

1st August, 1945 : Switzerland's 654th birthday

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SWITZERLAND'S 654TH BIRTHDAY.

After 6 years of great political tension and anxiety, the 654th birthday of Switzerland, on the 1st August 1945, marks the beginning of a new chapter of Swiss history ... Switzerland's second post-war reconstruction within the first half of the twentieth century!

In previous issues of "Helvetia", we have already referred to the spirit in which the Swiss people have welcomed this new era of peace in Europe. In this message, which is dedicated to the 654th birthday of Switzerland, I should like to pay tribute to the heritage which the Swiss nation has been able to safeguard through their good fortune, casting a glance in conclusion on some international problems of the hour.

Above all, there has been saved the political independence of a freedom loving people, whose privilege and joy it is to inhabit a land of unexcelled beauty. Their democracy, which I do not hesitate to define as one of the finest and most genuine, will be handed on intact to posterity by the present generation.

At a time when the flame of liberty was burning low, the appeal for the guaranteeing to all the peoples of the world of the famous "four freedoms": "freedom of speech and freedom of worship, freedom from want and freedom from fear", became the inspiring slogan of all democracies.

In the Swiss Federal Republic these "four freedoms" have been in practice since long ago. The individual rights guaranteed in the Swiss Federal Constitution to Swiss nationals and aliens alike, specifically refer to "freedom of speech" and "freedom of worship", and to many other individual rights. To them must be added the political rights of the Swiss citizen, which are more extensive than in any other democratic country in the world. The Swiss form of Government is indeed the most direct government of the people by the people. Social justice, embracing "freedom from fear" and "freedom from want" has, for centuries past, been built up locally by the Communes and Cantons, so that at the present time a sound foundation of social justice exists. Upon this foundation, particularly since the beginning of this century, there have been built diverse more modern welfare institutions such as an extensive and efficient system of voluntary associations for free medical service, workmen's compensation, unemployment insurance and pensions schemes by many authorities, industry and trade. Plans are now being discussed for an extension of national welfare, through governmentally operated social security schemes, such as universal superannuation, universal widows' and orphans' benefits, and modern methods of family protection. These welfare projects will be accomplished by the beginning of 1947.

The results of the age-old tradition of liberty and social justice in Switzerland are obvious. Foreign observers of Switzerland have always been impressed by a certain dignity in the bearing of the common man, be he farmer, labourer or employee. I recall the exclamation of the well-known French Socialist, Jean Jaures, when he addressed a political gathering of Swiss working men at the beginning of this century. Perplexed by the prosperous look of the audience, when entering the crowded hall, he asked "But where are the working men?". It is therefore not surprising to find that the farmer and working man in Switzerland are loyal patriots and that, in general, an enviable social peace exists in the land.

Having successfully come through the severe test of this war, the Swiss nation now faces the new international political era with solidarity and confidence. Naturally enough, this new international political era is being moulded by the world-wide bloc of the victorious United Nations. Thus through abstaining from war, neutral countries find themselves at the present time somewhat isolated from the dynamic stream of international politics. Amongst them is Switzerland who, as a permanent neutral could not enter the war at the last minute for the expediency of being counted as an Allied Nation. And so, in company with another prominent neutral - Sweden - Switzerland was absent from San Francisco, which fact she accepts as a natural consequence of her policy during the war years. That does not mean, however, that Switzerland was not intensely interested in the outcome of the San Francisco Conference. Nor does it mean that Switzerland will remain in isolation. She is firmly bound to the whole world by her diverse linguistic and racial ties, by her political and fecund cultural history, by her wide international ramifications in trade, commerce and science. Also, it cannot be denied that in the past years of war Switzerland has added new prestige to her history through the great humanitarian activities of the International Red Cross in Geneva, and by the difficult mission undertaken by the Swiss Government in representing the interests of more than half of the belligerents. Switzerland is, therefore, not afraid that she will remain isolated.

In order to overcome the diplomatic isolation which has existed for 28 years in respect of one of the great countries among the victors - Russia - Switzerland is pursuing, with all the necessary dignity, a course which is compatible with the new political constellation in the world, especially on the European continent. There certainly exist no unsympathetic feelings between the Swiss and the Russian people. We well remember the many Russians who, prior to the first world war, were popular guests of our Universities. The heroic defence put up by the Russian people in this war is generally admired in Switzerland. It would, therefore, only be intolerance regarding the existing forms of government on both sides, which could in my opinion, form an obstacle to the development of friendly relations which, in former periods in the history of the two countries, were taken for granted.

Dr. Walter Schmid
Swiss Consul.

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GENERAL GUISAN LAYS DOWN HIS COMMAND.

A few days ago General Guisan announced his intention to resign on August 20 from his post as Commander-in-Chief of the Swiss Army. The Federal Assembly will accept his resignation and in the name of the Swiss people will thank the General for the great services he has rendered our country.

The Swiss press of all shades and languages unanimously expresses hearty and unrestricted thanks as an expression of the feelings of the whole Swiss people. General Guisan has left an everlasting memory in the hearts not only of all Swiss soldiers but also of all those who have participated in some way or other in Switzerland's war efforts. The newspapers point out that for 50 years General Guisan has worked indefatigably and with greatest knowledge of the science of war for the training of our Army, that he has brought the latest achievements and innovations of modern warfare to the knowledge of our people, that in this most dreadful of all wars he has shown great wisdom in the protection of our country and that with his unrelenting courage and his outstanding power of judgment he has greatly helped to preserve Switzerland from harm. All Swiss papers agree that the Swiss people admire General Guisan as a man of character who has been strong enough to be natural, frank and hearty but also modest enough to ask for deep respect.