

News at random

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NEWS AT RANDOM

After June 30th the cantonal bank notes will lose their legal tender. The National Bank founded in 1907 was given the monopoly for the issue of notes, but the existing notes of the cantonal banks continued to enjoy currency throughout the country.

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A strict control on the wearing of military uniforms and armlets is being exercised; it is stated that their misuse has facilitated spying facilities.

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Owing to bad visibility, a Swiss plane crossed into German territory last week to the neighbourhood of Waldshut; it was recognised but apart from a reference in the daily bulletin no further notice was taken of the incident by the German command.

* * *

Sensational revelations may be expected following the arrest of ex-colonel A. Fonjallaz; the news was released to the Swiss press on January 29th, though the arrest took place on the 25th at Schaffhausen when he was on the point of boarding in company with a German agent the express to Berlin. Col. Fonjallaz has been on the retired list for many years and he will be remembered as a prominent member of the "frontist" movement which sought to remodel our Constitution on fascist lines. By his activities he ostracised himself and amongst other callings he was dismissed from the lectureship which he held at the Federal Polytechnic High School at Zurich. Elsewhere he would be described as "Nuisance number one" in Switzerland. For some time he endeavoured to interest Italian political circles in a fascist organisation he intended to create in our country. He is now charged with espionage in favour of a belligerent power and it is stated that a considerable number of persons are implicated. Further arrests have been effected in Bellinzona and Geneva; it is also stated that a son, René Fonjallaz, a writer and former Olympic bobsleigh rider, has been detained in his chalet at St. Moritz together with a German woman staying at the same place.

Fair-reaching efforts are being undertaken by the Geneva authorities to balance the $5\frac{1}{2}$ million deficit which is anticipated in the 1940 budget. By increasing the existing cantonal taxes by 30% an amount of $3\frac{1}{2}$ million will be secured and it is hoped to find the remaining two million by economies in the administration one of which is the withholding of the statutory salary increases of the whole of the civil servants. The difficulties are accentuated by the strong opposition on the part of the socialists.

* * *

A welcome feature is revealed by statistics just published about the population of St. Gall. The number of inhabitants has been slowly dwindling since the last war, but the year 1939, with a figure of 63,571, shows an increase of 80 as compared with the previous year; 13% of the total are foreigners.

* * *

Naturalisation in the canton Wallis will in future be granted only to those whose mother is of Swiss nationality or who have been educated at Swiss schools and have spent their youth in the country.

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The Neuchâtel Cantonal Bank has earned a net profit of over a million francs for the twelve months to end December last.

* * *

In order to study ways and means by which Swiss help can be rendered to the best advantage, National Councillor Henri Valloton has gone to Finland; he was also the bearer of what is thought is the last message of Federal Councillor Motta expressing sincere sympathy and admiration for the heroic fight for independence of the Finnish people.

* * *

A general warning has been issued to skiing enthusiasts on account of the great danger of avalanches caused by fresh snow and wind.

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The recent explosions at the Werkzeugmaschinenfabrik Oerlikon which caused several casualties are stated to be due to sabotage; the cantonal police authorities are following up the matter and a reward of Frs. 2,000 is advertised for information which will lead to the arrest of one of the malefactors.

MADAME THURNHEER VISITS THE HOME FOR AGED SWISS.

Madame Thurnheer, the wife of the new Swiss Minister to the Court of St. James's, whose arrival in this country has recently been announced, has taken an early opportunity of identifying herself with the welfare of the Swiss Colony.

The occasion was the quarterly and annual meeting of the Home for aged Swiss, held last Saturday, February 3rd, when the Committee and the Home were honoured by the presence of Madame Thurnheer.

In company of the new President of the Swiss Benevolent Society, Col. A. Bon, and Mr. F. M. Gamper, Vice-President, and members of the Committee, Madame Thurnheer was shown round the Home by the Matron and took the keenest interest in the welfare of the resident pensioners and in the installations and organisation of the Home. Her visit and the kind words she had for everyone — of sympathy to the aged guests and of appreciation and encouragement to the Committee and Staff — gave obvious pleasure to all who were thus privileged to meet her. That Madame Thurnheer's first official contact with the social activity of the Swiss Colony in London should have been meant to the work of the Swiss Benevolent Society and its Home for old Swiss pensioners will, no doubt, appeal to all circles of the Colony.

Madame Thurnheer was kind enough to stay on after her inspection and followed with no less interest the actual proceedings of the meeting, at the beginning and conclusion of which Mr. Gamper, who was in the chair in the absence of the President of the Home, Mr. H. Senn, at present in Switzerland, welcomed her and expressed the great pleasure her visit had given to all. The Chairman also officially welcomed the new President of the Swiss Benevolent Society and thanked Col. Bon for having kindly spared the time to attend this meeting.

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LA SITUATION POLITIQUE QU'A CREEE LA MORT DE M. MOTTA.

La tombe s'étant refermée sur celui qui fut un grand magistrat, nous ne pouvons tarder à examiner ici la situation créée par son décès, au point de vue politique.

Mais aussi, disons-le tout de suite, afin de ne décevoir personne : on est obligé pour l'instant de s'en tenir à quelques constatations de fait et à quelques hypothèses. A quelqu'un qui l'interrogeait sur le successeur probable de M. Motta, un parlementaire a répondu : "Je voudrais bien pouvoir vous renseigner, car cela prouverait que je le suis moi-même." N'importe, tâchons de voir clair dans ce brouillard ; et d'abord, distinguons deux choses qu'il ne faut pas confondre.

M. Motta doit être remplacé comme conseiller fédéral et comme chef du département politique. L'Assemblée fédérale élira le nouveau membre du gouvernement ; elle n'a rien à dire quant à la répartition des portefeuilles, qui est de la compétence exclusive du collège exécutif lui-même. Il n'est donc pas nécessaire, pour pourvoir le département politique d'un titulaire, d'attendre ce que décideront les groupes en vue de l'élection. Il semble normal qu'un département aussi important que celui des affaires extérieures soit confié à une personnalité ayant déjà cette expérience qui ne s'acquierte qu'avec les années.

La tradition veut du reste que les plus anciens membres du directoire aient le privilège d'opter pour un portefeuille vacant. Elle est légitime. Et il ne subsiste pour ainsi dire aucun doute que notre diplomatie trouvera son chef parmi les magistrats actuellement en charge.

Deux noms ont été prononcés : celui de M. le président Pilet-Golaz et celui de M. Etter. L'un et l'autre possèdent de hautes qualités qui les désignent pour un tel poste. Si l'on en croit certaines rumeurs, on préférerait cependant, dans les conjonctures présentes, y voir un Romand. Ce qui est sûr, c'est que M. Pilet-Golaz a toujours porté un intérêt très vif aux problèmes de politique extérieure, qu'il connaît bien et sur lesquels il aime à se documenter d'une manière précise. Son caractère, qui allie à une réelle souplesse une ténacité toute vaudoise, lui rendrait plus facile une tâche qui, par elle-même, est bien loin de l'être.

Mais n'anticipons pas. Nous venons de le relever : le Conseil fédéral est seul juge de la question. Toute pression par laquelle on tenterait d'influer sur sa décision irait à fin contraire. Cette décision, au demeurant, ne saurait tarder beaucoup.

Bien plus complexe est la succession de M. Motta comme membre du Conseil fédéral. Elle soulève, il ne faut pas le dissimuler, des difficultés considérables.

Le défunt représentait à la fois le parti conservateur-catholique et le Tessin. Mis à part le cas où la majorité ferait une concession au parti socialiste — hypothèse sur laquelle nous reviendrons tout à l'heure — il faut trouver un candidat conservateur. Et il serait évidemment préférable de le choisir dans le Tessin, qu'il serait fâcheux de priver du siège qu'il détenait. Les arguments favorables à une participation de la Suisse italienne sont d'un bon poids : cohésion nationale, droit des minorités, bref, les mêmes raisons que nous invoquons souvent en faveur de la Suisse romande.