties which require energy, zeal and diplomatic ability.

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The Customs Revenue for March 1942 amounted to 13,000,000 frs., a decrease of 2,000,000 frs. on the corresponding month last year. Similarly, the first quarter for 1942 shows a decrease of 6,000,000 frs. on the first quarter of 1941, when the revenue was 41,000,000 frs.

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