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FREEDOM AND CO-RESPONSIBILITY

In a short while, 1967 will close down, and all its joys and disappointments, its achievements and failures will belong to the past. Few of the world problems have been solved, and a big question mark looms up when we think of the new year and all the longed-for solutions. For Switzerland, many are the problems, too, in spite of continued relative affluence. Politically, the discussion with regard to her neutrality and her place in Europe and the world, goes on.

Switzerland's Mission

In a recent talk to the London Group of the Nouvelle Société Helvétique, Dr. Peter Gilg, Lecturer at Berne University, tried to answer the question regarding Switzerland's future. It must be seen from the present, and the present is inseparable from the past. Dr. Gilg picked out three famous Swiss who had tried to give an answer, the Liberal lawyer and parliamentarian Carl Hilty at the time when imperialism was at its height (1901), the Protestant sociologist and theologian Leonhard Ragaz in the middle of the first world war, and the Catholic aristocrat Gonzague de Reynold when German National Socialism endangered Europe (1938); in each case at a time of crisis, discomfort and danger. Each asked the question if the Small State could have a future at all. Each answered in the affirmative, provided the country had a Mission. Dr. Gilg believes that Switzerland still has a mission today, even to keep her independence, as a kind of mandate entrusted by history and based on the spiritual structure of the European peoples.

Not the Role of just a Critic

The eminent former Federal Councillor Prof. Dr. F. T. Wahlen asked the question whether a small country like Switzerland, neutral and unaligned, had a place in the world of politics when he gave a lecture on "Swiss Co-Responsibility for present and future in St. Gall in June. He emphasised that in this indivisible world the role of a Small State was not that of a critic watching the happenings on the stage from a theatre box, but that Switzerland's position obliged her to action. Solidarity was a term which we had put side by side with neutrality since the last war. Its meaning reached far beyond the humanitarian obligations of a neutral country. An apparent contradiction was often pointed out: neutrality demanded being impartial, and solidarity meant at times taking sides. The question of what solidarity meant, had become a significant part of Swiss foreign policy. The call for increased activation of Swiss solidarity remained of equal importance to regard for the ensuing obligations, said Prof. Wahlen. In the centre of this debate stood Switzerland's relation to United Nations on one hand and to the dream of a unified Europe on the other.

The Confederation and UNO

The Swiss Europa Union at its Annual Congress in Aarau in November, issued the so-called "Ten Aarau Theses". In this document, the organisation expressed satisfaction with the progress made by the Community of the Six which it calls the "motor" of European efforts at unification which have a growing influence in other Western European countries. Switzerland should apply as a full member, but the biggest obstacle was her neu-

trality. This problem was overrated and her neutrality should be confined to the military sphere. The fundamental conception of a unified Europe should be kept in mind by Government and Parliament, especially in a possible Governmental Programme which has been asked for in the so-called Schuermann Motion, as well as in the forthcoming total revision of the Federal Constitution. So far the Europa Union.

Switzerland's position with United Nations has changed. When UNO was founded, Switzerland could only have joined by relinquishing her neutrality. Since then it has been seen that the most important obligation of solidarity which members had to take on, namely a worldwide system of collective security, has proved "sound and smoke". Swiss solidarity, says Prof. Wahlen, refers not to *texts* but to the *ideals* of UNO. It is the difficult task of Federal Council and Parliament to extricate from the happenings of grey reality those essentials on which solidarity can be put to work. That is precisely why Switzerland joined actively and purposefully most of the Specialised Agencies of United Nations.

Switzerland could not join UNO today either without U.N. accepting her neutrality. But Mr. Wahlen realises that she cannot keep her place in a community of nations without an *active* policy of neutrality. He hopes that soon Switzerland will also be able to join the European Human Rights Convention, once the two stumbling blocks of votes for women and religious *Ausnahmsartikel* have been removed.

But there are not only rights — also duties if any community, within the State and within the world's nations, is to thrive. Perhaps, said the former Federal Councillor, the time had come not only to speak of Human *Rights*, but to think also of a Human *Duties* Convention. That in itself would at least have educational value.

Lack of Political Interest

In a later talk which Prof. Wahlen gave in Zurich, he referred to the reasons for the clearly discernible lack of political interest among the citizens, which he considers to be a result of the existing climate of affluence and of a weakening of political, ideological and denominational contrasts. This development has had its repercussion on the position and sphere of influence of the political Parties. Their programmes have taken on more and more similarity. Yet they cannot be replaced by groups of experts and computers. They will remain the instruments of forming political opinion and produce the necessary *Nachwuchs* for high political office. Another change is in the relation between Federal Council and Parliament since the founding of the Confederate State in 1848. As the State's tasks increase, the working ability of the Militia Parliament has become more and more limited, whilst the Government's powers have extended. Prof. Wahlen appealed to the fourth power in the country (next to the people as the Sovereign, and legislative and executive authorities), the economic organisations to consider more the interest of the country as a whole. "Much could have been done to hold back inflation and thus to reduce the present malaise, but economy as well as the individual citizens have often lacked the will to discipline and self-control".

“Special Case Switzerland” — Co-operative Federalism

Adolf Guggenbuehl published a book in August called “The Swiss are different”. It is true that what is known as the “*Sonderfall Schweiz*” has always been a fascinating topic, and the large number of excellent books on the subject is surprising. The fact that they are in great demand testifies to the interest which must be there, or books like Hans Tschaeni’s “*Profil der Schweiz*” and Oskar Reck’s “*Die Schweiz im Spiegel*” would not have been so much in demand; F. T. Wahlen’s “*Dem Gewissen verpflichtet*” would not have become a bestseller; nor would the annuary of the N.S.H. devoted to the total revision of the Constitution have been out of print so soon. A Foundation for Swiss Co-operation which has been the aim of the Nouvelle Société Helvétique for some time, has become active under the presidency of Mr. Théo Chopard, a great friend of the Swiss abroad. Its aim is a new co-operative federalism. Teachers and students organisations form study groups and seminars. At the traditional “*Ustertag*” on 22nd November, the N.H.G. President Oskar Reck said that the only way to get the ever increasing mass of indifferent citizens integrated into political life, is to imbue federal politics again with clarity, lucidity and intelligibility.

Alternative to Patriotism?

The Zurich Theologian and Editor Dr. H. H. Brunner, in a talk to the German-speaking Swiss Church in London some time ago, said that the younger generation was trying more and more to find new *Leitbilder* which were alternatives to the patriotism of our forefathers. The lecturer feared that Switzerland was on the path to a “splendid isolation” by objecting to any criticism and remonstrations from outside, in spite of her role as international country dependent on lively economic relations, tourism and worldwide communications, and being the home of the Red Cross, the Ecumenical Movement of the Churches and the “Gnomes” of Zurich. “We don’t have to be told by foreigners what to do with regard to votes for women” is a favourite retort. In the second war Switzerland was involved in a hard and highly risky probation test. It was literally a question of existence. To oppose Hitler’s ideologies and military power successfully, was only possible by the whole people remembering their individuality, their historical heritage and the importance of their democratic principles. Just how vital that was, is shown in Prof. Edgar Bonjour’s “*History of Swiss Neutrality*”, its volume covering 1930 to 1939. The Federal Council had realised that in order to understand Switzerland’s position in the war, the author must explain the previous history first before writing about her neutrality during the war. She stood the test and emerged victoriously, and that, in Dr. Brunner’s view, may be one of the reasons for the maxim still so prevalent today “what was good enough for us, is good enough for our sons”. But the younger generation is no longer ready to accept this. Patriotism has fallen into disrepute. The term patriot goes back to the 16th century, and especially in the French Revolution, a patriot was a *good* citizen, and any opposing elements were *bad*. Those found wanting in patriotism are often accused of lack of love of their country. A sensible patriotism must express itself in active co-operation in trying to solve concrete tasks, otherwise it is a meaningless feeling.

Youth Is Waiting

The enlightened men and women of the generation that has gone through two wars and an economic crisis do

not expect that the image of Switzerland which they have carved for themselves should be “conserved, canonised and passed on as alone valid” (National Councillor Peter Duerrenmatt), but they ask that the image be taken seriously. The former federal Councillor Wahlen is convinced that youth is ready when we show them the confidence which is necessary as well as justified. Federal Councillor Nello Celio, too, at the Annual Congress of the Young Liberals said that youth was not necessarily non-conformist. He appreciates young people’s attitude, however extremist, to the country’s problems and politics in general. In his view, there is a vital field of activities ahead of us, the duty to provide thorough information, to stimulate ideas and discussion above all personal interest. To train youth is not sufficient without strengthening their sense of belonging. We don’t want an active élite and large, disinterested masses. We have a chance to engender true patriotism, which at the same time leads more surely to the idea of a unified Europe than where indifference, scepticism and lack of interest in politics abound. Then Johannes von Mueller’s words need not frighten us “Once the time has passed when our fathers might possibly have founded a greater republic, nobody will hinder you to have the best”.

The Second Generation Abroad

These thoughts should be of some consolation to the generation of Swiss living abroad whose sons and daughters find it difficult to “belong” to two countries. The problems facing these young men and women are often belittled, but they are real enough. The Assembly of the Swiss Abroad next August will be devoted to the problem of the young *Auslandsschweizer* and their contribution to Switzerland’s *présence* in the world.

Step Outside

When the “*Aktion für freie Meinungsbildung*” published its first political statement in Swiss dailies (signed of “*Trumpfbaar*”) in February 1947, they used Gottfried Keller’s famous words “No Government and no battalions are able to protect right and freedom where the citizen himself is unable to step outside his front door and to investigate what goes on.” We have the freedom to either step outside and investigate or to sit at home, inactive and indifferent. Perhaps we feel like Bernard Shaw when he said that liberty meant responsibility and that was why most men dreaded it. Perhaps we do fear responsibility, the co-responsibility which distinguishes us as higher species of God’s creation. The more we ask and expect of the modern Welfare State, the more we limit our personal freedom. If we want to remain free we must not push all responsibility on the powers that be out of sheer laziness. Our countrymen at home have shown trust and confidence when they accepted the new Constitutional Article for the Swiss Abroad. Accepting the rights accorded to us, we should also be ready to do our bit. It is so easy to sit back and pretend lack of time and abilities. We may not have been endowed with riches or the gift of the gab, with energy to shift obstacles and vision to evolve new plans and ideas. But there is not one of us who has not been given tackle or talk, tithes or time to be used in full co-responsibility. 1968 gives us a new chance.

MM

(Compiled partly from material received by courtesy of “*Agence Télégraphique Suisse*”, “*Basler Nachrichten*”, etc.)