

Switzerland and the Second World War

A Clarification

Speech given at a function organized by the SVP of the Canton of Zurich

on March 1, 1997 at the Hotel International, Zurich-Oerlikon, 10:00 a.m.

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Nothing new under the sun

The conduct of Switzerland during the Second World War, its economic and foreign policies as well as those regarding neutrality and refugees, which remarkably kept it out of the Second World War and allowed it to remain unscathed amidst the surge of National Socialism, has once again come under discussion.

At the same time it is peculiar: The sensational news, pompously announced as historical revelation, has long been known to all reasonably well-informed contemporaries. Until now, absolutely nothing new has come to light which must not have long been known to those who are interested, and especially those who are bear the responsibility in political, business, and public life.

A part of this was already the subject of heated discussion in the press, in Parliament, and in public during the World War and especially in the post-war years. Neutrality during the Second World War, trade policy, national defence, foreign affairs and the refugee policy are - and were - the subject of numerous historical studies and expertise. In all of the more recent history books and in the teaching of history in today's schools, everything has been said which is now, naively, being proclaimed and denounced as news.

Nevertheless, given the present serious tirades aimed at our country, our people and our conduct during the Second World War, the "classe politique" is reacting about as reflectively and calmly as chickens in a coop with a fox lurking outside. The reason for this can be found in a hitherto blatant general disregard of history by the leaders of our nation, as though one could shape the present and the future without a knowledge of history. In the last years, it is a wisdom that has been virtually ridiculed and mocked in political circles.

Our government and well-known representatives of industry are lacking in any kind of a clear concept, acting - or rather reacting - in an extremely contradictory and unfortunate manner. With their attitude, they are continually encouraging those groups which are attacking us incessantly. In addition, a large part of the domestic press is goading the mood of uncertainty with sensation-seeking headlines and with deliberate indiscretions which ensure an impeding and self-destructive sense of doom. In this, the feelings of innumerable citizens for our native land are being repeatedly offended, the elder among them are being hurt with respect to their lifelong efforts and achievements for this country. A clarification is therefore necessary. It is a matter of concentrating on the essentials amid the thicket of foolish and contradictory headlines, and it is a matter of not now being misused, as many hope, for erroneous policies.

There can be no ambiguity

The essential historical facts must serve as unmistakable guidelines for the political response to the condemnation of our country, our people and our government in judging the conduct of Switzerland during the 1930's and 1940's. The essential historical facts are incontestable and as follows:

1. Between 1933 and 1945, the Swiss people proved their resistance to Nazi thought and conviction. On the national level, almost 100% of the voters elected members of the democratic political parties which had remained Swiss! A single representative of the National Front was seated in Parliament for four years as of 1935.¹ The Swiss were in no way Nazis. They, together with the press and government officials, strongly disapproved of the fascist drive, even evidencing their hatred for it. Throughout these years, Switzerland remained a democratic constitutional state.

2. No one in our country was mistreated, tortured or murdered with the approval of the state. Federal Councillor Obrecht announced to Hitler, unequivocally, in 1938 that the people of Switzerland were not about to venture abroad and join forces with the other side. Any aggressor, regardless of who, could expect war.²

3. A total of 800,000 men (20% of the population in a country of 4 million) safeguarded our national territory and strengthened armed neutrality. They were ready to give their lives for our country. No important traffic axis, no industrial plant worth mentioning fell intact into enemy hands.

4. Under tremendous sacrifice, Switzerland demonstrated an unparalleled will to resist. In this respect, it would be worthwhile to mention the so-called "cultivation campaign" under the direction of the future SVP Federal Councillor Wahlen [a program by which as much arable land as possible was reclaimed and given over to the cultivation of potatoes and other herbaceous plants], food rationing, wartime provisions, defence bonds and additional taxation.³

5. Whoever has spoken with citizens who consciously lived through this period realizes that the people of Switzerland stood together. Families of employees, factory workers, farmers were all bound by a feeling of solidarity, a common bond and identity, as never before and never again.

6. As the most recent studies have shown, the military threat was indeed reality. In the summer of 1940, on Hitler's orders, the German General Staff conceived detailed plans to invade Switzerland. At the same time, Mussolini wanted to extend the Italian border to the northern chain of alpine mountains.⁴ In 1942, in front of Mussolini, Hitler referred to Switzerland as the "most despicable and wretched people and national entity" and to the Swiss as "mortal enemies of the new Germany". Stalin ridiculed the Swiss as "swine".⁵ Too much credence should not be attributed to the words of mass murderers, but at the same time they can be interpreted as compliments!

¹ The person in question was Robert Tobler (National Front) from Zurich. The Union Nationale, which tended more to Italian fascism, brought Georges Oltramare from Geneva into the Lower House of Parliament, also for a four-year period. Cf. *Historische Statistik der Schweiz* [Historical statistics of Switzerland], edited by Hansjörg Siegenthaler and Heiner Ritzmann, Zurich, 1996, p. 1045.

² "Other countries must realize. Those who honour us and leave us in peace are our friends. Those, on the other hand, who seek to attack our independence and our political integrity will be met with war. We Swiss are not about to venture abroad and join forces with other countries." Speech by Federal Councillor Hermann Obrecht before the Basel group of the New Helvetic Society, March 15, 1939. *Bonjour, Edgar: Geschichte der schweizerischen Neutralität* [The history of Swiss neutrality], Volume 3, 2nd edition, Basel/Stuttgart, 1967, p. 320f. Allusion to the visits paid by Hitler to the Austrian Chancellor Schuschnigg and the Czech President Hacha.

³ *Handbuch der Schweizer Geschichte* [Handbook of Swiss history], Volume 2, Zurich, 1972.

⁴ Urner, Klaus: "Die Schweiz muss noch geschluckt werden!" [Switzerland must still be annexed], Hitler's plan of action against Switzerland, 2nd edition, Zurich, 1990. *Schweizer Lexikon* (Encyclopedia of Switzerland), Volume 5, Lucerne, 1993, p. 688 (written by Georg Kreis).

In an interview with the *Weltwoche* newspaper, Klaus Urner, a professor at the Swiss Technical University in Zurich, warned that we should not try to play down the military threat to which Switzerland was exposed at the time. "To dismiss it all as mere talk would be to misjudge once again the evil nature of National Socialism." In "Die *Weltwoche*", No 6, February 6, 1997.

⁵ *Bonjour, Edgar: Geschichte der schweizerischen Neutralität* [The history of Swiss neutrality], Volume 5, Basel, 1970, p. 66, 408.

7. With the Swiss militia's determination to resist, the fact is that a Swiss campaign under Hitler would have cost and tied down a disproportionate amount in terms of forces for the aggressor.

8. It was only at the end of 1942, following the occupation of southern France, that the advantages of an intact Switzerland prevailed for the Third Reich. As the Allies advanced into southern and western Europe in 1943/44, the danger of a German invasion to protect supply lines intensified.

9. Humanitarian aid also contributed to neutrality's positive balance. During the war, 295,381 registered refugees and enemy aliens lived for a shorter or longer period on safe Swiss ground. In addition, there were numerous emigrants, including many Jews, who were not registered with the police and were privately housed.⁶ The International Committee of the Red Cross not only aided refugees, it also rendered innumerable good offices to the war-faring countries. Neutral Switzerland assumed the mandate of a protective state for 43 countries and their citizens in the face of their opponents, including that for the United States with regard to 12 hostile states. This fact seems to have been forgotten as well!⁷

10. As of June 1940, Switzerland was totally encircled by the Axis powers. It thus lost free access to the outside world. Leeway for the trade necessary to survive was narrow. Under these circumstances, especially after 1940, it was self-evident that Switzerland engaged in trading with the Axis powers. With whom else? It became a question of safeguarding the most essential imports and exports - and in both cases, one tried to do so with the Allies to the extent that it was possible. Commerce with the Allies, however, was only possible when the surrounding Axis powers allowed goods to pass. In addition to the resistance of the people and the army, the survival of this small state depended upon the skilful negotiations of official foreign trade delegations and private entrepreneurs. They could not succeed without compromise and concession. In all sections of the population, the fear of unemployment, hunger and deprivation was substantial and justified. Political and social unrest would have broken the spirit of resistance. All political parties, including the Social Democrats, were fully aware that trade relations with the Third Reich were unavoidable for an encircled small state. The groups which are apologizing today for the trade policy of the past are attributing a guilt to those who were responsible for it (otherwise there would be no need for an apology!), and are offending those conscientious negotiators in the most grievous manner. Should one apologize for the fact that a people has been saved from starvation?

11. Despite assertions to the contrary, Switzerland basically upheld the law of neutrality during the war, and voluntarily applied it even more rigidly than required by international law. Our law of neutrality allowed no preferential treatment of a military nature for the war's leaders, no granting of free passage for troops, no release of interned soldiers before the end of the war, no state-owned weapon sales to the war's leaders. Switzerland complied with this in every respect.

12. On the other hand, the policy of neutrality allowed a more elastic position. Explicitly not prohibited were preliminary contacts with possible allies before the invasion (as General Guisan did with the French), weapon sales by private industry, and the exchange of goods on a private basis.⁸

13. It was in any case impossible to insist that the Swiss population adopt a neutral stance at the time, even if certain Federal Councillors would not have been adverse to this idea during the Second World War for fear of the country's menacing neighbours.⁹

⁶ Composition of the Political Department, February 19, 1946. Historische Statistik [Historical statistics], edited by Hansjörg Siegenthaler and Heiner Ritzmann, Zurich, 1996, p. 997. Cf. also *Bonjour*, Volume 6, 1970, p. 42.

⁷ The population of the 43 countries who entrusted Switzerland with their diplomatic representation during the Second World War totalled 1.6 billion people, or one fifth of the world's entire population. The Swiss represented the USA's diplomatic interests towards Bulgaria, China, Denmark, Germany, Finland, France, Indochina, Italy, Japan, Romania, Thailand and Hungary. Conversely, countries at war were represented in the USA by Switzerland; these were Germany, France, Italy, Bulgaria and Japan. Cf. Rings, Werner: *Advokaten des Feindes, das Abenteuer der politischen Neutralität* [The enemy's advocate, the adventure of political neutrality], Vienna/Dusseldorf, 1966, p. 9, 11, 19f. Cf. also *Bonjour*, Volume 5, 1970, p. 361.

⁸ *Schweizer Lexikon* [Encyclopedia of Switzerland], Volume 4, Lucerne, 1992, p. 785 (written by Georg Kreis).

⁹ In the summer of 1941, Carl Ludwig, a member of the Basel Governing Council and professor of law, opposed the call by Federal Councillor Eduard von Steiger and other Swiss politicians for neutrality not only on the part of the country and the government but also on the part of the people. Cf. *Bonjour*, Volume 6, 1970, p. 156 ff.

14. Even during the war, the implementation of neutrality was the subject of intense controversy. On December 3, 1944, before the war had ended, the British wartime Prime Minister Winston S. Churchill commented as follows on the role of Switzerland during the Second World War: "Of all the neutrals Switzerland has the greatest right to distinction. She has been the sole international force linking the hideously sundered nations and ourselves. What does it matter whether she has been able to give us the commercial advantages we desire or has given too many to the Germans, to keep herself alive? She has been a democratic state, standing for freedom in self-defence among her mountains, and in thought, in spite of race, largely on our side." ¹⁰ America even praised the Switzerland's resolve. The respected New York Herald Tribune wrote in 1943: "The Swiss remained true to themselves even in the darkest hours of the year 1940, when nothing but the valour of Great Britain and the blind faith of free men in the rest of the world stood between Hitler and Europe." ¹¹

15. Today, no opportunity is missed to trample the state maxim of neutrality and to scorn the army's willingness to defend its country. Interestingly, this derision emanates from precisely those political quarters which opposed and blocked the military defence of the country even in the 1930's, and which today are still against the army and armed neutrality. And once again, these are the people who are enraptured by the peace that was too much trouble for them to defend. Writing in the Berner Zeitung, Adolf Muschg described neutrality as an "ill-mannered fart". This professor of literature happens to have a language of his own which suits him. In 1940, national-socialist Germany also described Switzerland's armed neutrality as "having been completely outdated by events and incompatible with the new order in Europe", ¹² (a sentence which is not completely unfamiliar to you today.) It was precisely because of Switzerland's declaration of permanent neutrality and its refusal to constantly adapt its foreign policy to changing events that it was not accused, after the Second World War, of having gone with the tide simply to gain a momentary advantage. What, may we ask the smart-aleck opponents of neutrality, would have become of Switzerland if it had not remained neutral during the Second World War? What would have happened, as some Swiss had wanted, if we had rushed to join the war with the Germans, assuring ourselves of some sort of "place in the sun"? What would have happened if Switzerland, encircled by Nazi Germany, had announced that it was entering the war on the side of the Allies? What would have happened to the Swiss population, to the refugees, to the Jews who had settled here, and to those who had been given shelter for the duration? Whoever considers the alternatives must come to the conclusion that there was no solution other than armed neutrality! Edgar Bonjour, who has given extremely expert and objective thought to the history of our neutrality, declared himself at the end of his many years of study to be an "unconditional supporter of our foreign policy maxims." ¹³ A comparison with Sweden, Portugal or Spain shows that Switzerland pursued the most consistent and stringent policy of neutrality.

16. At that time, not everyone in our country had the strength to resist the danger and the pressure from outside. There were weaklings, conformists, and pussyfooters - there always have been, there are today, and there always will be. Isolated government measures, encouraged by high-handed officials out of touch with reality, are incomprehensible with hindsight and deserving of criticism. These include the identification stamp for Jews, regulations decreeing that Jews should bear the cost of Jewish refugees, the hermetically sealed border after 1942, the deportation of refugees, and the overly-rigorous censorship by authorities. In some instances there was also evidence of an excessively compliant attitude towards a menacing Germany. All of these facts have been long documented by historical studies. The decisive factor, however, is that it was ultimately those who were capable of resisting and those who were willing to resist who prevailed in our country. Retrospectively, all countries have regretted such mistakes in individual cases. But it is the overall picture that matters. And in this respect, Switzerland did not fail - it excelled. Who would dream of admonishing the British for Chamberlain's policies, the Americans for their delayed intervention in the war, the Soviet Union for signing a non-aggression pact with Hitler? None of these factors can diminish the major contribution made by all of them to the liberation of Europe.

¹⁰ Winston Churchill on December 3, 1944, as quoted in the Neue Zürcher Zeitung newspaper of January 18/19, 1997.

¹¹ Comment in the New York Herald Tribune of January 26, 1943, cf. Bonjour, Volume 5, 1970, p. 362.

¹² Bonjour, Volume 5, 1970, p. 137.

¹³ Bonjour, Edgar: *Erinnerungen* [Memoirs], 3rd edition, Basel, 1984, p. 245. Bonjour emphasizes that "neutrality had an abiding sense and purpose ... in contrast to most other countries and certain muddle-headed people at home, who believed that the binding strength of neutral status was undermined by the historical development of nations and the totally changed situation of the modern age." Bonjour, Volume 5, 1970, p. 447.

In 1940, when the threat to Switzerland was at its peak, Federal Councillor Pilet-Golaz disquieted the Swiss people with a speech that was conciliatory to Germany. He honoured those fighting on the front with a reception in the Swiss parliament building. Violations of Swiss air space were tolerated. General Guisan was repeatedly forced to appeal to the people because after 1940, he no longer trusted the Federal Council's will to resist after 1940. According to Hermann Böschenstein, following the resignation of the two resolute Federal Councillors Minger and Obrecht in 1940, our country had the weakest Federal Council since the founding of the federal republic.¹⁴ (The judgment by history, fifty years hence, of today's Federal Council remains to be seen!) But this was the marvellous thing: in spite of occasional vacillation, Switzerland held out at the highest level.

17. If the question of conciliation or resistance is raised, then we must also ask who had actually been so keen to conform between 1933 and 1945: the people, or the so-called leaders of politics, business and society?

The answer is unequivocal. The population was far more decisive in its resistance and its readiness to defend sovereignty than many of those in the highest circles. Much was hidden from the people. During those years, civil rights were restricted, the press was censored, the government ruled with additional powers. At times the Federal Council adopted the language and the totalitarian political culture of the fascist opponents.¹⁵ In his conciliatory speech of 1940, Foreign Minister Pilet-Golaz said "The time for inner re-birth has come." He called on the Swiss people to follow "the government as a reliable and devoted leader who will not always have to explain, clarify and justify its decisions".¹⁶ Pilet was thoroughly elitist in his convictions, viewed the Swiss people merely as a dull mass with no will of its own, and compared democracy to a shrivelled and falling leaf.¹⁷ The tendency of governing politicians to resent any popular interference in their "higher insight" and to avoid referendums to the extent possible is something with which we are only too familiar today! In this case we can also learn from history. Is it not true that leaders today are tending to conciliation in ceding fundamental democratic rights to a centralist bureaucracy in Brussels?¹⁸ It is to be hoped, however, that such tendencies are as doomed to failure today as they were in the past, that they will fail because of the urge for independence, because of a certain spirit of contradiction and solitary nature of the Swiss, fail because of the diversified political culture of our country, fail because of our federalism and a sovereignty of the people which must not be relinquished.¹⁹

18. Some of the leading figures from the business world were also calling for us to adapt to the military power surrounding us, an immediate and rigorous alignment with the "new Europe" (how often in the past, and again today, has the idea of a "new Europe" been dangled). Many business leaders believed Goebbels, Hitler's propaganda minister, when he announced on March 25, 1941 that the new European order envisaged by Germany offered nothing but advantages to every country (nor are these empty words unfamiliar). If Switzerland did not wish to participate, according to Goebbels, that was its decision, but it was bound to bring economic disadvantages (a tone of voice well-known today). The Swiss people would gradually come to understand the dawning era (such prophecies still have not

¹⁴ "After everything that four decades of historical research has produced, I stand by my thesis that, when the second general mobilization took place in May 1940, Switzerland had its weakest national government since 1848." Böschenstein, Hermann: *Vor unsern Augen, Aufzeichnungen über das Jahrzehnt 1935-1945* [Before our eyes; a record of the decade 1935-1945], Bern, 1978. Cf. also Bütler, Heinz: "Wach auf, Schweizervolk!" *Die Schweiz zwischen Frontismus, Verrat und Selbstbehauptung 1914-1940* [Wake up Swiss people! Switzerland between frontism, betrayal and self-assertion 1914-1940], Bern, 1980, p. 179 f.

¹⁵ Jost, Hans Ulrich: *Bedrohung und Enge* [Threat and confinement] (1914-1945) in: *Geschichte der Schweiz und der Schweizer* [History of Switzerland and the Swiss], Volume 3, Basel/Frankfurt, 1983, p. 175.

¹⁶ Radio address by Federal Councillor Marcel Pilet-Golaz on June 25, 1940 and held in German by Federal Councillor Philipp Etter. *Bonjour*, Volume 7, 1974, p. 160-163.

¹⁷ *Bonjour*, Volume 5, 1970, p. 438.

¹⁸ "Seen historically, the desire for a single European economic area is not new. Twice it has almost seemed close to realization: the first time under Napoleon and the second under Hitler. It is, of course, not correct to draw simple parallels. In both instances unity was forced by the military might of a dominant European power seeking to bring Europe together solely for its own interests. This is no longer the case today. A single power has given way to a pluralism of countries, but the principle of pressure and the inherent loss of sovereignty have remained." Stadler, Peter: *Schweizerische Neutralität - eine geschichtliche Würdigung* [Swiss neutrality - a historical appreciation], lecture given on May 11, 1996 at the 11th ordinary general meeting of the AUNS.

¹⁹ Jost, Hans Ulrich: *Bedrohung und Enge* [Threat and confinement] (1914-1945) in: *Geschichte der Schweiz und der Schweizer* [History of Switzerland and the Swiss], Volume 3, Basel/Frankfurt, 1983, p. 175.

gone out of fashion).²⁰ If one reads the minutes of the general meetings of the leading Swiss corporations from the war years, recording the demands being made by both trade associations and representatives of the trade unions, one is astonished at the conciliatory tone reminiscent in its choice of words of the most recent times.²¹ The decisive factor, and this is again the wonderful thing, no "authoritative" voice could prevail. The will to resist remained strong.

19. It is difficult to understand why all of the countries of the world took such a cold-hearted and cruel stance against the Jews. Few had a reason to point a finger at others. The following is quoted from a book published in 1993 about Paul Grüninger, a native of St. Gallen who saved the lives of many Jews: "Heinrich Rothmund and the federal police department responsible for aliens collaborated with the Swiss-Israeli community and with many social-democratic police chiefs in 'the most loyal way', as shown in many speeches and letters of the time."²² The 1938 refugee conference held in Evian under the auspices of the Americans produced no concrete results because no country was willing to accept the refugees. In May 1939, the ship "Saint Louis" with more than 900 refugees on board, most of them Jewish, was refused permission to dock in Florida by boats of the United States Coast Guard. The captain was forced to return to Europe, and most of the passengers were subsequently killed by the Nazis.²³ In 1940, the Swiss consul reported back to Bern from the USA that, even in a free-thinking country like America, almost half of the Americans sympathized with the anti-Semitic faction.²⁴ In 1942, the American Senate rejected a proposal which could have saved 20,000 Jewish children from the gas chamber.²⁵ By that time, Switzerland had taken in 29,500 refugees.²⁶ Sweden, a country whose geopolitical situation was incomparably better, had offered shelter to only 12,000. Switzerland took in more refugees than the typical emigration countries of Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa combined. But Switzerland also turned away some 30,000 Jewish refugees. Switzerland's refugee policy, which has been described exhaustively in various publications, is certainly not something in its history to be proud of. Unfortunately, Switzerland was not an isolated case in this respect. (Wanting to be an exception has never been a good idea.) Switzerland was regrettably in good company.²⁷ All countries have their inglorious chapters of history.

But astonishing things happened. There was immediate resistance from the people, who only later learned of these measures, from the church and from parties across the entire political spectrum to the

²⁰ The German propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels on March 25, 1941, *Journal de Genève* newspaper, No. 83, April 8, 1941. *Bonjour*, Volume 5, 1970, p. 251.

²¹ On labour organizations: Jost, Hans Ulrich: *Bedrohung und Enge* [Threat and confinement] (1914-1945) in: *Geschichte der Schweiz und der Schweizer* [History of Switzerland and the Swiss], Volume 3, Basel/Frankfurt, 1983, p. 174. On the attitude of social democrats and the trade unions cf. speech to Parliament by Robert Grimm, member of the Bern governing council and of the federal Parliament: "The problems will not become any easier in the future. The economic situation will force us to take a whole range of unforeseen measures which, for understandable reasons, have repeatedly been rejected in the past but which today appear necessary if we are to survive at all. It will perhaps be appropriate also to point out that we must declare war on the naive assumption that, in a situation in which Europe is in flames, in which an all-out economic war is being waged, we can simply adopt, or could simply have adopted, certain measures which will allow us, or would have allowed us, to retain the old economic order in Switzerland. In the past we have had crises and unemployment, but the unemployment that we can now expect will have a completely different character to any period of unemployment in the past. In the past there was a connection between a surplus of raw materials and unemployment; today a shortage of raw materials is the cause of the impending unemployment." Cf. *Amtliches Stenographisches Bulletin der Bundesversammlung* [the Official Stenographic Bulletin of Parliament] of December 5, 1940, p. 640.

²² Keller, Stefan: *Grüningers Fall, Geschichten von Flucht und Hilfe* [The fall of Grüninger, tales of flight and assistance], 3rd edition, Zurich, 1994, p. 202. On the close collaboration between Jewish organizations in Switzerland and the authorities cf. Picard, Jacques: *Die Schweiz und die Juden* [Switzerland and the Jews], 1994, p. 145, 150f. Keller, Stefan: *Grüningers Fall* [The fall of Grüninger], 1994, p. 77, 95, 119-121, 125.

²³ Hertzberg, Arthur: *Shalom Amerika! Die Geschichte der Juden in der Neuen Welt* [Shalom America! The story of the Jews in the New World], Munich, 1996, p. 276-278.

²⁴ Report by the Swiss consul in New York to the Swiss Political Department on March 12, 1940. Cf. Picard, Jacques: *Die Schweiz und die Juden* [Switzerland and the Jews] 1933-1945, 2nd edition, Zurich, 1994, p. 305. In 1938, almost half of the Americans thought that the Jews were partly to blame for their persecution in Europe. Hertzberg, Arthur: *Shalom Amerika! Die Geschichte der Juden in der Neuen Welt* [Shalom America! The story of the Jews in the New World], Munich, 1996, p. 273.

²⁵ Guggenheim, Willy (editor): *Juden in der Schweiz, Glaube - Geschichte - Gegenwart* [Jews in Switzerland; faith, history and the present], Küsnacht, 1982, p. 84.

²⁶ The Association of Swiss Jewish Welfare (VSJF) gave a figure of 29,500 as the number of Jewish refugees taken in. Cf. Picard, Jacques: *Die Schweiz und die Juden* [Switzerland and the Jews] 1933-1945, 2nd edition, Zurich, 1994, p. 378.

²⁷ Guggenheim, 1982, p. 84.

government's refugee policy. Public outrage was so great the Federal Council was forced to relax the closure of Switzerland's borders.²⁸

20. There can be no ambiguity. Even if individual decisions were wrong, the behaviour of certain people questionable and conciliatory, on the whole Switzerland deserves respect, esteem and admiration for its policies in those years. There is nothing to apologize for. On the contrary, the Swiss people were spared war and foreign occupation, death, hunger and poverty at the cost of hard work, deprivation, fortitude and resolution. Several factors determined by the state played a vital role:

- return to integral, or total neutrality - unequivocal adherence to the democratic order
- the army's decisive commitment to the country's defence
- a wartime economy that can be summed up in the words "preventive measures, care, work and bread"
- a controlled system of commerce based on the principle of "foreign trade with all sides", both to maintain neutrality and assure supplies, as well as out of consideration for exports
- the establishment of these maxims in the minds of the people and their consequent readiness to endure and defend

In view of the difficult situation, this resolute defence policy can be denounced as a wholesale failure only by someone in the self-righteous, hypocritical and moralistic belief that he has never made a mistake and will never be confronted with difficult decisions. This, together with the extraordinary achievements of our ancestors, must be invoked to counter the vociferous attacks if the historical facts and the value of a Swiss state are to have any meaning.

²⁸ Bonjour, Volume 5, 1970, p. 22-24. Häslar, Alfred A.: Das Boot is voll [The boat is full], Zurich, 1967, chapter entitled "Resist!", p. 116-188.

The so-called "reappraisal" of history

The "reappraisal" of history has become a well-known phrase among politicians and journalists. After these circles have regarded the study of history as backward in the last years, it has now become the number one priority. People prefer to babble on about visionary planning, designs for the future, a "post-2000 Switzerland" and similar concepts. And suddenly politicians and representatives of the media are surprised that they are not well versed in history and believe we should begin by reappraising it.

Since when, however, has it been common practice in a free democracy for the state, meaning the government or parliament, to reappraise its own history? Official court scribes and poets exist only in absolute monarchies, although dictators of both the left and the right have been known to commission official versions of national history. But in this country, in a democratic constitutional nation, it is uncommon and inconceivable that the state should write its own history! We still have complete freedom of research. Only the individual historian - or whoever feels called to be so - should be concerned with the writing of history. Professor Edgar Bonjour was fully aware of this. To completely maintain his independence, he published his work privately and, with the exception of reimbursement for expenses, refused all remuneration for his book.²⁹ For once the Federal Council consciously refused to comment - sometimes (and not only in this case) the best thing that the Federal Council can do! I doubt whether the newly-appointed Historical Commission can undertake its research with the same disinterest that Bonjour did. The Federal Council made a point of emphasizing the fact that the nine members of the commission included four foreigners in addition to five Swiss, and that three of the nine were Jewish,³⁰ thereby hoping to objectivise and sanction the results from the outset. I would like to know if, in addition to the historians who are specialized in tracking down the sins of the past, the commission includes others who have an understanding for the difficult situation which existed at the time? Does this commission include historians who realize that Switzerland was in a difficult position between 1939 and 1945, and that its actions were honourable? One of the members of the commission is Jakob Tanner, recently appointed professor of social and economic history at the University of Zurich. Because I am an industrialist and also interested in economic history, I happened to come across some of his writings. Tanner is the so-called co-author of a book which is subtitled "From the Marxist Point of View". The book concludes with the words: "The fact that a process of this kind, which aims at creating a socialist society, is destined to be a long and difficult one, is clear to everyone who is familiar with political reality, particularly in Switzerland. But only the overcoming of these difficulties affords the opportunity of creating a socialist democracy which is valid in all areas of life."³¹ In Eastern Europe we have seen the consequences of Tanner's Marxist ideology, what a Marxist version of history has achieved in the East, and what has become of his socialist democracy. The dreadful suffering, hunger, death, banishment, forced labour and concentration camps, the catastrophic consequences for the population remind me of Nazi atrocities. I only hope that the other members of the commission are more profoundly versed in economics. If not, we can look forward to quite a report! In any case, in view of the commission's composition, we are not prepared at the outset to accept its findings as some sort of gospel truth. And we shall not, at the outset, claim that this is the basis for a definitive history of a state. Personally, I do not believe that everything historians have written until now is nonsense. Certainly, details will come to light when previously inaccessible archives have been opened, for instance economic relationships or some aspects of Swiss foreign trade. But this cannot change history as a whole.

²⁹ Bonjour, Edgar: *Erinnerungen* [Memoirs], 3rd edition, Basel, 1984, p. 231.

³⁰ Widmer, Sigmund: *Parteigutachten statt Wahrheitssuche* [A party assessment instead of a search for the truth] in *ZuriWoche* newspaper, January 30, 1997. The members of the historical commission are: Jean-François Bergier, professor of economic history at the Swiss Technical University in Zurich (President); Sybil Milton, Holocaust Museum, Washington D.C.; Vladislav Bartoszewski, Poland; Paul Friedländer, Israel; Harold James, United Kingdom; Georg Kreis; Jacques Picard; Jakob Tanner; Joseph Voyame

³¹ Tanner, Jakob/Müller, Felix/Schäppi, Hans: *Krise: Zufall oder Folge des Kapitalismus? Die Schweiz und die aktuelle Wirtschaftskrise, eine Einführung aus marxistischer Sicht* [Crisis: Chance or the result of capitalism? Switzerland and the current economic crisis, an introduction from the Marxist viewpoint], Zurich, 1976. Tanner's obvious role model, Karl Marx, wrote frightening anti-Semitic tirades in 1844: "Money is the most eager god in Israel."; "The bill of exchange is the true god of the Jews."; "What Jewish emancipation really means is the emancipation of mankind from the Jews.": "We thus identify in Judaism a general and present antisocial element."

The self-righteous, hypocrites and other moralists

In this country, the current discussion about Switzerland and the Second World War is being largely determined by Swiss moralists on the one hand, and by foreign Jewish organizations who want money from us on the other. There is a great deal of hypocrisy in the arguments on both sides. The Jewish organizations which are demanding money deny that they are interested in money. In fact, however, this is exactly what they want.

On the Swiss side, a fund has been opened with the declared purpose of "humanitarian aid" or "gratitude for the fact that Switzerland came through the war unscathed". But the true and underlying meaning is "for the satisfaction of all claims", or in other words it is a question of money. In my opinion, a clear discussion of the legalities is needed, and that would be far more honest.

The current discussion is far too strongly influenced by moralists. With hypocritical self-righteousness, they pick on the Swiss people, the decision-makers of the 30's and 40s, on our forefathers. It is above all the young representatives of the left, a few theologians, numerous sociologists, professors, artists and journalists who are sure that they know - in detail and from a safe distance - what we should have done better in the difficult situation of half a century ago. In bigoted, loud-mouthed, hypocritical manifestos, these people extol their own highly sensitive sense of humanity, their flawless character, their deep concern, and they are quick to point a finger at the guilt-laden decision-makers. "We are the good guys, we are disassociating ourselves from the bad guys, and we are proclaiming it in full-page advertisements."

The "moralists" have pushed to the front in politics and the media, and not only in this particular case. It is actually not surprising because our society is teeming with moralists. Especially in politics. It is dangerous because in difficult situations there is little place for moralists. In the end, they are never willing to accept responsibility, to vouch for others, or to achieve a solution for others which is good, feasible or at least optimal. They are concerned only with themselves, with their own untarnished image and with their own reputation. As soon as their image is threatened, as soon as they have to stick out their heads, they slither away from responsibility, and disappear.

Whoever bears responsibility has a duty, the duty to do something specific in a specific case, in a specific place, at a specific time. In spite of, or together, with individual imperfection, it must be done. It is a well known fact that responsibility can best be discerned and a difficult task for the community can only be fulfilled when one's own reputation and person is disregarded. He who is truly aware of responsibility knows how demanding it is, and he is aware of the fact that he cannot seek justice everywhere and throughout the world. He can and must act where he is, where he has an overview, and where his strength is adequate to the task. Not so the moralist. He declares himself to be competent for everything, everywhere and at all times. He presumes the right and even the duty to oversee justice everywhere. The goal of the moralist is not that justice is observed, and that justice is actually realized, but rather the demonstration of his own role in its achievement, and that he is flawless. Moralists do not act out of love for humanity and for causes but out of ambition to appear in a favourable light. This has always been one of my principles - be it in economics or in politics: hands off the moralists. Their conduct is immoral and unethical. Politics, society and economics in Switzerland today are relatively strongly influenced by such moralists. I think it is clear from the results. Anyone who studies the history of the Second World War soon realizes where truly responsible people were at work, and where the moralists held sway. On the whole, we must let Switzerland be during the Second World War. It fulfilled its task of seeing that a democratic Switzerland came through the war unscathed. Morally, this is of high standing. It is what counts! It is worthy of respect and admiration. Had Switzerland taken the path of today's "moralists", it would have perished - perhaps together with hundreds of thousands of people. But the moralists would have preserved their untarnished image! And that is immoral!

During a radio discussion, Nationalrat Hubacher accused Switzerland of surviving the Second World War with a stained vest rather than with a "spotlessly white" one. Yes, for God's sake, has anyone ever maintained that Switzerland had an immaculately clean vest? The women and men of the war generation, those who had to struggle against adverse circumstances for economic and political survival, who had to make decisions for a land which was surrounded and threatened by a barbaric regime, cannot at the end appear with an immaculately clean slate. As a trade unionist, Mr. Hubacher should actually know that those who work, those who cope with the chores of everyday life, cannot at the end of the day profess to have an immaculately clean vest.

It is also in the character of the moralists to apologize for everything possible. But the easiest is to apologize for things for which one was neither responsible nor competent of achieving. The immaculately clean vest becomes even more visible. In fact, it is easy to apologize for the deeds of our fathers and grandfathers, for the war generation. But the moralists are indifferent to the fact that their apologies serve only to humiliate and degrade those who carried the heavy burden of responsibility.

A new gramophone record

Ladies and gentlemen, we are watching with increasing astonishment the direction in which the current discussion on the alleged confrontation with the past and its resolution is leading in this country. The Swiss people are becoming aware of politicians, members of the media and artists who are using the opportunity as a pretext for their own political causes. The entire affair is being used to relinquish sovereignty and neutrality, curtail constitutional law and transfer more power to the "classe politique". Federal Councillor Cotti went as far as to claim that the entire affair is, so to speak, the penalty for standing on the sidelines of the European Union and the EEA. I am not surprised that such an assertion comes from a Federal Councillor who is always complaining about the inability to differentiate. The claim is about as precise in its distinction as one in which we would maintain that Mr. Cotti's Foreign Ministry could better have managed the present crisis had he not spent a good part of last year abroad with the OSCE. In this case it appears that Federal Councillor Cotti - and with him numerous journalists - have come up with a totally new idea. Until now, a gramophone record has been continually droning the message to the people that Switzerland must join the EU for all of the substantial economic advantages it would bring. But, with the high and rising unemployment in the European Union, the record has been audibly scratched, and for the Swiss it is worn out. An ever diminishing number of people believe in this proclaimed message of salvation. Therefore it's time to play a new record, one which again presumes the stupidity of the people: If we were members of the EU or the EEA, so the people have been told, the other member countries would certainly have rushed to help us. As though the EU countries were not jolly glad that their own past is not being discussed. Questions may be ventured: What, actually, were the conditions in Germany, or in Austria, in Nazi occupied countries such as Belgium, Holland, Denmark, Norway, France or Greece, in dictatorships such as Spain or Portugal? What was it like in neutral Sweden? Who exactly collaborated with the Nazis and to what extent, who participated in the persecution of the Jews and to what degree? No, if we had become members, the present EU countries would remain exactly as silent as they are today. That the Federal Council, with its contradictory and feeble line of action in this matter, must find a new pretext is easy to understand. Let it conceal the fact that one is not willing or not able to defend our country against foreign accusations! Just as incompetent managers constantly excuse the lack of EEA membership for their own failures, the Federal Council is now blaming the lack of the EU for the inability to defend this country in the present situation.

What should be done?

What is this actually all about? Rationally considered, it is in the end a question of financial demands from Switzerland even if the contrary is being said or the demands are being defined as something else. What is not clear is what Switzerland should be paying for:

- is it a matter of aid for people who are in need?
- is it a matter of financial compensation for suffered injustices?
- is it a matter of Switzerland's settling its debts?
- is it a matter of reparation payments?
- is it a matter of the restitution of illegally acquired assets?
- is it a matter of hush money?
- is it a matter of averting threatened boycotts?
- is it a matter of so-called damage control?
- is it a matter of polishing our image?
- what is it actually all about?

Until now, this question has not been answered and I have the impression that it suits some people if the issue remains blurred. However, I believe that this question must be accurately clarified. In my opinion, the following must be done or omitted:

1. Switzerland must officially and decisively speak out against the exaggerated accusations of both domestic and foreign critics and against financial demands. One must not be intimidated by accusations of anti-Semitism if demands from foreign Jewish organizations are rejected. Only a state which defends its legitimate concerns, and can defend them, is deserving of respect. Switzerland, even though a small country, must not bow to every bit of mud-slinging. In this case, one can learn from a thorough reappraisal of history. As mentioned before, the discussion about Switzerland's conduct in the Second World War is in no way new. During the war, and in the post-war years, it played a significant role. In this respect, demands have always been made on Switzerland, especially fifty years ago. But it is noteworthy that demands and accusations, in their present outrageousness, are only being levelled at Switzerland some fifty years after the war's end. Formerly, too many people would have been alive in our country who were there at the time, and who would have resolutely explained, corrected and dismissed implications on the basis of their own personal experience.

How did Switzerland previously react to such situations?

At all times, and especially in cases of conflict, neutrality, had to be explained and defended abroad. That is in the nature of neutrality. It is clear: a neutral state is neither enemy nor ally. To be neutral is extremely demanding. Switzerland had to repeatedly remind both the Allies and the fascist countries at an early date that neutrality is the consequence of the Swiss concept of state. It is an essential part of our governmental and national being, related to geographical location, the small size of the country, federalism and ethnic diversity. It therefore cannot be suddenly discarded or significantly changed without affecting the national existence as a whole. As already mentioned, Switzerland did this with such clarity during and before the war that both camps, which consisted of several countries, accepted it although they would have preferred support to neutrality. Even after the war in 1946, the Swiss delegate to Washington Walter Stucki had to use unmistakable language. The fact that Switzerland did not participate in the war is "almost considered a crime, and is incomprehensible as such". According to Stucki, if Japan had not attacked the USA, it would have stayed out of the war as well. On the other hand, if Switzerland had been attacked, it would have joined the war as America did. Switzerland seems to be misrepresented as defeated and militarily occupied country and it is forgotten "that we are, even though small and powerless, a sovereign and independent state". Stucki emphatically recalled the words of the American President Roosevelt spoken on Christmas of 1943: "The rights of every nation, whether large or small, must be respected and as carefully preserved as the rights of every individual in our own Republic. The doctrine that the strong should dominate the weak is the doctrine of our enemies, and we reject it."³²

³² Stocki's inaugural speech in Washington, cf. *Bonjour*, Volume 9, 1976, p. 323.

Where can such unequivocal opinions be found today?

To be decisive and convincing in defending the interests of Switzerland, which is the duty of our officials, one has to stand up for Switzerland and its values! If one no longer takes neutrality seriously, if one calls for adaptation on all sides, if direct democracy and the will of the voters are being noticeably ignored, if one apologizes abroad for the decisions of the Swiss people, if one wants to "qualify" or even disallow direct democracy and neutrality by integrating Switzerland into the European Union, if one is not convinced of this country's sovereignty, then one no longer has the power and the strength to preserve the interests of this nation.

2. Demands made under threat of boycott must be rejected with utmost determination. Let us not forget: It was the boycott of Jewish business in Germany that initiated the atrocious extermination of the Jewish people. Whoever averts boycotts by complying with demands, whoever gives in to blackmail, will be repeatedly exposed to blackmail and subject to new boycotts.

3. If the Federal Council believes that the settlement of dormant assets (which today is a matter of private law between the banks and their customers) is no longer expedient, it should submit a new motion to Parliament so that the question, which concerns not only Jewish assets, can be resolved anew.

4. The humanitarian fund, which has been established by the banks and other business groups, is the concern of these private donors and has to be considered as such. The Swiss Confederation has nothing to do with it. Even if the Federal Council were to assume the fund's management at the request of the those who have contributed to it, it should do so at the request of these groups and according to their instructions. This fund, specifically, has nothing to do with payments of the state nor with tax funds. It is for the banks, industry and private individuals to decide whether or not, and with what amount, they want to participate, as well as for what reason, and for what purposes.

5. Compensation, or whatever it might be called, for an allegedly inappropriate Swiss trade and economic policy during the Second World War, is out of the question. Switzerland's foreign trade policy with German-occupied areas during the war, was not only legal but, together with armed defence, necessary for the survival of Switzerland. No Swiss enterprise, which was involved in commerce with these countries, should be reproached. Everyone, including trade unions, social democrats and the entire population were aware that these measures were necessary for the survival of Switzerland. If industry, the banks, the federal government, or whoever were to pay money or apologize for this economic policy, it would amount to an unjustified criticism of the wartime policies of our country. It would mean apologizing for a policy which saved the people from starvation. Because there was no other possibility of saving our country, such criticism or payments would amount to a betrayal of our people.

6. On the state level, the Allies, especially the USA, and Switzerland reached an agreement in 1946 and 1952 with regard to looted gold and German deposits in Switzerland. These contracts were the result of intense negotiation, represented a compromise, and are legally binding.³³ The government or industry should in no way compensate for the fact that during and after the Second World War we were involved in international trade. It should be emphasized again: these foreign trade relations, together with the uncompromising will to defend the country, were the condition for the survival of Switzerland. It was a country which, even in times of the most dangerous threats, remained neutral, democratic, and as free as possible. At the present time, our representatives must use the law to counter pressure and power politics. A short time ago in America, I became convinced that the excitement there is much more subdued than it is here. Despite news in our press to the contrary, the Americans have "heroes" other than the celebrated member of parliament whose noble deed consisted of promis-

³³ Washington Agreement of 1946 (and 1952): an agreement between Switzerland and the Allies, and the USA in particular, on German funds deposited in Switzerland, which the victorious Allies wanted Switzerland to hand over. Switzerland released 50% of German assets and kept the remainder to cover its own credit balance. In principle, the German owners of the retained assets were granted a claim for compensation. As far as the claim to German "looted gold" acquired by the Swiss National Bank is concerned, the bank finally agreed to release gold to the value of 250 million francs. The USA released frozen Swiss assets worth 5.3 billion francs and withdrew the "black list" (of companies and individuals who, in the Allies' view, had engaged in illegal trade with the Axis powers and who, as a result, were boycotted). Difficulties in implementing this agreement led to further negotiations and finally, in 1952, to a new agreement.

ing a certain amount of money to an official office somewhere which did not belong to her to begin with.

7. If, after careful examination, we come to the conclusion that the National Bank, other Swiss banks or corporations have illegally enriched themselves or have not refunded assets to their rightful owners, the money must be returned to the rightful owners or their heirs. If they cannot be traced, and one comes to the conclusion that it is legally possible and correct to use such payments in the spirit of the victims, this should be done. It must be done within an irreproachable form of law and legal claims. The use of such funds should be contractually bound.

8. Another proposal at present is that a fund should be established out of gratitude for Switzerland's not being dragged into the whirlpool of war. For instance, this money could be given to surviving family members of the Holocaust victims. A fund out of gratitude based on pressure from without, quasi as an order to be thankful? This has something implausible about it. I oppose the idea. For whatever purpose such a fund would be established, the other side would interpret it for its own purposes. With the establishment of a fund for humanitarian purposes by the banks, Dr. Sigi Feigel, Honorary President of the Jewish community in Zurich (according to the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*), was already referring to compensation for the "guilt of the past" and "guilt of the perpetrator". As a lawyer, Mr. Feigel should be more precise. What is concealed for the jurist behind the double meaning of the word "guilt" or "debt"? Which guilt or debts are concerned? Who are the perpetrators? How high is the debt, and when is it satisfied? Should such payments amount to a recognition of guilt? Of even greater interest is the remark from the Jewish World Congress in New York that it amounts to a "first step" (according to the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*). What is the meaning of "first step"? And where does it end? To suddenly establish a fund out of gratitude with government assets at a time of manifold claims and accusations is an exceptionally delicate matter, implausible and therefore unacceptable. If private individuals want to do it, that is their matter. Our country did not miss the appropriate chance of expressing its gratitude for being exempt from the war. At the end of the war, the federal government and private individuals, in an impressive campaign, collected and donated 200 million francs, or 8.5% of federal expenditures, to the victims of the war.³⁴

9. Whatever the government decides to do, it should not be forgotten that those responsible are handing out money of the Swiss people and not their own.

10. If we are going to learn something from the whole affair, we should recognize that consistent opposition in cases where we are convinced of our rights bring more than the gradual giving way which only leads to further demands. All of the members of the business and banking community who are talking of damage control and those politicians who are going on a pilgrimage to Washington should again read the remarks of the Swiss delegate to Washington from 1946 and act accordingly: "The existence of a small state like Switzerland is almost exclusively dependent on law. And Switzerland even less than another state cannot afford to relinquish its sacred principles of law for the sake of momentary advantages, to surrender its reputation over the long term for the sake of temporary economic advantages."³⁵

It was true in the past, it is true today, and it will be true in the future. There can be no ambiguity.

³⁴ Our people want to express their thanks, Swiss donation to the victims of war, Bern, 1945: "An act that we do not want to boast about but that we view as self-evident."

³⁵ *Bonjour*, Volume 9, 1976, p. 322.

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