

What others think of us : Switzerland to-day

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**WHAT OTHERS THINK OF US.
SWITZERLAND TO-DAY.**

(E. W. *New Statesman and Nation* 13.4.36).

Adolf Hitler, it is true, was born not at Schaffhausen but at Braunau; but his theories of race and language create for him very nearly as good a claim to swallow up Switzerland as to absorb Austria. Certainly some 850,000 out of over four million Swiss speak French, while the 280,000 Ticinese speak Italian, but the best National Socialists despise Vienna as three-quarters Czech, and are there not Slovenes in Styria? Three million Swiss speak a German dialect, and their home, at any rate, has already become *Gau Schweiz* in the eyes of genuine Nazis who believe that "race-consciousness" can be gradually induced. It is scarcely necessary to insist that Switzerland holds a key position. From the Jura she controls the southern road from Germany into France via the Belfort gap; she is the road from France to the great Danubian basin. What, then, is the outlook for Switzerland, now that the Nazi floods are overflowing the frontiers of Germany?

It may be safely asserted that, up to the present, Mussolini and, more particularly, Hitler, have stimulated the democratic self-consciousness of Switzerland. In spite of their social interlinking with Germany and their sympathy for Germany after, and to a considerable extent during, the war, the German-speaking Swiss are traditional democrats in the more literal sense which Swiss federalism makes possible. While their democracy is therefore more actual than ours, they share with the English, and even more with the Scots, an inheritance of rebellious Protestantism which, unlike Lutheranism in Germany, refuses to bow before the State. The majority of the German-Swiss follow the teaching of the Zürich reformer, Zwingli; Luther has no noticeable following, while Calvinism remains strong in the West. Thus to racial, authoritarian and centralist theories and to pagan cults, Switzerland has substantial resistance to offer, resistance which manifests itself in various ways.

While many Swiss people believe that the economic crisis necessitates greater centralisation in economic affairs, there is strong resistance to any political contraction of the country's much cherished federal liberties. A referendum last year in favour of modifying the constitution in a corporative direction was heavily defeated. In Socialist Basel and Zürich, particularly, there seems to exist a grasp of the practical implications of National Socialism, a real grasp which is largely due to proximity perhaps, but which is singularly absent in England. It is significant that one is everywhere asked in tones of consternation "Why do the English allow themselves to be gulled by the very type of phrase with which Hitler duped his critics and opponents within Germany itself?" The German Swiss dislike Jews, but, where we mostly forget, they remember that a merciless "cold pogrom" is proceeding in Germany. Karl Barth is back in Basel to remind them of the persecution of genuine Protestantism. Before a news film in Zürich the audience is requested not to hiss Hitler; when Hitler arriving at Essen was shown on the screen the other day, the Zürich public indulged in a good burst of laughter. To speak Reich German in German Switzerland to-day marks one out as a probably undesirable foreigner — and this is not usually due to anti-emigré feeling. The *Cornichon*, a company of actors with an extraordinarily good cabaret programme, is touring the chief German-Swiss towns with a definitely anti-Nazi programme, and *Schweizerdeutsch* is emphasised as their medium; they sell out every night, and they are supported in Zürich, for instance, not only by the Socialists, but also by the extremely respectable *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* milieu. The Social Democrats with 51 seats are, by the way, the largest, though by no means a majority, party in the Swiss National Council. The Swiss Socialist movement is undoubtedly vigorous, and it has succeeded hitherto in preserving a high standard of life for the workers. There is, however, a rather ominous split between the Socialist party and the Trade Union leaders, since the latter have advocated the devaluation of the Swiss franc; the political leaders condemn this proposal as spelling a reduction in real wages. Any serious fall in the standard of living might shake the fidelity of Socialist waverers.

The Federal Government is determined to be deflationary. It is dominated by the Free-thinking Liberals (50 seats in the National Council, but four out of seven Federal Ministers) whose *Zürcher Ztg.* shows, is cautious. Ostensibly both Capital and Labour are anti-Nazi to-day. But while there is no question of their being consciously un-Swiss it should perhaps be remembered that the Liberals represent financial and industrial interests which are deeply involved in the economic affairs of Germany. Swiss bankers have invested large sums in the Reich, and some two or three milliards of Swiss francs are still frozen in Germany. Though the Swiss are indignant at Germany's financial intransigence, their

creditor desire to recover their wealth is exploited by the debtor, who skilfully underlines the economic dependence of Switzerland. In an autarchist world, indeed, Switzerland should logically be eliminated, for she works up imported raw materials and her imports markedly exceed her exports. In 1935 Germany exported 338.4 million Swiss francs' worth of goods to Switzerland and imported 169.7 million francs' worth from Switzerland. France came second on the list of Swiss customers, but with only 207.9 million Swiss francs' worth of goods sent to Switzerland and only 121.3 million sent from Switzerland to France.

It would thus be foolish to deny that there are danger points in Switzerland, the kind of weak places which a National Socialist high tide might demolish. The actual pro-Nazi movement, calling itself "The Front," does not openly profess Pan-Germanism; it merely advocates Nazi methods inside Switzerland without regard for the racial paradox involved. This movement made headway until June 30th, 1934, but lost its direct importance after that. It cannot, however, be disregarded, because it expresses the views of a considerable section of army officers. After the murder of Gustloff, the *Führer* of the German Nazis in Switzerland in February, a rather sinister illustration of the attitude of the military occurred. A certain Captain Hausammann of St. Gallen, who is publicity organiser for the Swiss Officers' Society, circulated letters in which he attacked the Swiss Liberals and Socialists with many of the phrases of Goebbels himself. He complained that the Left press in Switzerland was responsible for the Gustloff affair, and was storing up justification for a German attack upon Switzerland. The Officers' Society has declared that it does not share Hausammann's views, but the Left protestingly points out that he has lost neither job nor commission. Outside military circles it is difficult to find anyone who felt any sympathy for Gustloff, yet the Federal Government has only forbidden that a successor to him should be appointed. Local Nazi groups are free from interference, beyond the nominal restriction that they are not to be centrally organised.

Certain general characteristics of Swiss life play a little into the hands of the Hausammanns. One hears a good deal of impatience expressed with the slowness of federal machinery and with the tendency for Federal Ministers to be forever re-elected; M. Motta, who is responsible for foreign affairs, was first elected in 1911. A country like Switzerland, which has hitherto had no centralised police force, and where even judges and generals are elected, finds idealistic democracy not always compatible with modern problems. The morale of a country which has been immensely prosperous and is now faced with an as yet unabating economic crisis is obviously vulnerable.

Switzerland has an extraordinarily high figure of savings per inhabitant, and the Swiss outlook is notoriously that of a possessing class. Many young people are keenly interested in the news from Russia, but Communism on the whole is weak and the official refusal to recognise the Soviet regime is due to the efficacy of boggy talk in a country of this nature. While German Switzerland pretty definitely condemned the Rhineland *coup* of March 7th out of distrust of Hitler, the French Swiss oddly enough were inclined to blame France for the pact with Russia, so great is the feeling against Moscow in influential circles in Western Switzerland. It is possible that the Ticino is the portion of Switzerland least influenced by Fascist ideas, for the Ticino is peasant country with no real Capital and Labour conflict.

It is interesting to observe that all Swiss parties have, since March 7th, agreed to devote credits to the tune of 235 million francs to rearmament. Switzerland, after all, if she cannot be undermined by Nazi propaganda, may be directly invaded on the way to France. There is evident nervousness to-day in Basel, which now lies face to face with German troops outside the protecting line of the Jura. Since the French and Belgian frontiers are so strongly fortified, a German attack upon France would in future be likely to come via Holland or Switzerland, and in view of the German consideration for British susceptibilities, it is thought by experts that the Swiss path would probably be chosen as the right one. Thus a final question arises — will Switzerland defend her neutrality, or could circumstances arise in which she might be deflected from her present determination to do so? This may be a final question indeed for France and for Western civilisation.

PERSONAL.

We extend hearty congratulations to M. Vincent Paravicini, son of our Minister, on his engagement to Mlle. Liza Maugham, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Somerset Maugham.

* * *

We deeply regret to announce the death of M. Frank, Robert, August Honegger, a Partner in the firm Honegger and Ascot, Ship-brokers, 34, St. Mary Axe, E.C.3, at the age of 29.

NEWS FROM THE COLONY.

NOUVELLE SOCIÉTÉ HELVÉTIQUE.

On April 15th at the London Group of the above Mr. Oscar E. Wetzel delivered a lecture on the Emigration of Swiss Industries. This most carefully compiled address started with a historic picture of the origin and development of the various industries in Switzerland. All branches were dealt with in turn, such as Cotton, Silk, Knitware, Chocolate, Condensed Milk, Watches, Machinery, etc. The speaker then explained how, through economic and political developments, one country after another cut out Swiss competition by high tariffs and other restrictions. The result was to put before these industries the alternative of closing down completely or manufacturing abroad. Soon a number of branch factories sprang up; first in the countries bordering on Switzerland and later on also in England and the United States. After the Great War this movement became accelerated through the considerable depreciation of certain currencies. The federal authorities tried to stem this loss of manufacture by prohibiting the export of the machinery needed for the production of the respective goods, but with little avail.

In his investigation of this wide problem the lecturer had come to the conclusion that, as long as the Swiss factories keep a financial control over the branches abroad, it is wiser to carry on the original works on a smaller scale rather than closing them down. All the more as the dividends earned from the foreign companies bring considerable sums to headquarters permitting the latter to work on a smaller margin in their own manufacture.

By this lecture Mr. Wetzel proved himself not merely an expert in his particular industry, but also a learned economist.

At the conclusion the President of the Group, Mr. A. F. Suter, in the name of the large audience, very warmly thanked him for his address and for all the work he must have had in preparing it.

T.R.

**ZÜRICH ROWING CLUB (HENLEY)
FUND APPEAL.**

We are delighted to inform our readers that the appeal which was made through the SWISS OBSERVER in conjunction with the SWISS LEGATION, for the above Fund, has met with a splendid success, and we wish to thank most sincerely our numerous subscribers for their generous and unstinted support which they have given to a cause, which we consider, was well worth patronising.

The total amount collected, viz. £100. 0. 0, will be put at the disposal of the Zurich Rowing Club, together with our best wishes for a successful challenge of the two cups, which they won last year in such a splendid fashion.

We are now closing the subscription list, and in doing so, we wish to voice our keen appreciation to our compatriots, who, through their support have shown that they were fully aware of the importance that Switzerland should take its proper place in the International Sporting community.

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