

Swiss anniversary outlook

Autor(en): **Schmid, Walter**

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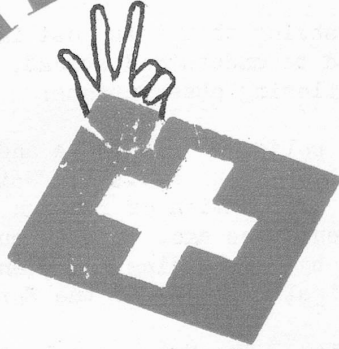
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SWISS ANNIVERSARY OUTLOOK.

Radio address by the Swiss Consul at Wellington,
Dr. Walter Schmid, on 31st July, 1943.

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I am glad to have this opportunity of saying a few words to my fellow-countrymen in New Zealand on the eve of the First of August, the 652nd Anniversary of the Foundation of the Swiss Confederation. For it was on August 1st, 1291, that the three original Swiss cantons formed the league which grew into what is known as Switzerland. August 1st has since been kept as our National Day.

As we prepare to celebrate it, the war is again getting closer to the borders of Switzerland. The Swiss people well realise that on the one hand the fate of the country depends on external circumstances - factors beyond our control - while internally it depends on the strength of the people's morale - their foresight, preparedness, general efficiency and determination. These are the known factors and the things that therefore count.

Throughout this war, the keynote of the morale of the people has been, and still is, the determination, in any event, to preserve the political independence of the country. They have remained frank and open in associating themselves with the principles of democratic government, and the same is true of the Swiss press. Morale alone, however, is not enough. It must be backed up by material and practical efforts - military, diplomatic and economic.

For centuries the defence of the country has rested upon compulsory military conscription, and since the outbreak of the war, we have had ample time to make the armed forces technically perfect in every respect. About half of the army of half-a-million men remains constantly mobilised.

In Berne, the Swiss capital, diplomatic life goes on as before the war, with representatives of all countries, including those of the Governments in exile.

In the sphere of diplomacy the proverbial Swiss neutrality is the guiding principle. Such a policy is a vital necessity for Switzerland on account of her internal constitution. If the Swiss, a nation of three different cultures, had not had the wisdom to remain neutral for 12 generations, there would probably be no independent Switzerland today, because the country would have succumbed to tension from within or pressure from without. Thus the Swiss people in their foreign relations are only reserving the right to adopt for themselves a policy which proves to be best for the country.

We are, of course, interested in seeing that this most important principle underlying our foreign relations should be understood abroad, and with this thought in mind I should like to make the following observations:

Swiss neutrality is exclusively a policy of the state and is no dictate to the conscience and sympathies of the individual citizen. Neither is Swiss neutrality a dictate of any foreign power or association of foreign powers. It was adopted voluntarily by the Swiss people centuries ago. Swiss neutrality has, however, been recognised on different occasions by the leading European powers, and by the League of Nations, as being in the political interest of the European continent.

Swiss neutrality is armed neutrality. The Swiss people take it upon themselves to defend their country against any aggressor. The question of whether or not they would be successful in preventing an aggressor from invading the country is beside the point. What counts is the fact that the country is highly prepared against any aggressor, and that the people are determined to defend it to the last.

Further, the long established tradition of neutrality of Switzerland created exactly the right atmosphere for nurturing the idea of the Red Cross, the activities of which are well known to all New Zealanders who have friends and relatives prisoners of war in enemy countries. All members of the Committee of the International Red Cross at Geneva are Swiss citizens, and their activities - simply inconceivable without the background of neutrality - are financed up to two-thirds by the authorities and people of Switzerland.

Yet the functions of the Swiss Government as a neutral agency between belligerents go far beyond those of the International Red Cross. The Swiss Government is vested with the administration of the Geneva Convention for the Treatment of Prisoners of War, in the actual text of the Convention, and in this war by the specific request of 27 belligerent countries, including Britain and America, Switzerland is acting as their Protecting Power. These large scale activities are mostly concerned with the promotion of humane treatment of prisoners of war and civilian internees, their repatriation and, in a general way, the protection of all foreign nationals left behind in the respective enemy countries when war broke out.

Finally, the independence and neutrality of the country have also given the people ample opportunity to help innocent victims of war-stricken lands, especially women and children and the homeless.

But Switzerland's path of neutrality is hard and weary. Lack of appreciation abroad of the facts and the integrity of Swiss neutrality, frequently make the country and its citizens a wartime target of prejudice and unfounded accusations.

Pre-war foresight, pre-war precautionary measures and an efficient war economic administration, have helped to achieve one of the most important aims: to guarantee work and food for the nation. For an inland country like Switzerland, one with virtually no resources of raw materials and dependent upon import and export, this problem is one of extreme difficulty. In the meantime, the acreage of tillable land has been trebled, and a small merchant navy of about 20 vessels, operating under the Swiss flag, has appeared on the seas, trading, within the limits of blockade and counter-blockade, the products of Swiss industries for the many goods which the country so urgently needs. Certainly the order of the day in Switzerland is severe rationing, but fortunately nobody so far has to starve. Care is also taken by the authorities in a generous way to assist those in need, including the refugees from surrounding countries.

And what about the future? The Swiss President, Monsieur Celio, recently announced the following principles for Swiss domestic policy in the post-war world:

1. Return from the present emergency regime to normal conditions, based upon the existing democratic constitution and institutions.

2. Continuation of the present system of political parties, which are a guarantee for the free functioning of the people's political rights.

3. Progressive measures in the sphere of Social Security and Social Justice.

Regarding the future foreign policy, he observed that the Switzerland-of-tomorrow was prepared to co-operate in all measures aiming to perfect an imperfect world. Switzerland, no doubt, will continue to preserve her status of neutrality.

In any event, it is to be expected that small countries will have to face difficult political problems in the post-war period. But they still have an important mission. They will remain essential for an intelligent pacification of Europe with its many races, different interests and varying degrees of political development, in all its diverse parts. Possibly the constitutional pattern of the Swiss Confederation may, some day, serve as a blue-print for a future federation of free and independent European countries.

Due to her share in the three main cultures of the European Continent, French, German and Italian, Switzerland has been called, culturally, the most typical European country, which is probably true. In the appreciation of individual and political rights, however, the instincts of the people are very much akin to the Anglo-Saxon political concept. To use a thought of the English poet Wordsworth, it would seem as if the mountains and the seas, both mighty protectors of freedom, have spared Britain and Switzerland the tyranny which has over the centuries weighed heavily upon most other countries of Europe.

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MESSAGES OF CONGRATULATION RECEIVED AND SENT ON THE OCCASION OF THE 652ND ANNIVERSARY OF SWITZERLAND.

Cable sent to the President of the Swiss Confederation, Dr. Enrico Celio:

"MY COMPATRIOTS IN NEWZEALAND GATHERED TOGETHER AT AUCKLAND WELLINGTON IN TARANAKI AND WAIKATO ON THE 31ST JULY THE FIRST AND SECOND OF AUGUST IN COMMEMORATION OF THE ANNIVERSARY DAY OF THE SWISS CONFEDERATION HAVE REQUESTED ME TO ADDRESS TO YOU IN THEIR NAME THEIR BEST WISHES FOR THE FUTURE OF SWITZERLAND THE PRESERVATION OF HER FREE AND DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS AND THEY EXPRESS TO THE FEDERAL COUNCIL AND COMMANDER IN CHIEF GENERAL GUISAN THEIR PROFOUND CONFIDENCE.

SCHMID SWISS CONSUL."

(English translation)

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Cable received from the Swiss Minister in London, Dr. Walter Thurnheer:

"ON OCCASION OF FIRST AUGUST CELEBRATION WISH CONVEY YOU AND YOUR STAFF AND SWISS COLONY HEARTIEST GREETINGS AND APPRECIATION FOR WORK CARRIED OUT TOGETHER IN SPIRIT OF COOPERATION AND DEEP ATTACHMENT TOWARDS COUNTRY."

Reply sent by the Swiss Consul in Wellington to the Swiss Minister in London:

"STAFF AND MYSELF HEARTILY RECIPROCATATE YOUR PATRIOTIC GREETINGS DEEPLY APPRECIATING YOUR KIND REMARKS STOP YOUR MESSAGE WHICH I ALSO PERSONALLY CONVEYED YESTERDAY TO BIG GATHERING AT MANAIA TARANAKI WAS THANKFULLY RECEIVED AND YOUR GREETINGS ARE SINCERELY RETURNED STOP SIMILAR SMALLER CELEBRATIONS WERE HELD PRIOR RECEIPT YOUR CABLE AND CONTENTS WILL BE PASSED ON TO THESE COMPATRIOTS.

SCEMID CONSUL."

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Telegram received by the Swiss Consul at Wellington, from His Worship the Mayor of Auckland, Mr. J.A.C. Allum:

"FELICITATIONS ON THE 652ND ANNIVERSARY OF THE FOUNDING OF YOUR CONFEDERATION AND CONGRATULATIONS ON THE FINE BROADCAST GIVEN YESTERDAY REGARDS."

A letter of thanks has been addressed to the Mayor of Auckland for his kind wishes.