

Zeitschrift: Helvetia : magazine of the Swiss Society of New Zealand
Herausgeber: Swiss Society of New Zealand
Band: 6 (1940-1941)
Heft: 7

Rubrik: Hie isch d'Schwyz = This is Switzerland calling

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HELVETIA



Monthly Publication of the
SWISS BENEVOLENT SOCIETY in New Zealand

Groupe New Zealand of the N.H.G.

AUCKLAND,
APRIL, 1941.

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6th YEAR VOL. 7.

HIE ISCH D'SCHWYZ.
(This is Switzerland calling).

The reception of the Swiss broadcast for Australia and New Zealand on Sunday, April 6, 1941, was excellent in the beginning, but during the course of the programme static disturbances were increasing, which towards the end became so bad, that the spoken correspondence after 7 p.m. was hard to understand. In the beginning, however, the reception, with the radio turned on only half, was as good as from any other European station, while towards the end the radio had to be turned on completely, which, of course, made the static worse. The broadcast coincided almost to the hour with the outbreak of the war between Germany on one side and Yugoslavia and Greece on the other side. There was no mention made of this latest development of the war; nevertheless it was reassuring to hear at this particular moment the renewed assertion that Switzerland would never enter voluntarily any compromise regarding her complete political independence and self-defence, her democratic institutions and the cherished individual rights of her citizens. These statements were quotations from very recent speeches made by the President of the Swiss Confederation and two other Federal Councillors, amongst them the newly elected Swiss Federal Councillor von Steiger. They were indeed timely.

The situation as regards food and raw materials was described as gradually becoming more serious, although we were re-assured that in the opinion of the Government the situation would hardly ever reach the stage of a famine, even though the question of importations is becoming more and more problematic. Wheat, for instance, cannot be any longer imported. The Swiss people will have to rely more than ever for their food on the Good Earth. The "Battle for Additional Land Cultivation" is in full swing. 75% of the 50,000 hectares of land, which have been planned for additional cultivation, are already under the plough. After a period of dryness, fortunately spring rains have set in and the crops are standing well.

During the month of March the Swiss people have given renewed proof of the stability of their internal politics. In different Cantons the Cantonal Parliaments have been re-elected, with the result that the main political parties, the extremists of the Right and Left Wings excepted, have been able to preserve their strength in these representative bodies.

In the realm of economics a trade and traffic arrangement was concluded with Spain, which provides for the development of the exchange of goods between the two countries and improves the transit of goods to and from Switzerland through Spain, which is of vital importance for our country. A similar trade agreement with Spain also includes a clearing arrangement and provides for the gradual payment of commercial debts by Spain.

In March a move for the change of the present alcohol regime in Switzerland has been turned down by the Swiss people by a majority of 150,000, and this result is hailed as most satisfactory for the economical use of the fruit crops and for the condition of health of the Swiss people.

Further, the Swiss Federal Parliament had to consider legal questions regarding maritime law and the use of the Swiss flag by her chartered ships. Thus, the bearded jokes about the Swiss Navy for the time being have become obsolete.

A Parliamentary Commission decided to recommend to the Parliament the creation of two new Federal Departments, which in consequence would necessitate the election of two additional Federal Councillors, raising the present number from 7 to 9. This increase should make it possible to have the Socialist Party represented in the governing body of the Swiss Confederation and afford French Switzerland a more equitable representation in two pending issues which necessarily must be solved in the near future. The Parliament, which was in session from March 24 to 30, also dealt with different new legislation and a move for a reform of parliamentary proceedings. The radio announcer was full of praise for the amount of work accomplished by Parliament during this short session. But further than this, he also praised the spirit of calmness and steadiness which prevailed in the two chambers.

The musical and rhetorical entertainment was very much enjoyed, and without prejudice to other contributions, the songs of the Val d'Anniviers and the Basel-Land recitals probably were the climaxes of the whole programme. Unfortunately the English report could not be well followed and the spoken correspondence was so much disturbed by static, that it could not be very well understood, at least not at Wellington.

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'PAPER BULLETS' AFFORD RELIEF FOR THE SWISS FUEL SITUATION.

Profiting from experience gained in the World War, Switzerland has developed new ways of conserving its fuel supplies in the face of growing demands. Perhaps one of the most ingenious substitutes now being used is the so-called "paper bullets."

In the Fall of 1914 a citizen of Geneva invented the so-called "paper bullets", a cheap and nevertheless satisfactory substitute for wood or coal. As the name suggests these "bullets" were nothing but soaked paper shaped into balls and then dried in the sun. To insure good results the drying process had naturally to be thorough.

So satisfactory were the "paper bullets" from 1914-1918 that there was 100 per cent co-operation on the part of Swiss families in supplying paper, containers for soaking, and drying apparatus. As many as 800 "paper bullets" could be turned out by one workshop per day. Local relief committees donated or sold them to needy families for a mere trifle. They were indeed the most wonderful "bullets" invented in the last World War.

Taken Lead.

In the present emergency the city of Geneva has again taken the lead in reviving "paper bullets" as a fuel substitute. Street vendors there and elsewhere in Switzerland are demonstrating and selling in large quantities a gadget which swiftly compresses the soaked paper into small balls, ready for the drying process.

Switzerland is poor in raw materials. But in wartime when fuel especially is scarce, many an abandoned old coal mine is being examined anew. These mines date back to early days when there were no commercial highways to other lands and no railroads.

In 1919 native coal production amounted to approximately 150,000 tons. This is indeed a negligible quantity, considering that the country needs over 3,000,000 tons of this fuel.

"Brown coal" used to be mined in various parts of Switzerland. At Boltigen in the Simmen Valley such a mine was operated from 1760-1911. The Gas Works at Bern used Boltigen coal for a considerable period.