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The Swiss Observer

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HOME NEWS

FEDERAL.

MILK PRICE.

The price of milk will be reduced by 1 centime per litre for the consumer from November 1st. At the same time, the price paid to dairy farmers will be reduced by 2 cts. for milk to be retailed, and by 3 cts. for milk to be used for cheese. While the reduction is of little or no importance to the consumer, the farmers are badly hit. Although the cost of living index figure stands at 160 (1914=100), the price paid them for milk is only about 37% above the 1914 level. The reason for this discrepancy lies in the big stocks of cheese, for which export possibilities continue to be unsatisfactory.

St. G.T.

FEDERAL COUNCIL.

The announced resignation of President Haab has already caused much heartburning among the political parties. The Socialists are debating, if they should give up their past policy of keeping out of the Federal Council in order to maintain their "political liberty" and claim the seat. So far, opinions are very divided. According to the "Vaterland," the present political composition of the Federal Council is the following:

Liberals	230,000 voters	5 seats
Socialists	220,000 "	0 "
Catholics	180,000 "	2 "
Farmers Party	130,000 "	0 "

LOCAL.

ZURICH.

Captain L. Bartsch, the well-known military pilot and aviation expert, has succumbed to the severe injuries he sustained three weeks ago in a crash at Dübendorf.

Professor Robert Seidel is retiring from the Federal Polytechnic and the Zurich University after 24 and 20 years service respectively.

At the end of September the Zurich Labour Exchanges had 897 unemployed on their registers, an increase of 140 in one month.

Mr. Eric Kessler has been nominated London correspondent of the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* in replacement of Mr. J. Halperin, who has again accepted the post of Berlin correspondent to the N.Z.Z.

BERNE.

A fatal accident due to unbelievable negligence is reported from Brugg. The 3 year old son of J. Schneider climbed on a wardrobe to get at some walnuts. There he also found a loaded pistol, the butt end of which he used as nut-cracker. His manipulations fired the pistol, and the bullet lodged itself in the child's liver. He died in hospital.

LUCERNE.

The cantonal accounts for the year 1928 show a surplus of 1,316,642 Francs.

Mr. and Mrs. Kiefer-Hablützel, of "Dreilinden," Lucerne, have undertaken to put two million Francs at the disposal of the Town Council for the erection of a building to be used as an arts gallery and concert hall. The only conditions are that the money is to serve exclusively for construction and interior installation, and that interest on the capital at 4½% p.a. be paid to the lenders during their lifetime. Afterwards the capital sum will become the absolute property of the town.

AARGAU.

The Poor Law is to be revised. The present Act dates from 1804!

ST. GALL.

Engelbert Rüegg, of Rossfallen near Goldingen, has confessed that he persuaded his brother Johann to set fire to the house inhabited by Karl Ebnöther, his wife and his two small children. Rüegg's stocks of cheese were stored in the building and over-insured, and he was pressed for cash. The brother was promised a reward of

500 Francs for the successful completion of his task. The family Ebnöther have lost everything they possessed, and an appeal to public charity has had to be made on their behalf.

St. G.T.

BALE.

The beautiful and historic Deutschritter-Haus near the Johanniter bridge has been pulled down and replaced by a huge block of flats. A correspondent to the "National-Zeitung" wonders, what induced the Authorities to agree to this, as he cannot understand this wanton and senseless spoliation of the beautiful skyline hitherto presented by the historical buildings fronting the Rhine between Münster and St. Johannor.

FROM THE TICINO.

FRANCESCO MESCHINI.

Referring to what was published in a recent issue concerning Francesco Meschini, the famous architect, the following additional details are taken from an issue of the "Popolo e Libertà": When studying at the Academy of Arts, in Milan, he was specially liked by Grato Albertoli, the famous Ticinese professor of architecture at that Academy and when barely twenty years of age Francesco Meschini was entrusted by Piermarini with the drawing up of the plans and design for the Scala Theatre of Milan, which is considered a fine piece of architecture.

When patriotism bid Meschini return to the modest solitude of his native village the Ticinesi eagerly called upon him to fill the highest positions in the Councils of the Canton. He has been the inspirator and directing mind in the development of the system of main-roads in the Canton. He was nearly seventy years of age when he undertook the building of the road of the Gothard but he was undaunted by the arduous task and the hardships he had to endure in a strenuous life, at such altitudes. As chief engineer and contractor at one and the same time he never stinted the work for the sake of personal gain. His one desire was to make the road one of solidity and magnificence and the proof that gold did not seduce him is in the fact that, when the work was accomplished, he declared himself satisfied with a very modest profit and returned to the State 150,000 francs, then a very considerable sum, out of the contract price.

After very insistent requests from the authorities of the Cantons of Uri and Schwyz, Meschini made all the plans for the road which from the Gothard pass leads to the lake of Lucerne, so that the main road which crosses Switzerland, from Basle to the Italian frontier, over the Hauenstein and the Gothard, can be considered his work. As a token of their appreciation the authorities of Uri and Schwyz jointly made him a present of a beautiful and valuable pendulum clock, depicting the oath on the Grütli and decorated with the shields of the two cantons.

VAUD.

In the canton of Vaud there are some 200 apprentices who are unable to attend professional courses on account of living too far away from the cities, where such courses are held. In order to enable these people to avail themselves of professional tuition, experiments have been made since 1927 with courses given by wireless. The State Council have just decided definitely to adopt this means of instruction, and radio sets will be installed in all the communes where no professional classes can be held. All the students living within a radius of 5 kilometres must take part in these wireless lessons. The communes are charged with finding suitable space for them.

According to a tradition which dates from 1918, the University of Paris bestows, every year, a certain number of titles of "docteur honoris causa" to famous foreigners. This year a noteworthy choice is M. le Docteur Roux, professor of surgery at the University of Lausanne.

The death has just occurred at Lausanne of M. Paul Piccard, at the age of 86 years. M. Piccard was professor of mechanics at the Academy of Lausanne between 1869 and 1881, has been honorary professor of the University of Lausanne since 1903, and was one of the founders of the firm Piccard-Pictet of Geneva, which is renowned for the improvements made in the construction of hydraulic turbines. It was M. Piccard who constructed the first turbines for Niagara.

MILITARY EXEMPTION TAX AND PASSPORTS.

It is a big jump but, having been recently to the Ticino, I feel I must say a few words in this connection. At the beginning of this month I had occasion to call at the offices of one of the Lugano dailies and eventually the talk drifted to the question of Military Tax and Passports. I was very pleased to hear that the editor and the controlling person of the paper (a clever lawyer and very active politician), fully shared the opinions of those who are protesting in this matter and I was further assured that the columns of that paper are wide open to Mr. Notari and his friends. So keen is the desire to help the Ticinesi resident abroad that I was informed an opportunity would no doubt arise to bring the matter before the Grand Council, at the suitable moment.

On my way back to London I had to call upon the publishers of the "Dovere" and here again, as soon as the Military Tax was mentioned, the gentleman appeared as keen about it as any of the Ticinesi in London. The question is considered of such general importance that I was assured the three or four leading dailies of the Ticino, representing the various shades of political opinion, would no doubt gladly co-operate to make the grievances and point of view of the Ticinesi abroad known to the population at home, so that effective action might be taken.

I knew that Mr. Notari had nothing to do with submitting to the "Dovere" a partial translation of his letter to the S.O. and when I pointed out that the comments of Mr. Carlo Maggini, leader of the liberal-radical party of the Ticino and chief editor of the "Dovere" were, in part, based on a misunderstanding, I was informed there is the keenest desire on the part of that paper to have the fullest possible communications, so that they can help all they can.

As if this was not enough, I soon afterwards met one of the Government officials, well acquainted with what is happening about passports and he took the initiative to give me a few items of inside information, adding that the whole question of the restrictions on passports constitutes a scandal, which has embittered Ticinesi from all parts of the world, and that it is high time a radical change was made.

I naturally was not in the Ticino for the purpose of sounding public opinion about this matter, but judging from the opinions of the few individuals to whom the matter was mentioned I feel certain Mr. Notari underestimated the support he would receive in our home Canton. As the winter months are approaching I suppose he will consider that the suitable moment to strike out has arrived.

O.B.

The Swiss Chalet.

The following article on our pretty wooden chalets, recognised all over the world as one of the most charming and comfortable kinds of dwelling house, is reprinted from the "Illustrated Carpenter and Builder." On account of his otherwise appreciative account the author may be excused for his unkind remark on Swiss taste in matters of art. Judged by the general level of architecture in Switzerland and other countries, notably England, it can hardly be said that we Swiss compare unfavourably with most other nations.—THE EDITOR.

Originally, the chalet was the unpretentious home of the Swiss mountain herdsman. Later, well-to-do farmers and land owners, attracted by the scheme of construction, built their houses on much the same principle, the stone and timber being procured locally. Then, as the decade rolled by, the leading architects, convinced that no better model could be found, applied it to private buildings—large and small. Many delightful examples may be seen in St. Moritz, round about the Lake of Lucerne, where, as the inhabitants say, all is "froth and munter," in the Bernese Oberland and valleys, on the outskirts of Engelberg, and elsewhere. Beautiful though Switzerland is, the Schweizer often is absolutely

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without taste in matters of art. He is eminently practical rather than artistic or imaginative. That architects and those whom they serve hanker after such picturesque dwellings is, therefore, strange.

The mountain chalet is far less fragile than it appears to be at first sight, for the lower construction is generally of stone, to a height of 7ft. or 8ft., the stone having been hewn out of the mountain side. Upon this solid and weather resisting foundation the upper structure of sawn timber or logs is erected. To withstand storms, the deep shingle roof is sometimes weighted heavily with miniature rocks. The small huts of the cow herds, as well as the cowsheds themselves are nearly always protected in this way. The durability of the building is truly astonishing; both roof and walls are impervious to the heaviest weight of snow. A destructive avalanche may descend upon them, hiding the little house from sight, and perhaps asphyxiating the ill-starred occupants; yet the dwelling sustains no damage worth mentioning. Nothing could be more solid; the chalet scarcely quivers when exposed to the full blast of a winter gale.

The steep pitch of the roof and the very wide-spreading eaves are features which add much to the picturesque quality of the chalets. But their object is the strictly practical one of throwing the snow clear of the buildings and protecting the wall surfaces both from snow and rain. A characteristic feature is the outside staircase, which sometimes provides the only means of reaching the upper floors.

The lower part is used for storage, the upper storey being given over to living room, bedrooms, and kitchen. A large family may necessitate a second storey; usually, however, the householder finds it unnecessary. But the dweller in the valley below, who has built a lordly chalet for his pleasure, may have demanded of the architect four storeys. Hotels of considerable size are often built on the chalet model.

Brackets, cornices, balustraded and open-work galleries and balconies, all engagingly carved, are included in the scheme. The carving serves to exploit portraits, texts, homely sentiments, a line from a poem, religious thoughts (inspired by the Herr Pastor), and the year the house was built. The inscriptions are in the decorative Gothic lettering. A typical one, from a chalet in the Bernese Oberland reads:—

Gott bewahre dieses Haus,
Und die da gehen ein und aus.

Repairs are noted in the same manner, as well as births, deaths, and marriages, a journey to a distant land, the return of the traveller, a formidable avalanche, together with its date, and other major and minor events. There is, for example, in the Valais Oberland a chalet which, constructed in the mid-eighteenth century, has its walls literally covered with inscriptions. Many of these are dated, and, going a long way back, they are of particular interest to antiquaries. The building, the largest of its kind, is lit by no fewer than 113 windows, some of which are too small to let in more than a shaft of light. The Schweizerhof, a famous Maloja chalet on the edge of a most enchanting lake, wherein the speckled trout obligingly allow themselves to be caught by the least expert anglers, also runs to many windows. Maloja, it may be noted, is reached from St. Moritz by the old-time diligence, a survival of the past.

Much of the carving is the work of Italians, especially in the Upper Engadine, which borders on Italy. These people are particularly skilled in decorating the window-frames, panels, and friezes entrusted to their care; each delightful embellishment thoroughly satisfies the most exacting connoisseur. The Swiss carvers are not best pleased at the importation of foreign labour, arguing that capable artisans abound nearer home.

When during the construction of a chalet, the chimney has received its finishing touch, a little fir-tree is fastened to the masonry, the national flag keeping it company. Everyone concerned with the building of the domicile is bidden to lunch by the hospitable owner; many workers are pledged in Engeldiner, the generous red wine of the country. The architect makes a patriotic speech, which includes references to William Tell and poetic quotations; the oldest carpenter and the senior mason prove no less eloquent. Mirth and jollification prevail; the guests are happy and contented.

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THE EDITOR'S POST-BAG.

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To the Editor of the *Swiss Observer*—

I must crave your indulgence if I have not yet found time to reply to the questions raised by my letter, published in your issue of the 17th August last.

Let me say that I realized at the time that my letter was bound to raise a good deal of criticism and comment. This is all to the good, but strange to say whatever adverse comments there have been, appear to be limited to individuals who, by virtue of their age, are safely protected from the regulations and injustices which I have made it my duty to publicly protest against, publicly, because I feel that publicity is the very soul of justice, and that through publicity alone can we ever hope to obtain some measure of redress and relief.

What is all the more surprising is, that even my most hardened critics, when confronted with facts and details, readily admit that it is illogical and illegal for the authorities to do this, that or the other. Why then should I have refrained from plain speaking? Has Swiss democracy and republicanism sunk so low that a citizen shall be afraid of saying what he means and feels about the actions of the authorities, whether federal or cantonal? And when the Federal Council is reducing the Swiss abroad to the status of "Heimatloser," why should I be afraid to say that I do not cherish such an honour?

It has been a source of great encouragement to me to have had the assurance from numerous individuals, both Ticinese and other Swiss, that the time has arrived when the whole question of the Military Exemption Tax and Passports should be thrashed out in earnest. After all, it is the most important question which concerns us Swiss abroad. It is no use denying the fact that the regulations now in force have caused widespread discontent not only here, but nearly everywhere, and if a census were made I feel sure it would be found that Swiss have been denationalised by the thousand if we include those Swiss born abroad who, having the choice of two nationalities, give up the Swiss in order to escape the rigours which they would, in the natural course of events, be subject to.

The two principal questions which my letter of the 17th of August raised are those of the legality of the regulations in question and the undue rigour in which they are applied. I do not intend to enter into these two questions in detail in this letter, but shall do so in forthcoming issues of your paper, if I may be allowed.

Great capital seems to have been made by the authorities of a decision by the Federal Tribunal in the case of a Zurich citizen, which decision is being made good use of to brush aside criticism of the regulations which arises from time to time. I have in my hands this particular verdict (covering 15 foolscap sheets) and I must say that the question before the Tribunal was merely whether in that particular case a refusal of passport was justified. The circumstances were very much against the citizen in question as the authorities were in a position to prove that there had been consistent and wilful evasion of the law over a period of four or five years. The amount of the tax was not in dispute.

After having very carefully considered the Federal Tribunal's verdict in this particular case, I am more than ever convinced that the majority of refusals of passports must have been made in illegal circumstances and that, in reality, the regulations complained of constitute a breach of the Constitution and of the law by the Federal Council.

I refer to this because this same verdict is quoted in the comments reproduced in the letter you published in your last issue, over the signature of Mr. J. Eusebio, emanating from the pen of Mr. Carlo Maggini, one of the political leaders of the Ticino, about which I shall have further to say at a later stage. No doubt, when fuller facts and comments are put before Mr. Maggini, he will be able to see that there is a considerable difference between the case dealt with by the Federal Tribunal and the points on which I, together with my friends, are seeking redress.

In closing these general comments I would like to mention I am pleased to hear from various of my friends, that there appears to have been a very considerable change of heart, on the part of the Authorities, during the last couple of months, so that if we should achieve even only a fairer application of the regulations, as they are, a substantial measure of success will already have been attained.

Yours faithfully,
W. Notari.

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GESCHÄFTS-ANZEIGE

Anstatt durch Zirkular, gestatte ich mir auf diesem Wege meinen verehrten Landsleuten anzuzeigen, dass ich das von Herrn F. W. Rühmann anno 1887 gegründete, sich eines sehr guten Rufes erfreuende,

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