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NOUVELLE SOCIÉTÉ HELVÉTIQUE AND ANGLO-SWISS SOCIETY.

Lecture given by the Swiss Minister, Monsieur
A. Daeniker.

(Conclusion.)

The invitation sent to the Swiss government was couched in the most flattering terms. The chief delegate of the U.N.O. armistice delegation, General Harrison, motivated his request as follows: "We consider that Switzerland is the obvious choice since that state has acquired in the eyes of the entire world a neutral status which is unsurpassed by that of any other state. It would be impossible to find a country which could more appropriately be termed neutral, being so scrupulous in this regard that it has not even associated itself with the United Nations".

"For many decades Switzerland has maintained an absolute neutrality. All nations and all peoples have learned to turn to Switzerland when the services of a third party are needed to mediate in an international dispute. Switzerland has always given an exact performance of the duties which she has undertaken."

The Federal Council never wavered on the question of principle. Thus the message says: Undoubtedly the mutual inter-dependence between countries, peoples and even continents is greater than ever before. Events like the Korean war are not only of a local character. Its prolongation or expansion would endanger peace in the whole world. Switzerland, like any other country which did not participate in the hostilities is interested to see it ended. The armistice is a first step towards peace; the participation of neutral states is essential to its execution. Our collaboration is required because we are neutral and therefore Switzerland cannot stay apart, then Swiss neutrality is a factor for the preservation of peace not only for our own sake but for the general benefit. Neutrality is not a passive principle of abstention, it has its positive aspects insofar as it allows us to fulfil certain tasks in the interest of peace and humanity which only a neutral state can properly carry out. It has often been said that neutrality has lost its significance. That it is no longer justified in a divided world. We are definitely opposed to this view. The Korea Mission will give us an opportunity to show that neutrality can serve world peace, even though our collaboration may put us before thankless, difficult and risky tasks.

These are the reasons why the Federal Council have accepted the mission. Moreover, they accepted without delay in order that an early announcement of our readiness might speed the conclusion of the armistice which occurred on July 27th, 1953. It demanded however as an essential condition of our participation that our delegates were permitted to act impartially and were not to be regarded as mandatories of any one side.

V. The tasks reserved to the Neutral Nations under the Armistice Treaty were twofold: Firstly, the Neutral Repatriation Commission, consisting of delegates from Poland, Czechoslovakia, Sweden, Switzerland and India, had to take over at Panmunjom from the U.N. 22,600 and from the other side 360 prisoners of war who had all declared beforehand their un-

willingness to be repatriated, to afford to each one of them a last opportunity to change his mind and declare this to the Commission and to allow during 90 days to agents of the states to whom these prisoners belonged to explain the conditions under which the prisoners could return home; and finally to await a decision of the political conference on Korea regarding the further disposal of the prisoners and to declare them civilians, if after 120 days from the date of taking them over no such decision had been given. For the custody of these prisoners, India, as Chairman of the Commission, had sent a contingent of 5,000 soldiers, every other delegate was assisted by a team of 50 of his officers and men.

How has this Commission fulfilled the expectations held by its sponsors? As the Swiss delegate to this body, I may be allowed to give you my impressions. It seems to be pretty clear that prisoners in an ideological or a civil war fought with such frenzy as the one in Korea, are hardly inclined to submit voluntarily to a procedure as was provided for them under the armistice treaty. This applied particularly to the 14,000 Chinese detained by the Commission who as followers of Chiang Kai-shek had deserted en masse to the Americans. They had to watch their communist-minded fellow prisoners go home on the conclusion of the armistice, whereas they were made to await behind barbed wire not only the end of an everlasting procedure but were also to be confronted with communist agents who would try to persuade them to accept

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repatriation. It may be true that most of these prisoners had been indoctrinated by the South and so worked up against this kind of procedure. But it seems absurd, considering the hatred and animosity reigning in those camps, to have expected any results from the meetings between the prisoners and the explainers. Naturally, the prisoners received our Commission with demonstrations of wild opposition and only owing to the calm, gentle and very human behaviour of the Indian soldiers was it possible to subdue gradually their resistance. When at long last we were able to arrange "explanations", the prisoners showed their contempt for the explainers by shouting them down and indulging even in physical attacks; it needed regularly two soldiers to protect four explainers against one prisoner. Things were not improved when the Communist explainers, to whose oratory talents and exemplary discipline I wish to pay tribute, tried to prolong their persuasive talks to two or three hours per head; the prisoners reacted only more ferociously and they refused point blank to appear before the agents.

Throughout these proceedings our Communist colleagues asserted that the prisoners were terrorised by anti-communist agents — they referred to them invariably as "agents sent secretly by the gangs of Syngman Rhee and Chiang Kai-shek" — that therefore things would work better if such agents were isolated and the camps reshuffled. The majority of the Commission, that is the Indians, Swedes and Swiss, were not convinced by these arguments. We did not believe in the presence of such agents and were

convinced that such segregation would be useless and impossible, considering the numerical weakness of the Indian troops; it would have led to wholesale slaughter. We equally opposed the demand from the Communists that brute force be used to bring the prisoners to the explainers instead of the persuasive talks which General Thimayya, our able chairman, had employed so far. Such a procedure would have been contrary to the Geneva Convention.

At the end of the three months' period only about 15% of the prisoners had had what was called the "benefit of explanations"; when finally the period of 120 days came to its end, the Swiss and Swedes asked that the prisoners should be liberated in conformity with the terms of reference. The Communists however demanded that the whole procedure be continued, because no political conference had assembled and most of the prisoners had missed the "benefit of explanations". Had we concurred with this view, I should still be at Panmunjom; but more serious was the likelihood of a mass breakout, with a heavy loss of lives, if the Indians had tried to suppress it. Our Indian Chairman, without asking for the advice of his colleagues, finally decided to escape from this embroglio by returning all prisoners to their former detaining powers who liberated them forthwith. I did not agree with the view of our eminent chairman, General Thimayya, that the whole procedure had failed to attain its ends. I maintain that things would have gone better if we had not had to suffer continuous interference from both commands. Since not less than 728 prisoners had been able to ask for their repatriation or transfer to a neutral country during the explanations and the further detention period, many more could have followed their example, if they really had made up their minds to incur the risks of such a decision.

The second task of the Neutral Nations in Korea was the formation of the Neutral Nations Supervisory Commission which is composed of four members only, namely Poland, Czechoslovakia, Sweden and Switzerland; it has to supervise, and inspect the movements of troops and war material from and into the two Koreas in order that the relative strength in manpower and material of the former belligerents should not be increased and report on their findings to the mixed armistice Commission. Any movements had to be routed through specific ports of entry, five each in South and North Korea respectively. Each member of the Supervisory Commission was supported by a



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detachment of officers amounting for Sweden and Switzerland to about one hundred each and for Poland and Czechoslovakia to more than 300 each. The daily work and supervision in the ports of entry was carried out by teams consisting of officers of the four Nations and a number of mobile teams were held at headquarters for dispatch at the request of one party into the territory of the other in order to investigate alleged breaches of the armistice treaty.

The experiences made by the Supervisory Commission have hardly been any happier than those of the Repatriation Commission. Since each belligerent had proposed two of the total of four delegations, it is obvious that the Supervisory Commission rarely reached a valid decision. The inspection teams in the South were able to make extensive investigations, but they rarely came to an agreed conclusion. The activities of the Northern teams were almost nil; they were seldom asked to investigate and had no right to do so on their own initiative. They suspected considerable traffic which was escaping their control by passing through other ports. The whole supervision became more and more a purely token one and could not seriously be considered a guarantee against the increase of the war potential. Furthermore the Polish and Czech members of the Commission almost invariably opposed any demand from the U.N. Command for the dispatch of a mobile team and the Northern Command finally forbade any such investigations in their territory.

As you know the activity of the Supervisory Commission has further been hampered by the agitation within the population of South Korea against the Polish and Czech members. I had heard before of these accusations of espionage, but I doubt strongly whether any member of a team could indulge in such activities under the very strict control exercised by the American military police. As things stand now, all the officers of the teams in the South are not even allowed to leave their camps or have contact with the population. They have to proceed to their inspection in closed vans or by helicopter.

You are probably aware that both the Swiss and Swedish Governments are anxious to bring their mandate to an end, but will not do so without being formally relieved by both sides. The harmony between the members of the Supervisory Commission has considerably improved; and their tasks have been immensely lightened since the departure from Korean soil of the American, Commonwealth and Chinese troops. It has therefore been decided that the number

of fixed and mobile teams, as well as the size of their staffs should be reduced by more than half.

I would not like to conclude this chapter without saying a word about the Swiss officers serving on our Korea Commissions. Speaking of my own team, they were mostly young lawyers, Civil Servants and a few elderly school teachers. It was a big chance for them all to be enlisted and to go and see parts of the world not easily accessible. We were somewhat apprehensive considering that their task was strange and without precedent, and could not be outlined beforehand. How would they stand comparison with the Swedes and Indians and American officers, people with whom they had never had any contact.

The experience was a very happy one. Although their knowledge of the English language was at first rather inadequate, it improved rapidly; they showed all the talents needed for such a mission: quick understanding, vigilance, initiative, discipline and discretion. I am sure they returned home with added experience which will profit them in their daily life and professional career. The Korean Mission proved to be at least of considerable educational value for the few hundred young Swiss who enlisted during these last two years in either of the Commissions.

VI. What were the lessons to be learned by participation in these Korea Missions? Our experiences are certainly not satisfactory. Neither of these Commissions was able to attain the aims which they were supposed to accomplish. Both Commissions



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came up against the encroachments and the interferences from either side. The Neutral Nations Commissions to Indo-China had to work under similar conditions with similar results. One of the causes is, that in Korea as in Vietnam the local Governments are not signatories to the respective armistice agreements. They feel therefore free to obstruct and complicate the work of the missions at will.

And then there is the problem of the partners, the other neutral members, whom we were not free to choose. They will obviously be selected by either side from among Nations who have no particular connection with the conflict to be settled. In the case of Korea, they were chosen among the Nations who had merely not been involved in hostilities, i.e. the widest possible interpretation of "Neutral". As I said before, the concept of neutrality is relative. In our totalitarian partners we encountered the very same opposition which made our dealings with one of the two sides so very difficult.

The considerations which led our government to accepting the principle of active neutrality will not be invalidated by our recent experiences; our readiness to continue on this new path will not be impaired. But we should beware of engaging in an enterprise which may lead to results to which we cannot subscribe; results which might throw doubts on our good name of being truly neutral, or results which would bring us into conflict with the moral convictions of our people. After all, the knowledge gained in Korea and in Indo-China is not yet wholly conclusive. Nations participating in such missions should exchange or pool the conclusions drawn from their experiences, which could then serve as a basis to set up directives for their future participation.

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The Neutrals will hardly ever be asked to collaborate in setting out the terms of reference for such missions (as was the case in the Gran Chaco conflict), they will merely have to accept or reject the terms which are submitted to them, however defective they may be. I think that if our government is willing to lend their assistance on future occasions, we should do so only under certain conditions. At least we should insist that:

1) Any such Mission serves a useful purpose and is ultimately conducive to the maintenance or establishment of peace; it should never be used simply to cover a deadlock which has proved insoluble in previous negotiations;

2) the powers of the Commission should be drawn as widely as possible and the Commission should be protected against the interference from any side;

3) the delegates should be bound to act impartially and solely in the interest of the parties to the conflict, although these expressions might be interpreted quite differently on ideological grounds;

4) the Commission must consist of uneven numbers in order to reach decisions by majority rule;

5) if the decisions of such a Commission affect vital interests and moral convictions of a member Nation, for example our concept of human rights, its delegate should be entitled to withdraw from the Commission's work.

Ladies and gentlemen, I hope that this talk will have convinced you that there is a point to be made for neutrality in modern world politics. I believe that true neutrality may exercise a useful function in easing tension and facilitating settlements when power and prestige politics have failed. Let us be confident that this beacon of hope will shine brighter and brighter over a divided world. Switzerland, who on the basis of its perpetual neutrality is not only willing but bound to keep good relations with all Nations, will be able to strengthen the esteem and confidence of other Nations by the faithful fulfilment of such tasks. By giving an honest example of practical neutrality, she will help also towards a better understanding of her own position in the world. I am glad to say that this new political concept, cautiously initiated but determinedly pursued by President Petitpierre, has found the unanimous support not only of our Parliament but also of almost the whole of our population.

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