

Swiss Guard Freedom

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SWISS GUARD FREEDOM.

(The following survey is reprinted with grateful acknowledgement from the "Christian Science Monitor," February 26th).

Although Switzerland, with its mixture of races and languages would appear to be particularly vulnerable to the propaganda tactics of the Nazis and other extremists, it has probably departed from its traditions less than any other European country.

A haven for political refugees from all nations and a country where one out of every seven Swiss men marries a foreign girl, who automatically becomes a Swiss citizen, the way would appear to be open for the disintegrating work of Nazi operators, yet the underground workers have had no conspicuous success here.

One reason why Switzerland has been able to maintain the freedom of her land and institutions and continue her tradition of tolerance to individuals and cultures is that the Swiss Government has not been weakly tolerant to forces which are hostile to tolerance itself, and which wish to destroy the Swiss democratic way.

German Nazis and Swiss pro-Nazi elements, the most dangerous of the extremists, have played out their entire bag of propaganda tricks and intrigue, but they have all been ineffective against Switzerland's strong policy in defense of freedom.

First impetus for government measures against Nazi agitators came from the people themselves. Mass meetings were held in Zurich and other cities as early as 1938, demanding that a dam be built against the flood of foreign propaganda which threatened the country. Newspapers took up the cry. Several Swiss papers were severely criticized by the majority of the press for carrying advertisements for the German propaganda magazine "Signal."

The Federal Council was requested to pass a bill for the defense of democracy giving the government larger power in regulating propaganda activities as an emergency measure. The bill was passed. It was greeted with general approval. The Swiss leaders did not feel that totalitarian powers with their expert knowledge of mass psychology should be allowed to use Switzerland as a free field for their subversive activities.

Danger points began to appear. In January, 1938, a meeting between important industrialists and the Nazi leader, Georg Hoffmann, was arranged. This meeting has often been compared with the 1932 Düsseldorf meeting of Herr Hitler with Rhineland captains of industry, except that the outcome was different. The aim of the Zurich meeting, as of the Düsseldorf meeting, was to gain the financial support of the industrialists to break the power of the trade unions and to establish a totalitarian regime.

Though some important industrialists did contribute to Hoffmann's party, the most important Swiss firms, such as "Eisen und Stahlwerke E. Fischer," remained aloof. Herr Hoffmann has not yet succeeded in making himself the Adolf Hitler of Switzerland.

One of Switzerland's leading industrialists was deeply involved, though he did not want it to be publicly known. When the "Schaffhauser Bauer" published an article accusing him of supporting a movement against Swiss democracy and for the introduction of Nazi principles, he sued the writer for libel.

The court decided that there were no grounds for libel charges since the accusation was based on facts.

A few "spontaneous" pro-Nazi symptoms were visible among certain elements of the working class, attracted by Nazi anti-gold eloquence, anti-Jewish noise and the glorification of the "dignity of labour" and of the "workingman's leader." The mass of the Swiss workers, however, accustomed to white bread and plentiful supplies of meat and vegetables, remained loyal to their Social Democratic party.

Two such fanatics, one of them a former railway worker, tried to start a new pro-Nazi party. They managed to get 700 Bernese working men into a hall for their first meeting. The assembled workers, however, declared their loyalty to Switzerland.

Despite a resolution to keep clear of Nazi ideas, the general attitude of the Bernese toward these would-be fascist leaders is one of tolerant sympathy for enthusiasts who have made a ridiculous mistake.

The most popular pro-Nazi movement was the National Front. But even this movement, which is still referred to by one of its former leaders as "a popular stampede" (Volksgedränge) only counted 2,000 members.

Its rules and regulations for members, almost an exact copy from the German National Socialist Party, bore the stigma of being entirely un-Swiss.

Talk of heroic ideals, discipline, self-effacement, political solidarity in the aggressive bombastic fascist style sounded ridiculous in the peaceful, stable Swiss scene.

Such rules as "Right is whatever is useful to the movement and to your people" didn't fit Christian conceptions of right and wrong held by most Swiss. The principle "The masses cannot govern themselves either directly or by a number of so-called representatives of the people," is disproved by the experience of Switzerland, one of the best governed as well as most democratic countries of Europe.

The Swiss are furthermore as one Swiss put it "constitutionally incapable of understanding the leadership principle."

Other fascist rules such as "Never squander your time in idle talk and self-satisfied criticism, but pitch in and work," have long been part and parcel of Swiss thought and are one of the reasons why Swiss democracy has worked so well.

The Swiss Federal Council might well have allowed this foreign growth in the Swiss scene to continue to exist had not the officials of the movement, encouraged by the Axis victory against France, and feeling their backs strengthened by Berlin, begun a noisy propaganda campaign among the masses and even served a sort of ultimatum against the Federal Council.

Widely distributed pamphlets of the movement said, "The days of the Federal Council are numbered. We are on the sides of the victor in this European conflict. The old men of this government are on the side of the defeated."

The "ultimatum" of the "National Movement" demanded the removal of restrictions which had been placed upon their activities under the law for the protection of democracy, the freedom to print a seditious daily and weekly and to hold mass meetings to preach their doctrines to the people. It further demanded protection from the "slanders" of patriotic societies and the restoration to "equal constitutional rights."

All Switzerland watched with baited breath to see how the Bundesrat would react to this ultimatum of a movement which, however unpopular in Switzerland, might expect the firm support of strong neighbours.

The Federal Council's reply was to forbid it completely and "all movements intended to replace it."

Most of the leaders of the group and other groups like it who were not arrested and imprisoned for subversive activities have fled to Germany, whence they write pamphlets and articles attacking Switzerland.

In the Swiss Nazi movement one can recognize the same tactics that brought the fall of so many countries in Europe. Pretending to be a small persecuted minority, the pro-Nazi bearers of an intolerant revolutionary doctrine wished to destroy all existing social forms and set themselves up as supreme masters.

The same appeal to tribal instincts was made in Switzerland as in other countries. The Jewish question was used as a wedge for German domination. Nazi pamphlets stated that the Jews were not among the "oath comrades" (Eidgenossen) who swore "mutual aid in defense of justice and liberty," on the mountain meadow of Rütli in 1291 and hence should be persecuted.

They forgot, however, that the Rütli oath was a reaction against German domination. The same propaganda against the domination of international finance and "hidden powers" was present.

The Swiss were not to be led from their own traditional path, however. Without sentiment or fear they have defended their national individuality more successfully than any other European nation. Perhaps they are being spared through Nazification and invasion partially because their poverty in natural resources does not make them a worthy booty. However, a good part of their freedom must be attributed to their own unbending character and the strong measures of their government in defense of democracy.

OUR COAL SHORTAGE.

(From the "Economist," April 5th.)

The Swiss winter is not yet ended, and coal for domestic heating is already scarce. Switzerland in normal times needs 350,000 truck loads of coal for her own consumption; 150,000 truck loads are required for heating, 100,000 for industry, and 70,000 for gas production. In normal years, nearly 53 per cent. came from Germany, 16 per cent. from France, 13 per cent. from Holland, 7 per cent. from Britain, 4 per cent. from Belgium, and the remaining 7 per cent. from Poland, U.S.A. and other countries. Since last winter, all sources of coal supplies — except Germany and Jugoslavia — were one after the other cut off, and Switzerland had to rely solely on German imports. These totalled 87,000 truck loads for 1940-41, and the deficit was about 180,000 truck loads, thanks to the stores accumulated during 1939 and the beginning of 1940. Measures were, therefore, taken last winter to cut down private coal consumption so as to enable the normal working of industry. The allowance of coal for heating was reduced to 60 per cent. of normal needs; and home resources were used to the utmost, but electricity, wood and peat could not fill the gap. The result was that new restrictions were made for the present winter, when private houses were only allowed 40 per cent. of normal consumption. December and

January were abnormally cold; and although workshops, offices and schools are closed on Saturdays, although school Christmas holidays were lengthened, and although heating was calculated to maintain a temperature of 60 deg. Fahrenheit at the highest in two rooms, and 45 deg. in the others, stocks dwindled rapidly and the Government made it clear that no further coal rations would be allowed. A small extra allowance was nevertheless made, but at the same time it was announced that heating would everywhere be stopped on March 15th.

According to an agreement concluded last autumn, Germany undertakes to deliver about one million tons of coal to Switzerland at a price higher by nearly 50 per cent. than the current price in Germany. Part of it is to be paid in gold and another part in land products such as cattle, pigs, cheese and other dairy products. The agreement should to some extent ease the situation of cattle breeders, as, owing to the stoppage of fodder imports, the slaughtering of about one-third of the cows and of one-fifth of the pigs had been contemplated. German coal deliveries were fairly regular for some time, but in December they were stopped, and Swiss importers were informed that coal and coke deliveries would provisionally cease for an indefinite period unless the Swiss railways could place all the necessary rolling stock at Germany's disposal. The Swiss had hitherto supplied only a proportion of the necessary trucks and were reluctant to send more to Germany. They apparently complied with Germany's desire and supplied her with more rolling stock. Deliveries have begun again, but on a small scale, and if they cannot be increased there will be a shortage next winter, with the result that further restrictions will be necessary.

Dearth of coal is only one of the hardships the Swiss are suffering. At present, each person is entitled in a month to 24 oz. of flour, maize and semola, 16½ oz. of wheat and barley products, 26½ oz. of fat and oil, 24 oz. of sugar, 16½ oz. of rice, 16½ oz. of macaroni, 8 oz. of dried peas and beans, and 9½ oz. of butter; the sale of meat, fresh milk and cheese remains unrestricted.

A new and great effort is to be made to increase home production and to double the area under cultivation. The present 440,000 acres under cultivation enable the feeding of half the population, and it is estimated that another 300,000 or 400,000 acres may be added. Thanks to the increase in the cultivated area decided in 1939, the yield of agriculture, which was 1,289 million francs in 1939, rose to 1,491 millions in 1940, and it is expected to exceed 2,000 millions in 1941. The main difficulty is the lack of labour. The Government has consequently issued a decree enabling it to make land work compulsory for several classes of persons: the unemployed; persons who have no special activity but are physically fit; and those who have some knowledge of land work.

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