

Home affairs

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HOME AFFAIRS.

by PIERRE BÉGUIN.

"International Courtesy"

(Behaviour of the various delegations in Geneva).

At the present moment Geneva is, no doubt, the most beflagged city in the world. All the hotels have put up the national flags of those delegations which are enjoying their hospitality. Private houses in which the secretariats or the reception rooms of certain delegations have been established, have also put flags in their windows. And, capping everything, the Cantonal and Municipal authorities of Geneva have made an effort to give a gay aspect to the town and to make it as welcoming and pleasing as possible, so that banners are to be seen fluttering in the breeze, all along the streets and the quays.

Nevertheless, for those who are observant of delicate gradations, a difference is to be seen in the attitude of the delegations. Those from the West, in accordance with an old custom which has always been observed during former diplomatic conferences, have all put out the Swiss flag beside their own national emblem. This is an act of courtesy towards the country, whose guests they are. The delegations from the East have abstained from this gesture, which is appreciated by Switzerland and which only requires a slight effort of the imagination. On the buildings which they occupy there are only to be seen the flags of their countries; the red flag with the white cross is always missing.

As a matter of fact, this difference in behaviour is of no importance. It merely serves to stress the divergent attitudes of the delegations, of which some continue to conform to international traditions and old customs, whereas the others, obedient to new principles, do not submit to the same rules. This is, of course, of no practical importance and, certainly, the results of the Geneva Conference do not depend upon it.

Another point, in regard to which an ancient practice has not been observed is the fact that the Geneva Conference was not inaugurated by a representative of the country in which it is taking place. Nor has any invitation been extended to a member of the Federal Council, as for instance the Head of our Diplomatic Service, to deliver an address to the diplomats gathered together on our territory. But, this can be explained easily; the question of the chairmanship of the Geneva Conference was so difficult to settle that, right from the beginning endeavours were made to avoid in so far as possible, the raising of questions pertaining to procedure or to protocol. So that no offence can be taken in regard to this.

But, there is still another difference to be observed, which deserves some commentary. If the Western delegations have rendered homage to our country by putting up our flag, with their own, the heads of these delegations have not come to Berne in order to pay a visit of courtesy to our supreme authorities. No contact whatsoever has taken place between the Federal Council and the heads of the American or British representatives. On the other hand — following each other rapidly — Mr. Molotoff and Mr. Chou En Lai — whose collaborators have completely ignored our flag — have travelled to Bern in order to

pay a visit to the Head of our Department for Foreign Affairs and to the President of the Confederation. These visits consisted of brief conversations and luncheons in the intimate atmosphere of the Wattenville House, a lovely old patrician mansion, in which the Federal Council entertains its important guests. Thus, compensation has been perfect; on the one side — the flags, and on the other — courtesy visits. Everyone has made a polite gesture and none, in the long run, has failed in courtesy.

Some of the newspapers have spoken of Messrs. Molotoff's and Chu En Lai's visits as being historical events. The expression is somewhat exaggerated. Naturally, in our divided world, one can and must welcome every contact which can be established across the Iron Curtain. One must take the first steps which will lead the world finally towards a reconciliation and towards a new unity. From this point of view these gestures of courtesy may be looked upon as being happy events. But, as to qualifying them as being historical, this cannot be done without obvious exaggeration. The face of the world will not be changed as a result of these visits.

SWISS DELEGATION AT THE CONVERTIBILITY CONFERENCE.

A Swiss Delegation headed by Monsieur M. Petitpierre, Swiss Foreign Minister, attended recently the Convertibility Conference in London. The Delegation included Minister Hans Schaffner, Chief of the commercial section of the Federal Economic Department, Minister G. Bauer, Delegate of the O.E.E.C., P. Rossy, General Manager of the Swiss National Bank, E. Hay, Director of the Swiss National Bank, Dr. Stopfer, Delegate of the Federal Council for Economic Agreements.

A Press Conference, attended by twenty London correspondents representing Swiss papers took place at the Swiss Legation, on Saturday, July 17th, at which Federal Councillor, M. Petitpierre, gave a *resumé* of the work of the Convertibility Conference. Various questions were asked, which were answered either by M. Petitpierre or members of the Delegation.

The Press Conference was followed by an *aphéritif*, at which the Journalists were introduced to members of the Delegation by the Swiss Minister, Monsieur Henry de Torrenté.

CITY SWISS CLUB

Will Members please note that no meetings are to be held during

JULY AND AUGUST.

They will be advised in due course of the resumption in September next.

THE COMMITTEE.