

Home affairs

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HOME AFFAIRS.

by PIERRE BÉGUIN.

"Military Lassitude?"

(Launching of an Initiative to cut military expenditure by half.)

A Popular Initiative was launched recently, in Lausanne, by a journal which, up to the present, has specialised in the publication of humorous matter. In spite of this, the Initiative in question is enjoying a certain success. In fact, it has been taken so seriously that a Federal Councillor has deemed it necessary to dissuade the citizens from signing it. This is somewhat of an unusual occurrence for, as a rule, our High Authorities, anxious as they are to prove their determination to respect integrally the exercise of popular rights, never intervene when an Initiative is launched, and reserve the exercise of their influence for that moment only, when an Initiative is submitted to Parliament, and then to the people themselves.

The purpose of this Initiative is to bring about what one might call a vacation in national defence. Its authors propose that next year, or at the latest in 1956, military expenditure should be reduced by half. Moreover, during this "vacation period" no orders for armament shall be given to industry. Thus, this Initiative exploits quite openly the somewhat widespread feeling, it must be admitted, that our military expenditure is exaggerated. But, this is not all; it also causes other strings to vibrate, as it meets half-way the desires of those idealistic pacifists who believe that Switzerland should give an example of partial disarmament; it also flatters generous hearts, in the sense that it expressly provides that the economies realised from the military budget shall not be of benefit either to the Federal Treasury, nor to the tax-payers, but shall be devoted for the purpose of building houses with cheap rents and for that of reconstruction welfare work in those regions abroad, which have been devastated by the war. It is proposed to use one half of the sum for each purpose.

As we have already said, this Initiative is being taken seriously in spite of its origin. It is already being opposed with a great deal of energy. If it is not met with a shrug of the shoulders, this means that there exists, quite obviously, a certain military malaise in Switzerland, and, more particularly, in the French-speaking regions of the country. A proof of this is to be found in the fact that a motion having the same tendency is to be dealt with shortly in the Parliaments of Neuchâtel and of the Canton of Vaud. And what we should be careful to bear in mind is the very instructive sign constituted by the support given to this Initiative in Socialist and Trade Union circles, where, one has the feeling, that a certain anti-military tendency which has been forgotten for more than twenty years, is once more rising its head. No doubt, all this corresponds to a widespread popular sentiment.

This malaise, or uneasiness, is undeniable, but it would not be impossible to dissipate it. For our part we are firmly convinced that the Swiss people, in its crushing majority, remains closely attached to the

principle of independence and to national defence. Its national reflexes are intact. But, the military effort undertaken during the last few years has not been properly explained to it. A sufficiently close contact has not been preserved between the high military and political authorities and the citizens as a whole. Too much confidence has been placed in the patriotism of everyone. There has not been sufficient appeal made to the people's good sense and understanding. It would be quite sufficient if a campaign to put matters straight were to be undertaken in an intelligent manner on a psychological plane, for all these tendencies which are now being manifested and which have found their expression in this Initiative, to fade away and disappear rapidly. And then, instead of allowing themselves to sink into a certain lassitude, we will find that all the citizens of this country will be ready and willing to accept cheerfully all the sacrifices required of them. All that is necessary is to show the people that these sacrifices are fully justified.

SWISS NATIONAL DAY CELEBRATION

Sunday, 1st August, 1954
3 to 5.30 p.m. (Doors open at 2.30 p.m.)

at the

CONCERT PAVILION BATTERSEA PLEASURE GARDENS

Entrances near Battersea and Chelsea Bridge

Patriotic Address by the
SWISS MINISTER, Monsieur Henry de TORRENTÉ

Programme includes:

CORALE UNIONE TICINESE

SWISS MALE CHOIR

SWISS ACCORDION CLUB

Community Singing

ALL SWISS AND THEIR FAMILIES GORDIALLY INVITED

Admission by ticket only, obtainable in advance, free of charge, on application by post to the Hon. Secretary, 1st August Committee, Miss S. MOROSI, 20, Briston Grove, Crouch Hill, London, N.8. (enclose stamped envelope)

After the celebration a Dance will be held from 6.45 - 11 p.m. in the VAUXHALL BEER GARDENS nearby

RELIGIOUS SERVICES: on Sunday 1st August, 1954

Joint Protestant Service In French and German at 11 a.m. at Swiss Church, 79 Endell Street, W.C.2.

Catholic Service at 11 a.m. Solemn Mass and Sermon in German and English, at St. Ann's Church, Abbey Orchard Street. S.W.1.