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The Swiss Observer

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NEWS AT RANDOM

The import and export figures for the month of September reflect the gravity of the present times. As compared with the month of August, imports have dropped by 51 million francs to 98 million and exports amount to only 55 million against 119 million francs.

By the collision of two army planes during manœuvres one of the pilots, Lt. Werner Reber from Wabern, lost his life.

A not very delectable atmosphere prevails in the Basle Grosse Rat whose president is a conspicuous communist and inter alia editor of the notorious paper "Freiheit," it has had several skirmishes with the local police. The socialist party to whose one-time support the president owes his exalted fauteuil has presented him with an address demanding in unmistakable terms his immediate resignation, but he remains adamant. "J'y suis et j'y reste."

A semi-official association called the "Cibaria" has come into existence at Berne for the purpose of supervising and regulating in conformity with the emergency decrees the import, export and distribution of all foodstuffs. It is hoped that the difficulties created by the limitations of the available import and transport avenues can thereby be better overcome than by efforts of individual firms. All the large concerns and wholesalers in this particular trade are members of the association; the president is Mr. A. Hodler of Berne, and the vice-president Mr. M. Maire of Basle.

A consultative commission to advise generally on imports and exports has been called into being by the Federal Council. The president of this large body is Minister Dr. Hans Sulzer (Winterthur) and the vice-president Dr. J. Hotz (Berne).

A recent bitter press campaign is recalled by the award of the Basle appeal court which reversed the decision of a lower court sentencing the local hotel union to the payment of Frs.30,000 damages for libelling the "Hotel Plan," the latter is now taking the case to the Federal Tribunal.

In order to meet a deficiency of lorry drivers which the army command has reported, the Federal Council has enacted a decree lowering the age limit; a driving licence can now be obtained on the completion of the 17th year.

During the month of September nearly 5,000 new radio licences have been taken out; the total number has now reached 578,411.

According to recent statistics the Neuchâtelois are the keenest film fans; for every thousand inhabitants 116 spend a few hours every day in the local picture houses. The proportion for most of the towns is between 60 and 100, but in our capital the films find the least favour where so far only 34 per 1,000 Bernese have found their way to the cinemas.

While most of our cantonal and municipal councils are spending the tax payers money freely and exhibit little compunction in presenting adverse budgets the Solothurn Kantonsrat is considering a motion to save an annual amount of over Frs.860,000 during the next four years.

The reorganisation of the Schweiz. Spar-und Kreditbank in St. Gall provides for the writing down of the share capital by 75% and at the general meeting held last week the whole of the old board consisting of nine directors was re-elected. It is stated that though the foreign investments have been written off no loss will be incurred by the creditors.

Both Basle and Schaffhausen are petitioning the Federal Council with the request to circumscribe exactly the powers of the military authorities. It is argued that the sovereignty of the cantonal and civil administration is in grave danger.

CITY SWISS CLUB.

Messieurs les membres sont avisés que

L'ASSEMBLEE MENSUELLE

aura lieu Mardi le 7 Novembre à 5.30 h. précises au Restaurant PAGANI 42, Great Portland Street, W.1.

ORDRE DU JOUR:

Procès-verbal.

Démissions.

Admissions.

Divers.

Le souper est facultatif et les participants sont priés de bien vouloir s'inscrire au plus tôt auprès de Monsieur P. F. Boehringer, 23, Leonard Street, E.C.2. (Téléphone: Clerkenwell 2321/2).

Le Comité

Two further military aircraft have come to grief in a thick fog over Berne when endeavouring to effect a landing; in the collision the two pilots, Lt. Gaston Delaporte and Lt. Jacques Kehrli died in the crash.

* * * * *

Some modification in the existing control of foreigners has been decided upon by the Federal Council. On the recommendation of the Army Command some foreigners may be interned or concentration camps may be established to house political refugees.

* * * * *

There is a movement among some of the political parties to bring before the new Parliament a proposal to levy a special tax from all foreigners permanently residing in Switzerland.

* * * * *

The Swiss railway system which is in control of the military director Col. Maurice Paschoud is divided into three operating districts corresponding to the divisions of the Federal Railways. The managers of the first and second divisions, Col. Fernand Chenaux and Col. Cesare Lucchini, remain at their posts as divisional military directors, while the third division is in charge of Col. Werner Baerlocher.

* * * * *

The September review of the Swiss Bank Corporation — which has now opened an agency in New York — supplies instructive information about the part Swiss immigrants played at all times in the public life of our great sister republic. Admiral Eberle was supreme Commander of the U.S. Navy from 1923 to 1927 and names like Studebaker (Emmenthal), Rickenbacher (Schwyz), Chevrolets (Bernese Jura) and Hoover (Argovie) are household words to-day.

WAR-TIME ORIENT EXPRESS.

The following is part of an article from "The Times" (21.10.39) and records the impressions of a traveller while passing through Switzerland on this famous express.

The Orient Express has resumed its journeyings across a troubled Europe. But no longer does it wait importantly for the traveller at Calais. It sets out

upon the long journey to Istanbul from the Gare de Lyon in Paris at 9 o'clock each evening. Its departure, across the French countryside, begins almost in silence. Even the cry of the conductor, "En voiture, mesdames et messieurs," has become a whisper rather than a chant.

Sitting in a compartment with the blinds drawn and trying to read a severely censored French newspaper is not likely to keep anyone awake. The beds had been made hours before. I followed the example of most other passengers and turned in. But not to sleep, nor to dream. The journey across France was one of hesitations, stops, and sudden rapid movements.

It was a queer experience to awake in a country which was not at war. Flicking up the blind in the early morning and seeing the green, clean-swept Swiss countryside with its background of mountains dusted with snow, induced an exhilaration which I felt was undeserved. There was a keen sense of being alive after those groping nights in London. When the train stopped and I heard the gurgle and tumble of a Swiss stream, the distant tinkle of cow bells, and the importunings of a vendor of chocolate the war vanished as a nightmare in the clear dawn. Only the newspapers told of grim happenings beyond the mountains. The restaurant car with its white napery, its coffee and rolls, its lavish display of pats of butter and its attentive waiters easily suggested the beginning of a winter sports holiday.

Passengers materialized. The majority, I discovered, were British. Two middle-aged ladies were journeying as far as Baghdad by way of Istanbul. They were the wives of British officials in Baghdad, and had no doubts about reaching their destination. Two or three men in the Colonial Service were going as far as Trieste, there to board an Italian liner going East. Other passengers included bank clerks returning to their posts in Belgrade, Bucharest, or Athens. A sprinkling of French passengers bound for Rumania, a Greek merchant from Manchester returning to Athens because his business in England had come to an abrupt end, and a couple of Rumanian officials nursing at all times a big, spectacularly sealed document — these constituted the obvious voyagers on the Orient Express.

There was no sign of war in Switzerland, not even a preponderance of uniforms. Only when the Orient Express entered Italy did the atmosphere of tension make itself felt again. As the train steamed past Lake Maggiore, with the fateful Stresa basking in the sunshine, passengers saw increasing numbers of greyish-green uniforms against the countryside. Buildings, too, were camouflaged. Through the windows one glimpsed infantry on manoeuvres. They were advancing in open formation. The soldiers looked back over their shoulders at the Orient Express, with its passengers safely sealed behind glass and steel.

Few of us were sorry to be leaving Italy and entering Yugoslavia. Meals and the ordinary purchases of travellers at railway stations throughout Italy had proved expensive. And throughout the 24 hours it had been impossible to obtain coffee. No explanation was offered; only a shrug of the shoulders and the alternative of tea and a slice of lemon.

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