

Home affairs

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HOME AFFAIRS.

by MAX NEF.

During the Second World War, Switzerland, also, supplemented the effective power of her military defence of the country by measures for the protection of the civilian population. In addition to a staff organisation, the building of air-raid shelters in apartment houses, as also the preparation of dug-outs for the population in small towns or villages, had been ordered several years earlier. When the war came to an end, certain of these measures were allowed to fall in disuse. When, however, later on, the hopes which had sprung up during the immediate post-bellum period, that the armistice would soon lead to a period of real peace, proved to be illusory, the responsible authorities proceeded once more to institute new measures in the domain of the protection of the civilian population. Public Opinion, however, very obviously found it difficult to let itself be convinced of the necessity for such preventive measures. Above all, the obligation to build air-raid shelters in the already existing apartment houses, met with considerable opposition, and this not simply because of the cost, which would have meant higher rents for the tenants. An official Decree on this subject was rejected by a Public Referendum, in the Autumn of 1952. Only a previous Regulation, according to which shelters had to be built in all new houses, remained in force, and has been applied since then. Thus, year by year, in all the bigger towns, means for the protection of some 100,000 inhabitants are being steadily established. In addition to the former arrangements which have remained over since wartime, possibilities of shelter are still required for about one million eight hundred inhabitants. For, in case of an outbreak of war, not all localities would be declared as having the obligation to provide shelters, but only the bigger ones among them. For one thing, all the men apt for military service would then be mobilised and, therefore, not at home so that the number of inhabitants who would be in such localities during wartime would be considerably smaller than in peacetime.

Recently, however, the idea is increasingly gaining ground, in Public Opinion, that so long as protection for the civilian population has not been

provided for in an adequate manner, measures of a military nature would not prove sufficient, in an era of total war, to give the country and its people the conceivable amount of security. Thus, an Association for the Protection of Civilians has been formed in Switzerland, on a voluntary basis, which is engaged in a very active propaganda, of an explanatory character.

Nor have the authorities remained inactive. The Draft Bill of a Federal Law on the Protection of the Civilian Population has just been published; this has been based on a former Decree, but in it, account has been taken of some of the criticisms levelled against it, at that time. Thus, for instance, the building of air raid shelters in the existing apartment houses is not to be rendered obligatory. Moreover, in order to stimulate the voluntary action taken in this matter, larger contributions from the State Treasury are provided for, in that at least half of the costs incurred will be covered by public moneys. The Confederation will also take over part of the cost of material for aerial defence, inasmuch as it orders its acquisition, or else it will provide for this being issued at a smaller cost.

From the organisational aspect, three different grades have been planned: the broad basis, without which no successful protective measures could exist, is formed by so-called "house-wardens". All inhabitants of houses, whatever their sex, can undertake the duties pertaining to this job, foreign nationals

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also being accepted, in so far as they are suitable for the job. As, in this case, it is a question of measures which are of a purely self-protective nature, their obligatory character would appear to be justified. The training of persons to whom special functions will be attributed, as well as the refresher courses, all of which only take up a few hours, will therefore not be compensated for by the State.

The next grade is that of the so-called "protection of industrial plants". Suitable organisations are to be set up in all public or private establishments and plants, including hospitals and administrations, whenever such establishments possess a staff of at least fifty persons. All those tasks which cannot be carried out by the House Wardens or the Organisation for the Protection of Industrial Plants, will become incumbent upon the local anti-air raid organisations. The establishment of protective measures will be obligatory on all Communes possessing more than a thousand inhabitants dwelling within a close settlement.

In regard to the joining of the Organisation for the Protection of Industrial Plants, or of the Organisations in the various localities, there is a question of this being made obligatory for males between the ages of sixteen and sixty-five, in so far as they are not apt for military service and are not engaged in any public work.

For women and girls, on the other hand, membership in such protective organisations are voluntary; this decision is due to the fact that the former official order making such service obligatory for women was especially severely criticised.

Measures for Air Defence in respect of the civilian population which have now been elaborated and which would be made applicable should war break out, are very similar to those in force during the last war and correspond to those which are provided for in most of the other countries. Furthermore, they will not only be applicable to wartime, but can be put into use also in peacetime, should any very great catastrophes occur.

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