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The Swiss Observer

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NEWS AT RANDOM

The following news items are again obtained from a variety of sources, however, no Swiss dailies have reached us since our last issue. We have been fortunate in receiving the bulletin of the Schweiz. Mittel-presse (W. Grossenbacher — Berne) which is of considerable service to us.

The Federal Council have decided to raise a loan of Frs.300,000,000 for the consolidation of floating debts and in payment of two Government loans recently fallen due. The loan is to be divided into two parts: a) Bonds at 3% interest to be reimbursed after 10 years b) Treasury bills at 3% to be reimbursed after 6 years. Both loans were issued at 100%.

The Federal War Food Office announces that in spite of the precarious position of imports and the lack of fodder, rations for June are to remain unchanged, except for butter, which is to be decreased by 50 grammes, thus reducing the ration from 300 grammes to 250 grammes. An extra sugar ration of 3kg. per person is to be allowed, however, for preserving. This extra ration must be kept exclusively for this purpose.

The ordinary accounts of the Confederation for the 12 months to end of December, 1940, close with a deficit of 30.2 million francs; the debit balance on the extraordinary accounts due to war conditions amounts to 860 million. The indebtedness of the Confederation is thereby increased by about 845 million to a total of 2,776.8 millions.

The city and canton of Geneva have come to an agreement for introducing trolley buses; the cost is estimated to reach about 1.4 million francs of which about Frs.150,000 will be spent in extracting the existing tram rails.

The Heads of the Corporations of Swiss Towns have decided to support the measures to be taken against the uncontrolled rise in prices of foodstuffs. A low price level in favour of the poorer classes is to be maintained.

The cantonal authorities of Zurich have accepted the draft bill cancelling the proposed deduction in salaries. The debate on the complete revision of the question of wages of local officials continues.

The new "Conseiller d'etat" of Fribourg, M. Ackermann, was sworn in on May 7th, 1941.

A new cantonal hospital has been opened in Chur (Grisons); it contains 150 beds, the most up-to-date appliances and costs 4½ million francs.

At the Obwalden Landsgemeinde held on the last Sunday in April ten naturalisation demands from foreigners were considered. Three of them were turned down though considerable sums of money were offered for the privilege.

The Department for Public Economy has decided — in conformity with the Federal Decree of October 17th, 1939, concerning the distribution of food — to introduce two meatless days a week, namely on Wednesdays and Fridays.

A further decree has been issued from the Swiss War Food Office, causing all available arable land — meadows and garden plots included — to be planted with potatoes.

The Federal Council have authorised the addition of 100% to the cost of production for spirits made from stone fruits; the selling price is to be increased by 100%.

The existing import difficulties are reflected in the falling-off of customs duties. To end of March last only 15 million francs was collected against 28.4 million last year and the total revenue for the first three months this year amounts to 41 million or 30 million less than for the same period last year.

Game and hunt licenses in the canton Solothurn produce about Frs.100,000 of which 60% is appropriated by the respective communes; the remaining 40% benefits the cantonal welfare institution for old people, widows and orphans. The sport is very popular in all classes of the population.

Tobacco duties during the last year have brought to the federal treasury 50.9 million francs against 45.4 million in the previous year; the increase is said to be due to the mobilisation and less unemployment.

Thanks to seasonal work on the land and the resumption of building operations unemployment in Switzerland has practically disappeared; the 7,800 registered (2,600 women) are composed mainly of elderly and physically failing people.

It was announced on the 23rd ult., that telegraphic communications between Switzerland and Alsace and Lorraine had been resumed.

On the occasion of General Guisan's visit to the Swiss Defence lines on April 24th there was a military parade at Payerne.

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May day was celebrated by the socialist parties and trade unions all over Switzerland. Zurich and Berne saw the traditional public procession, whereas in Basle a meeting took place in the "Volkshaus." In Geneva the manifestations were limited to group meetings as public demonstrations were not allowed. Everywhere the day passed without incident.

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With the beginning of summer-time the General decided in accordance with a decision of the Federal Council, that blackout should start one hour later, as from May 5th, i.e., instead of at 10 o'clock as up to now it will begin at 11 p.m. and continue until 5 a.m. as hitherto.

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On June 7th and 8th there will be a collection throughout Switzerland for the benefit of the International Red Cross Committee in Geneva.

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Basle is to have the Federal Shipping Office where a register will be kept of all ships entitled to fly the Swiss marine flag. Dispositions have been drawn up to regulate the rights and duties of owners, captains and crew, etc. So far imports from overseas have been effected by the government charter of neutral shipping but it is now possible for private interests to purchase and operate their own ships.

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Negotiations to release large quantities of goods lying in Spain and Portugal and belonging to Swiss Importers have now been successfully completed. They will be transported via Genoa thanks to the good offices of the Italian authorities.

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Private motor cars have since the beginning of this month disappeared from the roads throughout Switzerland. The issue of petrol has been suspended the much reduced stocks being reserved for lorries. Imports from the Rumanian oilfields have practically ceased there being no direct communication.

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At a recent meeting in Berne, members of the Commission for War Economy stated that the extension of the agricultural programme was a success.

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The cultivation of waste land officially ordered by the Federal authorities has had very gratifying results. Some of the cantons have exceeded the prescribed quota. The work has been carried out by the farmers who were assisted by soldiers on special leave and by the temporary release of army horses. Volunteers from towns and industrial centres also offered their services as well as the 12,000 Polish soldiers still interned in our country.

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A notable anniversary was quietly celebrated on March 31st last; thirty years ago at 2 o'clock in the morning the two working parties, North and South, piercing the Lötschberg tunnel joined hands thus joining the Bernese Oberland to the Valais. During the construction one of the tunnels under the Gastern valley collapsed causing the death of several workmen and necessitating a deviation from the original plan.

The railway track passes between Frutigen and Brig through no less than 35 tunnels and 22 bridges and viaducts and is even to-day considered a masterpiece of engineering.

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The accounts for 1940 of the central committee of the International Red Cross submitted to the Federal authorities show an income of about 2.6 million francs 80% of which has been subscribed in Switzerland; a small part only of the expenses is defrayed by the belligerent states to whom the office in Geneva renders invaluable services. By far the greatest part of the labour to alleviate the lot of the large number of prisoners of war is discharged by an army of 3,000 ardent volunteers. The magnitude of the task is shown by the fact that so far over eight million names have been indexed.

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The falling birth rate has not yet affected the lively family in the Bärengraben at Berne where five little bruins have just made their appearance.

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The Budapest University have conferred the title of Dr. hon. causa on Prof. Laur for his agrarian studies.

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The new Recruits for the Swiss Vatican Guard took the oath on May 6th, 1941.

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National Councillor Dr. A. Oeri received hearty congratulations from friend and foe on the completion on April 1st of forty years' activity as chief editor of the Basler Nachrichten. Ever a staunch champion of our Constitution, rights and liberty, he was a deciding factor in our country joining the League of Nations the collapse of which remained a great disappointment to him.

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Out of nearly a hundred applicants Max Vogel, of Fribourg, secured the appointment of sports and gymnastics instructor for Iran (Persia); he has been given a three years' contract during which time he is to organise light athletics and school gymnastics in that country.

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It is stated that the bulk of the Swiss residing in Yugoslavia and Greece have preferred to remain at their posts though they have been officially enjoined to make use of the facilities for repatriation. There are about 300 in each of the two countries, mostly in comfortable commercial positions.

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The American alpinist Dudley F. Wolfe who died recently during a Himalaya expedition bequeathed about Frs. 26,500 to the Swiss Alpine Club for scientific research.

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A new series of eight airmail stamps has been issued on the 1st of this month. The designs are the work of Albert Yersin in Pully. Instead of the former symbolic subjects landscapes will be shown thus: Jungfrau (30 cts.), Valais (40), Lac Léman (50), Alpstein (60), Ticino (70), Lake of Lucerne (1 Fr.), Engadine (2 Fr.) and Churfirsten (5 Fr.).

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In spite of adverse conditions 492 Swiss emigrated to countries oversea notably to the U.S.A., the South American republics and Australia.