

Zeitschrift: Helvetia : magazine of the Swiss Society of New Zealand
Herausgeber: Swiss Society of New Zealand
Band: 11 (1945-1946)
Heft: 10

Rubrik: Sundry news from Switzerland

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HOUSING SHORTAGE IN SWITZERLAND.

Although permits to build 13,333 dwellings were issued in Switzerland during 1945, only 8,412 were constructed, according to official statistics. Despite the shortage of housing, not more than 13,000 dwellings are expected to be erected during 1946 because of the deficiency of bricks and other building materials.

The housing shortage in Zurich is so acute that hundreds of families are temporarily accommodated in barracks, huts, and schools, and some have moved into semifinished houses. (Foreign Commerce Weekly.)

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SUNDRY NEWS FROM SWITZERLAND.

Following the resumption of diplomatic relations with Russia, the Federal Council has appointed Col. Hermann Flückiger to the post of Swiss Minister in Moscow. He is a lawyer by profession and for many years had an extensive practice in Biel as a notary. In the army, after having been in charge of a frontier brigade, Col. Flückiger was advanced in January 1941 to the command of the third division from which he retired at the end of December 1944. The colonel emerged into prominence by his successful chairmanship last September over the Russia-Swiss military commission in regard to our treatment of Russian refugees and internees, the felicitous outcome of which largely paved the way to the present friendly relations with the Soviet Union - relations which in 1924 had been broken off as the sequence of an unpleasant incident. Col. Flückiger was born in 1885 at Bargen (Berne) and has never been in the diplomatic service. The Russian Minister to Switzerland, Mr. Anatoly Kulashenkov, is a young diplomat of 34 years who has already held important posts in Italy, Persia, Turkey and Greece.

At the delegates' meeting of the Swiss liberal party held at St. Gall, Federal President Kobelt praised the distinguished services of Federal Councillor Petitpierre, our foreign minister, to whom in the first instance we were indebted for the re-establishment of normal relations with Russia and which thereby removed the first obstacle in the way of a possible co-operation with UNO. Federal Councillor Petitpierre pointed out that Switzerland was the only state in the constitution of which neutrality was a fundamental article; he did not believe that we could be asked to change our constitution in order to become eligible for UNO.

The first of May manifestations organised in all Swiss towns passed off peacefully, large crowds attending everywhere. The banners and streamers displayed the usual slogans such as "Increase in Wages", "Old-age Insurance", "Equality of rights in Switzerland", "Participation in UNO" (Geneva), and "Break off with Franco regime" (Berne). Federal Councillor Nobs addressed the crowd at Berne and expressed the hope that Switzerland would be able to join the world security organisation without surrendering her neutrality and without taking part in future quarrels among nations. He also dwelt on the unsatisfactory state of the Federal finances. The last war had cost our country about five times as much as the previous one; in 1913 the assets of the Confederation amounted to about 100 milliard francs which in 1920 was converted into an indebtedness of 1,2 milliard rose in 1920 to 1,5 milliard and stood now at 8,5 milliard francs.

The bathing establishment, boathouse and restaurant Fürigen near Standsstad has been destroyed completely by a fire that broke out early on Tuesday morning, May 14th.

Four election rounds were necessary at the Landsgemeinde in Glaris until the requisite votes were obtained for the new Landammann Dr. Rudolf Stüssi; he takes the place of the former Ständerat Dr. Mercier. Several minor proposals were sanctioned without opposition.

Of all the Swiss towns Berne disposes of the smallest number of cinemas, namely eight. Zurich takes pride in 29, Geneva 20, Basle 15 and Lausanne eleven.

In the elections for 194 members of the Grosse Rat in Berne the two parties of the left scored a victory, though not sufficiently decisive to gain control of the council. The socialists increased their mandates from 55 to 69 and the new "party of labour" marched up with three newcomers.

Damage of about a quarter of a million francs was caused by a fire which broke out on May 15th in the Gipsfabrik Läufelfingen (Baselland). Thanks to the prompt assistance of the fire brigades from Liestal and Olten the conflagration was mastered within a couple of hours.

The temperance movement in the canton Aargau has addressed an urgent appeal to the Federal Council to restrict to a minimum the fermentation of malt, fruit and grape; it is considered a normal and practicable contribution of Switzerland towards the present fight against famine.

A people's initiative demand supported by the necessary number of signatures in the canton Vaud seeks to declare the 1st of August a public holiday.

The former Federal chancellor, Georges Bovet, died in Lausanne at the age of 72. For ten years from 1934 he occupied the distinguished post with exemplary efficiency and thoroughness; he was first, in 1910, an ordinary translator in the administration and by passing through the different stages acquired a unique experience for the ultimate object of his ambition.

Neuchâtel is the latest town that voices the desire for an airfield; negotiations are in progress with the adjoining communes of Boudry and Colombier for the acquisition of a suitable ground.

A devastating hailstorm over the region between Concise and Vaumarcus along the lake of Neuchâtel is reported to have ravaged wide tracts; all the fruit trees and three quarters of the corn and vintage districts are said to have been rendered barren.

It does not always constitute an enjoyment to gather "how others see us" but the following extracts from a report sent by a casual correspondent to the "Sunday Express", May 12th, may gladden the hearts of some of our Genevese subscribers:

"The Genevese are furious cyclists. One in two of the population has a bicycle and 90,000 in a small town which one can cross on foot in half an hour is quite a lot.

The local people prefer to live cramped inside the town in modern flats rather than ten minutes outside in cottages.

The mentality of the citizens of Geneva is ardently Swiss, patriotic and freedom-loving.

Bordering on France, they have imbibed some of the carefree customs and the laissez-faire of the French. They take life easy, and don't worry about the great events that fill the newspapers in other countries.

Far more important to them is the fact that the Genevese police have discarded their dark blue winter uniforms for pale blue summer attire, that a century old lime tree has its first flowers, or that a 4 lb. trout has been caught in the lake.

A feature of this sun-drenched town is the life of the cafe terraces.

Here at aperitif time all important transactions are effected, from buying a car to the clandestine purchase of foreign money or gold for smuggling into France.

Switzerland is the only country in Europe and Geneva the only town in Switzerland where one can get any kind of drink one desires. Tobacconists are piled high with cigarettes of every brand and the main streets are crammed with jewellers' shops, their windows filled with watches.

You can tell these shops at a distance, as outside each you will see a bunch of American soldiers on leave. They seem to spend the greater part of their time looking at watches, and then selling their own kit to be able to buy. The number of civilians now wearing khaki shirts and trousers gives one the impression of being in an occupied country.

The British are loved here, and it is hoped by all that travel problems will soon disappear and the town be filled again with short-sighted old ladies in extraordinary hats and with Baedekers under their arms, asking incongruous questions in excruciating French."

Swiss papers report that orders have been received from Russia for 20 million watches.

The favourable trade conditions are reflected by the large number of commercial vacancies registered during the first three months this year with the employment office of the Schweiz. Kaufmännische Verein. For the 3,200 clerical posts to be filled there were no more than 2,100 applicants; half of the latter were already in employment and merely wished to improve their positions.

A national conference of workers in the building trade held at Berne accepted an offer by the employers granting a general rise in wages. The hourly rate is increased by 22 cts. in the five large towns, by 20 cts. in smaller towns and by 18 to 15 cts. in specified rural districts; in addition extra payments for annual holidays are conceded. The new agreement affects about 70,000 craftsmen and labourers and disposes of the acute tension that dominated the building trades for some time.

The personnel of the Federal administration is now more than four times as large as it was in 1913; in the customs section the increase has been 72% only while in the postal service and the railways employment has remained practically stationary.

Tobacco growing is reaching record figures. The cultivated area extends now over 1,300 ha. of which about 25% each are found in the cantons of Valais, Fribourg and Ticino. In the Broye valley 1,173 tons, the highest ever, were produced last year with a value of 2.8 million francs.

A new Swiss invention shown at the Basle Fair and stated to attract the biggest crowds at its stand is the "Isophone". It records messages when one's own phone is left unattended; the rent of this tattling attachment is about £8.10.0 per month. And here is a short report about the Basle Fair published in "The Times", May 16th:

"During the 10 days of the Basle trade fair, which has just closed, the exhibition buildings were visited by 425,600 persons. This is an increase of 65,000 on last year's figures and is the highest on record. More than 12,600 were visitors from foreign countries. The success of the fair has drawn attention to the eminently favourable economic situation of Switzerland, which is now enjoying an unexpected period of trade prosperity. Unemployment figures have never been so low. The attractions of industry have caused a scarcity of labour in the agricultural and building trades. Requests to the Federal authorities for permission to bring in foreign workers have greatly increased.

It has been found necessary to warn the business community that the present high demand for Swiss goods is artificial, in that it is merely the reflex of the immediate needs of foreign countries, and that it will not last. The Federal Council has warned industrial firms against over-employment and over-expansion and has counselled them to defer wherever possible expanding their works and enlarging their staffs."

The office for the care of war refugees is being liquidated within the next few weeks. A special train left Basle at the beginning of this month repatriating 430 German military internees, 220 civilians and 81 employees of the diplomatic and consular services. About 300 Germans had to be left behind as for various reasons they refused to return to their fatherland; for the present they will be settled under police supervision in

a separate camp in the Jura. There are still some Polish, French and Russian refugees (the latter in the Aargau) to be dealt with; their plight is desperate as a good many of them prefer to stay where they are now; amongst the Russians suicide is a common way out of their misery as the Soviet seems to insist on their surrender.

The Federal Council is submitting a message to the two houses of parliament which will be dealt with at one of the June sittings and which attempts to settle the future of compatriots who have been repatriated from belligerent countries. Altogether about 60,000 were forced to return - about 130,000 managed to cling to their precarious place of abode - and the catalogue of loss and damage reached the stupendous amount of 876 million francs; the Federal Council has fixed a sum of 75 million francs (125 francs each) towards efforts to put them on their feet again, i.e. to find them similar employment or teach them a new promising trade. As regards the heavy losses the government cannot accept any responsibility but will continue its exertions to secure some compensation and the unfreezing of credits (mostly accumulated savings).

Over 14 million "Pro Juventute" stamps and postcards were sold last December and the amount of 1,69 million francs will go to a welfare fund for juveniles past the school age.

Here is a cutting from "The Times", May 21st:

"The Joint War Organisation of the Red Cross and St. John has made "a parting gift" of £100,000 to the International Red Cross in Geneva as a token of its deep appreciation of the inestimable services rendered to British prisoners of war and of its co-operation in the work of the War Organization in many other difficult tasks of the war. The Scottish branch of the British Red Cross Society has joined in the gift by adding £15,000.

M. Max Huber, the acting president of the International Red Cross, in expressing "utmost gratitude and profound relief" to Field-Marshal Lord Chetwode, the chairman of the executive committee, Red Cross and St. John, said so great a financial respite in their obligations made all the difference between "the pursuit of our present endeavour or relinquishing many essential parts of it." M. Huber added: - "Your gift comes at a moment when the problem of maintaining our traditional activity is at its most acute, owing to various circumstances attending the end of this war."

NATIONAL DAY CELEBRATION IN WELLINGTON.

The 1st August celebration for the Swiss community in the Wellington district and their friends was held in the Evening Post Building, as it has been in recent years. It was very nice to have with us our new Consul Mr. Ernest Theiler and his charming wife, and during the evening Mr. Theiler made a lively speech which everybody enjoyed. We saw some films, including "G.I.s in Switzerland" showing American soldiers enjoying the beautiful scenery. Musical items were given by Mr. Max Brulisauer and friends and another artist entertained us with some clever conjuring - all the smokers wanted to learn his trick of making cigarettes appear endlessly from his pocket. Led by Mr. Steffen on his accordion we tried out some Swiss songs - these were more successful later on when people had really warmed up to the singing.

The supper was quite a feast, with various Swiss specialities included; the ladies deserve a very hearty vote of thanks for providing so much good fare. We also give grateful thanks to Mrs. Cattin for her untiring efforts and to Mr. Hofer for his help with decorating the hall.