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SUNDAY NEWS FROM SWITZERLAND.

What is stated to be the biggest conflagration in Basle for twenty years destroyed in the night of August 13th the timber yard of Schmidt Schne A.G., in the Kleinbünningerstrasse. The damage is estimated to exceed one million francs and the valuable stock of timber is irreplaceable under present conditions. The tram service along the adjoining road was temporarily interrupted as the heat from the fire had melted down the over-head wires.

A new monster tram car has recently earned the sweeping admiration of the Balois; it carries a hundred passengers (27 sitting and 73 standing) and had been lent for a week by the Zurich administration in order to demonstrate its practicable use of the Basle system.

Daily menus over the telephone to suit all tastes and fit all purses is the latest Swiss method of assisting housewives to cope with rationing problems. Housewives dial "75430", a girl dictates two menus - one for lunch, one for dinner. The menus are not unrealisable daydreams of a pre-war gourmand! Every dish has been carefully pondered on and adapted to the season as well as the budget of the average Swiss middle-class family of four.

'Tomorrow's lunch will be vegetable soup; cabbage and barley with sausage and boiled potatoes. Dinner will be mixed apple and potato pulp made a little more tasty by putting slices of toasted bread on top. Then follows coffee and milk with bread and whey-cheese.' This innovation has been brought into existence by the collective effort of the telephone administration and the Zurich municipal gas company. The menus are composed by a group of experts paying the most careful attention to rationing prescriptions and nutritive substance.

One of the greatest economic wonders of our days is the fact that Switzerland possesses the largest Re-insurance Company in the world. In spite of the isolated position of our country, the Swiss-Reinsurance Company in Zurich has not only been able to keep up its business, of which more than 90% is derived from abroad, but reached last year the highest premium receipts since its foundation with an amount of 360 million francs. The result from the foreign activities of the Company is for our economy of the utmost importance, as from them it pays in direct taxation annually more to the Swiss exchequer than what it earns in an average year from its home business. The undertaking owes its existence to private initiative and personal enterprise, but its prestige to Swiss ability, reliability and trustworthiness, which in these uncertain days are appreciated all over the world.

Whilst almost the whole world is aflame and the already existing difficult position in many countries is made even worse through labour troubles, our little country enjoys not only external peace, but also an almost undisturbed labour concord. According to official statistics only 19 labour disputes have occurred during the last year by demands for an increase of wages, causing strikes of short duration. As a result of these difficulties merely 7,000 working days were lost. Only four strikes, involving 400 strikers and 1,700 working days occurred at firms belonging to employers organisations. This low number of lost working days bears witness of the sense of responsibility of workmen and employers alike and of the conviction that peace in industry is of the greatest importance for Swiss economy.

It is probably unique in the whole world that all the members belonging to an industry take their holidays at the same time. This happens actually in the Swiss watch industry now for some years past. In this way all the watch factories close down in the first week in August. In the canton of Neuchatel alone roughly 40,000 watchmakers, men and women, have had their well-earned and fully paid holidays.

At the beginning of this month no less than 150 trucks of ten tons each containing several millions of prisoners' parcels had accumulated in the Geneva railway sheds waiting to be despatched to their destination; they were sent from the U.S.A., Great Britain and Canada. In the first quarter of this year well over 30,000 tons of Red Cross relief parcels for prisoners of war or civilian internees left Geneva. Steps are being taken to ensure larger and more regular consignments of parcels to non-interned civilians, as it has been found that trial parcels sent to non-interned British, Norwegian, Polish, Dutch, Czechoslovak, French, and Belgian subjects have reached them.

The delegates meeting of the Swiss Alpine Club, held at Pontresina, voted a credit of Frs. 68,500 for the reconstruction of the huts on the Ludernen and Blumlisalp. It was also decided to admit the professional guides to the benefits of the Club's accident insurance by increasing the members' contribution by one franc.

After a lively campaign the inhabitants of Horgen (Zurich) rejected by a small majority a demand by the shop assistants backed by the socialists to close stores and shops at five o'clock on Saturday afternoons.

Believed to be the oldest Swiss, Alois Gabriel, of Unterwalden, celebrated his 103rd anniversary on the 6th November.

Fribourg is one of the few cantons which is entirely self-supporting. A large portion of the agricultural products are exported to neighbouring cantons; the cultivated area has nearly doubled from 15,500 hectares in 1918 to 29,500 in 1943. About 850 truck loads of surplus cereals have benefited the rest of the country.

The tobacco crop in the Broye valley has produced about 900 tons, which is less than in previous years, but the quality is stated to be excellent; the falling-off is due to drought.

At a special manifestation in Schaffhausen the mayor welcomed about 600 young men who had reached the age of 20; they each received a present and a copy of the communal charter.

A large part of the small village of Arbaz, near Sitten, was destroyed by fire, said to have originated in a barn. Over ten buildings were reduced to ashes, many families were ruined amongst whom are the Sernier, Quarroz and Torrent.

In Geneva mushrooms can only be sold at the open markets where a special inspector is always in attendance; the latter is giving free advice to any purchaser of this delicacy. (Our readers will be interested to hear that mushrooms which are in such great demand in this country contain no nourishment at all.)

We may yet see some of our compatriots in the actual fighting line not on the orders of General Guisan but of Commander von Pfyffer who is the C.O. of about a hundred unscripted but privileged gallant warriors known as the Papal Swiss Guard. The news that they have had to discard their picturesque uniform of medieval cuirass with two-handled Crusader sword and change into ordinary battle dress with automatic rifles and live ammunition may have caused visions of the Tuilleries in some of them though we hardly think that they will be called upon to emulate that historic feat. Like all famous regiments they are proud of their history. They were called into being by Pope Julius II during his reign from 1503 to 1513; originally the Swiss Guard was recruited exclusively from Lucerne and it is recorded that Michelangelo designed their uniform.

About one hundred Australians, who had escaped from prisoner of war camps in Italy and made the journey over the Alps, arrived recently at Brig, in Switzerland, where a big Protestant gathering of the Canton Valais was being held, with services in French and German for the hundreds of persons who had come from all parts of the Canton.

The Australians were given a great reception by the Swiss, and a service in English was held for them by Pastor Hahn of Sierre, who was formerly in London.

The Federal Council has authorised the National Bank to open special credits for the benefit of the watch industry in order to stimulate export notably to America.

In spite of the high cost and scarcity of instruments the number of Radio subscribers has increased during September by 545, totalling at the end of the month 757,619; since January 28,388 have invested in new installations.

A somewhat gloomy outlook was given to the members of the Swiss Association of Tourist Traffic when they met at Neuchatel. They were advised to cater in future for tourists with little money and that a recovery of tourist traffic on the pre-war level cannot be expected, and that a recovery after the war will take time.

An inquiry was opened in connection with about 100 extremists of the right, whose centre of activities was at Zurich. The Federal Court has just ordered a first group of 12 defendants to appear before the Federal Penal Court, charged with infringing the Federal Council's decree of 5th December, 1938, suppressing acts contrary to public order and the institution of measures to protect democracy.

The 13th volume of the Statistical Year Book of the League of Nations, just published, shows that the birth rate has continued to rise sharply during 1942 in Switzerland. The death rate has dropped.

Swiss scientists, supported by Basle's great chemical industry and the authorities, have recently constituted in Basle the first Swiss Academy of Medical Science. The young generation all over the world is in arms and has little leisure for disinterested art and science. There is a danger that the rising generation will show a serious lack of scholars, that progress in science will have a setback. The new Swiss Academy will make it possible for gifted young people to consecrate long years to study and research. Switzerland feels it her duty to create an organisation which will facilitate the resumption of intellectual exchanges as soon as peace is restored. The new Swiss Academy's Members are not elected for life, but are delegated by the Swiss Universities and the medical profession, and hold their seats only for eight years. Professor Wagelin, from Berne, has been nominated President for a period of four years. The originator of the project has emphasized the aims of the institution and the importance of the scientific researches for our little country.

The military tribunal IIIA, sitting from September 13th to October 4th, dealt with 24 defendants who were accused of violating military secrets between October 1941, and October 1942. The following judgments were pronounced against the principal accused: - (1) Marc Erwin, born 1912, foreigner, to twenty years hard labour and fifteen years expulsion from Switzerland. (2) Buck Paul, born in 1896, from Zurich, travelling agent in Zurich, to twenty years hard labour and ten years loss of civil rights, degradation and expulsion from the army. (3) Schulthess, born in 1912, from Zurich, representative in Basle, to twenty years hard labour and ten years loss of civil rights and expulsion from the army. Further five accused, whereof, one a foreigner, were condemned to various terms of imprisonment of from ten to three years.