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The Swiss Observer

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NEWS AT RANDOM

The official weather forecasts issued from Berne are now suspended; one of the reasons given is that the information implied by this publicity might interfere with the neutrality of Switzerland.

* * *

Some commotion has been caused in Basle by the evacuation of most of the townships across the frontier such as Mulhouse, St. Louis and Hüningen. The tram services via Lysbüchel and between Riehen and Lörrach have, however, been maintained and enjoy increased favour on account of the restrictions imposed on motor-cars.

* * *

The Rhine harbour at Basle is choked with all kinds of vessels as down-river traffic has been stopped. Empty passenger and freight boats have been moved higher up and are now moored near the bridges in towns thus imparting a novel aspect to the river banks.

* * *

About 35,000 Swiss returning from France are expected in Geneva. The first train already left Paris on September 2nd early in the morning and carried about 1,200 compatriots amongst whom were a large number of children.

* * *

We take our hat off to Mr. Hermann Ferrari of St. Gall whose nine sons joined the colours when the general mobilisation was decreed in Switzerland last Saturday week.

* * *

The Geneva socialists are being subjected to severe criticism by the action of the Swiss Socialist Central Committee which proposes to expel the local president, M. Leon Nicole, from the party. Nicole is an ardent exponent of communist principles and has now been disowned by his life-long collaborator, André Oltramare.

* * *

The Swiss National Exhibition in Zurich which was closed at the outbreak of war has now been re-

opened though a number of events, mostly of an international character, will not take place. Fate has not been kind to our great exhibitions as the last one held in Berne in 1914 was overshadowed by a similar crisis.

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A special train left Berlin last Sunday week with a contingent of Swiss militia from Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Finland.

* * *

The Federal Council is granting the necessary credits to the Cantonal authorities so as to enable them to assist Swiss refugees who are without means.

* * *

A note affirming its neutrality has been addressed to the Federal Council by the Principality of Liechtenstein with the request to communicate its contents to the belligerent powers.

* * *

Major Paschoud, the general manager of the Swiss Federal Railways has been made a Colonel and is now the military director of our railway system; he is the brother of a once prominent member of our Colony who was for some years President of the Swiss Mercantile Society.

* * *

A new catholic church in Dornach (Solothurn) was dedicated last Sunday week by Bishop Dr. F. von Streng.

* * *

Dr. Jacobi Balli, from Caverigno (Ticino), has been appointed Swiss Consul General in Barcelona; he succeeds Mr. A. Gonzenbach who filled this post during the Spanish Civil War.

* * *

General Guisan has appointed National Councillor Col. Dr. Roger Dollfus as his "Generaladjutant." Col. Dollfus hails from Castagnola and is 63 years old. During the last war he commanded the Ticinese infantry regiment. He studied law and economics and for a number of years directed a banking establishment in Milan.

* * *

The Federal Council has granted the international committee of the Red Cross a credit of Frs. 200,000 to enable it to resume without delay its war activities. The organisation of an information service concerning prisoners of war and persons killed and missing in belligerent countries will be the first step.

* * *

Drastic regulations have been decreed for the control of foreigners especially deserters and those of the emigrant type. All visitors from abroad must now obtain a visa from the respective Swiss Consul.

The hares, foxes, bears and wild birds will have a peaceful time in our country as hunting and shooting as a sport has been prohibited until further notice.

* * *

The whole of the Franco-Swiss frontier from Basle to Geneva has been closed to all traffic; a reduced railway service is in operation.

* * *

The Federal Council has exempted the members of the Pope's Swiss Guard from military service in Switzerland.

* * *

Train services with Italy which were stopped altogether have now been partially restored.

* * *

The elections for a new National Council are due this autumn; no date for the voting has yet been fixed definitely though the last Sunday in October is freely mentioned.

* * *

The constant rise in the customs revenue will probably experience a serious set-back. In the eight months to August this year the amount so collected was in the neighbourhood of 197 million francs which compares with 170 million in the same period last year.

* * *

Until further notice the circulation of all private motor cars is prohibited on Sundays and official bank holidays; the order came into force on September 9th and affects all the roads in Switzerland.

* * *

A special train left Geneva last Wednesday with about 600 English holidaymakers who were stranded in our country.

* * *

The Gotthard line is likely to derive considerable benefit from the existing state of things if the reporter of the "Daily Express" (September 13th) is correctly informed. This is what he tells us: at Basle Reichbahnhof, on the edge of Swiss territory, I saw lines of German trucks piled with coal, rumbling steadily in the direction of the Gotthard Tunnel, in the High Alps, towards Italy.

Five expresses and 13 ordinary trains were running from Basle into Germany to-day. Incoming trains were hours late owing to troop movements.

At Goschenen, at the foot of the Gotthard, it was stated that the north to south traffic was much greater than the south to north. Italian traffic was mostly vegetables and other foodstuffs, including chickens.

It is calculated that at least 25,000 tons of coal and iron are daily passing the Swiss junction of Erstfeld bound for Italy. The traffic reminded onlookers of the November 1935 traffic when Germany sent coal and iron ore to Italy after sanctions against Italy.

To shorten German-Italian rail traffic through Switzerland, the Italians are working day and night to finish the electrification of the Chiasso-Milan line in time for the first trials on September 20th.

"AN ENGLISHMAN LOOKS AT SWITZERLAND."

(The following appreciation appeared in the September issue of the "Windsor Magazine" over the name of George Godwin; it contains a few obvious inaccuracies but they do not spoil the beauty of the picture.)

ED. S.O.)

In the past, history teaches us that it has been the small nations, Greece, Florence, Elizabethan England, to name but three, that have made the greatest contribution to human progress. It seems reasonable to suppose, then, that the small nations of the world to-day may still possess those virtues that appear to flourish less robustly on imperial soil.

What, for example, has Switzerland to teach the world; Switzerland, that stands like an enchanted land of perpetual peace amid the intermittent wars of the world?

The answer, I think, is the simple one that Switzerland has discovered the recipe for enduring peace. And here is the remarkable paradox. This country, which for more than four centuries has enjoyed immunity from wars abroad and revolution at home, contains within the framework of its structure every element now being held responsible for the internal and external difficulties of the greater states.

Consider what these are:

It has no unity of race, being composed of German-Swiss, French-Swiss, and Italian-Swiss.

It has no natural frontiers, its bounds upon the south and west being arbitrary and counter to the logic of geographical fact.

It has no unity of language, but four main languages, German, French, Italian and Romansch, these being again divided into an indeterminate number of distinct and not-easily-acquired local dialects.

It has no unity or religion, being divided between the Catholic and Protestant faiths.

It has no unity of literary culture, a fact which follows naturally from the diversity of its tongues and racial stems. Last, it has no unity of tradition.

Here, theoretically at least, are all the elements one would predicate for social, cultural, economic, and national disintegration. And what does one find? One finds that these incompatible and, one would think, hostile elements fuse like the metals of an alloy into a new form and one that contains all the virtues of its components plus the added value of its mass.

No less astonishing is the success of the machinery

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whereby Switzerland has welded its diverse components into a smooth-running political instrument. For the paradoxical character of race and culture applies also here.

Thus, the government of the country is not centralized, as are the governments of the great States, but proceeds from the periphery towards the centre. Switzerland has no parliament, but many parliaments; it has no parliamentary system, but many such systems.

Yet this most loosely knit of all European State structures is in fact the most stable.

Turning now to achievement, one meets with the same element of the unexpected, the apparently illogical.

For example, we know that England acquired her pre-eminence in the last century by reason of her wealth of raw materials for the creation of industrial revolution. In Switzerland, by contrast, one has a poor country, as all mountainous countries must be intrinsically poor, lacking in most raw materials, and in coal most of all.

Such a land, on the logic of its geographical facts, one might expect to develop only within the well-defined and narrow limits of husbandry and the like.

But what does one find? One discovers a country unknown entirely to the ordinary English visitor bent on the enjoyment of climate and scenery, a country highly industrialized, with such great centres of heavy industry as Zurich.

And so, once more a paradox. Switzerland is land-locked the full circle of its frontiers. Yet in Zurich, in this year's very lovely National Exhibition, I saw a display of modern machinery which included giant propellers for the largest class of ocean-going liners!

Switzerland, then, as a modern state, presents the picture of many paradoxes, and the significance of these paradoxes has at this time real value and importance. For this reason: they offer the lie direct to those who claim that there are irreconcilable racial and political differences between Germans, French and Italians, since these all live amicably side by side under the red cross of Geneva, speaking their own tongues, worshipping in their own way, conducting their community life according to their local traditions.

Switzerland shows us these three great racial types welded loosely, yet firmly, into the mould of a peace-loving modern State; and, in doing so, points a plain moral by demonstrating the falsity of much of the Totalitarian ideology.

POUR LA PATRIE.

Over the week-end two contingents, numbering altogether about 800, of our compatriots, who have been called up to join their respective units, will leave, or have already left London for Southampton-Havre *en route* for Switzerland.

Amongst those who are going to serve our country, are many friends whose faces one will miss, for many this call brings hardship and for not a few almost bankruptcy, to those we would say to keep a stout heart, remembering that even the darkest cloud has a silver lining.

To all who have answered the call of our country we wish a safe and speedy return.

CORRESPONDENCE.

(*In encouraging and publishing correspondence on any matter of interest to our readers we wish to stress that we do not necessarily subscribe to the opinions expressed therein. The following dwells on the traditional neutrality of Switzerland in an unorthodox manner but probably reflects the feelings of not a few of our compatriots. ED. S.O.*)

55, Firsby Avenue,
Shirley — Croydon,
11th Sept., 1939.

The Editor,
THE SWISS OBSERVER,
23, Leonard Street,
E.C.2.

Dear Sir,

I was sorely disappointed to find from your article entitled "WAR" that you, too, harbour the sentiment which appears so prevalent in Switzerland, namely that Switzerland should remain neutral in the present conflagration.

It simply passes my understanding that our country should take up this attitude which, I consider, is thoroughly unworthy of her. I will admit right away that Switzerland's neutrality is a matter of international agreement, but while Hitlerism is rampant such agreements count for very little, and events during the last few years have proved conclusively that neutrality would very quickly become a myth if Germany should emerge victorious from the present struggle.

When one recalls the anxiety that the Swiss registered during the liquidations of Austria and Czechoslovakia, and remembering the colossal amounts of money that Switzerland had to spend recently on defence work, it seems to me the most logical thing to take an active part in this fight to save Democracy, particularly for a country that likes to think of herself as the very cradle of Democracy.

If there could be two opinions as to the instigator of the present war, there would be some excuse for Switzerland keeping neutral, but the issue is so clear that no sane person can have any doubt on the matter.

I have the feeling that Switzerland, by taking an active part in this war on the side of England and France, could materially shorten its duration, as I believe this fact would have a marked moral effect on the poor, misled German nation.

It will be entirely due to the efforts of England and France if the freedom and independence of Switzerland is safe in future, and it appears to me wholly unworthy of our country to let others fight her battles while she looks on.

I believe that the example of Switzerland would even induce other neutral countries to revise their attitude, for there can be no doubt that peace in Europe can only be attained by the complete overthrow of the Nazi regime.

When one considers the prompt response of the British Dominions, it is indeed painful to think that the countries which will most immediately benefit by the overthrow of Hitlerism, namely the countries bordering on Germany, cannot pluck up enough courage to throw in their fate with England and France.