

# Home affairs

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**HOME AFFAIRS.**

by PIERRE BÉGUIN.

**"A Right Conception of Neutrality".**

When Switzerland was designated by the belligerents in the Korean war to be one of the countries called upon to send neutral observers, charged with the task of superintending the repatriation of the prisoners belonging to both the opposing forces, voices were raised in this country, asserting that this was a perillous venture. They also doubted whether this participation in the application of the Armistice Treaty was compatible with neutrality, which is Switzerland's maxim in all matters relating to her foreign policy.

Very soon, however, they proceeded to calm down. But, they were roused again recently, when our delegates ran up against difficulties and when the attitude adopted by them was seriously criticised by the Communist countries, more particularly by China, whose governments proceeded to engage in protests by diplomatic means, in Berne, whilst their national radio indulged in polemics. Here was a chance for the Cassandras to exclaim: "We foresaw all this!"

What was it that really happened, of so serious a nature? As you are aware, those prisoners who refuse to be repatriated, for political reasons, must first listen, before taking their final decision, to "explanations" given by official delegates from their country of origin. These delegates have the right to try and convince them. It is necessary that so serious a decision as voluntary exile should only be taken after having become thoroughly acquainted with how matters stand. But, it has been expressly provided for in the Armistice Treaty that no force or menaces should be employed in regard to the prisoners who do not wish to go home, and that no affront should be made to their dignity or self-respect.

Well, as you no doubt also know, the Swiss delegates were obliged to protest on two occasions. First of all, when certain agents of the Communist countries proceeded to conduct their "explanations" in a manner which was thoroughly inhuman, as a result of their insistence it became mental torture. And then, again, when the Chinese Koreans insisted that the prisoners who refused to listen to the "explanations" should be made to do so by force. By thus protesting, our delegates simply adhered to the imperative provisions of the Armistice Treaty. They were also absolutely within their rights

to refer to the rules of the Geneva Conventions on the Red Cross, which constitute, in a certain way, for all civilised countries, a charter of the rights of Man and a charter of the inalienable rights of the individual. Furthermore, it was their duty to remain faithful to the general ideas which prevail in our country. That is a matter of conscience, regarding which there can be no discussion.

During the course of a lecture recently given by Mr. Max Petitpierre, the Head of the Federal Political Department — who had already discussed the matter with his colleagues in the Federal Council — stated very clearly that our Government unreservedly approves the attitude and the behaviour of our delegates in Korea. He rejected the accusations made by the Chinese and Koreans, on this subject.

This kind of language will be listened to by our people. It is necessary that, in Switzerland, it should be realised — and it *is* being realised effectively — that neutrality neither is, nor can be — merely an abstention. On the contrary, it imposes duties upon us. And these, we must accept freely and even gladly, inspired by the thought that by carrying them out we are rendering services to those who have been the victims of misfortune. We must not allow ourselves to be preoccupied with thoughts of gratitude or of understanding on the part of everybody. These duties which are the outcome of neutrality are so sacred that there can be no question of their admitting of any gratitude. That is the only possible attitude to maintain. Monsieur Petitpierre recalled this, in clear and well-put terms. No single voice will be raised in Switzerland to contest what he has said.



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**HOME AFFAIRS.**

by PIERRE BÉGUIN.

**"The Survival of Wartime State Control".**

If we go back a few years, we find that immediately after the war, the number of voices raised in Switzerland, demanding a rapid demobilisation of Governmental plenary powers and of the directivist measures which were the outcome of such powers, became ever greater and more vigorous. It is true that the Administration showed resistance to this and did not want or else hesitated to renounce from the extraordinary competencies which it enjoyed. Public opinion, however, was quite definitely hostile towards State control.

This it made manifest on several occasions, more particularly on that day when it approved the popular initiative in favour of a return to direct democracy, the initiative which had for its purpose and its ultimate effect, the restitution to the Sovereign People of its right to control and to oppose, which had been in abeyance during the war period. But, Public opinion showed its opposition on other occasions also, as when it voted against the maintenance of the rules governing road transport and against the interdiction to build or enlarge hotels. Each time, official circles had let it be understood that it would be very dangerous to renounce from these directivist measures and that should this happen, it would be followed by a lamentable state of anarchy. The Swiss people, however, preferred to place their confidence in the principle of free competition. It would be somewhat difficult to prove this confidence to have been wrong, as the promised catastrophies have never materialised. They are still being awaited.

Nevertheless, there still subsists a very important chapter of this emergency legislation, imbued with a very directivist character. This is the one which concerns the control of rents. It would not appear, if we are to believe the intentions which have just been expressed by our authorities, as if this measure is to be abolished for a long time to come.

In point of fact, the rents in respect of all the housing units built before or during the war are "frozen". Only a very small increase has been authorised since then. But, its role is of no importance. At the time, this measure was very necessary if a rise in the cost of living was to be prevented, that is to say if nothing was to be neglected in order to avoid inflation. Everyone was in

agreement in regard to this subject. Nevertheless, discussions subsist concerning the length of duration of this régime, which has every sign of perpetuating itself.

On the one hand, it is certain that for owners of real estate — many of whom are far from rich — this measure has the effect of being real spoliation. But, there is something which is still more serious. There exists such a big difference in regard to the rents charged for appartments in old houses and those that have been recently built, that the repartition of housing is no longer equitable; it may even be said that it is no longer inspired by really social principles. For, we find elderly couples continuing to live in flats which have a large number of rooms, just because their rent has remained practically at the same level as it was before the war, whereas the general cost of living has gone up by 70 per cent. Meanwhile, young couples, with several children are reduced to either living in appartments which are far too small for them, or else to paying exorbitant prices, in some newly-built house.

It will not prove possible to get out of this deadlock, until such times as a decision will be taken to reduce the existing difference between the rents for old and for new houses and flats. In order to achieve this, more free rein should be allowed to competition, which would lead to a better balance, that is to say, towards a more social and more rational distribution of the housing units available. In this respect, however, it would seem indubitable that it will prove very difficult to convince the tenants, that is to say, the greatest number, of the rightness of this idea, most of them, quite evidently, preferring immediate material advantages to other, more distant and more aleatory advantages. For this reason, the problem in question will remain tabled on the Helvetic agenda, for a long time to come.

**SWISSAIR COCKTAIL PARTY.**

On the occasion of the visit to London of Mr. Marc Virchaux, Press Chief Officer of Swissair in Switzerland, the London Management of Swissair invited Members of the English and Swiss Press to a cocktail party, which took place at the Dorchester Hotel, Park Lane, W.1. on Thursday, February 4th, 1954.

Mr. W. Wyler, General Manager for U.K. and Eire introduced Mr. Virchaux to the guests.

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