

Sundry news from Switzerland

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Despite a certain slackening of the actual activity of the Swiss industry, as compared to that of 1939, the stock exchange index for shares is still well above its level at the beginning of the war. This proves the confidence of the public in the future of our industry during the coming year. The war years have generally been favorable to enterprises of the machine industry and the factories of electrical equipment, industrial tools and precision instruments and made it possible for them to distribute reasonable dividends and to consolidate their returns. Through this, our industry will be better prepared to face an eventual series of difficult years. (Commercial Bulletin.)

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SUNDRY NEWS FROM SWITZERLAND.

In the course of a meeting of the Chamber of Commerce in Zurich, information was given concerning a project for the construction of a big airdrome at Kloten, a project which has been approved by the Zurich Grand Council. The Canton is said to be ready to build at its own expense a Continental Airport. On the other hand, the Canton would ask for the Confederation's help for the construction of an airfield designed to take care of Inter-Continental traffic.

One thousand four hundred and fifty applications have already been submitted for the Swiss Trade Fair in 1945. Unfortunately it has been impossible to accept all. Furthermore, the system of admission to the Fair has been reorganized. Last year's account of the Trade Fair closed with a benefit of half a million francs.

Last year's Swiss National Day collection yielded a net revenue of 1,234,000 francs, i.e. 213,000 francs more than in the previous year. According to the statutes of this action, the money will be transmitted to the Swiss Red Cross.

In a manifestation on women societies in Berne, an extension of the political rights of women and increased collaboration of women in communal questions was demanded.

In the City of Zurich, the electors ratified a number of projects including one relative to the equipment of a Laboratory for Radioscopic Work and another providing for the construction of an electric power plant at the Julier.

The Government of Geneva, in a special session last Tuesday, January 23rd, welcomed the new French Consul General, Mr. Xavier de Gaulle. Cantonal President, Mr. Francois Perreard addressed hearty words to the new French Consul to which Mr. de Gaulle replied.

The Political Department has given our Minister in Berlin the necessary instructions regarding the protection of Swiss citizens on the Reich's territory and territories of the Reich occupied by the Russians. All Switzerland's diplomatic personnel including that of the Consulates will remain at their posts. Swiss citizens residing in Germany have received from our Legation the counsel not to leave their present residence and no general repatriation plan is under consideration for the moment.

Five years ago on February 1st, the compensation funds set up to cover loss of income, due to active military service was introduced in Switzerland. This has become the greatest social work our country has known so far. It makes it possible for the soldiers to receive in addition to their army pay, a compensation for the loss sustained in their normal salary enabling them to support their families without undue difficulties.

The head of the Commercial Section of the Federal Department of Public Economy, Dr. Hotz, announced that at present 300,000 tons of foodstuffs and 100,000 tons of technical raw material are waiting in ports of the Iberian Peninsula to be shipped to Switzerland and that the ports on which our country is absolutely depending are still blocked. Dr. Hotz declared, 'the actual prosperity of our industry has only been an illusion and our production is at present beginning to slacken considerably. Therefore, all economic forces of our country must join their efforts to pull through and to overcome future difficulties. In the field of international collaboration,

Switzerland is still determined not to give one inch from her policy of strict neutrality. Great satisfaction is reigning at the Federal Palace with regard to the coming negotiations between Switzerland and the expected commercial delegations from Washington, London and Paris.¹

Beginning March 1st, the needy people of Switzerland will get a price reduction on shoes amounting to 35% for adults and 50% for children. The Confederation, the Cantons and the Communes will share in this plan.

The number of Swiss emigrants to overseas lands is growing smaller and smaller which is not astonishing in view of present circumstances. In 1943, only 18 people went overseas. In 1944, the number was 13.

The month of January is marked this year by very low temperatures comparable to those recorded in 1891 and 1893, which were the lowest ever recorded. Snow fall was heavier than usual and left great drifts in many parts.

The cold wave in January underlines the present shortage of fuel due to an almost complete interruption of coal imports. In Schaffhausen the schools had to be closed for two weeks.

In Basle, where similar measures had to be taken for the schools, coal for the gas plant has brought up the hardest problem. The allotments of gas for kitchen purposes had to be reduced by 50%. There are talks of setting up collective kitchens with food distribution centers in all parts of the City.

The Labor Party in the Canton of Zurich has just launched an initiative in favor of women's suffrage. The text of the initiative which concerns the Canton of Zurich only runs as follows: "Women citizens are to be placed on the same basis as male citizens as far as the right of vote in general and eligibility to cantonal and city offices are concerned."

The Swiss accident insurance has been adjusted to the increased cost of living. So far the highest salary to be insured by insurance companies amounted to 21.- francs a day and 6,000 francs a year. These maximums have now been raised to 26.- francs and 7,000 francs respectively. The measure was taken in the form of a full power decision.

From the Federal Council's answer to a question by National Councillor Zigerli (Zurich), we learn that according to news received so far some 30 Swiss citizens residing in France have been executed by German occupation forces or by so-called members of the French Movement of Resistance. Various steps have already been taken for the clarification of the circumstances surrounding these sometimes very obscure events. Where trustworthy statements from witnesses allow it, the German government has been asked for explanations. The rights in favor of the executed person's families have been reserved.

The government of Basle has decided to cut down all superfluous trees in the alleys and parks of the town. The wood will be a welcomed substitute for the lacking coal.

In view of the severe rationing of cooking gas in Switzerland the social office of Zurich has decided to open public soup kitchens in the town. For the time being only at lunch time on week days a limited quantity of soup will be supplied. The soup will be sold without profit and for one meal coupon per liter.

In the London News Chronicle the well-known English journalist A.J. Cunnings points out that as a future country of tourism Switzerland may count on greatest interest among the British public. For five years, Mr. Cunnings writes, the English have been obliged to remain on their island. In 1937, 1,250,000 English people have taken a trip to the Continent.

Aga Khan who since the beginning of the war has resided in Switzerland, mostly in Geneva, left our country for India, accompanied by his wife and a large party. His son will continue his studies in Switzerland.

Thanks to the efforts of the European Student's Relief Society, 46 French students have been enabled to come to Switzerland. They will be taken to our well-known health resort of Leysin. Their stay in our country will be financed by the action for student war victims.

On the last exchange of war prisoners through the mediation of Switzerland it is announced from Berne that the exchange comprised some 7,150 seriously wounded American, British and German soldiers. At the same time some 875 civilians from both sides were also exchanged. Finally, a number of American and German sanitary personnel will now also return to their home countries. The whole action carried out under the supervision of the Section for Foreign Interests of the Federal Political Department has enabled some 10,000 persons to rejoin their families. The Federal authorities have expressed their gratitude for the unselfish work done by the many persons engaged in this humanitarian enterprise.

Fifteen days ago, a campaign was organized in Basle for the collection of household articles such as dishes, kitchen utensils and all kinds of furniture. These articles are for the people of Mulhouse in Alsace who are in dire need of them. A first effort brought together 52 truck loads and a second reached 22 truck loads.

The government of the Canton of Solothurn has taken a decision which is quite unprecedented in Switzerland. It has decided to submit to the cantonal parliament a project for the obligatory insurance of all children in Solothurn between one and fourteen years whose parents have an income of less than 4,000 francs a year.

After the arrival of the preliminary consent of the French Government, the Federal Council appointed Dr. Carl Burckhardt, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross as Swiss Minister to France. This post has been vacant since last summer.

From Berne it is announced that despite his appointment as Swiss Minister to France, Prof. Carl Burckhardt will not resign for the time being from his post as President of the International Committee of the Red Cross. However, for a certain time while he will be representing Switzerland in Paris, Prof. Burckhardt will not exercise his presidential functions.

The Federal Council granted the visas for Switzerland to the Russian delegation to the International Trade Union Conference in London after this delegation had been invited to our country by the Swiss delegates.

The Russian delegation at the London World Trade Union Conference informed the Swiss delegation that in view of the prearranged travelling route they would not be able to accept the Swiss invitation to come to Switzerland.

After the departure of a first train with export goods from Switzerland at the end of last week, the formation of a second similar train has now been begun. Some of the freight cars have already arrived at the border station of Bollegarde. A third train will be formed before long and there are already plans for a fourth and fifth. The last two trains will transport Swiss electric installations which were urgently required by Spain for a long time. The French railways have declared themselves ready to permit in future the transit of several trains per week consisting of freight cars loaded with export goods and empty cars destined for the transportation of import merchandise. The question of the unhampered transit of these trains through Spain is at the moment being discussed with the Spanish authorities.

On Thursday's air bombardment of Stein a/ Rhein, an eyewitness reported that in proportion to its size, Stein a/ Rhein with its 10,200 inhabitants has been relatively harder hit than Schaffhausen in April last year. The bombardment took place on February 22nd at 1.36 p.m. and lasted only a few seconds. One foreign plane out of a group of 4 suddenly rose sharply up into the sky and then several observers who had been watching the happenings saw the bombs drop. So far 9 casualties and 18 wounded, some of them badly injured, have been reported. Some 50 people have lost their homes. They have found refuge with private people or are in hotels. Eighty-five persons are no longer able to use their kitchens and are taken care of by the war relief office.

At Rafz, an entire family of eight persons, the family Siegrist, have lost their lives. They were probably having lunch when the bomb surprised them. The sight of the dead bodies was undescribable and it was only possible to identify them by their clothing. With their father and mother all five children were killed. The sister of Mrs. Siegrist, Miss Emily Schweitzer was also among the victims.

Five other bombs were dropped close to the destroyed Siegrist chalet.

A big fire broke out in a barrel factory at Zofingen, Aargau, which destroyed the factory's installations over a 20 acre surface. Damage is estimated at more than 600,000 francs.

According to a press dispatch, the Swiss citizen Mr. Albert Georges Hapsburger died in the German concentration camp of Dachau on November 7, 1944. Some 20 years ago, Mr. Hapsburger left Tramelan in Switzerland for France. On October 28, 1944, he was arrested by the Gestapo and taken from Belfort to the concentration camp of Dachau. The deceased was 57 years old. He left his wife and two daughters who were able to return to Switzerland.

In its meeting of February 27th, the Federal Council took a number of decisions, the most important of them lifting the bans on political parties and setting up new dispositions for the maintenance of order and the defense of the Constitution. Beginning March 1st, the interdictions on extremist parties of the Right and Left, interdictions which were fully justified by prevailing circumstances when they were applied because they contributed to the protection of home security, are now to be lifted. The Federal Council reserves for itself the right however to place a ban for a limited period on all groups or associations which might jeopardize home or foreign security. The penal provisions of the new decree contain measures for the protection of constitutional order based on the law of December 5, 1938 which penalizes acts contrary to public order and enacted measures in defense of democracy. The new decree provides a more rigorous definition of what constitutes high treason, and deals with acts designed to dismember the state or to undermine the authority of public authorities. It also punishes infractions of established rules regarding foreign political organizations.

Prof. Carl Burckhardt must give up his work as president of the International Committee of the Red Cross in Geneva during the time of his mission as Swiss Minister in Paris. Mr. Max Huber who was Prof. Burckhardt's predecessor at the head of the Red Cross has accepted to resume ad interim the presidency of the International Committee of the Red Cross.

February 27th was marked again by repeated violations of Swiss skies by foreign aircraft, either American or unidentified. Our ground defenses and security squadrons were in action. Nine American bombers were shot down or forced to land. One fell at Celerina in the Grisons, another landed at Altenrhein, five at Dubendorf, the eighth crashed at Allschwil and the ninth at Seebach.

In view of the sudden gas rationing which has naturally brought an increase in the consumption of meals in restaurants, the War Office for Food Supply has decided to enlarge the possibilities of exchanging food coupons for meal coupons. Details of the new regulations will be published at the end of the month.

Until 1926, the Canton of Schwyz has been the only state in Europe, and maybe in the whole world, which had no income tax but only a tax on capital and capital revenue. After five attempts for a reform have previously been rejected, the people of Schwyz finally accepted a somewhat more modern tax legislation which also included income tax. The regulations on capital tax, however, are still dating from 1854. They are so drastic that particularly in cases of smaller fortunes complete tax honesty almost means the surrender of the entire capital. At the moment the parliament of Schwyz is discussing a modern and just new tax law in its third reading. It is not to be doubted that the project will be accepted by the cantonal parliament. Its fate in the following public vote however is less certain.

The Swiss Medical Mission to Normandy in France has left Switzerland at les Verrieres after having received their instructions from Dr. Raymond, chief of the medical staff of the Swiss Red Cross. This mission has been organized in the framework of the "Swiss Gift to War Victims" for which action a nation-wide money collection has just been started in Switzerland.

Last Sunday, the Winter Army Championships came to a close in Montana. General Guisan, Commander in Chief of the Swiss Army spoke a few words to the competitors. At the present time, he said, it is not only the armor and the motor that count on the field of battle but also the personal value of the men, no matter what their armament or their grade may be. The General stressed the high quality of the physical preparation of our soldiers and officers.

On the occasion of the collection in behalf of war victims which will be taken up next week, on a scale unknown heretofore in Switzerland, the Post, Telephone and Telegraph Administration has permitted the usage of blue and not green remittance blanks for the first time in history. This blue bulletin is attached to the little booklet devoted to the "Swiss Gift for War Victims", which is to be distributed in all Swiss homes. This means that about 1.5 million copies will be distributed.

A few days ago, Switzerland's activity as protective power of Italian interests in Great Britain has come to a close. The task has now been transferred from the Swiss Legation in London to Count Nicolo Carandini, the Italian diplomatic representative who recently arrived in the British Capital. Italian citizens residing in the United Kingdom and Italian prisoners of war will therefore no longer be represented by Switzerland but by the Ambassador of the Bonomi government.

SUBSCRIPTION FEE: Payment of the 1944-45 fee has been exceptionally slow up to the present. We shall include special circulars with the "Helvetia", with the expectation that these reminders will not be left unheeded.

Please remit to either the Secretary; to the Treasurer, Mr. W. Ungemuth, Clarence Street, Northcote, Auckland; to Mr. A. Peyer, 48 Moa Road, Auckland, W.3; to Mr. John Steiner, Eastport Road, Waihou; to Mr. C. Gebert, P.O., Opotiki; or to Mr. E. Dickenmann, P.O. Box 386, Wellington.

We also wish to solicit the goodwill of those members who are willing and able to donate more, apart from the nominal fee.

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