

An Editor speaks

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AN EDITOR SPEAKS.By **PIERRE BÉGUIN.****"A Language Equilibrium".**

It has happened, quite by chance, that during the last few years the High Command of the Swiss Army has had a majority of Superior Officers who come from the French-speaking parts of Switzerland, French thus being their native tongue. In view of the fact that a number of retirements have taken place recently there will now be a better balance achieved between the representatives of the German-speaking majority and the Latin minority. For psychological reasons this is very satisfactory.

In wartime or when on active service, that is to say when Switzerland's neighbours have become belligerents and she runs the risk of being drawn into an armed conflict, the Swiss Army possesses a Commander-in-Chief who is invested with the rank and the dignity of a General. In peacetime our Army has no Commander-in-Chief at its head.

This is a very special régime, which is probably peculiar to our country alone and often causes surprise to foreigners. Historical reasons are the explanation of this régime. It goes back to the ancient Confederation of States, that is to say, to those times when each Canton was the Lord of its small Army and when a unity of command was only necessary when the whole of the country was threatened by external dangers — when the action of the autonomous Cantonal military contingents had to be co-ordinated and made subject to a single command. The continuance of this régime is probably due to the mistrust felt by all democracies for any too great personal military power.

Thus, in times of peace the Swiss Army does not enjoy any autonomy; it is subjected strictly to the civil power. It is the Federal Councillor who is in charge of the Military Department who is, so to speak, in command. In any case, he ranks first in the military organisation of the country. Above all, it is he who presides over a body of superior officers who, grouped in this fashion in the Commission for National Defence, constitute the military authority. The principal personages in this Areopagus are the Chief of the General Staff, the Chief of the Instructors Corps and the Commanders of the three Army Corps. Among these, the Chief of the General Staff occupies the most important position; he is, in the full sense of the term, the *primus inter pares*, or "first among his peers".

Of recent years it has happened that the Commission for National Defence has been composed mostly of officers from the French-speaking regions. The Federal Councillor in charge of the Military Department is a French-speaking Swiss. So is the Chief of the Instructors, and so, also, is the Chief of the General Staff. Moreover, one of the three Army Corps Commanders also comes from the French-speaking part of the country.

Naturally, there had been no thought of favouring to this extent the French language minority. All the officers holding these positions had been chosen because of their capabilities, *i.e.*, in an absolutely objective fashion. It was just chance that the most capable among them happened to be French-speaking.

The remarkable thing about it is that this situation has never been the subject of criticism on the part of the German-speaking Swiss. This goes to show the

extent to which the German-speaking members of the Confederation are good fellow-citizens — in spite of possessing so great a majority — friendly and anxious to be on terms of good understanding. Generally speaking they possess such a highly developed sense of national community that they either forget the language differences or look upon them as negligible.

We are indulging in these reflections today because the composition of the Commission of National Defence, that is to say of the body which represents our High Command, has been modified. Two French-speaking officers have resigned — the Chief of the General Staff and the Chief of Instructors. The first-mentioned officer has been replaced by a German-speaking Swiss; the second, by an officer who, although he was born in the French-speaking region and possesses the characteristics of that part of the country, has maintained the right of citizenship of his forebears, who came from the German-speaking part of Switzerland.

We realise perfectly well that this modification of the linguistic composition of the High Command is of secondary importance. What is essential is that the personnel of our higher-ranking cadre should be younger. Nevertheless, we cannot but congratulate ourselves on the fact that in such capital questions there should be no competition between the majority and the minority, and that so little should be thought about it. Indeed, we are tempted to see in this an additional proof of this evident truth: Switzerland is divers, as a result of her four national languages, but she does not have any minority problems. And this gives us the benefits of peace and equilibrium.

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