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HOME NEWS

In reply to an interpellation suggesting a reduction in the postal charges especially on inland letters from 20 to 15cts., the Federal Council states that in spite of the satisfactory returns of the Swiss Post Office, lower rates cannot at present be taken into consideration as this would mean a loss of about six million francs in the receipts under this heading. It is also anticipated that the next congress of the Universal Postal Union, to be held in 1929, will decide on certain modifications which will adversely affect the budget estimates.

At the Urner Landsgemeinde held last Sunday it was decided without much discussion to bury this old institution and introduce the modern method of giving expression to the will of the people by local and secret suffrage. Though the change is generally ascribed to the influence of the Liberals this party received a set-back by being unable to get their candidate, Dr. Karl Müheim, elected as one of the Federal States Councillors. Both representatives of the canton in the Federal States Council remain Conservatives. The Landsgemeinde was attended by about 4,000 electors.

Though a deficit of nearly five millions was originally budgeted for, the final accounts for 1927 of Basel-Stadt close with a surplus of about Frs. 126,000, in the main due to higher returns from the income and property taxes.

A military enquiry has been ordered into certain occurrences which caused the bulk of Bataillon 84 (Appenzell) to refuse obedience to its captain, who was somewhat unpopular with his men and belonged to another canton.

A manager of the Zürcher Handelsbank, Mr. Fridolin Stüssi, has been placed under arrest pending the investigation of a charge of defalcations amounting to about Frs. 180,000.

A fatal accident happened last Saturday at the Neuchâtel aviation meeting. One of the 'stunts' consisted of parachute descents, and when one of these apparatuses was released from a military aeroplane it failed to open, with the result that the mechanic, Ernst Buser from Basle (an experienced parachutist) dropped down to the ground and was instantly killed.

In an accident caused by the bursting of a tyre, M. Arnaud Piguet, of Yverdon, lost his life while the four other occupants of the car suffered more or less serious injuries; one of the latter is M. Jules Vautier, the head of the well-known tobacco firm bearing his name.

EXTRACTS FROM SWISS PAPERS.

Finances fédérales.—A l'Assemblée générale de l'Association commerciale et industrielle thurgovienne, M. Hultegger, 1er secrétaire du voort à Zurich, a exposé la situation financière actuelle de la Suisse. Ce coup d'œil général n'est pas inutile, les divers problèmes financiers se présentant souvent individuellement à l'attention du public. Voici les grandes lignes du rapport de M. Hultegger :

Au cours de la guerre mondiale, la dette publique de la Suisse s'est élevée à 2 milliards 200 millions, ce qui représente 560 fr. par tête de population contre 43 en 1913. Depuis 1914, chaque année a créé un nouveau déficit, qui s'est élevé en 1921 jusqu'à 127 millions; dès lors il a constamment diminué, pour se réduire à 1½ million en 1927. L'amortissement progressif de la dette s'impose à bref délai, car à eux seuls les intérêts de la dette, annuellement de 112 millions, représentent près du tiers des dépenses totales de la Confédération (pour le canton de Genève la proportion est à peu près la même).

Depuis 1926, une somme est réservée chaque année pour cet amortissement, si bien qu'en 1934 la somme de 360 millions pourra être remboursée; encore faut-il, pour que cette opération ne soit pas illusoire, que les Chambres évitent de créer de

nouveaux déficits ou d'employer à d'autres buts les sommes ainsi réservées.

Ce rétablissement financier a été rendu possible par les nouvelles taxes. Le premier impôt de guerre a rapporté 128 millions; l'impôt sur les bénéfices de guerre 730 millions; le second impôt de guerre 398 millions jusqu'ici; la taxe sur le timbre et les coupons 330 millions. Au total 1 milliard 600 millions, payés par 340,000 contribuables sur 4 millions d'habitants (l'impôt sur les bénéfices par 12,000 contribuables seulement).

Les cantons, opposés aux impôts directs fédéraux, ont été circonvenus par une participation aux nouvelles ressources fédérales. En 1927, la taxe sur le timbre et les coupons a produit 12 millions de plus; l'impôt sur la bière donnera à peu près 4 millions, et l'augmentation du droit de douane sur les autos à peu près autant. De la taxe sur la benzine, devenue très forte, 1 a été réservé aux cantons. L'ensemble des droits douaniers produit 200 millions, ce qui paraît être un maximum.

On peut regretter, au point de vue financier, que le rendement des droits sur l'eau-de-vie et sur le tabac ait été réservé aux assurances sociales. Or, l'alcool ne rapporte en Suisse que 5 fr. à l'Etat par tête d'habitant alors qu'il en procure 30 à l'Etat britannique; avec les taux anglais, on pourrait obtenir 500 millions par an.

D'autre part, le Conseil fédéral a fait de grands efforts pour comprimer les dépenses en diminuant le nombre des fonctionnaires; il en reste aujourd'hui 1000 de plus qu'en 1913, ce qui n'a rien d'exagéré.

—Journal de Genève.

NOTES AND GLEANINGS.

The "Sesa."

Whilst in England the railway companies are left to fight their own battles against the ever-increasing competition of road transport, drastic action has been taken in Switzerland by the Government through the Board of the Swiss Federal Railways. In order to counteract the attack by motor lorries on the railway goods traffic a separate organisation has been created. This scheme and its operation is fully set out in *Modern Transport* (May 5th) and offers most instructive reading:—

"The 'Sesa,' *Suisse Express Société Anonyme*, is a private company formed through the initiative and with the participation of the Federal Railways. Its object is: (1) to support endeavours tending to improve the movement of passengers and goods, and (2) to operate undertakings of all kinds having any connection with the carriage of passengers and goods. Its first duty is to institute a supplementary service which ensures the direct cartage of goods from point to point, as well as from the consignors' premises to the Federal Railway depots and from the railway to the premises of the consignee. In addition it can, by agreement with existing official carrying agents, either on its own initiative or at the request of the railway administration, organise a supplementary distributing and collecting goods service over longer or shorter distances. It is not allowed to organise transport services paralleling the Federal Railway lines, either directly or by circuitous routes, except with the railway's consent. It is at liberty to conclude agreements with private firms, either to operate itself or through agents the supplementary services it has to provide. The 'Sesa' commenced operations on January 1st, 1927. During a recent debate in the Swiss National Council, the Federal Councillor, Mr. Haab, chief of the Department of Posts and Railways, after speaking of the danger to both the State railways and the private companies by reason of the steady increase in motor competition, said that the formation of the *Suisse Express S.A.* ('Sesa') was a legitimate act of defence in meeting this competition.

In the interests of the public, Article 22 of the law regarding railway rates required the railways to organise at the principal stations an official cartage service, which operates if the users of the railway prefer not to cart or from their premises or are unwilling to arrange with a cartage agent to do the work. The railway has also the right to undertake the cartage itself, or to enter into agreements with cartage contractors to enable this work to be done in accordance with a fixed scale of charges. As a matter of principle, the railway would also be within its rights if it included the cartage charges in its carriage charges. If, in order to get traffic, it were worth while doing so, the railway could even do the work either without charge or charge only part of the cost and bear the balance. In order, therefore, to obtain a paying traffic, the railway

can take any action it thinks fit. On the other hand, the ordinary cartage contractors are not forbidden to work for those who require their services. It is pointed out, however, that private contractors work under more favourable conditions than the official agents, seeing that they are under no obligation to do cartage work; they can decide to refrain from working districts with little traffic, and, in addition, their legal responsibilities are less severe. Finally, the official cartage contractors have to undertake not to compete with the railway in any way. It is, therefore, incorrect to say that the railway administration wishes to ruin the private cartage firms. These considerations, said Mr. Haab, must not be overlooked if the equitable and economical character of the "Sesa" is to be appreciated. As regards the official cartage work, the "Sesa" is the contractor; so far as other transport is concerned it gets the traffic in the interests of the railway.

The arrangements in force up to the present have been found to be wasteful in that, for example, the official carrier has had to carry a few cases of packages from the station to some distant quarter of the town, while other independent carriers were going to the same place without full loads. The "Sesa," and reciprocally the owners of lorries or the carriers who will become its agents, will do away with this parcelling out of the cartage, and will thereby contribute to a more rational organisation, and, in consequence, give the public a cheaper service. The official carriers have indeed realised this; in fact, nearly all of them, numbering about a hundred, have contracted to work henceforth as agents of the "Sesa," which, for the moment, will not purchase vehicles of its own. The Association of Swiss Carriers has also concluded a contract with the "Sesa." The latter is now able to offer to the users of the railway cartage rates as much as 40 per cent, but, on an average, 15 to 20 per cent, lower than before. The reduction of rates having had to be introduced generally, as from a certain date, before any increase in traffic could result, the "Sesa" granted subsidies to its agents; but, as the traffic grows these payments will diminish, and at the proper time they will cease altogether.

It is emphasised that the "Sesa" is a private company. It is true that the Federal Railways, constituting the most important railway system, hold most of the stock; but there is, in addition, a large number of individual firms and private railways holding stock. It was with the deliberate object of enabling the secondary railways to benefit by the advantages of the "Sesa" that it was not affiliated to the Federal Railways. Outside the cartage service already alluded to the "Sesa" intends also to serve localities at some distance from the railway, carrying goods in these districts, and collecting for delivery to the nearest station. This supplementary transport service ought, if possible, to be carried out by private firms, and it is only in cases where such arrangements cannot be made that the "Sesa" reserves the right to undertake the work, or to arrange for its agents to do so. Hence this duty is not being carried out in opposition to the interests of private firms, but with their collaboration. Nevertheless, the "Sesa," and the railways working with it, can themselves fix the conditions under which this collaboration shall be made. From the financial and economic points of view, it is anticipated that the formation of the new company will lead to an improvement in the transport organisation of the country. It should enable the railways to recover, at least in part, the traffic they have lost during recent years, while it should also reduce the deflection of traffic from rail to road transport. The results it has achieved in this respect in a short time are said to be very gratifying. After only a few months' existence the "Sesa" has succeeded in recovering traffic worth about 1,200,000 francs that had been lost to the railways, so that it is expected about 3,000,000 francs worth will be regained during the first year. It is stated that more than one-third of the firms who have been approached on the subject have decided to discontinue using motor transport.

A further recovery of traffic is expected to result from a new proposal, under which special rates are to be quoted in competition with motor transport. The Federal Railways, as well as the normal gauge private lines, and many of the narrow-gauge systems, have, in particular, decided to carry for the future goods of all kinds at rates equivalent to the usual cost of carriage