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The Swiss Observer

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NEWS AT RANDOM

Swiss papers are reaching us somewhat erratically the most recent issue being dated February 18th. The Neue Zürcher Zeitung and the Tribune de Genève are the only dailies which find our office. Some of the following news items are of course of a later date as they are gleaned from a variety of other sources.

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A memorable speech was delivered by Federal President Wetter at the convention of the liberal democratic party held in Berne on March 23rd. He said that there were times when the defence of our democratic ideal was an easy matter; in the last two and a half decades this had radically changed. We now know that the value of our guaranteed neutrality was represented by the measures in which we could defend our frontiers by the strength and persistence of our own forces. He could not anticipate the outcome of the war but he was convinced that as a free country we can and shall survive. An unqualified neutrality will remain our policy after the war. Our economic life is based on a free exchange of goods with all countries as Europe alone cannot satisfy all our requirements. It may be necessary to take an active part in international economic reconstruction but the basis of such a co-operation must be the free and unfettered relationship between independent states. Serious problems demanding strenuous efforts were before us and they could only be solved by a strong, healthy and united people. He had no objection to legitimate criticism inbred in every Swiss but unfair attacks on the Constitution of the State undermining authority and prestige abroad would not be tolerated. Every citizen must be aware of his responsibility and act accordingly.

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During the present session the National Council has held a debate on the question of food and raw material supplies. Federal Councillor Stampfli read a report on the position of food rations and intimated that cheese supplies at the end of February this year were larger than at the same time last year. M. Stampfli further stated that sufficient potato and vegetable supplies would be forthcoming to carry Switzerland over to next winter. He added that the necessary would be done to lower the price of fodder.

Federal Councillor Stampfli mentioned that the talks in Madrid — since concluded — would result in more shipping being placed at Switzerland's disposal and he stressed the fact that Switzerland would necessarily be dependent on home production to the greatest extent.

M. Stampfli went on to say that the position with regard to raw materials for industrial purposes was more difficult. Supplies of coal were assured up to the end of April, he said, then further deliveries of coal and iron would depend on the new arrangements with Germany. He appealed for careful and economical handling of all commodities and reminded his listeners that the army must come first.

The draft bill for a Swiss Naval Flag is shortly to come into force.

In conclusion Federal Councillor Stampfli warned the people not to fall into indifference or to indulge in self-pity.

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On March 27th, 1941, an agreement facilitating trade relations between Switzerland and Spain was signed in Madrid by the Spanish Foreign Minister, Sener, and Professor Keller, Delegate of the Federal Council. The liquidation of Bank Clearings was also signed and the commercial delegation then left for Lisbon to resume trade negotiations there.

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In connection with the question of utilising all arable land to the utmost, the fixed price of potatoes and vegetables was described as too low. Prices of such commodities are expected to be raised shortly.

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The Swiss War Food Office announced on the 19th March that owing to the very strong and continuous north wind (Bise), the soil had been badly dried up and that it was essential that farmers should roll the earth surface and thus allow the water to rise to the roots of the young plants.

The same Department announced that as from the 14th April the price of bread will be four centimes higher. Thus the kilogram will cost 52 centimes instead of 48 centimes. Since the outbreak of war bread has gone up 9 centimes.

CITY SWISS CLUB.

Messieurs les membres sont avisés que

L'ASSEMBLEE MENSUELLE

aura lieu Samedi, le 3 mai à 12.45 p.m. au Brown's Hotel, Dover Street, (near Green Park Tube Station).

ORDRE DU JOUR:

Procès-verbal.

Démissions.

Admissions.

Divers.

Dejeuner à 1.0 h. précises. Les participants sont priés de bien vouloir s'inscrire au plus tôt auprès de Mons. H. Bingguely, 167 Clapham Road, S.W.9 (Téléphone: Reliance 4150).

Le Comité.

The Committee of the Pro Juventute have sent food to hundreds of Swiss Children in France and Belgium. The Swiss Committee for assisting children who have suffered through enemy action and the "Schweizerhülfe" have each given Frs.5,000 towards the costs.

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The Federal Council has also decided to raise the price of beer. The new price which came into force on April 1st shows an increase of 6 to 12 centimes per litre.

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Director Winkelmann spoke on the subject of agricultural training at a meeting of the Association of Swiss Farmers on the 21st March, 1941. He advocated an agricultural apprenticeship of one year with the chance to qualify on conclusion.

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The Federal Statistical Office states that the index figure for wholesale prices during the month of January shows an increase of 1.6% as compared with the previous month; it is now 166.5 (Basis 100% in July 1914). The cost of living index figure records a similar increase to 162.9% of which 18.7% has taken place since the beginning of the present hostilities (end Aug. 1939).

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At the General Meeting of Swiss Engineers in Zurich, the conviction was expressed that after the war the increase in the use of electricity would continue; the meeting urged the Government to take this into consideration by preparing plans to satisfy demands.

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As a consequence of an all-round increase of oil prices petrol is now being retailed at the equivalent of 4/10 per gallon.

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This year's Basle Fair which is being held from the 19th to the 29th of this month has attracted a record participation from practically the whole of our industrial and manufacturing undertakings. Though the existing exhibition halls have been considerably extended by the construction of three capacious tents a large number of belated applications for space had to be refused. Preparations are already in full swing to marshal agricultural products for the "Comptoir" at Lausanne which will open its doors as usual later in the year.

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The new Swiss Centre for co-ordinating traffic communications held its first meeting for 1941 under the presidency of Mr. Armin Meili. The Centre has taken over the publicity service abroad of the Swiss Federal Railways; its principal aim is to further tourist propaganda.

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The "Schweiz. Kaufmännische Verein" discussed recently the questions of subjecting opening of new business concerns to official licences. They arrived at the conclusion, however, that such a law would make it impossible for young men to start on their own and would thus stifle initiative.

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The "Regierungsrat" of St. Gall has passed a resolution whereby stock is to be taken of all supplies of hay to prevent producers from holding back supplies in the hope of obtaining higher prices later on.

At a recent sitting of the Basle Grosse Rat the finance director stressed the necessity of curbing cantonal expenses. The annual accounts for the last ten years had each closed with a deficit and the state expenditure per head of population had risen from Frs. 116 in 1909 to Frs.415 in 1939. Though fresh taxation was unavoidable it would be impossible to sustain the present high standard of living.

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English business hours were introduced in the administrative and commercial offices of St. Gall chiefly with the idea of saving fuel. The innovation, however, had to be abandoned after a short trial period as the short luncheon interval did not appeal to the black-coated fraternity who were evidently resolved not to forgo the traditional "Kaffejass."

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Trolley busses are now circulating in Berne between the main station and the Schosshalde via the Bärengraben and between the Inselspital and Bümplitz.

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Commenced over twelve months ago the air-raid shelter at the Bundesbahnhof in Berne is now completed; it is said to be bomb- and gasproof and offers refuge to about a thousand people with seating accommodation for 600.

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Increased taxation of both income and capital is the consequence of the budget for the canton Geneva which for the present year anticipates a deficit of over six million francs.

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The Ober Toggenburg (St. Gall) has also taken a fancy to the Trolleybus. The districts of Nesslau, Wildhaus and Buchs are being wired and the service is expected to open early in autumn.

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The townspeople of St. Gall are in the lucky position of evading increased taxation. The 1941 budget shows a deficit of just over Frs.700,000 but the Stadtrat decided to maintain the present taxation rate of nine per mille. — To end of last year the number of inhabitants amounted to 63,321 of whom over 12% were foreigners, mostly Germans.

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It was announced on the 22nd March that the steamer "Armando" — 3,800 tons d.w. — which is sailing under the Panama flag from New York to Genoa, is carrying goods destined for Switzerland. The ship is eventually to be placed at the disposal of Swiss export trade for shipments between Genoa and New York.

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The French Government has apologized for the unintentional bombing of Kreuzlingen and has offered to pay compensation for the damage caused.

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The maintenance of the many thousands of emigrants or fugitives who are being granted asylum in our country has proved such a financial burden that the voluntary assistance organisations can no more cope with the problem. The Federal Council has there-

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fore decreed that moneyed emigrants shall contribute towards the support of indigent refugees and a percentage on both capital and income is to be levied for this purpose. Any emigrant refusing to participate in

this gesture of solidarity will be deprived of his permit of residence.

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The close relations existing between Liechtenstein and our country have been further cemented by an agreement permitting nationals of the former to accept employment in Switzerland without any formalities.

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Protestant clergymen in the canton Geneva are likely to have a hard time during the coming months on account of lack of funds of the "Eglise Nationale" which in spite of the name is not subsidised by the state. The financial support amongst the members of the church (about 95,000) is said to be very poor and has resulted in a deficit of Frs.60,000 for the year to end of December 1940.

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One of the last living veterans of the 1870/71 frontier occupation Jacob Ernst of Gossau (Zurich) celebrated recently his 100th anniversary.

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A standardised radio set is now being manufactured by order of the Federal Post authorities and will be sold at Frs.128.—. Housed in a small bakelite cabinet this 4-valve superheterodyne instrument covers the medium-wave band only.

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According to the "Leader," March 29th, Swiss household cooking is developing on new lines but the description of Rösti is a revelation to us. This is what our contemporary says: "Swiss cooks have now to use a newly invented potato flour resembling corn starch. Bread rations have been reduced by 60 per cent. in all hotels. The Swiss speciality — rösti kartoffel — has been banned. It is (or was) boiled potatoes chopped and fried in a golden brown pancake. Fat is now so scarce that the Government has had to abolish this national delicacy. Recently confectioners were taken by surprise when an unheralded radio announcement from Berne forbade whipped cream for luxury dishes. Prizes have been offered to any Swiss cook who can devise either a new way of frying without oil or a substitute for whipped cream. The Swiss chocolate trade has also been badly hit. Figures just issued show an export decline of more than 56 per cent." If any of our readers in the domaine of gastronomy can devise a recipe for frying without oil or fat we shall be delighted to forward it on to the Prize Committee, and the editor's spouse will be greatly relieved and most anxious to add her modest reward!

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A giant pine tree reaching a height of 37½ metre and reputed to be 362 years old has been felled near Davos Platz.

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As the usual springtime shortage of cattle suitable for slaughter has been made acute through lack of fodder, the Swiss War Food Office has arranged that only two-thirds of the number of animals slaughtered in April 1939 and 1940 will be available this year.

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Hans Wunderly-Volkart died in Meilen (Zurich) after a short illness at the age of 70. Formerly a leading figure in local industry — he owned and managed a tannery — he was very popular in sporting circles having been honorary member and several times president of the Automobile Club. At the age of 65 he participated in a bear hunt expedition to Spitzbergen.

The Swiss Skiing Champion, Fritz Kaufmann, died suddenly at his home in Grindelwald, at the age of 35; he represented our country at Olympic Games and other international meetings.

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Former National Councillor, Dr. Giovanni Polar, died at Lugano at the age of 73; he was actively associated with many undertakings in the canton Ticino notably the electricity works Sopra-Ceneri.

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Raoul Houriet, a former advocate in La Chaux-de-Fonds, died at Lausanne at the age of 72. For a number of years he was secretary to the Federal Tribunal and previous to this appointment held important judiciary offices in Egypt notably the one of President of the Mixed Courts.

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Dr. V. E. Scherer, a popular and active personality in Basle political and art circles died in an Arosa sanatorium on February 13th at the age of 60. A widely known lawyer he was for thirty years a member of the Grosse Rat; in 1919 he was elected to the States Council from which body he resigned in 1925. At the time of his death he was a member of the National Council to which he belonged since 1928.

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M. Eduard Luscher, a member of the Bernese Government and of the National Council died on March 29th. M. Luscher was also a member of the Executive Committee of the Swiss Federal Railways and a former Councillor of the municipality of Berne.

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Lieut. Franz Morg, age 25, of Winterthur, was accidentally killed at Mesolcina (Ticino) by the explosion of a mine.

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During patrol duties in the Gianduns valley (Grisons) Corp. Fritz Breinlinger, age 36, of Neuhausen (Schaffhausen) stepped on a false snow bridge and lost his life in the fall.

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A grave and fatal occurrence is recorded from Fribourg where eleven infants in the childrens home Monrevers were erroneously inoculated with a poisonous serum instead of a diphtheria vaccin.

APPEL AUX SUISSES DE L'ETRANGER.

Les mesures de défense prises pour protéger l'indépendance de la Suisse et préserver le pays du fléau de la guerre ont exigé des dépenses considérables. La dette de la Confédération s'en est trouvée tellement accrue qu'il est nécessaire de procéder sans délai à des amortissements. Dans ce but, le Conseil fédéral a décidé de percevoir une contribution unique au titre de sacrifice pour la défense nationale. Toute personne domiciliée en Suisse doit verser une contribution s'élevant, pour les personnes morales, à 1.5 pour cent de la fortune nette, et allant, pour les personnes physiques, de 1.5 à 4.5 pour cent de cette fortune.

L'arrêté concernant le sacrifice pour la défense nationale prévoit aussi que des dons volontaires peuvent être faits à la patrie. Le Conseil fédéral a tenu à ce que les milieux ayant le désir et la possibilité de verser plus que ce qu'ils doivent ou ceux qui, sans être assujettis au sacrifice, veulent néanmoins manifester par un geste leur fidélité au pays, aient l'occasion de réaliser cette volonté. Il pensait aussi, en ce