

News at random

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NEWS AT RANDOM

While the deficit in the ordinary Federal budget for the present year will probably not exceed 109 million francs, the extra-ordinary expenses are estimated to reach 4,890 millions by the end of 1942, of which sum 1,340 millions are expected to be spent during the current year. Of that total about 1,170 millions will by the end of the year have been covered by amortisation or by taxation. In comparison it must be remembered that the costs of the mobilisation during the world war 1914-18 amounted to a total of 1,600 millions. To cover the cost of the mobilisation the extra-ordinary taxes in 1942 are expected to yield: from the annual capital tax 90 millions, 80 millions from defence taxes, 100 millions from war profit taxes, 50 from turn over tax and 10 millions from the so-called stores tax, i.e. a total of 330 millions.

The nett indebtedness of the Swiss Confederation (without the liabilities of the Federal Railways which amounts to 3,200 millions) amounted at the end of 1940 to 2,777 millions. It grew during the last year by 800 millions and will undoubtedly reach 4,500 millions by the end of the year unless some relief will take effect. It can, however, be stressed that up to now in order to finance the public Exchequer, the note issue has been used very sparingly. The accounts of the cantons as well as of the communes are equally suffering under the pressure of the mobilisation costs. For 1941 the cantons budgeted for an excess expenditure over income of 59 millions as against a deficit of 46 millions in the previous year. Most of the communes also record constantly growing deficits, so that increases in taxation will have to be expected where not already in force.

* * *

The socialist Initiative for the extension of the Federal Council from seven to nine members and its election by the people was rejected in an impressive manner on the last Sunday in January. The initiative which was instituted shortly before the outbreak of the war in the summer of 1939, and sponsored by the disappointment of the Socialists at not securing election of their candidate into the Council, was signed by 150,000 voters. The Federal Council and the Federal

Assembly recommended its rejection. After a lively campaign the Swiss people decided with 519,000 noes against 250,000 ayes for the rejection of the innovation. All the 25 cantons had a majority against it this time, whereas in a similar initiative in 1900 nine small cantons, preponderantly catholic were for the acceptance. The same cantons viz. the four inner cantons, Glarus, Zug, Fribourg, Tessin and Valais have since changed their views thoroughly although five of them never had one of their citizens in the Federal council. The most thoroughly rejecting one of these previously accepting cantons is Fribourg: in 1900 an almost three to one majority for and in 1942 an eight to one majority against. In the Valais the result is seven noes to one aye, Appenzell Ausserrhoden nearly fourteen noes to one aye. Therefore in future the Government of the country will be elected as before by the Federal Assembly, which itself is subject to election by the people.

* * *

Import figures for 1941 compared with those of pre-war indicate a decrease. The reason is scarcity of raw materials and transport difficulties. The decrease compared with last year amounts to about one-fifth. Exports, however, have increased by more than frs. 170,000,000 to a total of two milliards and 24 million francs, mainly due to higher prices. During last year we had to pay about 10% more for imports which were smaller by 20% than the imports of 1940. Exports are by 11.2% higher and amount to one milliard four hundred and sixty-three thousand francs.

* * *

For ten long years the record of the Swiss Federal Railways stood at 128 million travellers, now last year it was beaten by 16 millions. The 144 million travellers at a daily average of 400,000 for a total rail net of not quite 2,900 km. represent a very good result.

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Even more imposing are the figures of the goods traffic which amounted to 23.2 million tons and surpassed the previous year by 3 million tons. This represents a daily average of 60,000 tons or an equivalent of 6,000 trucks of 10 tons each.

No less satisfactory is the financial result. The record receipts of 1929 with 431 million francs have been beaten by more than 20 millions. With a total of 452 millions the result of the last year before the last war (1913) was more than doubled. The working surplus obtained amounting roughly to 200 millions is 31 millions higher than in 1939 and about 16 times larger than in the year of crisis 1921. In the 39 years of existence the Federal Railways had only 17 years in which they recorded a surplus, whereas 22 years closed with a deficit. Bad deficit periods were the years 1914 to 1922 and 1931 to 1938. The satisfactory results since then are mainly accounted for by the disappearance of road transport, so that the rail remains the sole traffic conveyor. These conditions will, of course alter again, but the satisfaction remains that a high record has been attained.

* * *

The Federal Office for Price Control recently stated that increasing supply difficulties were directing the attention of the public more and more to home-produced foods. The fish of our lakes and rivers contribute a valuable share in this direction. In order to forestall high prices on the fresh water fish market, the Price Control Office will fix for the first time periodical maximum prices for suppliers, wholesalers and retailers.

* * *

The Swiss Farmer's Secretariat is calculating that the ultimate gross production of agriculture in 1941 will amount to 1678 million frs., which represents an increase of 170 millions. According to provisional results corn growing amounted to 97.2 millions (1940 73.1), potatoes 83.2 mill. (68.9), sugar beet 8.1 mill. (6.5), wine growing 91.5 mill. (44.2), fruit growing 298 mill. (278), milk production 529.9 mill. (513.4), pig keeping 192.7 (191.4) and poultry 77 mill. (64.3).

* * *

Switzerland has happily been spared a serious cattle epidemic. Foot and mouth disease which not so many years ago befell many tens of thousand of cows, appeared only in the canton of Tessin as an epidemic, but of no great consequence as only about 1,000 cattle and 3,400 small cattle were affected. In five other cantons the disease was found in isolated instances which did not exceed a total of 100 cases. Less favourable was the condition of the pigs. The red murrain was proved in 5,900 cases and caused 3,600 pigs to be killed. The swine-fever raged in 1,500 sties and demanded 4,000 victims.

* * *

The extension of the soil cultivation and the stringent reduction of import of cattle-fodder necessitated a forcible reduction in the number of cattle in Switzerland. The number of cows which was 926,000 in 1939 has been reduced to 860,000. Half of the food-stuffs to sustain the one million pigs was imported so that a considerable reduction could not be avoided. Their number dropped by 170,000 and the fodder difficulty will very likely cause a further reduction by about 50,000 to 70,000. The measures to reduce the consumption of meat (three meatless days per week) are therefore easily explained. The effect of the fodder

shortage has been even more severe with poultry. The number of 5.5 millions of hens dropped to 3.7 millions already in the spring of 1941 and since then has been reduced still further, so that one must reckon with a decrease in numbers by about 40%. Yet already pre-war home production of eggs could only cover one third of the total consumption and the import amounted in peace time to roughly 440 million eggs per annum. This will explain the present ration of only two eggs per month per head of the population.

* * *

The Government of the canton Valais has just issued an order which will please all friends for the protection of the beauties of our home land. In future, the use of corrugated sheet iron for buildings is prohibited. In villages and their immediate neighbourhood, where there are corrugated sheet iron roofs, these will have to be painted over with grey or brownish shades. By this order the domestic product of the canton, the slate, which harmonises so well with the landscape comes again into its own.

* * *

What was a "Folk of Herdsmen" has long ago become an industrial people, which luckily, however, has still retained a large cultivation of the soil. From the published census of businesses of 1939 it is found that there are 244,000 concerns which are engaged in Industry, Trade, Commerce and Traffic, employing a total of 1,285,000 persons. Compared with the census of 1929 the number of firms has increased by 28,000 and the number of the employees by 29,000. The changes which have taken place in the employments are very interesting. An increase of 10,000 employees is recorded in food production, in the metal and engineering industries the number grew by 16,000 and the chemical, rubber and leather industries increased their numbers of work-people by 6,000 whereas the paper and graphic industry advanced by 7,000 workers. On the other hand the textile and clothing industry shows a reduction of 24,000 employees. The number of people employed in the distributing trades increased by 24,000 to 230,000.

The number employed in the home industries shows a reduction of 10,000 workers, thereby dropping to 27,600, whereas small businesses which employ three people at the utmost and which form the great mass of concerns, have considerably increased.

General Trade and Commerce inclusive the Building Trade employ in 116,000 undertakings 799,000 workers. In this census the experiment was made for the first time to get a detailed computation of the various categories of employments. It showed that of 692,000 workers 264,000 completed a regular apprenticeship, 244,000 picked up their trade by employment without being apprenticed and 184,000 are unskilled workers. The industrial census comprises 803,000 Swiss citizens, 53,000 foreigners in addition to 397,000 Swiss women and 32,000 foreign women.

* * *

For the second time during this war an appeal for a collection for our soldiers and their families is being made. In 1940 the fund (Nationalspende-Stiftung) obtained thus eight million francs, which were used for relief. Salaries and wages equalisation is assisting the soldiers and their families and the Federal Military Assurance is looking after the sick and invalids as well as after the widows and orphans of soldiers who died in the service of their country. But there is still a

wide field left for the fund. It assists the soldier when the governmental assistance is insufficient, it looks after widows and children, erects soldiers huts, is responsible for spare time occupation, supports the military laundries and looks after the washing of the soldiers. All these activities are to be financed through a collection which is taking place this month.

It is hardly believable that the ski sport in Switzerland is only about fifty years old. Previous to that there were, however, a few rash young men who put long boards on their feet and soared away and already in 1868 the Glarner Konrad Wild ascended the Mitlödi by means of skis. The epoch-making voyage of Nansen towards the North Pole on skis also spurred some Swiss to try skiing, but the sport only came into vogue after two Norwegians gave demonstrations of the art. From 1892 onward, skiing extended gradually to some of the mountain districts until to-day it has become an indispensable means of communication. Skiers in Switzerland are to-day numbering many hundreds of thousand. Only a few weeks ago General Guisan visited a camp at Wengen where 500 school girls were initiated into the art of skiing. A similar camp for boys exists in the Oberland of the canton de Vaud which also was visited by the General. Skiing to-day is indisputably the most popular sport in Switzerland.

On New Year's day morning it was just forty years since the first train of the Swiss Federal Railways entered the railway station of Berne. The train coming from Aarau was decorated with the Federal flag, the only outward sign that the four great private railways passed into Federal possession, to be followed on May 10th, 1909, by the Gotthard Railway. The purchase of these railways was decided by a popular vote on February 20th, 1898, by about 386,000 ayes against 182,000 noes.

According to an official communication Export shipping via Genoa to New York has been suspended, as all the shipping available under the Swiss flag will be required in a shuttle service Lisbon—Genoa for the shipment of grain. However the War transport department is doing everything possible to tranship promptly the export goods destined for New York and further west into the time chartered "Greek steamers."

Friends of Swiss history are continuing their historical researches into the ancient Roman period in spite of the unfavourable times in which we are living. At Moehlin in the Fricktal, the commune and the Association for the study of local history have commenced the restauration of a Roman watch tower. There are forty places known between Basle and the lake of Constance where such watch towers stood. In Windisch, the Roman Vindonissa, the excavation of the foundations of some Roman barracks are continuing and in Baden a Roman pottery works has been excavated, bringing to light some very rare technical implements.

In spite of the rationing of dairy produce, the International Red Cross Committee has obtained permission both from the Federal Council and the two Axis powers concerned to export a certain quantity of

milk products to Greece to be distributed to starving children in that unfortunate country. This supply will be taken from our own reserves.

In order to concentrate the many voluntary works of assistance and relief for the victims of the war, the Federal Council has nominated a delegate in the person of Edouard de Haller, a member of the International Red Cross. He will conduct discussions with a view to relieve children in Belgium, Holland, France, Yugoslavia and Finland by finding temporary homes in Switzerland. There is also a plan for the reception of wounded and sick soldiers in Switzerland.

The long list of belligerent nations whose interests are represented by Switzerland has had a new country added. Switzerland now represents the interests of Egypt in France and those of France in Egypt.

After Switzerland has increasingly been called upon to represent the interests of belligerent nations in enemy countries, another task has been entrusted to her by international agreement. Switzerland is to arrange the exchange and repatriation of the diplomatic and consular representatives of such European and American States which amongst themselves have broken off diplomatic relations. As representative and delegate of the Federal Council Lieutenant Colonel Dr. Carl Gossweiler from Muri, near Berne, has been appointed.

Dr. Paravicini, the brother of our former Minister in London, is the official delegate of the International Red Cross in Tokyo where he has been a medical practitioner for a large number of years.

The extraordinary cold and dry winter has in many places caused a serious dearth of water, which is particularly and unpleasantly felt in the supply of electric current. The level of the lakes and rivers is at its lowest for over a century; all the minor lakes are covered with ice from 5 ins. to 8 ins. thick. An extensive reduction in the use of current had to be imposed on all current consumers. The power works on the

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Rhone, which in normal times has an inflow of 250 cubic metres per second, has now an inflow of only 130 cubic metres, i.e. the lowest since its existence.

A wave of arctic conditions swept over our country at the end of last month. The Rhine froze in several parts between Schaffhausen and Basle, stretches of the Gotthard line were submerged in snow-drifts six to eight metres high and gigantic avalanches wrought havoc in alpine regions. A goods train was derailed and the line temporarily blocked by an avalanche which descended between Amsteg and Gurtellen (south of the lake of Lucerne) nine people being killed in one house alone. Another destructive avalanche on the Col des Mosses buried amongst others the wife and daughter of M. Rigassi, the editor of the "Gazette de Lausanne."

The large radio station near Lausanne which was erected some ten years ago by the League of Nations for its exclusive use has now been definitely taken over by the Swiss broadcasting system. After lengthy deliberations the final terms were settled by arbitration.

An airplane factory — the first one in our country — has commenced operations in Stans, on the lake of Lucerne. It is proposed to build a special type of 'plane, the Pilatus S.B.2, able to take off from most unfavourable ground and to maintain communications between places in the Alps.

The family, Urbain Germanier, of Vétroz in the canton of Valais, can be proud of its four sons. All the four are Officers in the Swiss Army, three serve in the capacity of Captains and the fourth as a first Lieutenant. The four Officers and their father form a group of excellent shots who have taken numerous wreaths home with them from the various festivals they attended and in many matches have been in the very first categories.

Hardly a month after completing his 100th year, Gottfried Muller, of Schlosswil, died as the oldest Emmentaler. He was for many years the sexton of the commune of Walkingen.

The Head of the Vatican Swiss Guard, Colonel Georges de Sury d'Aspremont, has asked to be relieved of his appointment which he has held for thirty years.

The well-known rifleman, Fritz Zulauf, died in Zurich last December; he was a champion with the pistol and secured at the International meeting at Stockholm in 1929 world fame by scoring the highest number of points.

According to a recent broadcast from Berne two Swiss citizens, Joseph Weidnitz and Johann Imhoff, and a foreigner have been sentenced to 15 years imprisonment on a charge of having handed over to a foreign power plans of a fortified position. — A number of high Swiss officers are said to have been placed on the retired list, no explanation being made public justifying this action.

The canton as well as the commune of Schwyz were entrusted with the organisation and carrying out of the 650th anniversary celebration of the Swiss Confederation. The balance sheet just issued shows

instead of the expected deficit a substantial surplus. The main source of the Frs.75,000 clear surplus is undoubtedly the festival play which took place in Schwyz and which attracted a considerably larger attendance than was expected. After deduction of Frs.25,000 which go to the organising Committee in Schwyz, an amount of about Frs.50,000 goes to the National charity (Nationalspende).

Severe train restrictions have been imposed by reason of the shortage of lubricants and the need for conserving electric power for industrial purposes. The special winter sports trains have been cancelled as from the 14th inst., and Sunday travelling may be suspended altogether.

The old Grisons castle Razüns which was renovated at great expense and opened in 1929 had to be closed down owing to lack of guests. For over ten years this beautifully situated castle served as a prosperous holiday centre for Swiss from abroad, who were not overburdened by worldly goods. Now the castle has reverted again to the Grison family Viele, to which it belonged nearly a hundred years ago and which will be a guarantee that this historical monument will be carefully preserved and looked after.

At Reichenau in the Grisons the first Swiss factory for wood saccharification is just being completed. From the trees in the Grisons forests there will be extracted Lignin (Cellulose), dextrose (grape sugar) and spirit, besides dried yeast which will serve as animal fodder. In Altstetten near Zurich another factory is being built where the manufacture of synthetic rubber will be started. This artificial rubber is produced according to a new process, for which an expensive technical installation will not be required.

The problem of drying grass electrically in large quantities has been satisfactorily solved by a series of trials last year. The Federal Council has now voted a credit of 1.5 million francs for the erection of drying plants in various parts of the country. The dry grass represents a valuable artificial fodder which is of great importance to-day. Experience has proved that the milk production did not recede after changing from fresh grass to dried grass feeding. In these electric drying plants corn, fruit marc, grape seeds (for oil production) and the leaves of sugar beet will also be dried.

Under the title "An Oasis in the Storm" a Swiss film was shown for the first time in Berne, at which the President of the Federal Council, Federal Councillor Etter, General Guisan, representatives of the Swiss and International Red Cross and the members of the Diplomatic Corps were present. It presents the charitable work of the Red Cross and is internationally conceived. It will take a message of charity and relief to all countries in the world.

The constantly increasing demand for exhibition space for the Swiss Industries Fair at Basle, had forced the management of the fair to add new provisional buildings to the existing ones. These provisional show-rooms were intended to be replaced as soon as possible by permanent buildings. Since 1939 a plan existed to erect a new hall measuring 262 feet in length and 144 feet in width to house the exhibits of the

building industry. The increasing difficulty in obtaining iron has caused a revision of this project, by using wood instead of iron. According to the calculation of the Architects and Constructural Engineers, the execution in ram-concrete and wood should be more economical than the construction which was in use up to now. Instead of the previously calculated 350 tons of building iron necessary for this particular building, only 32.5 tons are required by the new method. Entirely new, and up to the present never previously applied, will be the roofing over in wood, without any support and with a span of 44 metres.

The articles produced by our textile industry and the efforts which are being made to be ready for the post-war period by the employment of the latest scientific methods are being brought home to our people by the establishment of "textile days." The Swiss textile industry employs about 100,000 people; the production has as a general rule exceeded the demands of the home market. Geneva is having its textile days this month and it will be Zurich's turn next month.

The accounts of Swiss Bank Corporation for 1941 show net profits, including the carry forward from last year, of Swiss francs 9,655,966, against 9,157,189f. for 1940. The total assets at the end of 1941 amounted to 1,370,094,424f. (1,366,071,396f.). It is proposed to pay a dividend of 4 per cent., the same as for the previous year. The carry forward will amount to 3,255,966f. (2,757,189f.).

UN SUCCES DE LA DEMOCRATIE SUISSE.

Le Dimanche, 25 janvier 1942, le peuple suisse a été appelé à se prononcer sur un projet de réforme constitutionnelle de la plus haute importance. Peu de temps avant la guerre, les socialistes, déçus de n'avoir pu faire élire l'un des leurs au gouvernement fédéral, avaient lancé une initiative populaire qui avait pour but de créer deux ministères nouveaux et de retirer au parlement le soin d'élire les conseillers fédéraux, pour le confier au peuple directement. Il était bien entendu, dans leur idée, que les deux sièges nouveaux leurs seraient attribués et qu'une campagne électorale vivement menée leur permettrait sans doute d'en obtenir un troisième.

Afin de réfuter par avance le plus d'objections possibles, les auteurs de l'initiative avaient pris toute une série de précautions et rédigé un texte relativement très détaillé. Bien que le nombre des sièges gouvernementaux dût être augmenté de sept à neuf, il était prévu qu'on ne pourrait pas choisir plus d'un conseiller fédéral dans le même canton. Il était précisé que l'on devrait tenir un compte équitable, dans la composition du gouvernement, des principales tendances politiques, ce qui revenait à prévoir pour l'élection du pouvoir exécutif une espèce de représentation proportionnelle. Les minorités linguistiques devaient, elles aussi, être équitablement représentées, en ce sens que la Suisse romande, italienne et romanche devraient en tout état de cause compter trois de leurs ressortissants au moins au sein du Conseil Fédéral. Enfin, pour faciliter l'élection et pour que les citoyens ne se trouvent pas en face d'une infinité de candidatures, le droit d'être élu était réservé aux citoyens suisses âgés de vingt ans qui se seraient assurés au préalable l'appui de 30,000 citoyens au moins.

Cette initiative était un produit d'avant-guerre. On pouvait se demander très sincèrement s'il était opportun de la soumettre au peuple et s'il ne convenait pas d'attendre le rétablissement de la paix pour modifier aussi profondément les règles qui président depuis près d'un siècle à l'élection du Conseil fédéral dont les membres, comme chacun le sait, sont désignés par l'Assemblée fédérale, c'est-à-dire par les deux conseils législatifs réunis. Mais, outre que les socialistes ont insisté pour que le souverain soit consulté dans les plus brefs délais, les milieux politiques de la majorité gouvernementale ont pensé qu'il était opportun de dissiper aussi rapidement que possible le malaise résultant de cette initiative : en effet, l'opposition pouvait prétendre que plus de 150,000 citoyens avaient demandé depuis longtemps la transformation du gouvernement et que l'équipe au pouvoir ne possédait plus la confiance du pays. Par ailleurs, il était plus que douteux que les socialistes fussent eux-mêmes très convaincus de l'excellence de leur thèse. Ils n'avaient pas proposé la création de deux ministères nouveaux pour améliorer le fonctionnement de la machine administrative ou pour décharger d'une tâche trop lourde certains chefs de départements. Ils n'avaient pas proposé non plus le remplacement de l'élection au deuxième degré par une élection populaire directe, pour que l'opinion du souverain eût une influence plus décisive sur la composition même du gouvernement. Leur entreprise était de pure opportunité politique. Ils avaient voulu se venger de ce que leurs candidats n'avaient pas été retenus par l'Assemblée fédérale. Comme on le dit de longtemps, la colère est toujours mauvaise conseillère.

En effet, il est tôt apparu que leur proposition n'était pas heureuse. L'élection directe par le peuple du gouvernement que l'on ne connaît pratiquement sous aucun régime démocratique, sauf dans d'apparentes démocraties dont les traits sont nettement dictatoriaux, aurait exposé des hommes qui doivent jouir d'un grand prestige, en particulier devant l'étranger, à la démagogie de certaines campagnes électorales. Celles-ci auraient duré des mois, en raison même de la procédure envisagée (cueillette de 30,000 signatures, vérification de celles-ci, organisation du scrutin, éventuellement deuxième tour, etc.) dont on pouvait prévoir que ses différentes phases exigeraient de huit à dix mois. Il faut dire aussi que les garanties offertes aux minorités linguistiques ne relevaient pas d'un sain fédéralisme, tel que nous l'entendons, mais d'une protection des minorités, de ce régime qui a empoisonné toute l'Europe de l'entre-deux-guerres. Enfin, outre que la proportionnelle gouvernementale serait un non-sens, parce qu'elle détruirait la cohésion d'une équipe gouvernementale laquelle doit être unie pour pouvoir agir, on pouvait craindre qu'elle ne ruinât la stabilité du pouvoir exécutif que nous considérons, à juste titre, comme un des plus beaux attributs de nos institutions démocratiques.

Ces raisons étaient sérieuses. Cependant il faut songer aux circonstances dans lesquelles l'initiative a été présentée au peuple. Nos lecteurs connaissent les difficultés actuelles de la Suisse. Chacun a des motifs d'être mécontent de son sort. Il est humain que l'on soit tenté de rendre le gouvernement responsable des difficultés quotidiennes, petites ou grandes. En un temps où la vie est réglementée dans ses moindres détails et où les libertés, publiques sont limitées dans l'intérêt supérieur du pays, l'occasion peut paraître