

Home affairs

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HOME AFFAIRS.

by PIERRE BÉGUIN.

"The Difficult Role of Neutrals".

When a request was addressed, last Summer, to various neutral countries, including our own, to send some military experts for the purpose of supervising the execution of the clauses of the Korean armistice which relate to the prisoners of war, the Swiss Government did not hesitate for a moment. It accepted this mission. And this was only natural. A country which has chosen neutrality and which intends to remain faithful to it has, for its first duty, the obligation to abstain from any participation, however indirect this might be, in all international quarrels. But, when hostilities are on the point of terminating, then it is compatible with its role, to offer its friendly services. In such circumstances there exists a need for mediators and arbitrators, and it is only the neutrals who can play this part. Moreover, as soon as it is a question of protecting prisoners of war, of watching over their present fate and their future, and of providing them with guarantees that they will not be made the object of arbitrary decisions, a neutral country both can and must cooperate. A humanitarian task is essentially something which lies in its province.

And this is the reason why a number of Swiss officers have gone to Korea. They are full of good will. No one could have any doubts on this subject. But, their mission is encountering some very serious obstacles and is proving far more thorny than had been either anticipated or imagined. For several weeks, already, echos of these difficulties have been reaching us, but the last few days have brought an increase in their number.

This is what had happened. Provisions have been made within the very text of the Armistice Convention that should any prisoners not wish to return to their country, they would have the right to refuse to be repatriated. Nevertheless, in order to be quite certain that such a decision on their part is free, absolutely free, and also, in order that their government should have the possibility of trying to get them back, it was agreed that they should be given an opportunity to listen to the explanations of the representatives of their country, who would attempt to persuade them to return to their homes. Such an arrangement was highly necessary, as it appeared to constitute the proper observance of the principle of the respect of the

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individual, which demands that prisoners should be able to make their decisions only then when they are fully acquainted with how matters stand, that is to say after they have been able to engage in a discussion on the pros and contras of the affair. And it was precisely the role of the neutrals to see to it that such objectivity should be maintained and to provide a guarantee for impartiality in this respect.

Unfortunately, nowadays, that is to say in an era when totalitarianism exists, it is difficult, if not impossible, to play a role of this kind. The adversaries, or former adversaries, who confront each other, do not speak the same language, do not obey the same principles and do not possess the same ideas. They do not attribute the same value to, nor do they recognise the same prestige in respect of arbitrators, observers and mediators. They are not looked upon as being judges. On of the parties would like to make them into advocates for its cause.

This is the reason for the conflicts which have arisen in the prisoners camps in Korea. On the one hand, some of the Swiss observers have withdrawn momentarily, because they considered that sessions in which the explanations took place led to excesses and to intolerable pressure being exercised. On the other hand, the Communist countries reproach these same observers with not having subscribed to measures which would tend to eliminate those propagandists who, according to them, are exercising pressure on the Chinese and Korean prisoners so that they will not allow themselves to be repatriated. These

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differences in opinion have led to diplomatic notes being presented in Berne, by China, Czechoslovakia and Poland. The Federal Council has taken cognizance of them. It does not intend to discuss them. Very wisely, it places its confidence in the Swiss delegates, who are not its representatives, who are autonomous and who have to shoulder their responsibilities quite independently and in accordance with their conscience. But, this is exactly what will not be understood by those who speak another language in these matters, and who do not recognize the autonomy of the individual and for whom every affair is an affair of State.

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PERSONAL.

The departure from London, two months ago, of Mr. Hermann Böschenstein, who for about a year was representing Ringier's Illustrated Press in this country, has caused wide-spread regret in the Colony.

During his all too short *séjour* he had taken a keen interest in the life of the Colony, and his collaboration, always generously given, was greatly appreciated.

Mr. H. Böschenstein has, since the 1st of November taken up the post as "Bundesstadt-Redaktor" of the "Luzerner Tagblatt" and has thus renewed his old connections with the Swiss capital, as he occupied an identical position for a Basle paper previous to his arrival in London.

We take this opportunity of thanking him very sincerely for his always helpful and efficient collaboration, wishing him the best of success in his new sphere of activity.

* * *

We extend sincere sympathy to Mr. W. Glur, of 31, Rossmore Court, London, N.W.1., on the occasion of the recent death of his brother, Dr. Arnold Glur, of Erlenbach. (Ct. Berne).

The deceased was a well-known veterinary surgeon. In the army he reached the rank of Colonel. (Veterinary Service).

* * *

We extend heartiest congratulations to Mr. and Mrs. W. Wyler, (General Manager of Swissair) of 31, Hyde Park Gardens, W.2 on the arrival of a daughter.



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