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The Swiss Observer

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HOME NEWS

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FEDERAL.

NEW YEAR'S RECEPTION AT THE PALAIS FEDERAL.

M. Baumann, President of the Swiss Confederation, has received on New Year's Day the members of the government of the canton of Berne, and the members of the Diplomatic Corps, representing some thirty-five countries, who presented to him their New Year's congratulations.

NATIONAL COUNCILLOR DR. E. GOETTISHEIM.

Through the death of Dr. Emil Goettisheim, the Swiss Liberal Party loses one of its most influential members.

Dr. Goettisheim was born in 1863, the son of the well-known Liberal States-Councillor, Dr. Christian, Friedrich Goettisheim.

After having completed his studies, the deceased established himself in 1888 as an advocate in Basle. At the early age of 31 he entered in 1894 the Grand Council over which he presided in 1904, and of which he was a member until 1914.

In 1905 he entered Parliament (National Council) of which he was a member for fifteen years. Dr. Goettisheim was a member of many special Parliamentary commissions where he rendered great services.

NEW "SWISSAIR" APPOINTMENTS.

The Board of Directors of the "Swissair" has appointed two new Directors in succession to the late Walter Mittelholzer and Balz Zimmermann.

M. H. Pillichody, until recently, Manager of the "Alpar" has been appointed technical Manager, whilst M. Eugen Groh, since the foundation of the "Swissair" its assistant Manager, will take over the Commercial Service.

Both the new Directors have great experience in Swiss Commercial Aviation.

APPOINTMENTS IN THE SWISS ARMY.

The Federal Council has appointed to the command of the "Zentralschulen," Colonel J. Gugger, in succession to Colonel Constam, who has been promoted to Colonel-of-division. Colonel Gugger has acted until recently as chief of staff of the 2nd Army Corps.

Lieutenant-Colonel J. G. Däniker, chief of section of the General Staff, has been appointed commander of the "Schiessschulen" in Wallenstadt.

SWISS T.U. LEADERS REJECT ALLIANCE WITH RUSSIAN UNIONS.

The leaders of the Swiss trade unions have formally denounced any *rapprochement* between the International Trade Union Federation and the Russian unions, on the ground that the latter are not organisations but an organ of the State as in Germany and Italy.

According to the Swiss Union leaders, the Party Dictatorship in Russia has not led towards democracy but towards the dictatorship of a clique, and finally to that of one man.

But the gravest danger for the international working class is the Russian communists' desire to impose on others their own methods of violence.

SWISS GOLD POLICY.

Soon after the revaluation of the gold reserve of the Swiss National Bank in 1936, which yielded a "profit" of over 500,000,000 Swiss francs and with which an exchange equalisation account was formed various quarters demanded the distribution of this sum.

It has been suggested that the gold in question be used for the alleviation of unemployment by the introduction of an extensive public works scheme. It was also suggested that the 500,000,000fr. be transferred to the Swiss Federal Railways in order to enable them to attain a sounder basis.

In the circumstances, the Swiss Federal Council deemed it advisable to express its opinion on the subject. In view of the mistrust prevailing at present, every country has to be armed against any unforeseen events as far as monetary problems are concerned, the Council states. Not by mere chance have nearly all countries which have gone off gold since 1931 put aside funds to protect their currency.

SWISS BANK'S LOANS EXTENSION.

The Bodenkredit Bank in Basle (Crédit Foncier de Bâle) invites holders of the Five per Cent. Mortgage bonds from four loans raised between 1910 and 1915, which are repayable in May, 1938, and, in one case, in January, 1939, as well as holders of the Five per Cent. Cash bonds, repayable in May, 1938, to attend a creditors' meeting to be held at Basle on 4th February next.

It is proposed to postpone the date of repayment of all the loans to 1st January, 1944. Creditors will also be asked to sanction a reduction of the rate of interest from 5 to 4 per cent. all round.

This scheme will only be valid if holders of the Five per Cent. bonds of 1930, due for redemption in May, 1942, and long-term banking creditors and long-term creditors also agree to an extension to at least the same date.

In consequence of the bank's reorganisation in 1929, the dates of maturity of the outstanding loans were prolonged to May, 1938, and January, 1939, respectively. The share capital is Swiss Frs.4,000,000.

SEVERE COLD IN SWITZERLAND.

The cold continues to be severe in Switzerland. The Lac des Brenets, a section of the River Doubs three miles long, is completely frozen over and covered with nearly a foot of ice. The lake of Morat, five miles long and two miles wide, is also frozen over and will probably be opened for skating. Two persons died from cold in Geneva and three in Haute Savoie.

Snow is good for skiing above the 5,400ft. level, but under that level, owing to persistent sunshine, it is generally crusty or hard.

ITALO-SWISS TRADE PAYMENTS.

The Italian National Institute of Foreign Exchange agreed to grant a guaranteed exchange rate for payments from and to Italy made in connection with commercial and financial transactions with Switzerland.

The Institute will collect from the Italian creditor or payee a special commission for such guarantee equivalent to one-half of 1 per cent. of the amount involved.

The Italian exporter to Switzerland of goods invoiced in Italian lire will receive the exact amount to his credit.

As regards exports invoiced in Swiss francs, he will receive the equivalent in Italian lire at the rate of exchange ruling at the time the Swiss importer effects payment into the Swiss National Bank account, irrespective of fluctuations between this date and the time of the actual transfer from Italy.

With reference to Italian imports, if these are invoiced in lire the Swiss exporter will receive an amount in Swiss francs based on the rate of exchange ruling on the day when the Italian importer effected payment into the Bank of Italy. No account will be taken of the rate that may be ruling when the actual transfer takes place in Switzerland.

The guarantee is also extended to Swiss financial credits, including the collection of dividends in lire.

LOCAL.

GLARUS.

At the age of 81, died in Glarus, M. Peter Schmid-Hösl, for many years "Gemeindepräsident" and a member of the "Landrat."

Doctor Christian Fritzsche, for 42 years (1881-1923) Surgeon-in-chief of the cantonal hospital in Glarus, has died at the age of 87.

BASLE.

M. Hermann Meyer, the well-known Swiss landscape and portrait painter, has celebrated his 60th birthday anniversary.

AARGAU.

M. F. Funk, President of the Board of the firm Brown, Boveri and Cie., in Baden, has celebrated his 80th birthday anniversary, he is the only living co-founder of the Brown-Boveri concern.

GRISONS.

Dr. Adolf Loewy, from 1923-1933 head of the "Schweiz. Forschungsinstitut für Hochgebirgsklima und Tuberkulose," has died in Davos at the age of 70.

The Mayor of St. Moritz and local officials, equipped with ten bottles of champagne, were at the air port at Samaden to greet the arrival of the first plane on the new service between London and St. Moritz.

THURGAU.

M. Albert Züllig, one of the founders of the Bodensee-Toggenburg Railway, and for many years President of the Board of the "Schweizerischen Bodenseezeitung" in Romanshorn has died in Egnach at the age of 71. The deceased was for several years a member of the Grand Council of the canton of Thurgau.

VAUD.

M. Georges Rigassi, Editor-in-chief of the "Gazette de Lausanne" has celebrated his 20th anniversary as a member of the Editorial Staff.

THE 22nd SWISS INDUSTRIES FAIR, BASEL.

March 26th to April 5th, 1938.

The Swiss Industries Fair for 1938 is fully justified in calling the attention of other countries to this institution. A development of 22 years has enabled it to acquire a well-merited reputation even in international economic circles. It is a temperamental demonstration of the efficiency of Switzerland's production. The quality of Swiss goods is always carefully kept at the same high level. The important economic measure of the devaluation of the Swiss franc has again opened out a number of paths to the world's markets, as was clearly confirmed by the increased number of visitors from abroad in 1937. The 22nd Fair from March 26th to April 5th, 1938, will continue this development; the outlook is highly satisfactory. Not only will there be an extension of the 21 general and regular groups, many of which are of paramount importance for other countries, but there will also be a number of special fairs. The 8th Watch Fair will be excellently represented, and machine tools will be much more in evidence than before. Of special importance to other countries are also the groups: electrical industry, gas apparatus, household requisites, and likewise textiles, with the handsome Fashion Salon. The Swiss Industries Fair is a perfect illustration of the hard work and progress of the industries of Switzerland. The big commercial path has to pass through Basle.

Swiss Legations and Consulates, together with numerous travel bureaux, will be glad to comply with any special wishes.

LA POLITIQUE

Vers la réorganisation des C.F.F.

Il est donc entendu que le parlement sera convoqué en février et que le Conseil national s'attaquera à ce gros morceau de résistance: la réforme des C.F.F.

On critique non sans raison la tendance actuelle à multiplier les sessions; et il est certain, comme nous l'avons déjà relevé, qu'en perdant moins de temps en décembre, la Chambre eût pu entreprendre l'examen du projet déposé par le Conseil fédéral. Mais on doit reconnaître aussi qu'il y a urgence à délibérer sur le cas du réseau national et qu'un renvoi à la session ordinaire de printemps eût présenté des inconvénients sérieux.

Nous aurons à revenir, à maintes reprises, au problème "ferroviaire," à ses divers aspects, et à plusieurs questions connexes. Aujourd'hui, nous nous bornerons à rappeler quelques faits et quelques dates, à titre de préambule.

Comme nul ne l'ignore chez nous, les chemins de fer n'ont pas été, à l'origine, une entreprise d'Etat: les premières lignes furent construites par des compagnies privées, mais l'idée de la nationalisation compta des adeptes dès le début et en acquit sans cesse de nouveaux, jusque vers la fin du siècle dernier. Les compagnies privées s'étaient rendues impopulaires le courant étatiste

et centralisateur devenant de plus en plus puissant, on se persuadait que la Confédération serait mieux à même d'assurer l'exploitation et de développer le réseau (ce qui, en toute justice, n'était d'ailleurs pas complètement illusoire). On comptait aussi sur la nationalisation pour obtenir de meilleurs horaires, des correspondances plus satisfaisantes. Enfin, il n'était pas indifférent de soustraire à l'influence étrangère un moyen de communication aussi important: n'oublions pas, en effet, que la majorité des actions de certaines lignes étaient aux mains de nos voisins.

Ces arguments parurent péremptoires, en dépit de l'opposition véhémement des adversaires. La loi du 15 octobre 1897, concernant la nationalisation, fut acceptée par le peuple, à une forte majorité, le 20 février 1898. Les Chemins de fer fédéraux étaient créés; le rachat des lignes présentant une importance économique ou stratégique pour une partie considérable du pays, fut décidé. On y procéda progressivement: certaines étapes, comme la réunion aux C. F. F. du tronçon Genève-La Plaine, sont relativement récentes.

Le coût de l'opération fut excessif; et maints espoirs que l'on avait fait naître, non sans témérité, ne purent être réalisés. Dès le début, le service des intérêts constitua une lourde charge, dont l'on eut le tort de ne pas se préoccuper suffisamment. Ce que l'on ignorait, du reste, et que nul ne pouvait prévoir c'était que la voie ferrée cesserait, à bref délai, d'avoir une sorte de monopole du transport à longue distance.

La guerre et la période qui suivit aggravèrent la situation: mais on voulait croire à une crise passagère. On s'aperçut néanmoins, à l'expérience, que le réseau national avait une organisation rigide, qui lui rendait difficile tout travail d'adaptation aux circonstances. Le loi — encore en vigueur — du 1er février 1923, s'efforçait de corriger certains défauts dans l'organisation et l'administration des C. F. F., notamment l'hypertrophie de la direction et les lenteurs bureaucratiques. Les résultats ne furent pas négligeables, mais la plus large autonomie concédée à l'entreprise n'alla pas non plus sans inconvénients.

Toutefois, depuis quinze ans, les circonstances se sont encore modifiées: le régime des transports a si bien évolué que, comme le constate le Conseil fédéral dans son message, "il ne s'agit plus simplement de réorganiser, il faut bâtir à nouveau." Les rapports financiers entre les C. F. F. et la Confédération demandent en particulier une refonte complète.

Un premier projet vit le jour en 1934. Mais on préféra régler d'abord le conflit rail-route. Le projet de loi sur le partage du trafic fut repoussé par le peuple le 5 mai 1935. Dès lors, on dut renoncer à subordonner à cette question la mise en chantier de l'assainissement.

Sur le problème principal se greffe celui des chemins de fer privés, que nous avons traité séparément. Signalons également l'initiative destinée à soustraire les C. F. F. aux influences politiques. Bien qu'elle parte d'un louable dessein, il ne sera pas possible d'en retenir la suggestion principale: la transformation de la régie d'Etat en une simple entreprise d'intérêt général.

Léon Savary.

(Tribune de Genève.)

WINTER SPORTS.

There are many kinds of sports which man has practised in the course of time. Hunting wild animals was no doubt the first of them, and sledging, skating and skiing have been known in the cold countries of the world for many centuries. Ice skating on the frozen Thames is reported to us as far back as the 13th century.

However, Winter Sports as we now understand them, date back only some 40 years. Dr. Spengler, a well-known German doctor, startled the world by proclaiming that the dry, cold air of the Alpine winter was of the utmost benefit to sufferers from tuberculosis. Little did the good doctor realise that those who visited the Alps in search of sport would soon outnumber by ten to one the invalids who flocked to Switzerland in search of health. While grey skies, fog and rain cast gloom over most of Europe, the Alps pierce through the cloud rack and bask in radiant sunshine under the bluest of skies. Where overcoats and mufflers scarcely ward off the all pervading rawness of the lowland winter, a bathing suit will do for skiing in the glowing sunshine and dry air of the mountains. At no other season are the contrasts between Alpine and lowland climate so evident or so much to be appreciated. To take a Winter Sports holiday is to enter another world, whence one returns sunburnt.

There is no country in the world which provides better skiing than Switzerland, says the Oxford University Press. The smooth sloping pasture lands are ideally adapted to skiing. Steep slopes and dense forests are, of course, highly unsuitable, and many a ski-runner who has graduated in U.S.A. or Canada has hardly

been able to contain his astonishment and envy at his first sight of Alpine ski grounds. Thanks to her topographical features, Switzerland is particularly favoured as regards snow conditions. The main massifs of the Alpine chain are encompassed within her boundaries, and the sports centres lie at correspondingly high altitudes, thus ensuring good snow from mid-November until Easter. Visitors who come out between January and March, of course, have longer days to enjoy the outdoor sports. Skiing may be practised throughout the year in the glacier regions, while it has discovered new horizons for the mountaineer, whose activities in the past were restricted to the Summer months.

Winter is a season of contrasts. The thermometer in the shade may be recording an incredible number of degrees of frost, but a few yards off on the rink, a man is smoking a cigarette in his shirt sleeves.

Tobogganing is the oldest of winter sports, but it has suffered severely from the competition of skiing.

The Swiss ice rinks are famous throughout the world; for the Swiss have learned the art of keeping an ice-rink in perfect condition. The Swiss ice-men have carried this craft to a high pitch of perfection. The ice is a popular rival of the snow for most ladies and middle-aged men.

Curling is as popular as ever, and has suffered far less than skating from the competition of skiing. There are, of course, very few young curlers, but even the most ardent of ski-runners, when he reaches the forties or the early fifties often prefers a game of curling after tea to the alternative of climbing another thousand feet or so for the run down before dinner.

Ice-hockey is also very popular. The Oxford and Cambridge Ice Hockey Match is an annual feature at St. Moritz. At most Swiss centres there are special rinks reserved for ice-hockey.

But, of course, by far the most popular of all winter sports, is skiing. This astounding craze for skiing, as a big London paper put it last January, "Skiing was introduced into Switzerland in the eighties but the popularity of skiing in Switzerland only dates from the late nineties, and from the opening years of the present century. There were many who prophesied that skiing would prove to be a temporary boom, like roller-skating."

They were wrong. Once a ski-runner, always a ski-runner. Every year the number of those who ski increases. The Ski Club of Great Britain reports an annual increase of between four and seven hundred members.

It is not difficult to understand the popularity of skiing. The ski-runner is not confined to rinks or toboggan runs. His skis are the key to the winter Alps. He can wander through forests deep in snow and up to the final snow caps of the great Alpine peaks. A ski track has been cut to the actual crest of the Dom (14,942ft.), the highest peak in the whole of Switzerland.

Skiing therefore appeals to all those who enjoy exploration, wandering and the adventure of the hills. But skis are more than a means to an end, something more than a convenient mode of locomotion among the hills and mountains of winter. Skis are the simplest of all the servants of speed. The pioneers carved a plank from mountain ash and attached this to their feet by a rough leather thong. A man and his horse are two personalities, but an expert ski-runner and his skis form an indivisible unit. The motorist imposes his will through an elaborate mechanism of pedals and levers, but the ski seems to belong to their owner just as wings belong to the bird, so intimate is the connection, so instantaneous their response to the command of mind and body. No form of swift movement gives a sense of personal control so complete.

Skiing is at once simple and subtle. It is simple because the movement owes nothing to machinery; between the ski-runner and the hillside there is nothing but the sensitive ash which responds to every change of rhythm in the slope. It is subtle because the snow is subtle. The hills are never the same, and the snow is never the same. Every run is a new discovery, every snowfall a new creation.

And then there is ski-jumping, the most dramatic and the most spectacular of all forms of athletic sport. The world record stands at over 82 metres, and this is equivalent to 270 feet measured in a straight line from the platform where the jumper launches himself into space, to the steep slope where his skis again strike the ground. Skiing is easy to learn. Young or middle-aged, it is never too early or too late to take up skiing, the pleasure of which may be enjoyed from the beginning — quite remarkably, in fact, after two or three days' proper instruction. This is why a fortnight of Winter Sports turns people into such enthusiasts.

There is a Ski School in each of the larger winter sports resorts and their pupils quickly become proficient in the grand sport. Some idea of the popularity of these schools may be gathered from the fact that in the 1936/37 winter season alone no fewer than 350,000 half-day lessons were

given. All schools teach the standardised Swiss ski technique, the secret of which is a thorough training in the elementary movements. Carefully elaborated exercises develop a natural, energy-saving sense of balance, so that when all the joints have been loosened and the whole body acts in unison with the movements of the individual limbs, skiing in all its phases is soon mastered. A short course at the Ski School in your resort, and you will soon be quite at home on your skis. The lessons are generally given in various languages and by instructors recruited from the elite of Swiss ski-ers.

Ch. B.

EDITOR'S POST-BAG.

5th January, 1938.

The Editor,

Swiss Observer.

23, Leonard Street, E.C.2.

Dear Sir,

I should be glad if you would grant me the hospitality of your columns for discussing a matter which, I believe, is at present occupying the minds of a large section of the Swiss Colony in London.

On Friday, January 14th, a meeting will be held at the Foyer Suisse when members of the two Swiss Churches, the Eglise Suisse in Endell Street and St. Anne's in Gresham Street, will discuss the advisability of joining their administrations which have hitherto been carried on independently. I understand, however, that it is proposed to continue holding services in the two churches simultaneously as in the past.

I think this is a great pity. As a comparatively young member of the Colony I do not know the exact circumstances which brought about the present position, but I do know that in the distant past, although the Swiss Colony was numerically larger, there was but one Church. It seems to me that the present state of affairs is a particularly unhappy one, and in my opinion every effort should be made not only to join the two separate administrations but to join also the two congregations.

After all, we are all Swiss of the same faith and I cannot see any good reason why there should be two separate churches when one would normally be large enough to hold the members of both congregations. Surely this would make for a feeling of closer unity and friendship amongst the members of the Colony.

Admittedly, the services at Endell Street are conducted in French, while those at Gresham Street are held in the German language, but I do not think this represents an unsurmountable difficulty if the right amount of goodwill and friendly understanding is employed. Very few people go to church every Sunday and it could be arranged to hold a French service in the morning and a German service in the evening on one Sunday and in the reverse way the following Sunday. Besides, there are but few German-speaking Swiss who do not know French and most French-speaking Swiss understand German.

That the services would be held at the Eglise Suisse at Endell Street is only natural, because the church there belongs to the Swiss and, I believe, its origin goes back for a century and a half. The church in Gresham Street could be given up and this would result in a considerable saving of rent, which could be used to supplement the much-needed funds that are already devoted to charity.

Although I have discussed this problem with many who go to St. Anne's I have not so far met anyone who would object to such a change. In fact, there are many who are reluctant to go to the City on a Sunday when it presents such a dismal appearance.

No one, I am sure, would challenge the necessity of having two clergymen at the Eglise Suisse, as there are many duties to perform. Many members of the church live so far away from the centre of London that even two reverend gentlemen would find as much work as they can cope with. I have even heard it said, and I do not think it is an exaggeration, that the untimely death of Pasteur Hoffmann-de Visme was precipitated by the enormous strain of work which he felt it his duty to take upon himself.

I believe that the complete amalgamation of the two churches would be a step in the right direction of bringing the members of the Swiss Colony into closer contact with each other. As far as I can see there are no obstacles large enough to prevent this, but should I have missed the whole point altogether, perhaps one of your readers will put me right.

Yours faithfully,

W. Meier.

