

Home affairs

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HOME AFFAIRS.

by MAX NEF.

As announced by the Swiss population statisticians, the number of inhabitants in our country recently exceeded the five million mark. A general census only takes place in Switzerland every ten years; for one thing it costs a lot, and for another the statistical evaluation is a laborious and lengthy piece of work. However, during the intermediate period regular estimates are carried out and published, on the basis of the births, deaths and migratory movements which are reported to the Registry Offices. The most recent of these publications gives the present figure for the Swiss population at five million four thousand inhabitants.

About the same time, the Canton of Zurich became the most populated of our Cantons, in that it has now surpassed Berne, which in this respect headed the list, up to now. The reason for this is to be found in the marked increase which has occurred in the number of inhabitants in the town of Zurich, which with its 420,000 inhabitants, in rough figures, is by far the biggest city in Switzerland. Basle comes next — at a considerable distance away — with not quite 200,000 inhabitants, and then there follows Geneva, Berne and Lausanne. In view of the fact that these five cities have more than 100,000 inhabitants they are entered into the statistics as being cities. Taken together they comprise over a million of persons, which figure represents a fifth of the entire population of our country.

A glance at the development which has taken place during the last few years, shows a steady growth of the towns, at the cost of the rural populations. Whereas the towns are growing bigger and bigger, the number of inhabitants in the small country places, more especially in the mountainous regions, is steadily declining, or else it remains stationary, so that there is no denying a tendency towards urbanisation.

During recent years, the number of births in Switzerland amounted to about 80,000 per annum. Almost immediately before the war this figure was smaller by almost a quarter, amounting as it did to 60,000. As, on the other hand, the death rate has remained practically the same, at 50,000, there is a correspondingly higher surplus of births, to-day. In

comparison with the last years, prior to the war, this surplus has more than doubled.

The reason for this development is to be found, for one thing in the greater number of marriages that take place. Furthermore, a shifting has occurred in the structure of the Swiss people, in regard to ages; the proportion of old persons or — in other words — the average life expectancy of the population has increased.


The estimates of the number of the population, carried out regularly by the statisticians, form a sufficient basis for many official or economic measures. For instance, the number of mandates meted out for the National Council — that is to say, the Lower Chamber of Representatives — is calculated per capita of the number of inhabitants residing in the various Cantons. Furthermore, a great many of the subsidies allocated by the Confederation, the Cantons and the Communes are also adjusted in accordance with the exact number of inhabitants. The same applies to the Cantons' share in the Confederation's revenue from taxation, and to similar reciprocal services and payments, such as are customary in a federatively organised land, between the Central Government and the Member States. As already stated, an official census, which is carried out on an appointed day throughout the entire Confederation and which lays claim to scientific exactitude, only takes place once every ten years. It was started after the foundation of the Swiss Confederation, in 1848. The first census took place in 1850, the last, in 1950. Meanwhile, the population of our country has more than doubled.

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HOME AFFAIRS.

by MAX NEF.

From the considerations put forward for discussion recently by Mr. Streuli, the Federal Councillor in charge of the Federal Department of Finance, on the subject of a future reform of the federal finances, it may be perceived what an important position in the financial economy of a country is occupied by its expenditure for military defence. This already because the Federal Constitution, which is the fundamental principle of the State, declares the chief aim of the Confederation to be the maintenance of the independence of the home-country. This chief aim of the Confederation necessitates the maintenance of an Army possessing military efficiency. The experiences of the Second World War have shown, once more, the fate that is likely to befall an unarmed or insufficiently equipped country.

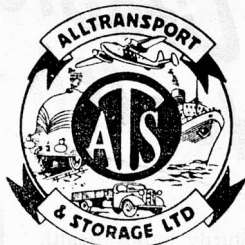
For Switzerland, whose maxim for her foreign policy is that of a permanent neutrality, there is still an additional international duty to be carried out, namely that her independence shall be defended by her own strength and means, as her Statute of Neutrality forbids that she should enter into a political or military alliance with another country or a group of Powers, which would serve the purpose of collective security. It is on these grounds that Switzerland is not a member of the United Nations, as were she to belong to this Organisation, political and military duties might arise which would not be compatible with the Statute of her permanent neutrality.

Moreover, it is laid down in an international principle that the military provisions of a permanently neutral State for its defence, must be such as are capable of fulfilling this purpose. Thus, a symbolic gesture is not sufficient. On the other hand, in view of the present position of international war technique, no more can be demanded, any longer, from a small neutral country in regard to its military preparedness, than what its economic and financial situation is capable of accomplishing and of bearing. It is for the country in question to decide upon what it, itself, deems to be sufficient from the military defence point of view, as also from that of the extent of the country's capacity to carry the burden. It must, however, see to it that it carries out the preparation of its military national defence in such a way that the foreign countries are convinced of the determination and the practical possibility of this neutral country to protect its independence, under all circumstances, in case of an international conflict breaking out.

It is quite obvious that in the present situation of World politics and in view of the rapid development of technical means of war, all this constitutes a heavy burden for a small country, a burden, moreover, which gains in weight steadily.

This explains the continuous increase in expenditure for military purposes, which has to be appropriated by the Confederation. At the time when the Korean war started, the Federal Chambers — as will

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be remembered — approved an additional appropriation for armament amounting to about 1,500 million francs. This comprised expenditure in respect of armament, equipment, increased mechanisation of the Army, and also for military construction work of all kinds. Since then, this extraordinary, supplementary credit has had to be added to, because the execution of orders by industry and trade has been affected by the general rise in prices, which naturally extends also to orders having a military character. Furthermore, some additional measures had to be taken in order to achieve a further adjustment towards the technical developments which have occurred in the armament efforts of other countries.

However, it has not proved enough for a big financial effort to be made only once in connection with the development of this additional armament programme in Switzerland. Quite the contrary, for this development in military preparedness requires fresh, recurrent annual expenditure. The arms, as well as the material must be kept in a state, where they are always ready for use. The same remarks apply to military buildings and installations. In order to achieve this, additional personnel is required. Moreover, if the Army is endowed with more material, as time goes on and it has to be renewed, this also means correspondingly greater expenditure. Three sets of figures will provide an illustration for this: whereas in 1914 the value of the equipment for an Infantry Regiment of not quite 3,000 men, amounted to about 370,000 francs, in 1939 the appropriation for this same purpose had already risen to three and a half million francs, whilst to-day, the cost entailed for it is true a much better outfit in arms and equip-

ment for the same number of men, come to as much as seven and a half million francs.

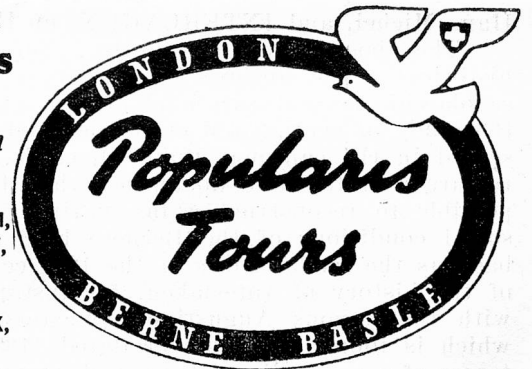
At the present time, appropriations for military purposes form more than one-third of the total expenditure of the Confederation. Viewed in ratio to the total national income, they represent some 3 per cent, which is less than what is expended by most of those countries in which similar conditions exist to our own.

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