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HOME AFFAIRS.

by PIERRE BÉGUIN.

"The Survival of Wartime State Control".

If we go back a few years, we find that immediately after the war, the number of voices raised in Switzerland, demanding a rapid demobilisation of Governmental plenary powers and of the directivist measures which were the outcome of such powers, became ever greater and more vigorous. It is true that the Administration showed resistance to this and did not want or else hesitated to renounce from the extraordinary competencies which it enjoyed. Public opinion, however, was quite definitely hostile towards State control.

This it made manifest on several occasions, more particularly on that day when it approved the popular initiative in favour of a return to direct democracy, the initiative which had for its purpose and its ultimate effect, the restitution to the Sovereign People of its right to control and to oppose, which had been in abeyance during the war period. But, Public opinion showed its opposition on other occasions also, as when it voted against the maintenance of the rules governing road transport and against the interdiction to build or enlarge hotels. Each time, official circles had let it be understood that it would be very dangerous to renounce from these directivist measures and that should this happen, it would be followed by a lamentable state of anarchy. The Swiss people, however, preferred to place their confidence in the principle of free competition. It would be somewhat difficult to prove this confidence to have been wrong, as the promised catastrophies have never materialised. They are still being awaited.

Nevertheless, there still subsists a very important chapter of this emergency legislation, imbued with a very directivist character. This is the one which concerns the control of rents. It would not appear, if we are to believe the intentions which have just been expressed by our authorities, as if this measure is to be abolished for a long time to come.

In point of fact, the rents in respect of all the housing units built before or during the war are "frozen". Only a very small increase has been authorised since then. But, its role is of no importance. At the time, this measure was very necessary if a rise in the cost of living was to be prevented, that is to say if nothing was to be neglected in order to avoid inflation. Everyone was in

agreement in regard to this subject. Nevertheless, discussions subsist concerning the length of duration of this régime, which has every sign of perpetuating itself.

On the one hand, it is certain that for owners of real estate — many of whom are far from rich — this measure has the effect of being real spoliation. But, there is something which is still more serious. There exists such a big difference in regard to the rents charged for appartments in old houses and those that have been recently built, that the repartition of housing is no longer equitable; it may even be said that it is no longer inspired by really social principles. For, we find elderly couples continuing to live in flats which have a large number of rooms, just because their rent has remained practically at the same level as it was before the war, whereas the general cost of living has gone up by 70 per cent. Meanwhile, young couples, with several children are reduced to either living in appartments which are far too small for them, or else to paying exorbitant prices, in some newly-built house.

It will not prove possible to get out of this deadlock, until such times as a decision will be taken to reduce the existing difference between the rents for old and for new houses and flats. In order to achieve this, more free rein should be allowed to competition, which would lead to a better balance, that is to say, towards a more social and more rational distribution of the housing units available. In this respect, however, it would seem indubitable that it will prove very difficult to convince the tenants, that is to say, the greatest number, of the rightness of this idea, most of them, quite evidently, preferring immediate material advantages to other, more distant and more aleatory advantages. For this reason, the problem in question will remain tabled on the Helvetic agenda, for a long time to come.

SWISSAIR COCKTAIL PARTY.

On the occasion of the visit to London of Mr. Marc Virchaux, Press Chief Officer of Swissair in Switzerland, the London Management of Swissair invited Members of the English and Swiss Press to a cocktail party, which took place at the Dorchester Hotel, Park Lane, W.1. on Thursday, February 4th, 1954.

Mr. W. Wyler, General Manager for U.K. and Eire introduced Mr. Virchaux to the guests.

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