

Swiss democracy in the European crisis

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SWISS DEMOCRACY IN THE EUROPEAN CRISIS.

Dr. H. W. Egli, London Representative of the "Bund," introduced a lively discussion on this topical subject at the Monthly Meeting of the Nouvelle Société Helvétique held on Friday evening, the 18th instant, at the Foyer Suisse. The subject naturally attracted a representative attendance, and after dinner the meeting was opened by Mr. A. F. Suter, President of the Society.

Alluding in his opening words to the entirely different aspect of international problems, wars of aggression and Colonial conquests, created by the foundation of the League of Nations and its obligations on Members, and whilst not disguising the loss of prestige the League suffered by reason of the weak handling of the Manchukuo problem, Dr. Egli briefly referred to the development of the present Italo-Abyssinian dispute right up to the imposition of economic sanctions at the present hour. Where does Switzerland stand, he asked, and was able to give the answer that Switzerland loyally stood by the League and its decisions, with the sole reservation bearing on the preservation of its traditional neutrality recognised by various treaties throughout the centuries till the present day.

It is well known that the case of Switzerland at Geneva is in the hands of Federal Councillor Motta and Minister Stucki, whose attitude it can be said has found universal approval in the country and sympathetic consideration elsewhere. It may not have been clear to the general public abroad why Switzerland should have made certain reservations, notwithstanding its expression of loyalty to the League. The reservations were made by Switzerland at the time of its admission to the League when these difficulties were already thought of in the light of Switzerland's perpetual neutrality.

The country itself at that time was assured of its neutrality being scrupulously safeguarded by a Message from the Federal Council and recognition was given to these interests by the other Powers sitting in Council in London in 1920 when the admission of Switzerland was accepted with the reservations made by its spokesmen. It was then admitted already that Swiss neutrality not only was an historic fact, but at the same time universally recognised that this neutrality fitted well into the general scheme of any League measures which at times might become necessary in order to ensure peace. Above all Switzerland was not required to participate in Military sanctions or to allow the movement of troops through Swiss Territory. This does not mean that sanctions of any kind were objected to in principle, on the contrary M. Motta made Switzerland's attitude quite clear towards the embargo on arms and sanctions of a financial measure now proposed by Geneva.

In view of the particularly close social, racial and economic contact between Italy and Switzerland the Federal Council thought it necessary to make some reservations regarding the complete application of the ban on imports from Italy. While appreciating the very special position of Switzerland and in particular of the Ticino in this regard, Dr. Egli expressed the hope that those reservations should not go beyond what seems absolutely essential for avoiding real danger to the safety of Swiss neutrality.

A lively discussion followed in which a good many of the members and friends present took part. From this it was soon evident that the meeting was in general agreement with the views expressed by the speaker. Various questions were put and answered, opinions voiced, and certain fears explained, but it was generally agreed that the League was to be supported in its action in the present instance, and that our Government should be encouraged in its loyal attitude towards any League measures which are, and may be, decided on for the preservation of peace and the cessation of the war between Italy and Abyssinia.

May the reporter himself be permitted to terminate by emphasizing the value of these discussions on Swiss subjects now arranged regularly every alternate month at the Foyer Suisse by the Council of the N.S.H., and express the hope that these Meetings may attract an increasing number of Compatriots for a free expression of opinion on all problems which, from time to time, agitate our country.

N.N.

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EDITOR'S POST-BAG.

To the Editor of the Swiss Observer,

23, Leonard Street, E.C.2.

SWITZERLAND AND SANCTIONS.

On the 19th October the "Swiss Observer" published an article by ST. in respect to the above question under the League of Nations Covenant which is very apt to misrepresent the Swiss position as a member of the League, and as a consequence is entirely misleading. ST., whom I consider fully competent to write on a topic different from the above has been under a misapprehension, and this makes it necessary to put things right.

I very strongly object against the tone and general attitude of ST. in his article as being inconsistent with the attitude generally adopted in Switzerland and I believe that there are very few who would approve of this kind of Journalism.

ST. states that "it is to their membership of the League that countries of Switzerland's size owe what say they have in international affairs; in pre-League days they had practically no say at all and very little position or rank in the international world — things were more or less "arranged" by the Great Powers."

May I ask ST. a few questions that might elucidate the different points raised as well as the arguments used by him: 1) What has size to do with the question of enforcing League Sanctions, 2) what does ST. mean when he states that in pre-League days small countries had very little say in international affairs, 3) does the fact that they have a say under the League convey any duty or moral obligation apart from the League Covenant, 4) when do and when does the Covenant not apply, and 5) Why was the Covenant not applied to the Sino-Japanese conflict?

ST. will no doubt realize the very serious position in which Switzerland was placed when they entered the League, and I want to make this more clear, because I feel that it is always a very great danger in Journalism believing themselves to be the chosen interpreters in international questions or international law. It is, in my opinion, not a function of the non-political press to criticise the attitude of a Government, but to report on the procedure and the issue of a case. The reader is the more appropriate judge in these matters, and it is entirely wrong to try to influence his arguing in any way.

Mr. Motta is certainly the qualified official representative of Switzerland in the League and his speech is proof of his ability as a statesman, highly respected by members of the League. Switzerland, it should be remembered, has entered the League *sub modo* of their absolute and indisputable neutrality in all questions of international intervention that would endanger Switzerland's position.

The League is not an entity and has no jurisdiction over its members, because apart from its members it is entirely devoid of any authority. If ST. now suggests that Switzerland should "pay the price for the benefits of membership" under the League I should like to ask him what these benefits are. Does not the fact exist that the Powers, i.e., Great Britain, France and Italy have entered into direct talks apart from the League? Has Switzerland or any other member of the League have a say in these matters? Yet, ST. will admit that these have a direct bearing on the question of war and peace. Should members of the League be morally or otherwise bound to sanction or ratify the issue of these direct talks?

France has shown the greatest consideration towards Italy in the affair, and Switzerland is fully entitled to say their *non liquet*. Mr. Motta was fully competent to state Switzerland's case as a member of the League and I should like to remind anyone in doubt about the sincere feelings towards Italy in Switzerland that the **Swiss neutrality is an interest as vital and as important, as real and as tangible as any Colonial interest, and *id quod nostrum est sine facto nostro ad alium transferri non potest*, i.e., what belongs to Switzerland, its neutrality, its rights and interests can not be transferred without our consent.**

It is the function of the League and each one of its members to limit the damage and the risks that might arise out of an ambiguity in the controversy. Switzerland will certainly respect its obligations under the treaty as far as this can be done without endangering the Swiss neutrality. Economic sanctions in respect to the arms embargo or financing the Italian Government may eventually be applied, but Italy will not interpret these acts in any way as an unfriendly attitude, but as an act of the League of which Switzerland is a member. The League, however, has no jurisdiction over private enterprise and will therefore not be able to interfere in any way to prevent normal trade with Italy.

In conclusion I should say that although we have every sympathy with Abyssinia in the present conflict there is no reason why we should not be able to maintain the sincere friendship with Italy, not because of any fear whatsoever,

but because of our neutrality, which we must protect and defend against any attacks from outside of the League.

We owe our position not to the League, nor to what we have had to say in international affairs, but to the fact of our strength and unity. Neutrality is not an asset or interest with which we can bargain or which we want to dispose of in favour of the League, it means Switzerland *ad exitum*, for without neutrality there would be no Switzerland. We would, therefore, rather leave the League than offer our neutrality as a price for the Covenant, and it would be a very great mistake to interpret this attitude as being inconsistent with the League Covenant.

A.G.P.

A reply to the above by ST. will appear in our next number.

23rd October, 1935.

To the Editor of the "Swiss Observer,"

23, Leonard Street, E.C.2.

Dear Sir,

It is with the greatest pleasure that I read your very interesting article "Switzerland and Sanctions" and I want to congratulate your paper on its frank and straightforward statement.

The lukewarm attitude of the Swiss Representative at Geneva is most decidedly not backed up by the 160,000 Italian-speaking Swiss he refers to. Does he perhaps believe that in a similar conflict with Germany the 3 odd million German-speaking Swiss would be a danger to Switzerland? or would the French-speaking community be any source of anxiety in a league conflict with France? As the reply to either question is a negative one, can we conclude that this gentleman suggests that the Italian-speaking Swiss are inferior patriots? As every Swiss knows, the loyalty and great patriotic spirit of our "fratelli Ticinesi," our spokesman need fear nothing from that quarter. As far as the 35,000 Italians are concerned, the matter is a very simple one. Have we not learned from our neighbours how to deal with undesirable aliens? Switzerland is in the fortunate position of being one of the few countries which are excused by the League from military sanctions and it is therefore not more than right to show a bit more team spirit, as far as economic sanctions are concerned. Only whole-hearted support from all members will be able to see the League through this serious crisis. Should it not be able to survive, then who will be the protector of the small nations from the "club law" of the great dictators? Even we Swiss will have to realize that we pledged ourselves to certain duties and that we are not only to share the advantages of the League.

PRO LEAGUE.

23rd October, 1935.

The Editor, "Swiss Observer,"

23, Leonard Street, E.C.2.

21st, October, 1935.

Dear Sir,

Will you allow me to pay my compliments to "ST." for his article "Switzerland and Sanctions," in your issue of the 19th instant.

I am sure that a good many Swiss will approve of what "ST." says, and I hope that your paper will find it's way to some authority in Switzerland.

About a fortnight or three weeks ago, you printed an article taken from the "National Zeitung" referring to an agreement which the St. Gotthard Railway had with Germany, giving Germany the right of transit, on this railway, in times of peace, or war.

I wonder if there was a second article, in reply to the first, in which case, I should have been pleased to have seen it printed in your paper.

Yours faithfully,

JULES WEIL.

Ep.—So far no reply has been published in the "National Zeitung" regarding the Gotthard Railway Convention.

To the Editor of the "Swiss Observer,"

23, Leonard Street, E.C.2.

Dear Editor,

Your article in last week's issue of the *Swiss Observer* entitled "Switzerland and Sanctions" is like the "parson's egg" — good in parts.

I subscribe very heartily to your evidently staunch belief that it is only through an institution like the League of Nations that Switzerland can voice her especial views, etc.

I also endorse what you write re our brethren on the southern side of the Gotthard. There is no need for anybody who knows them to be wondering whether their sympathies are with the League or with Italy. They are Swiss foremost