

<b>Zeitschrift:</b>	The Swiss observer : the journal of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK
<b>Herausgeber:</b>	Federation of Swiss Societies in the United Kingdom
<b>Band:</b>	- (1928)
<b>Heft:</b>	335
<b>Rubrik:</b>	Prepaid subscription rates

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**Download PDF:** 16.02.2026

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# The Swiss Observer

Telephone : CLERKENWELL 9595

Published every Friday at 23, LEONARD STREET, LONDON, E.C.2.

Telegrams : FREPRINCO, LONDON.

VOL. 8—No. 335

LONDON, FEBRUARY 25, 1928.

PRICE 3d.

## PREPAID SUBSCRIPTION RATES

UNITED KINGDOM	{	3 Months (13 issues, post free)	Fr. 36
AND COLONIES	{	6 " " 26 "	66
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SWITZERLAND	{	6 Months (26 issues, post free)	Fr. 7.50
12 " " 62 "	12	" "	14

*Swiss subscriptions may be paid into Postscheck-Kontos Basel V 5718.*

## HOME NEWS

The Federal Tribunal in Lausanne has upheld the contention of the Bernese treasury to assess the building of the International Postal Union for municipal rates.

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According to statistics compiled by the Swiss National Bank, the amounts standing to the credit of depositors in Savings Banks have increased during 1927 by about 220 million francs, and are computed to total at the end of last year 3,870 million francs.

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A new (Kornhaus) bridge is to be built in Zurich over the Limmat at a cost of about three million francs.

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Dr. Raimondo Rossi, a former Ticinese states councillor, has been offered the post of Financial Administrator to Persia; he has declined the offer for reasons of health, but has recommended as a substitute a personal friend of his.

\*\*\*

The number of factories in operation in Switzerland at the end of 1927 was the highest since 1912 and reached 8,163. With the exception of the abnormal year 1918, the number of workmen employed constituted a record and amounted to 366,350; of this total 65,000 were employed in the machinery and 42,500 in the watch and jewellery industry.

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The estate known as "Säntisbäck" on the Zürichberg, is to be acquired at a cost of Frs. 195,000 for the purpose of a zoological garden; it is stated that the financial support for this scheme offered by the Zurich citizens has been most encouraging.

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A ski party descending into the Bagnes valley (Valais) was surprised by an avalanche, causing the death of one of its members, the well-known Geneve lawyer, Marcel Brunet, the president of the Municipal Council.

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The trial of Oskar Kessler, a former cashier of the Swiss National Bank in Zurich who absconded and was subsequently arrested in London, came to an end last Monday. Kessler was sentenced to five years' imprisonment and his chief accomplice, Karl Bühler, received a similar term. Of the original amount of Frs. 540,000 abstracted the major part has been recovered and judgment has been entered against the two prisoners for the actual loss of Frs. 165,000.

## NOTES AND GLEANINGS.

### The Stockport Tender.

All the English papers without exception have joined in the chorus chanted by Mr. D. N. Dunlop, the director of the British Electrical and Allied Manufacturers' Association, who cannot conceal his chagrin that the Swiss firm, Messrs. Escher, Wyss & Co., have beaten their English rivals in tendering for the power-generating plant at Stockport; their price of about £51,000 was 33 per cent. below the lowest English tender. We suppose that Mr. Dunlop cannot dispute the fact that our electrical engineers in Switzerland command an experience second to none, and that there is nothing very remarkable in their being able to hold their own against competitors who are, so to say, newcomers in the field of modern power-generating plant. There is no justification for the attempt to throw dust into the eyes of the non- or badly-informed by such fantastic allegations as that "on an efficiency basis British plant justifies itself at a price 80 per cent. above that of foreign plant." Mr. Dunlop also hints at lower wages being partly responsible for the discrepancy, but he wisely omits to give chapter and verse; he makes, however, a very grave charge when, in referring to the three stations at Edinburgh, York and Newport equipped with Swiss generating plant, he asserts that "in those three stations inefficiency in operation has necessitated, in four years, excess expenditure of over £140,000

and brought the ratepayers a corresponding loss in revenue." A pertinent reply from the Borough Electrical Engineer at Newport (Mon.) has been published in the *Financial Times* (Feb. 10th) from which we give the following extract:—

"Twelve British firms and four Continental firms submitted tenders, and the most favourable all-Swiss tender was £14,000 below the most favourable all-British tender.

Notwithstanding this, the steam consumption guarantee of the Swiss plant was materially better than the best British guarantee, and, moreover, the Swiss firm was prepared to accept as high a financial penalty for failure to comply with their guarantees as any British firm was prepared to accept.

After the tenders had been received and the amazing difference in price disclosed, and before placing an order, they had considerable negotiations with the British tenderers through the official channel—namely, the British Electrical and Allied Manufacturers' Association—but without result.

Ultimately it was reluctantly decided to place the contract with a Swiss firm, but only on the condition that the alternator and the condensing plant were both manufactured in this country, with the result that 71 per cent. of the work and financial payments remained in this country, although this decision meant an increased expenditure of approximately £8,000.

With a complete knowledge of these facts, Mr. Dunlop deliberately accuses the Newport Corporation of boycotting British production and British labour, and describes it as an attempt on the part of municipalities to force British firms below starvation level.

Mr. Dunlop suggests there ought to be some form of public inquiry into the circumstances under which such contracts are placed abroad, but it would be very much more to the point if there were a public enquiry into the circumstances under which British tenders for municipal plants are prepared and regulated, and as to why it is that British firms in the British Electrical and Allied Manufacturers' Association are able to quote the colonial and foreign markets, such as Japan, China and South America, prices for turbo-alternator plants not only lower than they quote in the home municipal markets, but at such a low level that Continental firms are frequently unable to compete.

So far as Swiss manufacturers are concerned, one knows better than Mr. Dunlop that the old slogan of low wages and inferior conditions of employment has been exploded. If the Swiss franc is translated into sterling, it will be found that the wage rates to-day in the Swiss shops are on the same level with the British...

Reading Mr. Dunlop's statement, the man in the street could reasonably conclude that it is only municipalities who are adopting what he chooses to regard as a policy of boycotting British production and British labour. Let Mr. Dunlop publish a list of private power supply companies and industrial manufacturing combines who have placed orders for Continental plants during the last two years, presumably because they regarded it as the only economical proposition in the interests of cheap production of their manufacturers. I venture to suggest it would throw an entirely new light on this thorny question.

I submit that it is to be very much regretted that Mr. Dunlop should use his official position as director of the British Electrical and Allied Manufacturers' Association—a position which he fills with so much honour—to give to the public Press a series of statements which can be easily refuted by those in a position to do so, but which the layman can only accept at their face value, perhaps believing that, coming as they do from one of the highest officials of the Association, they must be official facts, and such as would not be made by a person holding such a position, and with a due sense of his responsibility, unless such statements were accurate."

### The League Capital.

The *Daily Telegraph* still harps upon the transfer of the League seat by giving publicity to irresponsible gossip; this is what their diplomatic correspondent communicates on Feb. 14th:—

"Despite repeated official denials, I am able to state that the talk in diplomatic and political circles in Vienna about the possible transfer to that city from Geneva of the League capital is still unabated. The Austrian Chancellor, Monsignor Seipel, has taken personal charge of the

matter, and claims to have the secret support for his scheme not only of Poland, Czechoslovakia and Serbia, but also of Italy. Indeed, it is suggested that, next to the French Minister, Comte de Chambrun, and the Polish Minister, M. Bardej, the Italian diplomats are the most active.

It is admitted, however, that the Quai d'Orsay is, on the whole, a good deal less enthusiastic about the idea of a transfer of the League's seat than is the French Minister to Austria. Great Britain is admitted to be clearly opposed to the whole plan, and France to be still hesitant.

An entirely unfounded attempt is being made to persuade the Austrian public that Germany would view the change without disfavour, and would not begrudge Vienna the honour of becoming the League capital, even though this would probably mean a deathblow to the prospects of Austro-German reunion because of the vast business advantages which, it is contended by the advocates of the change, it would entail for both Austria and Germany. The truth about Germany's supposed friendliness to Chancellor Seipel's ambitions is that the German Minister in Vienna, Herr von Lerchenfeld, may be personally favourable, because his prestige as a fully-fledged Ambassador would, no doubt, be heightened by the establishment of the League at Vienna, where he aspires to play, and, as a matter of fact, succeeds in playing, an ever-increasing personal rôle.

What is stranger still is that Chancellor Seipel should apparently have succeeded in persuading the leader of the Pan-German party, Herr Wotawa, that, in the long run, the transfer of the League capital to Vienna, would not hinder, but rather facilitate, Anglo-German reunion, provided not a whisper be heard about this until the seasonable moment, which is still remote. If Herr Wotawa, who has a reputation for ingenuousness, has been brought to believe this, the Little Entente representatives have been brought to believe the contrary. Chancellor Seipel, however, has not yet secured a definite reply from the Austrian Democrats, among whom he has latterly been taking soundings on the point. He has refrained, moreover, from broaching the subject to the Agrarian Party, who, he seems to think, would be strongly opposed to his project.

All this Viennese tittle-tattle, though interesting, is very much in the air because of the impracticability at this date of altering the venue of the League. Chancellor Seipel and the Austrian advocates of the transfer profess the opinion that, by making Vienna the League capital, they would avert possible invasions in the future from both the South and the South-East. On this point I can only repeat what I wrote the other day—that the League is bound to feel safer behind the Alpine frontiers of Switzerland and the sturdiness of the Swiss militia than within the exposed and militarily undefended frontiers of the present Austrian Republic."

### Flying Above the Alps.

The following interesting description is published in the February number of *Airways* :—

"To the enthusiastic climber, the mere suggestion of flying above the Alps may be something akin to sacrilege, like advocating to a huntsman the shooting of foxes. The true mountaineer may look with scorn on the proposal to enjoy almost with ease, the transcendent beauty of the upper world, hitherto the rich reward of long-sustained and dangerous effort afoot. Rather would he force his weary way, foot by foot, hand-grip by hand-grip, up the unrelenting ice slopes to gaze at his journey's end on a vision of unsurpassed grandeur.

But—*autre tems, autres modes*—and, though in the past I have scaled various peaks in Switzerland from below, I determined to view their glories from above, with the added intention of increasing my knowledge and experience of flying in high altitudes under geographical conditions which are unobtainable in England.

Zurich seemed to offer the greatest facilities towards this end, and the Imperial Airways' route offered in part an obvious way of reaching my destination. Incidentally, I should like to express my gratitude to the agents and pilots of that company with whom I came in contact in Paris and Zurich for their unfailing courtesy and help.

Before leaving Paris their manager telephoned at my request to Zurich for an intelligent anticipation of the weather that might be expected in the near future, for, obviously, fine weather and good visibility were essentials.

The report was generally favourable, and soon after leaving Le Bourget we climbed through light, drifting clouds that at times obscured the landscape .