

# Economic National Defence in Switzerland

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## ECONOMIC NATIONAL DEFENCE IN SWITZERLAND.

By Dr. HERMANN BÖSCHENSTEIN.

Each year, during the month of June, the Swiss Parliament engages in debates on the so-called Routine Report. In the Spring, the Federal Council submits to Parliament a comprehensive, printed report regarding its activities during the past year. This Report then goes to the Parliamentary Board of Examiners, which is divided into sub-Commissions according to the various Government Departments they represent. These proceed to inspect carefully the matter laid before them, which reveals the co-ordinated work of the entire Administration. After that, a Rapporteur is nominated for each branch of the Federal Administration, and Parliament has the possibility to both freely criticise the Administration, and to express its wishes. When dealing with this Annual Routine Report, it is customary to deal also with pending motions and parliamentary postulates. Should the Federal Council have taken action on them, then they can be written off, or filed away. To do this, however, a decision must be passed by Parliament. In this connection, a very interesting debate has taken place in the National Council with regard to the question as to whether the postulate regarding the creation of a Higher Council of War should be maintained. The former Division Commander, Eugen Bircher, had put forward such a Motion, in the year 1947. In the meantime, the Federal Council has appointed a Commission for Economic National Defence and has nominated a high official as Special Delegate and Co-ordinator. The Federal Council was therefore of the opinion that the creation of a Higher Council of War for Defence purposes was superfluous. This question was thoroughly gone into, on the basis of a special report, by the Parliamentary Military Commissions. These sided with the opinion of the Federal Council, and Parliament expressed its agreement, by a large majority. Federal Councillor Kobelt, Head of the Military Department, stressed the fact that in times of danger and of war it was the National Government itself which functioned as an Organ of Co-ordination and as Higher Council of War, and that it would appear indicated that the Direction of the Department of Public Economy should be entrusted with the Presidium of the Commission. As a matter of fact, there already exists an entire so-called "shadow" organisation, that is to say that it already possesses a staff and is thoroughly organised, has already met on several occasions and has made a number of arrangements. Once more, the Federal Offices and the country's economy have found themselves working in close co-operation and mutual confidence. In the considered opinion of both the Federal Council and Parliament, the creation of any new Organ would be superfluous. There already exist Parliamentary Military Commissions and the statutory Commission for National Defence, which unite the Superior Military Chiefs under the presidency of the Minister for War. National Councillor Bircher was of the opinion, however, that there should be created a special Council for War Economy, or rather for Economic National Defence. A Council of this kind would, nevertheless, merely comprise the same persons and organs of economy and

Administration, as at present. It was very clearly demonstrated at the time of the setting up of an Extra-Parliamentary Commission for the Examination of Military Expenditure, how difficult it was, in a small country like Switzerland, to find leading personalities of the business world who were ready to undertake expert jobs, which took up so much of their valuable time. All those who count in the life of a country, are already occupied to such an extent that they are not keen to be dragged into other jobs. The greatest attention is being devoted at present to the question of National Economy. The Federal Council fully realises that the military side of National Defence is not everything, and that both spiritual and economic defence preparation and readiness are of decisive significance. That is why it is imperative that, already in time of peace, measures be taken in order to ensure supplies of raw materials and foodstuffs, and that such important factors as the Press Service, Radio transmission, transport, post and the problem of Labour Service and man-power should be carefully gone into and organised. In Switzerland, the feeling is very strong against the establishment of too many new organisations. People don't want a Council for Economic National Defence which would operate outside the Federal Administration and Swiss economic circles, and would have the right to take decisions without taking into account the interests of the already existing institutions.

Dr. Bircher's motion had one successful result, in that it has led, following upon the increase in international tension, to measures being taken, such as the recommendation to all house-wives to lay in stocks of unperishable goods — iron rations — and the obligatory laying in of stocks on the part of industrial concerns and the foodstuffs trade. It is, of course, impossible for any country in time of peace to provide for all possible contingencies which might menace its welfare, in view of the fact that no new war is a repetition of those which have preceded it.

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