

No. 656

BERNE,

November 25, 1919.

My Lord,

*in reply.*

With reference to my despatch No. 634 of the 12th instant, I have the honour to inform Your Lordship that, in the course of the recent debate in the National Council on the Vorarlberg question, Monsieur Calender made a long speech of which the following is a summary.

After having outlined the latest development of the question, he pointed out that the situation of the Vorarlberg had become so critical that the inhabitants of the Vorarlberg could expect help only from Germany or Switzerland. There was no doubt that Germany was working for a union with the Vorarlberg and that Vienna was in favour of such a union, should the Vorarlberg become separated from Austria. In spite of all pro-German propaganda, the great majority of the Vorarlberg people were for a union with Switzerland and there could be no doubt that an eventual union would from many points of view be of advantage to Switzerland, while union with Germany would constitute a political danger for Eastern Switzerland.

There had, Monsieur Calender continued, been rumours that Italy would, in case of a union between the Vorarlberg and Switzerland, demand compensation, but such rumours were without foundation and Monsieur Tittoni had made a statement to that effect to the Swiss Minister at Rome. Switzerland, for her part, would never consent to any question of compensation being

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The Earl Curzon of Kedleston, K.G.,

etc. etc. etc.



connected with the Vorarlberg question.

Speaking on behalf of the Federal Council, the Minister for Foreign Affairs came to the following conclusions: Switzerland would not interfere in any internal question between the Vorarlberg and Austria. Should however the former desire to be separated from Austria, the Federal Council would support the Vorarlberg people, as far as their desire for a realisation of the right of auto-decision was concerned, in any appeal they might make either to the League of Nations or to the Paris Conference. Moreover the Federal Council were ready to give economic support to the Vorarlberg, particularly in the shape of credits and food-supplies. This speech has attracted considerable attention as marking the end of the policy of complete disinterestedness which the Federal Council appear to have followed hitherto in regard to the question. I understand that some assurance of Switzerland's benevolent intentions will now be sent to the Vorarlberg authorities.

In the course of an interview yesterday with the local correspondent of the "Journal de Genève", Monsieur Bovet informed me that, a really determined effort was now being made by Germany, and especially by Württemberg, to secure the annexation of the Vorarlberg. The campaign was apparently being conducted under Count Moltke at Stuttgart. From the best possible source he had been informed that the present Austrian Government were seriously considering a scheme to declare the dissolution of the Austrian Republic and to give the various provinces of the country a free decision as to their future lot. In practice, however, the scheme of the Württemberg propagandists and of the Austrian Government was so to arrange matters that, when the decision in favour of dissolution came about, the Vorarlberg would go over to Germany. The present tendency of the Vorarlberg to play with the question of annexation to Germany was due, Monsieur Bovet thought, primarily

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to the difficulties in connection with the exchange, the Vorarlberg finding it much more advantageous to buy in Germany than in Switzerland; unless something positive was done to counteract the present German effort, the Allies might find themselves faced with a "fait accompli". The present idea of the Federal Council was, Monsieur Bevet said, to submit the matter to the League of Nations and to endeavour to secure complete independence for the Vorarlberg, which would then enter into some form of customs union with Switzerland. The exchange question could, in such an event, be put right by an advance of, say, thirty million francs to the Vorarlberg; it would of course be understood that the Vorarlberg would remain responsible for her share of the Austrian war debt.

Monsieur Bevet left with me an interesting and comprehensive memorandum on this question, a copy of which I transmit to Your Lordship herewith. Monsieur Bevet observed that he personally was opposed to the immediate union of the Vorarlberg with Switzerland as advocated in the memorandum, but that he concurred generally in favour of the terms of this document, which contained a useful history of the case.

A copy of this despatch has been sent to the British Delegate at the Peace Conference.

I have the honour to be, with the highest respect,

My Lord,

Your Lordship's most obedient,

humble servant,

(signed) THOMAS RUSSELL