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Stucki's appraisal of Allied-Swiss ² ~~the~~ Negotiations

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DR. WALTER STUCKI DEFENDS THE CURRIE AGREEMENT
AND WASHINGTON ACCORD

Prepared by Walter H. Choles, Consul General

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On Armistice Day in Basel before a large audience composed of the financial and industrial leaders and economists of the country, Dr. Walter STUCKI, former Swiss Minister to Vichy and at present the righthand man to Federal Councillor Dr. Max Petitpierre, Chief of the Federal Political Department, spoke for an hour and forty minutes in defense of the Currie Agreement and the Washington Accord. This speech was not only a justification of the Swiss political course during the war, but an apologia of the rôle played by Dr. Stucki therein. His vigorous and lucid presentation of the Swiss foreign policy and Swiss necessities were well received, but the initiated knew that Dr. Stucki was speaking as a disappointed man, as revealed by the bitterness and sarcasm which attended his utterances last Monday in Basel.

Perhaps the most significant announcement made by the former Swiss Minister to Vichy during the course of the evening was the statement that there would be no release of German assets in Switzerland by Bern until the exchange rate between the Swiss franc and the German Mark has been fixed.

Dr. Stucki began by pointing out that the promulgation of the Atlantic Charter establishing the principle of equality for large and small states alike brought a ray of hope in the darkness then enveloping Europe. "But what has become of it in reality", he said? "Can one still speak of equality today, considering everything that has happened of late, the veto rights of the Great Powers, for example? If in 1936 in the city of Basel Dr. Hjalmar Schacht could address us and say 'the world is out of gear', these words are more true today than at that period. At that time we were still living in a world material intact.

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"But in 1945 at the time of the Currie agreement, we were faced by three Great Powers behind which were arrayed another sixteen states. Ten years ago we were still able to reject with a firm 'no' the blandishments and solicitations of a Hermann Goering. However, in the dangerous political isolation in which Switzerland found herself at the end of hostilities in a world lacking material and moral foundations, our 'no' could not have avoided consequences of such action because the pressure upon us was heavy. We were considered as a haven of Fascism; we were considered as prolonging the war; we were considered black sheep in the eyes of the surrounding world since we were still maintaining politico-economic relations with the already flinching Third Reich, and still trains were running from north to the south via the St. Gotthard tunnel.

"When it was announced in the press that Mr. Currie as a special delegate from the United States would be coming to Bern, accompanied by British and French delegates, a sigh of relief was noticeable all over the country. It should not be forgotten that the hopes which we cherished after the liberation of France proved to be futile. The gap which was to open for us remained closed. At that time our imports were at their lowest figure. The Delegation when it arrived, was not at all in a friendly frame of mind. In a manner which was in effect an ultimatum, the breaking off of relations with the Third Reich was requested; also the discontinuance of transit shipments through the Gotthard pass.

"What were we to do? We had to come to an agreement. A condition without a contract would have exposed us to a trial of nerves which Switzerland would not have been equal to at the time.

"In this connection, the Federal Council blocked the German assets in Switzerland; moreover, exports to Germany were reduced considerably, also the transit shipments from north to south and the export of electrical current were discontinued to a great extent.

"If critics considered our blocking of German assets as a rather overdue measure and taken under foreign pressure", Minister Stucki pointed out "that political wisdom made it necessary to combine this decision with the Currie Agreement. In fact, this measure had already been considered and was in process of realization when the news of the arrival of the Currie delegation reached Bern. What prevented Switzerland from putting this measure into effect sooner was nothing less than the country's lack of coal; and Switzerland needed coal which was only to be had from Germany. This may not look well, in any case it was correct from a political point of view. Our situation was understood even in Berlin and the blocking of the German assets in Switzerland was not

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"considered by the Germans as an unneutral act, the same may be said of our other measures.

"The Currie Agreement was a compromise and certainly not a bad one. The delegates arrived as enemies and returned to their country as our friends. The moral and economic isolation threatening Switzerland was ended. The ports in southern France were opened to us and gradually imports arrived again. The Currie Agreement will be justified by history.

"The situation seemed to improve. But the regulation of October 30, 1945 concerning German reparations (a 'law' laid down by the Interallied Control Council in Berlin) again upset matters, as it stipulated the Allies might pay themselves with German assets invested in neutral countries outside of Germany. The immediate consequence was the creation of a new set of economic and political factors which changed our situation for the worse.

"In October 1945 the Federal Council received a petition signed by important parliamentarians of all camps and 220,000 Swiss citizens to the effect that the blocked German assets in Switzerland were to be considered in the first place as a pledge for our own, Swiss legal claims. We were again exposed to the danger of becoming once more isolated. The Proclaimed Lists of Certain Blocked Nationals were continued, newspaper attacks increased, our situation became uncomfortable. The Allied claim for the surrender of German assets was supported by the argument that these assets represented a new and latent danger of war and that they should be used to alleviate the damages of war and for reconstruction purposes.

"The route to Washington had in the meantime been prepared. The decision of the Washington conversations was plain from the beginning and was reached before the Swiss Delegation had left Bern.

"There were three possibilities left. A refusal; where would it have led? Certainly only to a new campaign of the world against our country. The complete power of a huge propaganda apparatus with its many demagogical possibilities would have inundated Switzerland. In view of the previously mentioned petition addressed to the Federal Council was there still the possibility for us to stick resolutely to the legality of our position because of the private nature of the property? A basis for this, however, no longer existed. To do so, would only have caused a catastrophe for the country. Of course, the great flood of systematic criticism and attack was blocked, but there continued some sputterings.

"Another alternative was open to us, that is, to submit humbly to the Allies. This we did not wish to do, nor could we afford to do it. So in the end there was again a compromise. And this latter was fixed a priori, that is, on the basis of

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supporting the principle of offsetting the account of German assets in Switzerland with German creditors against marks. Our constitution does not recognize expropriation of property without indemnification. It is not without interest to learn that this proposal was initiated by commercial and industrial circles in Switzerland. Moreover, the binding instruction to the Swiss Delegation was that a surrender of assets of Germans residing in Switzerland would not be discussed.

"The hard fight in Washington where our delegation was exposed to sharp attacks, before all by the foreign press, ended in a constructive compromise. The deblocking of Swiss assets in the United States, the elimination of the Proclaimed Lists of Certain Blocked Nationals, and last not least the clarification of the foreign political atmosphere as well as the return of confidence and the growing importance of world conception are Swiss assets which should be taken into account. Considering this, our parliamentarians could well afford the ratification of the Washington Accord.

"It is necessary", Minister Stucki pointed out especially, "to do completely away with all talk about our being obliged more or less to submit humbly to our foreign opponents. Neither in the Currie Agreement, nor in Washington were our opponents granted any rights to intervene in our affairs. The compilation of German assets in Switzerland is solely a matter of Swiss administration. Our partners to the Accord are entitled to obtain information. This is self-understood.

"Switzerland's consent to cede 250 million francs which continues the subject of criticism, must, first of all, be considered as a Swiss contribution to solidarity with friendly Central Banks which, deprived of their funds, must again take up, under the most difficult conditions, their economic functions also in the interest of Swiss economy."

Dr. Stucki in permitting the personal element to dominate so much of his speech, again revealed that he is no psychologist. He spoke as a man who is uncomfortable under his present Chief, Dr. Max Petitpierre, with whom he does not see eye to eye. He realizes that there is no longer any future for him in the Swiss Public Service. In fact, the former Minister to Vichy made no bones of his disappointment by his direct reference to democracies being ungrateful to their public servants. It is known that he could have been appointed Minister to Sweden, but neither he himself nor Mrs. Stucki seemed satisfied with Stockholm. They regarded the offer as a doubtful honor after their long period of successful service in Paris and Vichy. Moreover, his criticism of the Swiss press met with a prompt and resounding answer in the NATIONAL ZEITUNG, Basel which, in its issue of November 13, called him to task by setting forth at length Bern's long record of appeasement vis-a-vis Hitler during the war and Dr. Stucki's indifference to journalists.

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This was a very carefully prepared document and a rare opportunity for Minister Stucki. It was well received by the large audience, but, according to the minds of those whose opinions are most valued here, Dr. Stucki failed to make the most of his opportunity. His speech of last Monday will in their opinion always be remembered as the utterances of an embittered and disappointed public servant.

Walter H. Sholes
American Consul General

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