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# The Swiss Observer

FOUNDED BY MR. P. F. BOEHRINGER.

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## NEWS AT RANDOM

Statistics just published give the value of imports during last year as 1889.4 million francs (1606.9 million in 1938), and the exports 1297.6 million (1316.6 million in 1938). Most of the 282 million increase in imports has taken place during the last four months and this period is also responsible for a loss in exports of about 190 million francs as compared with September/December 1938.

\* \* \*

Particulars are now published of the financial proposals which Federal Councillor Wetter will present at the coming session of Parliament. The extraordinary military expenses in connection with the present mobilisation will reach by the middle of this year the stupendous sum of  $2\frac{1}{2}$  milliard francs. It is proposed that this amount — and the further increase caused by a prolongation of hostilities — should be despatched by the present generation, i.e., within the next thirty years or so. As, however, the figure is too large for a reasonable plan of amortisation operated within that period, a tremendous effort will be set on foot to reduce it to limits which come within the scope of an annual defence tax, say about 1,800 million francs. This reduction will be secured by a war profits tax, the appropriation of 250 million francs from the exchange equalisation fund of the National Bank, and a defence contribution in the form of a property (Vermögenssteuer) tax of between  $1\frac{1}{2}$  and 3%.

\* \* \*

In order to counteract speculation in farm and building lands a decree issued by the Federal Council makes it compulsory to obtain the consent of a local authority before a transfer or additional mortgage can be registered. No sale with an increment of more than 30% will be allowed, even if through intensive cultivation the value of the land may have increased beyond that figure.

\* \* \*

The Organising Committee of the Swiss National Exhibition in Zurich has forwarded a cheque for Frs. 50,000 to the Swiss Minister in Helsinki to assist in Finnish relief work.

The collection in Switzerland on behalf of Finland has enabled the committee to forward a first contribution of half a million francs to the Finnish Red Cross.

\* \* \*

The Federal Court has sustained the appeal of Federal Councillor Leon Nicole against the prohibition of making public speeches in the canton Vaud.

\* \* \*

One out of four is riding a bicycle in Switzerland, the number of licences taken out in 1938 being 1,212,433. The poor man's car is most popular in the cantons of Berne, Zurich and Aargau, whilst in the Ticino its popularity is on the decline.

\* \* \*

A former director of the well-known watch and munition factory, Tavaro S.A. in Geneva, Auguste Varaud, has been arrested; he is charged with fraud and falsification of documents and is said to have sold to two competing firms certain patented secrets of manufacture.

\* \* \*

Federal Councillor Giuseppe Motta died last Tuesday morning; he had been ailing for some considerable time. The loss of Our Grand Old Man, whose far-sighted and consistent policy had maintained the unique position of our country is extremely serious, especially in these critical times. The British Government have sent a message of sympathy to the Federal authorities at Berne. The following obituary is taken from "The Times" (24/1/40).

M. Giuseppe Motta, who was five times President of the Swiss Confederation and probably the most outstanding figure in Swiss political life, died in Berne on January 23rd, at the age of 68. He had been a member of the Swiss Federal Council for nearly thirty years, and was for the greater part of that period the most eloquent representative of Italian-speaking Switzerland. His work in connection with the League of Nations had given him an international reputation.

Giuseppe Motta was born in 1871 at Airolo, in the Canton Ticino, where his father was postmaster at the time of the horse-drawn post coaches. He was educated partly in Italy and partly in French-speaking and in German-speaking Switzerland; and this accounted for his remarkable ability to speak French and German as well as his native language. He established himself in his Canton and soon became one of the prominent lawyers of the Ticino. He sat for some time in the Council of State as a Conservative member.

In 1899 he was elected deputy on the National Council, and in 1911 Federal Councillor. He was