

The Swiss government and its war policy : critical reports and selfless actions

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called upon to speak at the special session and followed by organising their own event. But apart from the differences in content some part was certainly played in all this by the fact that Switzerland was beginning an election year. In spite of all, the memorial occasions

will have had at least some lasting value. They will prevent Switzerland going down in history as a country which in 1989 was prepared to celebrate the mobilisation at the beginning of the war but ignored what happened towards the end of it. ■

The Swiss government and its war policy

Critical reports and selfless actions

During and immediately after the war the Swiss authorities had to come to terms with their own policies. But only much later and with great delay were the "illegal" humanitarian actions of individual officials decently honoured.

For Switzerland too the end of the Second World War came as an enormous relief but hardly a surprise. The tide had turned at Stalingrad, although Hitler's unpredictability made

there was constant supervision and criticism as and when necessary.

Extensive reporting

At the end of the war it was felt that a wide-ranging series of reports should be made about the use of the special powers in all areas of federal policy. The hope was that lessons could be drawn from the wartime experience. One set of reports was from the army's active service. The report of the general was eagerly awaited and with it were published the reports of the most senior officers – the chief of the general staff, the adjutant general and the head of armaments.

Some parts of the general's report contained sharp criticism of the Federal Council, with which the commander-in-chief had had problems regarding the call-up of troops during the war. For the general military and strategic considerations were all-important, while for the Federal Council financial and economic factors played a major role, as also political considerations. It was afraid

that demands on the civilian militia might be too great and war-weariness might set in. It was an open secret that there had been many problems between the army command and the Federal Military Department. The Federal Council felt obliged to reply to the general in a counter-report. But in view of the great popularity of General Guisan it had to do this very diplomatically.

Max Nef, editor of the "Neue Zürcher Zeitung", drew up the report on press and radio and gave a well-informed description of the restrictions laid on press freedom. There was relatively little censorship and few confiscations, and the freedom enjoyed by the Swiss press elicited spiteful attacks and repeated threats from Nazi spokesmen.

The war economy was also the subject of a comprehensive report. It had functioned excellently. Food and petrol rationing had worked in a most exemplary way.

The delicate subject of asylum and refugee policy was put in the hands of a liberal member of the Basle cantonal government. His criticism of the treatment of persecuted Jews by the immigration authorities was outspoken. It was met by a counter-report from the minister responsible, Federal Councillor von Steiger. However, this did not succeed in justifying in any convincing way practices which were questionable on humanitarian grounds.

Delayed rehabilitation

During the war years a brave show was put on by the people of this neutral country most of which went unrecognised. This included the farmers' wives who had to look after farm, home and family alone as well as the many working people who willingly did extra hours. Particularly important were the civil servants who disobeyed questionable regulations and followed their consciences. Two examples out of many were consular official Carl Lutz and St. Gall police chief Paul Grüninger, the last of whom has unfortunately never been fully rehabilitated.

In Budapest Lutz managed to provide thousands of Jews left to the mercy of Nazi thugs with documents which saved them from being transported to the extermination camps. Grüninger allowed refugees to cross the Swiss border into safety. On orders from Berne he was dismissed without a pension and spent the rest of his life in poverty. ■

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it by no means certain that the hated little country would not be attacked.

Upon the outbreak of war the Federal Assembly gave the Federal Council special powers which suspended a small part of the constitution. But the government's jurisdiction was much narrower than in the First World War. In spite of this the executive and legislative branches agreed that these extra powers should be reduced and abolished altogether as soon as possible. Periodic reports on their use also meant that

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