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HOME NEWS

After a long discussion, the Opium Convention has been ratified by the National Council, with only two dissentients (Basle).
* * *

The total of the Federal War Tax is returned as 791 million francs, of which 21 million still remain unpaid. About 171 million have been used to lessen the distress caused by unemployment, and 240 million have been allocated to benevolent institutions.
* * *

The Swiss Federal Railways, amongst other facilities to encourage visits to this year's Basle Fair, have granted a fifty per cent. reduction on railway tickets—that is to say, single tickets will be available for the return journey.
* * *

The accounts for 1923 of the town of Lausanne record a surplus of over 1.3 million francs, a deficit of nearly 500,000 francs having been anticipated.
* * *

At an official gathering in Berne, composed of the representatives of cantonal employment offices, Mr. Pfister, the Director of the Federal Labour Office, dwelt upon the necessity of still further curtailing the immigration of foreign labour.
* * *

The Grosse Rat of Berne has voted a credit of one million francs to alleviate unemployment; the total amount disbursed by the canton since 1918 in this direction amounts to about 7½ million francs.
* * *

The Swiss Aero Club is asking the Federal Council for a subsidy of Frs. 20,000 towards the purchase of a new balloon, "Genève," which it is intended to enter for competition in the next Gordon-Pennett race.
* * *

Nearly 28 million cartridges for non-military rifle practice have been expended during the year 1923.
* * *

At the annual conference of the building trade in Zurich it was stated that for the first time since 1914 the building activity during the last year had been normal, but that from a commercial point of view the contract prices were not remunerative on account of the many risks incurred by the builders under present-day conditions.
* * *

With reference to the propaganda book circulated by the "Giovanni Ticinesi" the Federal Council has ordered an enquiry. It is not thought that the publication will have any disadvantageous influence in the canton Ticino, but it is feared that it will create and encourage an erroneous impression in certain Italian circles about the aspirations of this canton.
* * *

The Munchenstein (Basle) factory of Messrs. Brown, Boveri & Co. has received official authorisation to work a 52-hour week until the end of June; the measure has not been favourably received by the workmen, a large number of them preferring to leave their employment, necessitating a temporary closing of the factory.
* * *

Major Anton Bon, who as president of the Swiss Hotel Society has rendered eminent services to this particular industry, has relinquished this office, being now on the London board of the Nestlé & Anglo-Swiss Condensed Milk Co.
* * *

Through an unexplained accident two boatmen lost their lives on the Lake of Geneva. They were taking their meals in a lower cabin of a large barge, the motor of which had broken down, and when the man in charge went downstairs to inform them of the accident, he found his colleagues dead. It is surmised that they were asphyxiated by escaping gases.

EXTRACTS FROM SWISS PAPERS.

Bern als Fremdenstadt. — Nach dem soeben erschienenen Jahresbericht des Verkehrsvereins der Stadt Bern sind im letzten Jahr 112,000 Reisende und 256,500 Logiernächte verzeichnet worden. Gegenüber dem Vorjahr wurde im Reisendenverkehr eine Zunahme von fünf Prozent festgestellt, d. h. ordentlich weniger, als die Frequenzzunahme in den Bergkuronen beträgt. Die Erklärung dafür liegt in dem guten Sommerwetter des Jahres 1923, das die Reisenden möglichst aufenthaltslos in die Berge lockte.

Die Zahl der Reisenden, nach Nationalitäten ausgeschieden, ergibt folgendes Bild: Schweizer 79,000 (gegen 78,000 im Vorjahr), Deutsche 6,700 (gegen 4,400), Engländer 4,300 (gegen 3,500), Italiener 2,000 (gegen 1,600), Österreicher 1,300

(gegen 750), Holländer 2,600 (gegen 2,500), Südamerikaner 1,200 (gegen 1,100), dagegen ist die Zahl der Nordamerikaner von 3,300 im Jahre 1922 gesunken auf 3,000 im Berichtsjahr, diejenige der Franzosen von 4,400 auf 4,100, und die Zahl der Belgier von 1,450 auf knapp 1,400. So wird also die Zunahme der Reisendenzahl aus Deutschland und Oesterreich fast wettgemacht durch die aus Valutagründen abnehmenden Besucher aus Frankreich und Belgien. Die gleiche Erscheinung macht sich übrigens auch im Tessin und an der italienischen Riviera bemerkbar.

Endgültig zerschlagen haben sich nach dem Bericht die Verhandlungen um die Schaffung eines Golfplatzes auf dem Gurten. Auch der Plan, in der Nähe von Bümpliz einen grossen Flugplatz zu erstellen, musste aufgegeben werden; indessen prüft der Verkehrsverein die Möglichkeit, in der Nähe der Kaserne ein Grundstück zum Flugplatz umzgestalten. Die Kosten würden jedoch etwa Fr. 700,000 betragen, sodass eine bestimmte Lösung noch längere Zeit wird auf sich warten lassen.
(*Arbener Tagblatt*.)

Un don original. — Un don original a été fait à la commune de la Chaux de Fonds par un particulier. Celui-ci a remis au trésorier, M. Vautcher, une somme de 1000 fr. qui sera déposée en banque et capitalisée au taux le plus favorable pendant 150 ans. Le capital ainsi placé se doublant tous les quinze ans atteindra donc un million en l'an de grâce 2074. Alors la Commune pourra prélever les neuf dixièmes de cette somme dans un but philanthropique. Le dixième restant, soit fr. 100,000,—, restera en banque dans les mêmes conditions et tous les 75 ans, on prélèvera les neuf dixièmes de la somme disponible en laissant toujours un dixième pour continuer le fonds. (*Gazette de Lausanne*.)

THE EIGHTH ANNUAL SWISS SAMPLES FAIR WILL BE HELD AT BASLE 17th to 27th May, 1924.

For information apply to:
The Commercial Division of the Swiss Legation,
32, Queen Anne Street, W.1,
or to:
The Swiss Bank Corporation,
43, Lothbury, E.C.2 and at Basle.

A special conducted party will be arranged
by the *Swiss Observer* to leave London on
Saturday, May 17th.

Other travelling facilities may be obtained
from the *Swiss Federal Railways*, 11b, Regent
Street, S.W.1.

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NOTES AND GLEANINGS.

By "KIBURG."

Rhine Navigation.

The Times (19th March):—

The Central Rhine Navigation Commission will meet in Strasbourg in order to revise the Mannheim Convention of 1868, which still governs conditions of navigation on the Rhine. According to Art. 354 of the Treaty of Versailles a project of revision was to be drawn up by the Central Commission, and the German Government pledged itself in advance to accept the decisions of a majority.

Germany clearly attaches great importance to the coming negotiations, in which she will take part on an equal footing with other States. She recognises that the new instrument will have the validity and permanence of a treaty in international law and will, therefore, do her utmost to prevent the acceptance of a one-sided agreement, such as would harmonise with French interpretations of the Peace Treaty. She relies on the support of Holland and Switzerland, who are likely to oppose any project which might perpetuate the present condition of the Rhine land.

The "Cologne Gazette" declares that a just solution must take account of the fact that the length of the German banks of the Rhine is six times as great as that of the French bank, and that the expenditure of Alsace and Lorraine on river works was only one-fifth of that of the other German Riparian States before the war. It further defines the aims of German policy at the Conference. Germany, it says, should strive for a new distribution of votes in the Commission in proportion to interests. At present France appoints a president and four members, the German States four members, and Great Britain, Italy, Belgium, Switzerland and Holland two each.

The question how far the Central Commission should be an independent corporation, and how far its decisions should be subject to the approval of the interested States, demands, it says, a clear settlement. In any case, it should confine itself to questions of general policy. Exclusive French rights, such as the appointment of a president of the Commission, the choice of Strasbourg as its permanent meeting place, and of French as its official language, must be abolished.

A "free" Rhine will, indeed, mean a big step forwards. And a generously accommodating spirit on the part of France would be "good politics" for her too.

League's Guarantee Pact rejected by Switzerland.

Morning Post (19th March):—

The Federal Council has decided not to adhere to the Treaty of Mutual Assistance submitted to the Governments by the fourth Assembly of the League of Nations. The Council takes up the attitude that the obligations under the Treaty would be contrary to Switzerland's policy of neutrality, the Treaty being in effect a new form of military convention.

Our country's undoubtedly special position as regards Neutrality will, of course, be a delicate problem as long as military or rather militarist problems are of such vital importance. I can only hope that the time may come soon when military conventions between different European States will be looked upon with the same spirit as would be a military convention between, say, Appenzell, Thurgau and the Grisons!

School Insurance.

Quite a good notion! *The Star* (March 19th):—

The Swiss Canton of Vaud, of which Lausanne is the capital, has just completed an extended experiment of compulsory sickness insurance for children attending the elementary schools.

The insurance is carried out through the medium of a Cantonal Children's Sick Fund, which is worked and controlled under the guarantee of the State, and the funds distributed amongst the various municipalities of the canton.

The benefits include payment for medical attention and drugs in cases of illness and accident during 360 days out of a period of 540 consecutive days.

The extent to which such attendance is necessary amongst school children is indicated by the statistics of the past year, which showed that amongst 50,000 school children assured, 35,853 cases of illness were notified and treated.

Ruhr Coal in Switzerland.

The Western Mail (14th March):—

His Majesty's Chargé d'Affaires at Berne reports that, according to the "National Zeitung" of February 19th, the "Ruhr-Kohlenkontor"—which is chiefly engaged in the furtherance of exports of Ruhr coal—has suggested to the Reich's Department of Railways that freight rates for coal should be reduced and exceptional tariffs introduced to enable the Ruhr coal to compete again on the Swiss and Austrian markets. The "Kohlenkontor" draws attention to the fact that, as a result of the war, exporters in the Ruhr had to neglect foreign markets in order to deliver to German districts deprived of their former English sources of supply, thereby almost entirely losing contact with their old customers. This is especially evident in the case of Switzerland, which used to obtain from Germany 90 per cent. of the coal she required before the war, and which has now practically ceased buying in the Ruhr district. The Saar mines, favoured by low freight rates, are competing with Belgium and the United Kingdom in their endeavours to win the Swiss market. German exporters will, therefore, be compelled to make an entirely fresh start to regain even part of their former foothold; in this respect their only hope of success lies in a large reduction in German railway transport rates and in the reintroduction of the special reduced tariff applied formerly to German coal in transit between the harbour of Mannheim and Basle.