

Home affairs

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HOME AFFAIRS.by JEAN SEITZ (*repl. P. BÉGUIN*).

Once more it is Jean Seitz who is replacing Pierre Béguin, in the weekly talk on Swiss politics.

Switzerland prides herself — and quite rightly in our opinion — on remaining resolutely attached to the democratic freedoms at a time when one sees these freedoms badly maltreated, in fact, if not in words. Two recent events, slight in themselves, show the spirit in which the immense majority of our people intend that the position of this principle shall be maintained.

A short time ago, in certain limited circles, a movement had started with a view to checking, by indirect means, the expression of Communist ideas. It should be noted that Communism is unanimously rejected by public opinion, with the exception of a handful of persons, whose activities have been condemned a long time ago, already, by the public. This small group of agitators, which is rapidly losing any influence it may have possessed, nevertheless has at its disposal a few Press organs, with an extremely small edition.

The idea was launched, in certain circles, that the publication of these journals should be rendered practically impossible. Without any official intervention taking place, that is to say without any legal prohibition, the spokesmen of this movement considered that it would be possible to silence these servitors of Communism, by stopping their supplies of paper for printing. The manufacture and the distribution of this indispensable matter for the transmission of ideas, are very centralised in Switzerland. That the suppliers of paper, quite evidently non-Communists, should stop the supplies for the Communists periodicals, which are always eager to undermine the régime, seemed a good way of making war upon them, to some people. It meant, however, that the liberty of the press would be hampered by a measure which had no legal basis and was of a private character, and this to the detriment of the Extreme Left, which is officially tolerated.

This indirect way of fighting an adversary who would not hesitate, for his part, if necessary to have recourse to much more Draconian measures, did not meet with the assent of either those who could have put it into effect, or of public opinion in general.

The paper manufacturers, the editors of journals, the Mixed Commission composed of representatives of the foregoing and of representatives of the writing profession, all refused to take this suggestion into

consideration. They all explained their own particular reasons, with the greatest clarity. Whilst disapproving of Communism and the methods used by the Press which it holds in vassalage, they all agreed that to make it impossible for the Communist Press to express itself, by means of a measure having a practical character, without any legal or juridical sanction, would represent a serious impediment to the freedom of the press and of opinion. The resulting violation of fundamental democratic liberties, would do more to imperil the very spirit of our institutions than could be accomplished by the activities of an extreme group, reduced to impotence by the excesses in its own propaganda.

But this broadmindedness with which the Swiss, through their attachment to the rules of democratic rights, intend to act in regard to the worst enemies of democracy, does not go so far as to make it possible for any foreigner to indulge in any doubts regarding the solidity of certain of our official positions.

An incident, which had for its theatre the city of Zurich, on the 1st of August, illustrates this point of view.

Mr. Beck, a professor at the Zurich University, had been asked to deliver the principal address during the course of the ceremony organised on the occasion of the Swiss National Holiday, in the city on the banks of the Limmat. A historian by profession, the orator considered that the moment had come to proclaim the fact that Swiss neutrality had had its day and that, willy-nilly, Switzerland had already made her choice between the two ideological blocks, or, rather, between the two political masses which to-day divide up among themselves the greatest part of the world and of our own Continent. The Head of the Zurich Department of Public Education, informed beforehand of the matter, requested the speaker to abstain from declaring his views on neutrality during an assembly which, after all, presented an official character, and at which, those who had been called upon to play an active part, were looked upon as being invested more or less with an official character. The orator confirmed with these wishes, but later on, he protested against what he considered to be violation of the liberty of expression.

This, quite evidently, was not the case. And, in spite of the opinion expressed by certain journalists, the majority of the Swiss people will not look upon the steps taken by the Zurich Councillor of State as being an attempt to suppress a fundamental democratic right. It is incontrovertible that Mr. Beck is free to

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profess any opinion he wishes on neutrality. In other circumstances he is free to expose it, by word or pen. But, charged with the task of pronouncing an allocation which, of necessity, had to be slightly coloured with officialdom, at a celebration which could have echos reaching abroad, he ran the risk of making people believe an opinion to be general, which is held by an extremely small minority. The Executive Authorities of our country, supported by the immense majority of the Swiss people, remain resolutely faithful to the idea of Swiss neutrality. To spread an impression which is contrary to this, has nothing in common with liberty of expression.

ALL ABOUT THE SOVEREIGN.

The Swiss Federal Court has refused to extradite to Italy two men accused of producing gold sovereigns there. The Court has ruled, that sovereigns are no longer legal tender. (*news item, Aug. 22nd.*)

COIN OF THE REALM?

The Treasury discloses
 Most serious concern,
 The Bank outright opposes
 The bench and bar of Berne.
 Our coin is counterfeited,
 According to report,
 And the forgers are acquitted
 By Switzerland's High Court,

A Treasury official
 Expresses shocked surprise—
 This judgment prejudicial
 Makes coin mere merchandise.
 The viewpoint is rejected
 As biased and unsound—
 The sovereign is protected
 Though we may not save the pound

In British courts and foreign
 The judges would come down
 On gangs that faked a florin,
 A shilling, or half-crown,
 And this more grave infraction
 The law should not dismiss—
 It is indeed an action
 Unworthy of the Swiss.

The sovereign may have vanished,
 And none dispute the fact,
 But it was never banished
 By a Parliamentary Act.
 A proclamation regal
 Must current coin withdraw—
 So passing gold is legal,
 While just outside the law.

The Briton should surrender
 His coins of minted gold—
 For other sterling tender
 Commodities are sold.
 But, not in circulation
 In the counting-house or till,
 The Bank makes declaration
 They are legal tender still.

MERCUTIO.
 (*Manchester Guardian*)
 23. 8. '52.

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