

EUROPE'S "NEUTRALS" ON GUARD*

TALK WITH THE PREMIERS OF HOLLAND,
BELGIUM AND SWITZERLAND.

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TO-DAY, twenty years after Versailles, Europe resembles more than ever an armed camp. International diplomacy tries feverishly to tighten up old alliances and to secure new ones. There is hardly a country not assiduously canvassed to throw in its lot with one of the conflicting tendencies which have gradually begun to outline themselves.

In 1939, as in 1914, the neutrals refuse to be drawn. For one group of them, Scandinavia, this is geographically much easier than for the three others, the most important and the most exposed of the smaller states: Holland, Belgium and Switzerland.

They do not believe that war is inevitable, but they are determined that, should war come, Europe will find them well armed, in military strength and psychologically, guarding their frontiers, so as to prevent their territories becoming a short cut for others.

The leading statesmen, be they in The Hague, Brussels or Berne, show a common front, a determined preparedness typical for each of them.

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HENDRIK COLIJN, Pilot of Holland.

In the very centre of The Hague—Holland's royal residence and Europe's greatest village, as the admirers of its calm and peaceful atmosphere have called it affectionately—stands a dainty old palace. The daughter of James I of England lived here in exile, and for recent years Princess Juliana used it as headquarters for the philanthropic organisation in which she is interested. To-day Dr. Hendrik Colijn, the Dutch Prime Minister has his office here. A lovely green brocaded study,

* It is to be kept in mind that the MS of this article was received during the early summer, and there has been no opportunity to revise it.—EDITOR.

curtains, carpet and chairs all in the same colour scheme—and a few rooms to house the smallest staff for any government head.

Almost seventy—"but I feel quite young", says Dr. Colijn, "only the doctor now allows me but fifteen cigars per day instead of my customary twenty-five, so that I can only start on them after luncheon". He is Prime Minister for the fourth time. After a strenuous military career and a picturesque political life, he is universally recognised as Holland's greatest living statesman, and that not only in foreign capitals, but even by his adversaries at home. His Grand Cross of the Order of the Netherlands Lion, more exclusive in Holland than the Garter in England, and—unique combination—the "Militaire Willemsorde", the Dutch V.C., testify of supreme achievement in the field as in the realm of statesmanship. He made his *debut* in politics as far back as 1911, as Minister of War. It was his mobilisation plan, the result of his thorough army reorganisation, which, put to the test in August 1914, probably saved Holland from sharing Belgium's fate. Did it make a difference to the German War Lords?—I asked him.

Dr. Colijn sucks his cigar meditatively. "We know from the *Memoirs* of von Moltke that the enlargement and overhaul of our army changed the marching plans of the German General Staff. You see", continues Dr. Colijn, who, a military man at heart, has never lost his military bearing, "that is why I hold to-day that where everyone rearms, a weak spot becomes a danger spot. Holland has a year ago almost doubled her yearly military contingent, to approximately 42,000 men, at the same time considerably prolonging their period of first training, by bringing it up to 11 months. More than 200 million guilders have been voted for new material alone. This expenditure weighs very heavily, but it is our prime necessity, the nation's life insurance, so to say, and the money which that needs simply has to be found first.

"In case of emergency we will have in the long run an army of half a million men ready, well equipped, well trained and with an excellent morale. For that is one of the very few blessings wrought by European disturbances of recent years, that national homogeneity has grown considerably. The defence minister is assured of a large majority in parliament. In principle even the socialists agree with our rearmament policy, and there is no agitation against it, which goes to show how the sense for national self preservation lives in our nation to-day, stronger than it has ever shown before."

"You do not consider the chances of a small nation to defend itself against an all powerful aggressor hopeless?"

"On the contrary," argues Dr. Colijn, "it would be inviting disaster not to defend oneself to the limit of one's power. To that, Holland is firmly resolved. No nation can harbour grievances against us. It must in fairness be added that, though we had a common frontier with Germany throughout the centuries, there has never been a German-Dutch war. There is, of course, some talk of a possible attempt to turn fortified flanks elsewhere by a swinging movement, through Switzerland or through Holland and Belgium, but such a movement would be then advantageous for one of the big powers only if those countries could not put up a stiff resistance. What we are doing now is to reduce such temptations by increasing our power of defence. And don't forget our old friend 'the water'! The Yzer battles showed how successfully inundations can be applied to defence. Our inundation system, one on a truly national scale, has been studied and perfected for years. It assures in the moment of danger a vast natural defence line to fall back on. The joke abroad is that whereas God created the world, the Dutch created Holland themselves. Well, there is some truth underlying this saying. My own father was a farmer in a polder, I have grown up there, on soil which has been submerged for centuries. Our watermills are no mere picturesque setting, they are a necessity, to keep our land remaining land. Holland is our own work—and as our coat of arms testifies: WE SHALL MAINTAIN!

"Our international position is one free of any bonds or commitments. We want to remain ourselves alone, to live in good neighbourship with all those who leave us in peace. And we want to save our people from becoming involved in the quarrels of others, merely through our geographical position."

The Prime Minister looks out over the spotlessly clean streets of The Hague with their lovely old trees. His strong face, almost classical in its complete oval, has deep lines, his eyes lie sunken behind eyelids shrivelled by the tropical sun. His short clipped white hair is brushed back in military fashion. A gold watch chain alleviates the soberness of his simple blue serge suit. He never strives after effect, he hardly gesticulates, his steady eyes rarely flicker or wander.

Gallant soldier of many hazardous expeditions; able administrator of a vast colonial empire; timely organizer of an

efficient army; brilliant international business executive—such is the background of the pilot of Holland's ship of state.

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PAUL-HENRI SPAAK, Belgium's "Grand Young Man"

Paul-Henri Spaak is undoubtedly Belgium's most promising young statesman. Barely forty, he occupied for the last three years a pivotal place in the Belgian Cabinet, that of Foreign Minister. Once before he declined the Premiership which his King—no mean judge of men, though himself still young—had urged him to accept. He finally gave in, early last year, to his country's insistence.

At the time of the German invasion of Belgium young Spaak was a boy of fifteen. Anxious to get over the Dutch border, later in the war, to join the troops on the Yzer, he was caught in the attempt and spent two years in a German prison camp. Perhaps no influence has been deeper than that caused by the plight of his youth. Hence no one responded more eagerly to the King's reorientation of foreign policy than the youngest of his ministers.

"The King's directives to his ministers, which made history, were not just his personal policy. The Head of the State therewith merely put the feeling of his people into words, better than this had ever been attempted before," the Prime Minister assures me. "They have the support of a vast majority in parliament. How did it come about? Well this new foreign policy, which we call our independence policy, had two parents: the failure of the Locarno Treaty with the German march into Rhineland, and the failure of the League of Nations, when Italy defeated it over Abyssinia. These facts spoke so brutally that we had to leave the plane of lofty ideologies for more realistic safeguards.

"We did not tear up any treaty obligations. We said to our great neighbours: we want to be an element of peace in Europe; what interests you is that our territory, strategically so important, does not become an easy prey for anybody. We guarantee to defend it to the limit against whichever intruder. This policy implies a strong Belgium. Therefore we are for a strong army, and the Government has greatly strengthened our defence at enormous material and personal sacrifices. We could only ask the nation to bear this by making it clear that Belgium would not play anybody's ally. We are the only sentry of our own fortress, we will fight only if our inde-

pendence becomes involved, or our territory. That is the vital difference between our neutrality policy now and that from before 1914. Isolation would have been impossible under the inter-dependency of states in the present day world.

"One must treat with the world as it is, not as one would like it to be. I regret the decadence of Collective Security. I am sure we will all live to realise how badly it is needed. But in the meantime one cannot build one's country's security on an ideology which for the time being is unfortunately out of fashion..."

We had discussed the war rumours of which Europe is full nowadays. Mr. Spaak does not consider war inevitable. Far from it. He is even so optimistic that he nourishes strong hopes to the contrary. But if it should break out, he does not see why it must of necessity be a repetition of 1914. There are many more chances that it will be different from 1914, and be fought on other fronts.

Many people to-day speak of a new sort of democratic "Holy Alliance", between France, Great Britain and the United States, I had suggested.

"I know," interrupts the Prime Minister. "But to me this seems unlikely. What, for instance, does each nation define under democracy? I do not believe that the next war—if there should be one—will be a clash of ideologies. More vital interests prevail. Communists have appealed for a democratic bloc, reaching from London to Moscow. But in Russia there is no socialism, not even communism left. I have respect for much that has been achieved there, and that against great odds, but I cannot see it as a democratic state which should be called to the rescue of our western liberties and institutions."

The Premier has spoken with great conviction. He is not only known in Belgium for his quick intelligence and his fine *esprit*; the masses know him as a courageous man, not afraid to tell his supporters unpleasant truths, his hard hitting tempered only by his obvious sincerity. Arguing coolly with his *concitoyens*—a word which he prefers to *comrades*—he won every time, "hands down".

Once upon a time, and it is not so very long ago, M. Spaak was known to be rather extreme in his views. "It goes like that in life," muses the statesman, "times change and we with them. The other day a man told me that he had not revised his opinions in forty years. Mind you, there had been a 'mere' Great War and 'only' the rise of Bolshevism and Fascism in

the interval. As if political sincerity depends on doctrinal consistency! I have not given up my socialist ideals, but I believe now in media to realise them other than revolutionary Marxism. The class war has had its use. It has forced reforms and given the workmen their rights. We are still divided in classes, but we can work for the common good, for the time is ripe for wider solidarities."

A politician by birth, Spaak has brought to that heritage the outspokenness of his generation. That is why he carried his party and, still young, became the leader of the nation. He hails from a family which has distinguished itself in public life for generations. His maternal grandfather was the great liberal leader Janson, and P-E Janson, the present Foreign Secretary, is his uncle; his mother is a socialist Senator. Personally he has none of the Latin effervescence, though he is a French speaking Bruxellois, M.P. for his native city. He is cool and aloof and sparse with his gestures. His speeches are so crystal clear that Borinage miners for the first time understand European politics, and are willing to modify their views under his persuasion. His diplomacy is straightness and singleness of purpose. He is a modern realist.

His enormous room, heavy with mahogany, looks out over the forecourt of Parliament Buildings. A beautiful flower place livens up his study, of which the windows are wide open. It is almost symbolical for the man and his work. And as I ponder his sturdy frame and his face so full of will power and yet so friendly, the motto leaps to my mind which this Socialist Prime Minister gave out to his followers: "Order, Authority, Responsibility"!

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GIUSEPPE MOTTA, Switzerland's Watchman.

I waited for Dr. Motta in the ante-room of the Federal Palace in Berne. It is a pleasant building, roomy but unpretentious, in this pleasantest and least pretentious of European capitals. Fountains everywhere enliven the arched streets, the happy Aar winds itself lustily along the rocks, now and then bursting into a cascade, for sheer joy of living.

When a commissionaire had ushered me into the study of Giuseppe Motta, Chief of the Federal Political Department, as the Swiss Foreign Secretary is officially styled, I could not help testing this absence of serious problems.

Surely, I insisted, the *Anschluss* upset Switzerland?

"It did in a way, and yet it didn't really," answers Dr. Motta cryptically. But he elucidates: "Of course, as we had lived with Austria in close neighbourship and friendship, one can understand the emotion of our people to see an independent state, so to speak overnight, completely liquidated. But instead of weakening our internal position, the *Anschluss* must have strengthened it. Our independence and our neutrality have now become even more indispensable than ever for the maintenance of European equilibrium, to Italy no less than to France or Germany. Everyone can see that. Besides, the powers have given us solemn assurances in this respect of which the value is incontestable."

"Switzerland's mission in Europe has always been to defend the Alpine passes; in doing so, Switzerland covers and protects vital frontiers of our big neighbours. For in our hands these are safe. A glance at the new map shows that our only neighbours are now Germany, France and Italy—three great European powers. We live in friendship with them all, for whatever their internal régimes are is no concern of ours. I am convinced that they harbour no designs on our territory.

"But if anyone should attack us—it would be a wanton crime, as there would be no possible excuse—we shall defend ourselves to the limit. Our people are absolutely unanimous. We have enlarged our defence budget from seventy to one hundred and twenty million Swiss francs, a great sacrifice for our modest state finances. And we prolonged the training of our army, a real people's army. The Swiss citizen never forgets that he is a soldier, nor the Swiss soldier that he is a citizen. We are not militaristic, but we are a military nation; discipline has always been a Swiss characteristic—as I think it is with all mountain peoples. Never has the spirit in our army been so good as to-day. We have strengthened all our frontiers, a natural defence already in themselves: the Rhine, the Jura and the Alps. No power will find it worth while to try a short cut through our territory."

Motta is in his middle sixties now. Born at Airolo, son of the Concessionaire of the mail coaches down St. Gotthard, before the tunnel was built, he has grown up in an atmosphere of worlds that meet, in that constant *va-et-vient* of people and ideas, between North and South. That marked his character. From his native Tessin he went to Fribourg, the French speaking Swiss canton, and in Heidelberg he graduated *summa cum laude* as Doctor of Law. Though Italian is the tongue

which he speaks at home, he can switch over into the French of a League of Nations speech, or the German of a cabinet meeting at Berne, without even being aware of it. Still under forty he was elected Minister of Finance, and when he had held that portfolio through the difficult war years, the country entrusted him in 1920 with its foreign policy of which he is still in charge. Five times in the meantime he was President of the Confederation, without relinquishing his departmental duties. For the President is only the first among equals: his Cabinet consists of his colleagues.

Our conversation dwelt on the high esteem in which Swiss democracy is held in the world.

"Swiss democracy is something unique in the world," explains Mr. Motta. "It has no historical parallel, neither in Ancient History nor in that of the Middle Ages. The secret of its charm? Three great European civilizations meet here, the grace and humanity of Italian ideology, crystal clear and generous French thought, and the methodical order and depth of German culture. The secret of its success? They absolutely equal one another; none can pretend that another is inferior or less important. Centralisation would be impossible; we do not seek unity of speech or race. We have, of course, our parties, but if you interrogate any one on its basic conception of the relation between the individual and the state, you would get essentially the same answer everywhere, for on great fundamental questions we think and feel alike.

"The absolute necessity of a small state is unity. Without that unity, which need not exclude variety, it would be doomed in the world to-day—as Austria showed! Often I think," muses Motta, "that perfect unity in liberty can exist only in a small state, without too deep a gulf between too rich and too poor. Ours is a government by the people for the people. A small nation has no desire to concentrate on the power of the state; that can leave it indifferent, the supreme thing that matters is the well being of the individual. Our state is there to serve the citizens."

Motta's predominant characteristic is his unimpaired youthful vigour. His forehead and nose dominate, they are almost classically Roman in an otherwise robust and square peasant face, engraved with countless little lines which in their play reflect his emotions. He has a witty mouth and dark attentive eyes. Parent of ten children, he looks eminently the exemplary father, jolly, yet not to be tampered with.

His study overlooks the snow-capped peaks of the Bernese Oberland. The setting sun caresses them in a kind blaze. A mild light permeates the cosy room with its simple tasteful furniture. Only one painting—of Tessin women kneeling at a wayside chapel—decorates the wall. Motta has followed my glance. “I have always loved walking; and as the years mount, I find my communion with nature growing deeper . . .”

Such was the confession of faith of Switzerland’s “Grey Excellency”, a man of understanding, loyalty and peace—those staunch characteristics of the Swiss people: heart and bulwark of Europe.