

Home affairs

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HOME AFFAIRS.

by PIERRE BÉGUIN.

**“Regarding certain Public Manifestations”
(Opposition to the raising of Rents).**

Within the last few days, mass manifestations, on a large scale, have taken place in several Swiss towns. In Berne, more particularly, no fewer than 20,000 persons assembled on the square in front of the Federal Palace, or Parliament Buildings. In addition to these mass meetings in the open air, a portion of the Press is also engaged in an intense campaign. This campaign has for its object the increase in rents which the authorities are proposing to introduce, which is meeting with great opposition.

At the beginning of the war, all rents were “frozen”. This measure was taken for the purpose of avoiding inflation, on the one hand and of maintaining social peace, on the other. It was understood by everybody, for — in the exceptional circumstances of that moment — it was realised that it was up to everyone to make the necessary sacrifices. Since then, price controls have been abolished, as a general rule, but such control was maintained precisely in the domain of rents.

This measure is disputable from more than one point of view. There is one point in particular which should be borne in mind. As rents for apartments in new buildings are fixed freely, they are very high, being calculated on the basis of actual construction cost. Meanwhile, rents in respect of old buildings remain immovable. In consequence, a situation has arisen which, it must be admitted, is not without disadvantages from the social point of view. What has happened is that well-to-do people go on living in apartments which are too big for them, simply because the rent is cheap, when they could do quite well with a smaller apartment, only a new one, that is to say, a more expensive one. In this way, those apartments which would be more suitable for people with modest incomes, are not available to them, and they are obliged to take a flat in a new building, which


is much more expensive. This situation is particularly hard on young married couples, who have great difficulty in finding a home for themselves.

Such a situation is abnormal. It is generally thought that it will continue to prevail so long as the integral control of rents is maintained, and is not made more flexible. In order to bring about a normal, or, at least, more satisfactory, situation, the advantages in retaining an old apartment should be smaller that is to say, the prices for the two categories of apartments should gradually be brought closer to each other.

The increase proposed by the experts, to which the Federal Council appeared to be quite ready to agree, had this aim in view.

However, it is meeting with a very categorical opposition on the part of the people, in which there is nothing of an artificial character. For a great many people, this “blocking” has become a taboo, if not an article of faith. This opposition is born of a certain mistrust. The tenants, who are reasonable people, would no doubt consent to a compromise, if only they knew where they were being led, if only there was a long term plan, if only the limitation of this increase were known. Unfortunately, such a plan is lacking. It is that which renders the principles of the problem liable to misinterpretation, and makes its solution so difficult.

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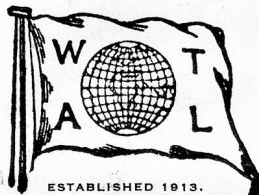
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