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HOME NEWS

There is every indication that negotiations, in order to settle the Free Zones dispute, will be continued with France. Minister Dunant had an interview last Saturday (October 17th) with M. Poincaré, who is disinclined to refer the matter to an international tribunal. The Federal Council insits, however, that the decree abolishing the Free Zones on November 10th should be withdrawn before new deliberations are initiated.

* * *

The 75th anniversary of the adoption of the Swiss Constitution (1848) was celebrated last Sunday at Sempach, National Councillor Dr. Meyer (Zurich) delivering the official address.

* * *

The traffic returns of the Federal Railways continue to show most satisfactory figures. The month of September records a surplus of about 13 million francs, not so much due to an increase in the takings, as to a reduction in the working expenses. The total surplus for the first nine months of the present year amounts now to over 81 million francs.

* * *

The Ticinese residing abroad are liable to pay income tax to their registered commune of origin —this decision has been confirmed by the Federal Tribunal in Lausanne, which states that a provision, contained in the cantonal institution to this effect, is not contrary to Federal Law.

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The election of Dr. Zimmermann, who recently became a member of the Grosse Rat of the canton of Thurgau, has been declared void by the Federal Tribunal, on the ground that as salaried director of the cantonal invalid and old-age institution he was debarred, according to the cantonal constitution, from taking his seat in the Grosse Rat.

* * *

According to figures, published officially, the membership of Swiss trade unions shows a marked retrograde movement since 1919, amounting at the end of 1922 to 154,700 members only. The reduction is most marked in the banking (41%) and textile (25%) industries, and least pronounced in the printing trade (3%) and state and municipal workers (0.8%).

* * *

A party of 200 Swiss are emigrating to Brazil, where they propose to form a colony; accompanying them are a teacher, a doctor, a clergyman, and several artisans.

* * *

The Nouvelle Société Helvétique has presented a petition to the Federal Council, demanding that Article 12 of the Constitution (prohibiting the accepting and wearing of foreign decorations) should be roused from its existing dormant condition and more clearly defined. In an article in the *Journal de Genève* Léopold Gautier explains that this step is not directed against decorations granted to Swiss savants or artists or citizens distinguishing themselves in humanitarian movements, but against the singling out of highly-placed persons, who in the political sphere may use their influence in the interests of foreign Governments. He points out that, whilst no such decorations have been offered since the war by Germany, many Swiss have been so favoured by Italy and France, and that the bestowing of the French red ribbon on some romand journalists during the Free Zones controversy has pained public opinion throughout the whole of Switzerland, this matter being viewed in Geneva itself with sincere regret.

* * *

Several Bernese firms have suffered heavy damage through a fire which broke out on Wednesday night, October 17th, in a warehouse in the Könizstrasse. The building was used for storing furniture, office fittings, books, etc. Over three hundred thousand new volumes, in addition to charts and maps belonging to the Bernese publisher Francke, are said to have been consumed by the flames, which destroyed entire editions of works by well-known Swiss authors, such as R. von Tavel, Jegerlehner, von Greyerz, Gfeller, "Röseligarten," and others.

NOTES AND GLEANINGS.

By "Kyburg."

The Savoy Free Zones.

The problem of the Savoy Free Zones has again become acute. The *Manchester Guardian* (15 Oct.) writes:—

A stiffish breeze is blowing between the Governments of France and Switzerland over a matter which may be obscure in law, but is plain enough in common sense. Geneva, though a Swiss town, is almost surrounded by, and is economically dependent upon, French territory. This territory is divided into two zones, between which and Geneva free trade has been guaranteed by treaties, one over a hundred and one over fifty years old. The Treaty of Versailles declared these guarantees to be out of date, but left their remodelling to agreement between France and Switzerland. An agreement was, in fact, reached in July, 1921, only to be rejected by popular referendum in Switzerland. Subsequent negotiations produced no result. M. Poincaré has now published an official decree, abolishing the two "free zones" as from November 10th next. The Swiss are indignant and say that, since the Treaty of Versailles left the matter over for agreement between the two States, single-handed action by France is a breach of the treaty. The French reply that, when the 1921 agreement was made, ratification of it in Switzerland by a referendum was not necessary, and that France cannot consider subsequent changes in Swiss domestic legislation which made it necessary. The juridical point is eminently suitable for arbitration, and the Swiss Government has decided to send a Note to M. Poincaré, suggesting reference to the International Court of Justice. One can imagine no reasonable grounds for refusing the suggestion. Whatever the legal rights and wrongs of the dispute may be, the economic arguments are clearly in favour of Switzerland. The Congress of Vienna did not in 1915 guarantee an economic hinterland to Geneva out of sentiment. The Savoyards, who in 1859 voted for union with France, coupled it with the condition that they should still be allowed to trade freely with Geneva. The treaties guaranteeing the "free zones" did not, in fact, establish any new practice, but merely confirmed a practice dictated by economic necessity since the eighteenth century. The necessity is as great now as it ever has been, and France's determination to make her economic coincide with her political frontier is only another instance of the modern passion, nowhere more evident than in the Treaty of Versailles itself, for subordinating economic needs to national ambitions.

But the nicest little touch I find in *The Times* of Oct. 15th, the Geneva correspondent of which lets himself go as follows:—

Swiss opinion in regard to the Free Zones question is somewhat calmer to-day, as a result of the articles in the French Press and of the explanatory communiqué which the French Government issued on Saturday. From these documents it may be gathered that the decree suppressing the Free Zones in Savoy, as well as the French Note to the Swiss Government, should be regarded as a sort of warning to the Federal Council and were intended to hasten the new proposal which is awaited from Switzerland. France does not consider that the negotiations have come to an end, so that there is no reason for the present to propose that the question should be referred to the International Court of Justice.

This statement will certainly help to make the situation easier, and negotiations are likely to be resumed before long. It may nevertheless be wondered whether it was necessary that France should have recourse to such steps which resulted in the recent feeling of resentment among the Swiss population, which has always been friendly to France.

Official circles in Berne and the Swiss Press have been very much hurt by an article, published in 'L'Homme Libre,' in which it is stated that during the war Switzerland opposed the establishment of a French military hospital at Evian, on the Lake of Geneva, although the Military Zones had already been suppressed. It must be recalled that, according to the treaty of 1815, Switzerland was entitled to occupy the Military Zones—that is, certain parts of Savoy—in time of war. In 1914, as Switzerland's neutrality was not menaced on this side, the Swiss Government did not exercise that right, and did not send troops to Savoy. Moreover, the Military Zones were not suppressed until the end of the war, and Switzerland never opposed the sending of French wounded to Savoy, where several French and Allied hospitals were established.

The incident raised by the French decree will lead to no trouble, and it is hoped that further negotiations will end in an agreement.

Well, well! Either M. Poincaré means to negotiate, in which case there did not seem to be any need for his decree, which is to operate as from November 10th, or he wishes to confront Switzerland with a *fait accompli* in the true Prussian diplomatic style, in which case, the sooner our Government invokes the aid of the International Court of Justice, the better. I have yet to learn that our Government will consent to being bullied, even although France, of course, is mightier than Switzerland.

Swiss Industrial Problems.

Swiss Industrial Problems are not easy either. We all, or most of us, know how difficult it is for our manufacturers to compete against works situated in low-currency countries. The problem of inflation was seriously discussed last year, when, just in the nick of time, trade, both home and export, revived somewhat, and it was seen that the winter tourist season was good. Other means to make it possible for our works to compete have to be found, however, and in the following article from *The Times* (Oct. 13th) my readers will find some of these means mentioned. They will also see how the very same problems which play such an important rôle in England, do so at home as well. From many points of view Swiss and British manufacturing and trading conditions are very similar, more so than most people imagine.

The slight improvement which characterized Swiss commercial affairs during the past few months has not been maintained. The number of unemployed has not decreased since the end of July and remains at 23,000. While there has been a diminution in the number of persons unemployed in the textile, foodstuffs, watch-making and paper trades, and also among unskilled persons, it has been just balanced by the increased activity of the hotel, building, transport, and chemical industries. At the same time, there has been an addition of 1,000 to the ranks of those only partially employed.

Difficulties are still being experienced in obtaining supplies of coal and coke for factory and household use. Certain deliveries of briquettes and coal from the Ruhr have been resumed, but at prices which have been enhanced by double export duties. Moreover, there is no little anxiety concerning future supplies. In these circumstances industrialists are growing firmer in their protests against the numerous permits that are being granted for the export of electric power.

Serious complaints are being made about the high cost of labour. A Zurich engineering firm, in announcing the receipt of some important foreign orders, states that it has been obliged to accept them at prices which do not admit of the payment of current rates of wages. At the same time there is a movement towards the adoption of a longer working day. A resolution was recently passed by an influential body, calling for the revision of the Factory Act, with a view to strengthening the capacity of Swiss industries that are struggling against foreign competition, and as a means of reducing the cost of production, and thus the expenses of living. The revision was not intended as an attack on the general principle of the eight-hour day, which would remain in operation wherever it was justified and economically possible.

A number of industries are finding it expedient to demand Customs protection: recently, the wheelwrights and blacksmiths; now the sugar-mills. Foreign competition is undoubtedly gaining ground at several points. It is reported that a "Swiss" artificial silk factory, which was recently established in the United States, is starting a "Swiss-American" branch in Germany and also acquiring a property at Feldbach, near Steckborn, in Switzerland, where 1,000 workpeople will soon be employed.

Swiss Water Power.

While on the question of Commerce and Industry, I think the following article, taken from the *Manchester Guardian Commercial* (11th Oct.), will further show a similarity of problems:—

Switzerland is practically the only industrial country in the world that has no coal deposits of her own; some anthracite mines in the Valais are no longer exploited because of the poor quality of the coal and the geological difficulties of mining. On the other hand, there are few countries that have such advantageous natural conditions for the transformation of water-power into electric current. Not only are there very considerable differences of level, but there are also important reserves of water in the lakes and glaciers, giving to the rational use of water-power a sound economic basis for exploitation all the year round.

The necessity of constructing as many new power stations as possible was felt generally all over the country, and the number completed since the end of

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