

Zeitschrift: Helvetia : magazine of the Swiss Society of New Zealand
Herausgeber: Swiss Society of New Zealand
Band: 9 (1943-1944)
Heft: 2

Artikel: Switzerland's part in the work of the International Committee of the Red Cross
Autor: Bodmer, M.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-942660>

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

Download PDF: 19.08.2025

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

HELVETIA



Monthly Publication of the

SWISS BENEVOLENT SOCIETY
in New Zealand

Group New Zealand of the N.H.G.

WELLINGTON.
NOVEMBER, 1943.

Vol. 2, 9th Year.

SWITZERLAND'S PART IN THE WORK OF THE
INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS

by

M. Bodmer, Member of the International Committee of the Red Cross.

"Everyone in Switzerland, whether they are contributing through deeds or gifts to our work, or whether they still stand apart, has reason to be deeply grateful: grateful that from our country, spared from war, the work of the Red Cross for the war-victims in all countries can be carried out. Compared with this debt of gratitude, everything that we are doing seems very little. The Swiss people, therefore, will gladly continue to carry the main burden of this relief work."

These words, with which Professor Max Huber ended his address regarding readiness for voluntary service, given over the Swiss Radio in 1941, have more significance than ever today. They contain an exhortation and, at the same time, a hope. Today, after two more cruel years of war, we may ask how far the Swiss people have fulfilled this duty of honour.

First of all it may be said that understanding and willingness have increased, and for that we are grateful to the authorities, to industry and trade and to all private donors and helpers. But, unfortunately, as the war goes on, the need becomes greater. Our tasks are becoming even more comprehensive and difficult. Responsibility increases, and resources decrease. For instance, now that there are almost no possibilities of exporting from Switzerland, it is becoming increasingly difficult to provide the means for maintaining our organisation. The belligerent countries are taking this into consideration. However, we must distinguish between the gifts on the one hand, and the organisation which is necessary for their transmission, on the other.

So far the belligerents have handed over to us, as trustees, goods equivalent to more than 1 milliard Swiss francs, and through the transmission of these goods to their destinations we have become one of the largest transport organisations in the world. The belligerents also contribute continuously for the upkeep of our organisation. However, the largest percentage for this purpose comes from Switzerland, and it is right that it should. Switzerland is greatly interested in the preservation of the independence and freedom of action of her most significant humanitarian institution. The International Committee of the Red Cross - whose headquarters are in Geneva, and whose members are exclusively Swiss citizens - therefore relies increasingly on the generosity of the Swiss people for the continued fulfilment of its traditional mission. Otherwise the International Committee would become merely a tool of the various interested parties, and would thereby not only lose its character, but also deprive Switzerland of one of the factors of her right of existence.

The upkeep of our organisation is estimated at 6,00,000 francs annually. During the first 3½ years of the war, donations amounting to approximately 16,000,000 francs were received from Switzerland and elsewhere, of which ca. 11,000,000 francs came from Switzerland. This proportion is good and should be maintained if possible. But it is not only money which safeguards our work. A most important and morally invaluable contribution is made by those thousands of Swiss men and women who are sacrificing their time and energy for this work.

We also owe a debt of gratitude to the various branches of Swiss economic life. They are helping us with donations and supplies of food and pharmaceutical goods. The dairy and chemical industries play a prominent part. We are also endeavouring increasingly to fight disease and epidemics by the provision of vitamins, serums and vaccines. These have been sent to all countries threatened by the outbreak of epidemics, or where epidemics had broken out on a small scale.

Through the help of the Swiss Women's Auxiliary Services ca. 70,000 pairs of spectacles have been received and we are now about to collect dentures, artificial limbs and crutches as well as lime-tree blossoms, peppermint and camomile, which will be stored in special centres.

Further, we are considerably indebted both to the authorities and to private enterprises for their help as regards transport. Swiss cargo boats carry monthly from America to Europe 4,000 tons of gift parcels from national Red Cross Societies. Four months ago s.s. "Caritas I", the first vessel of the International Committee of the Red Cross, left the port of Lisbon, under the Swiss flag, and is now crossing the Atlantic regularly. Every month ca. 600 railway vans run from Geneva through Switzerland to the various prisoner of war camps, a transport which is carried out gratuitously by the Swiss Government and the Swiss Federal Railways. The Swiss Federal Mail makes its contribution in a similar manner: since the beginning of the war ca. 41,666,000 letters to and from the International Committee of the Red Cross have been forwarded free of charge.

From the above it will be seen that Switzerland, conscious of the fact that the great idea represented by the red cross on the white shield can only be realised by deeds, is also materially contributing to the alleviation of the calamities of war.

.....

On August 6th, Federal Councillor Pilet-Golaz informed the Government that instructions had been given to the Swiss Legations in London and Washington, concerning the answer to the Notes on the rights of asylum, issued by the Anglo-Saxon powers. In this answer, it is said that Switzerland reserves the right to itself to decide on this question in absolute liberty and sovereignty. The attitude of the Federal Government is strongly supported by the press and here are a few extracts we have so far come across:

"Der Bund" - "Considering that no concrete case exists, that only possibilities are now envisaged, the British Note and President Roosevelt's statement assume the nature of a warning and of pressure - a step unusual towards a State with which friendly and peaceful relations are maintained. Switzerland is not called upon either now or in the future, to give any judgment on the question of responsibility for the war. It belongs to Switzerland's best traditions that the right of asylum should be interpreted in a generous fashion."

"Gazette de Lausanne" - "We should lose one of the most essential privileges of an independent State if we agreed to bow to foreign interference in this sphere."

"Winterthur Tagblatt" - "The question of whether the Swiss right of sanctuary ends cannot and must not be influenced by foreign desires. Whatever may be the political creed of strangers knocking at the door, Switzerland will not give or refuse admission at foreign behest".

"Basler National Zeitung" - "Since when are the war aims of a combatant party binding upon neutrals?"

"Berner Tagwacht" - "The right of granting sanctuary is our own affair. We decide who is worthy and who is not. However, we have refused sanctuary to many worthy people during the war, and before that. Let us hope that no one in Switzerland will be in favour of sanctuary being granted to those having to answer for war crimes. They had courage enough to commit the crime; we hope they will also have the courage to answer for themselves. They should not bring any neutral country which they have often mocked, into difficulties by seeking protection here. This war itself is a crime, the greatest for over a century, and many cruelties and crimes have been committed, largely in the name of a new morality and a new justice, which cynically despised former conceptions."

FINANCIAL REORGANISATION OF THE SWISS FEDERAL RAILWAYS.

Mr. Celio, President of the Swiss Confederation and Head of the Post Office and Swiss Federal Railways Department, has announced that a detailed scheme for the financial reorganisation of the Swiss Federal Railways is now under study.

The financial reorganisation of the Swiss Federal Railways has become vitally necessary. The scheme will involve both the taking over of part of the liabilities incurred by the national railways and an increase in transport rates. The State will thereby increase its own debts by 2.3 to 2.4 milliard francs, a sum which includes 1.7 to 1.8 milliard francs taken over from the debit balance of the Swiss Federal Railways and a 600 million francs deficit from the Pension Fund.

On the other hand, as a result of the enormous and constantly increasing rise in the price of rolling stock and running costs - 233% for coal, 588% for lubricating oils, 116% for rails, 74% for uniform cloth, 665% for tin, etc. - an increase in transport rates is anticipated. It is estimated that this would yield a further revenue of 25 million francs, namely, 10 millions on passenger tickets, 14 millions on goods transport and frs. 900,000.- on cattle transport.

Receipts and expenditure of the Swiss Federal Railways. A comparison of receipts and expenditure of the Swiss Federal Railways during the last few years is shown in the following table:

Year	Receipts		Expenditure	
1937	336	million francs	224.6	million francs
1938	320	" "	229.5	" "
1939	361.2	" "	223.9	" "
1940	397.8	" "	238.8	" "
1941	455	" "	260.6	" "
1942	468.3	" "	288.4	" "

As compared with 1936, the worst financial year for the Swiss Federal Railways since the last Great War, 1942 receipts show an increase of roughly 178 million francs. On the other hand, running costs reached a peak in 1930 when they amounted to 291.4 million francs; since the outbreak of the present war, they have again increased considerably, and will doubtless soon exceed the 1930 level.

THE SIXTH STAGE OF THE SWISS AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION PLAN.

The goal set for the first five stages of this plan was the increase of arable land in Switzerland, so that, should the necessity arise, the country could be entirely self-supporting as regards food supplies and dispense with importations. Although the increase in the surface of land under wheat has not yet reached the acreage required, vegetable and potato plantations are sufficient and need not be augmented for the time being.

In the programme set for the sixth stage of the agricultural extension plan during the 1943/44 period, these results have been taken into account; they are, above all, to be consolidated and the deficiency noted in the fulfilment of certain parts of the plan is to be made good. This is particularly the case as regards disafforestation which, in certain parts of Switzerland, has not yet reached one-tenth of the surface specified in the plan, whereas in other districts, the acreage of disafforested land exceeds the plan by one-fifth. Taking the country as a whole, however, disafforestation is behind the minimum set by the plan by more than one-third.