

What others think of us : Switzerland and the Nazis

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WHAT OTHERS THINK OF US. SWITZERLAND AND THE NAZIS.

(Manchester Guardian, 24.4.36).

In view of Switzerland's unique linguistic relationship to Germany, Austria, Italy, and France, the state of mind of the Swiss to-day is worth examining. The most articulate feelings run counter to the most powerful interests. Switzerland has reacted fairly strongly against the ideas and methods of Nazi Germany, but she is absolutely dependent upon importing raw materials from abroad and upon exporting the finished manufactured goods, and it is with Germany that she is most deeply involved both for imports and for exports.

Every Swiss tenet and tradition runs counter to the conceptions of Hitler. To be Swiss is to belong to a political organisation whose essential characteristics are diversity, democracy, and decentralisation. Where race and language have nothing to do with nationality, traditions and constitutional forms appear to supply the cement which binds the society together. The disturbance created by the great German neighbour gone Nazi is naturally most violent in German Switzerland. Here ostensibly both capital and labour are anti-Nazi because in Basle and Zürich it is difficult to ignore the decivilising impulses of Hitlerism. But the dominant party of Liberals in German Switzerland (which has, of course, nearly three times the number of inhabitants as in French and Italian Switzerland put together) represents industries which require a German market, and banking which looks for returns on its big investments in Germany. The possibility, however improbable it appears at the moment, cannot be completely ignored that, in new circumstances, these people might prefer a compromise with Nazi Germany at the expense of their own Left parties to a fight to the death against Hitler.

Academic Contacts.

The well-to-do German Swiss (it should be remembered) nearly all have some relations with Germany and have usually been to German universities. Though Professor Karl Barth has been sent home from Bonn to Basle, many Swiss professors have accepted the Heidelberg invitations. Few expelled German scholars have been taken into the Swiss universities, and Swiss publishers show reluctance to publish books which they will not be able to sell in present-day Germany. Plans for a conscious defence of German intellectual values by Austro-Swiss co-operation have not developed at all, for the German Swiss are predominantly Zwinglian and suspicious of the clericalism of the Schuschnigg regime. In French, as in German, Switzerland, feeling against Soviet Russia, except among Socialists and Communists, is sufficiently strong to give Hitler at least one virtue in the eyes of the Centre and Right.

National Socialism has a special appeal for the young. Nowhere in Switzerland, however, do university students appear to be drawn to Hitler. The authoritarian spirit of the age undoubtedly affects the students, but not in the radical German way. There is also a group of Young Liberals (within the old Liberal party) which advocates certain constitutional reforms, such as more frequent dissolution of the National Council and less frequent referendums. The Young Liberals have not, however, made headway during the last few years. None of the essential characteristics of Fascism obtrudes itself into political life. The press, for instance, is really free, though editors are asked to refrain from the use of certain "emphatic" expressions. The Socialists actually govern big towns like Zürich and Basle and they have been running a "Boycott Italian goods" campaign. Communism is weak, except in French Switzerland. Only in French Switzerland is there a united Socialist-Communist front, and this adds to the intense dislike felt by the Geneva Right for the Socialist Mayor of Geneva, M. Nicole. The Ticino is much torn between democratic principles and Italian sentiment, but here, where the population consists of small peasant proprietors, and is not divided between employers and employed, many people detect the sturdiest democrats of all. Though the Agrarian party is reactionary on the whole, it is also said that the peasants in some of the less-known cantons, Appenzell, for example, will prove the most obstinate champions of democracy if it comes to the test.

German Tourists.

It is clear that Nazi propaganda, while possessed of certain important natural advantages, has a great deal of leeway to make up in Switzerland. There is a large German colony which has been proportionately active. It is characteristic of the dual nature of the German campaign that the murder of the German Nazi leader Gustloff on February 4th came at a moment when the Swiss Government was greatly embarrassed by the tourist dispute with Germany. Before this it had been arranged that German tourists should be allowed money to spend in Switzerland as against Swiss purchases of German coal. This arrangement was of the greatest

importance to the Swiss hotelkeepers, who have lost the custom of travellers from sterling or other devaluated-currency countries. On February 1st Germany had announced that her tourists were spending too much in Switzerland, and they were held up — with a view, perhaps, to defecting them to Garmisch-Partenkirchen. The Federal Government later succeeded in persuading Germany to release her tourists again, but its anti-Nazi measures were proportionately mild. At present no successor may be appointed to Gustloff in order that the German organisation shall be decentralised. This is clearly an almost meaningless prohibition, and it is observed on the Left that the German Nazis have just brought out a new paper called "Deutschland Heute," which looks exceedingly like the forbidden "Reichsdeutsche."

There is also a group of Swiss Nazis who call themselves The Front, but since June 30th, 1934, their membership has certainly dwindled. A much more serious thing is the pro-German, and indeed pro-Nazi, feeling which clearly exists among many Swiss officers; Colonel Wille, who commands the infantry, for instance, is well known to be pro-German. Since, as a result of March 7th, Switzerland has decided to expand her army and armaments with a view to defending herself against Germany, a curious situation has arisen. The political influence of officers should not, however, be exaggerated in a country which so detests the idea of a military caste that it appoints no generals; only when action is required are generals made, and even then they are elected by Parliament!

Hitler's technique is to take the old world by surprise and, maybe, using an excuse like the Gustloff murder, to strike where no one expects it. If Switzerland can withstand Nazi propaganda she cannot long withstand a direct German onslaught. Apart from the possible "Gleichschaltung" of Switzerland herself, expert opinion points to the Swiss route for Germany if once again she wishes to invade France. Popular expectation supposes that the Germans would advance by way of Basle towards the Belfort gap, so that the Swiss could shoot down from the Jura. Technically, however, there is as much to be said for the Zürich route between Jura and Alps, with the capture en route of the machine production factories of Winterthur. Switzerland is one of the racial and economic hinges of Europe, and her and her rulers may be faced with big decisions if the Great Powers are unable to establish a constructive peace.

BRITISH CHILDREN IN THE ALPS.

A New Home at Davos.

Under the auspices of The New Helvetic Society a most interesting lecture, illustrated by numerous lantern slides, will be given at Swiss House on Friday next, 15th of May, at eight p.m. on a theme which is of great importance to Switzerland in several respects.

Doctor W. Behrens a prominent medical authority, living and practising at Davos, will speak on the wonderful healing power of the mild alpine climate prevailing at Davos and a few other places in Switzerland as well as on a practical attempt, recently started, at re-establishing a home for British children at Davos.

This enterprise undoubtedly is of considerable interest to our home country, not only from an economic point of view, but especially as a means for strengthening the bonds of friendship and humanitarian sentiment so happily prevailing between Switzerland and England.

Our alpine healing resorts are no doubt eminently suitable for assisting sick people from all over the world to attain or regain health, which they are in many cases unable to find anywhere else, not even in the seaside sanatoriums, however beneficial they may be in other cases. To put those Swiss healing stations at the service of the youngest generation is, of course, a particularly desirable development.

Doctor Behrens and his friends have conceived the alluring plan of establishing at Davos a special home for British children with the assistance of local medical authorities in England. A promising beginning has been made, and it is hoped that before long it may develop on sound foundations into a permanent establishment.

What better return could our country make for the bountiful hospitality that we Swiss are enjoying in these British Isles. It is hoped that numerous members of our colony may attend this interesting lecture.

"OLDE FRIENDS" EVENING

at the
UNION HELVETIA CLUB,
on Friday, May 1st, 1936.

One of the last social events during the spring season of the Colony, took place last Friday at the Union Helvetia Club, 1, Gerrard Place, W.1.

I understand that for the last 17 years the "olde" friends of this well-known Club have foregathered annually, in order to spend a few happy hours in congenial company. Judging from the vivacious assembly which met in the prettily decorated Banqueting Hall, the Union Helvetia Club has not only a host of "olde" friends, but quite a number of young ones, and thus the blending was a most excellent one.

A simple, but very nice dinner opened the evening, and I wish to pay a compliment to the stewards of the Club, Mr. and Mrs. Wymann, for the efficient way, in which they looked after the material welfare of the 100 members and guests.

Shortly after 10 o'clock, M. J. Indermaur, who was in the Chair, proposed the toasts to H. M. the King, to Switzerland, and to the "Olde Friends." He welcomed in a very few words the revellers, and I wish some of the Chairmen, presiding at Banquets and Dinners, would follow in Mr. Indermaur's footsteps, with regard to the shortness of their oratorical efforts, it would please everybody, and incidentally save me a lot of work and troubles. M. Indermaur, who is the popular President of the "Landeswältung" made a few very flattering remarks about some of the guests and friends present, and as everything, which friend Indermaur says, comes straight from the heart, it went straight to those quarters too.—

The second speaker was billed on the menu, to be M. P. Lehrian, but as the popular President of the Union Helvetia had not then arrived, the "Swiss Observer" was therefore asked to say a few words to praise the Ladies.

M. A. Wyss, a very old friend of the Union Helvetia, and an instigator of the "Olde Friends" dinner answered the toast to the "Olde Friends" in his usual witty manner.

The Banqueting Hall was then cleared, and dancing started to the music of a very efficient Orchestra.

As a novelty, Monsieur de Courcy, a "inégalable Déceptionist" gave a very enjoyable performance, his skill and wit was much appreciated by the company.

The songs rendered by some of the Ladies were also very much applauded.

The very jolly evening came to an end shortly before 2 a.m. and all the "Olde" and Young friends of the Union Helvetia said *au revoir* to each other, after having cemented again old friendships and made new ones.

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EVENING PROGRAMS OF THE SWISS BROADCASTING STATIONS.

MAY 10th — MAY 16th.

BEROMUNSTER. (Principal items).

SUNDAY, May 10th.

(Greenwich Time).

- 7 p.m. Sport Resultate v. Sonntag.
- 8.5 p.m. Unterhaltungskonzert (Radioorchester).
- 9.25 p.m. Alte Musik, Dargebracht durch die Vereinigung "La Ménestrandie" Genf.

MONDAY, May 11th.

- 8.15 p.m. Sieben Lieder im Volkston, v. Harald Barth, gesungen v. Paul Kuen.
- 9.10 p.m. Gastkonzert René Matthes.

TUESDAY, May 12th.

- 8 p.m. Uebertragung aus dem Berner Stadt-Theater, "Penthesilea," ein Trauerspiel v. Hr. v. Kleist.

WEDNESDAY, May 13th.

- 7.30 p.m. Für die Schweiz im Ausland, Wochenrückblick v. Dr. H. Büchi.

THURSDAY, May 14th.

- 8.35 p.m. Zyklus. "Schweizer Lyrik der Gegenwart" Dr. Paul Lang.
- 9.10 p.m. Konzert des Radio Orchesters Zürich.

FRIDAY, May 15th.

- 7.45 p.m. Solothurner Lüt, Gäu und Nieder Amt, Plauderei.

- 9.10 p.m. Hansjoggel im Paradies, Fragmente aus dem Bühnenspiel v. Walter Lesch und Robert Blum.

SATURDAY, May 16th.

- 7 p.m. Geläute der Zürcher Kirchen.

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(Société Anonyme)

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