

Zeitschrift: The Swiss observer : the journal of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK

Herausgeber: Federation of Swiss Societies in the United Kingdom

Band: - (1941)

Heft: 988

Rubrik: Gleanings from the English papers

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

Download PDF: 09.12.2025

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

GLEANINGS FROM THE ENGLISH PRESS.

Apart from foreign propaganda and its supposed effects on Swiss policy and outlook, articles dealing with events in our country are of necessity reduced to a minimum. Here are a few references both instructive and entertaining.

* * *

The Beleaguered Swiss is the title of a gratifying survey which appeared in the "*Spectator*," May 2nd, under the name of Dr. W. W. Schütz; it is reproduced in full.

The self-preservation of a small country surrounded by Axis territory represents a remarkable feat. Neutrality becomes in such a case a status the preservation of which demands sacrifices and determination hardly less severe than in the case of warring countries. This is particularly so in the field of economics in face of an expansionist terrorism trying to force the smaller nations of Europe into what is vaguely called the "New Order." Indeed, it seems hardly credible that an unobtrusive and comparatively powerless State like Switzerland should successfully maintain not only its political and intellectual independence, but also its economic integrity and self-determination. For the geographical situation of Switzerland is such that since the entry of Italy into the war and the conclusion of the French Armistice in the summer of 1940 all the frontiers adjoin, and therefore all the routes from and into Switzerland lead through, Axis territory; only a small strip of coastline at the south-west corner of the Lake of Geneva borders on Vichy France.

This position imposes a multitude of vast problems upon Switzerland in economic spheres as well as simply in the task of keeping communications with the outside world. Already at the outbreak of War in September, 1939, Switzerland's important line of communication with Great Britain, the Rhine was closed by the Third Reich. Transit agreements were concluded with both Allied France and non-belligerent Italy, according to which the Swiss were permitted to use the harbours of Marseilles, Bordeaux, Genoa, Savona and Trieste. Fifteen Greek ships (of 136,000 tons) were chartered, and the belligerent nations were informed about their whereabouts and movements. But for the transport of British coal, which had been shipped till then by the Rhine, Seine-shipments and rail-transport had to be substituted: 90,000 tons of coal were captured by the invading German army, and discussion is still going on about their release. Other goods could not proceed through the Mediterranean, for the Italian refusal to allow Greek ships under the Swiss flag to sail to any of the registered harbours made it necessary for Switzerland to try to bring these goods overland from Lisbon *via* Spain and Vichy France. But the Spanish railways proved incapable of coping with additional transport, for Franco Spain is short of wagons. Some forty thousand tons of goods still wait to be moved from Lisbon.

These problems arise chiefly because Switzerland insists on maintaining her relations with the democratic countries. The Third Reich, immediately after its ships were driven from the high seas, charged its Swiss customer tremendous fees for

those goods destined for Switzerland which had been transported in these very ships, which had to take refuge in neutral harbours. Sums up to 20 per cent. of the value of the goods were demanded if the Swiss moved them from these Nazi vessels lying idly in harbour, and hard bargaining about them still continues. Yet the insistence of the country on maintaining its economic independence is stronger than the temporary advantages which might be obtained by falling in with the "New Order." The pressure upon Switzerland in this direction is, naturally, heavy. But as in the question of communications, the Swiss maintain in all other spheres of their national economy and international relations complete control of their own affairs.

Since it is now becoming practically impossible to obtain the essential goods from England and other democracies which had been the main vendors of coal and petrol, still stronger efforts are being made in that "beleaguered fortress," as the Swiss call their little country, to become as far as possible independent of the outside world. They send their own wagons to foreign countries in order to obtain their loads there; for in spite of assurances given at late as 1939 that the international practice of sending exports in the rolling-stock of the exporter would be recognised, these, like other promises by the "New Orderers" were soon repudiated. Inside the Swiss frontiers up to 80 per cent. of the railways are power-driven and the remainder are being gradually transferred from coal to electricity. The struggle for independence of coal and petrol is, however, only part of the tremendous effort which is being made to keep the country out of the Axis sphere of influence. Those raw materials which are vital for the maintenance of Swiss industry are imported under an agreement providing that these goods shall not be re-exported unless they have been used in an industrial process. In the matter of payments the Axis uses its power to strangle its small neighbour, so that the principle of payment is being abolished in favour of the principle of mutual exchange.

General pressure on the resources of the country is heavy, because the replacement of stocks which are now gradually being used up is becoming increasingly difficult owing to blockade, counter-blockade, and the general political tension. The natural consequence is a system of rationing of essentials as

CITY SWISS CLUB.

Members and Ladies are cordially invited to a

LUNCHEON & SOCIAL PARTY

(6/6)

on Saturday, June 7th at 12.45 for 1 p.m.

at the

DORCHESTER HOTEL, PARK LANE, W.1

SPECIAL DISPLAY OF SWISS FILMS

A circular giving full details will be posted direct to Members.

well as of other goods in short supply. Foodstuffs, fats, soap, leather-ware are rationed. Certain imports, such as sugar, have been taken over by the Government. Steep rises in price in consequence of rationing (for example a three- or fourfold increase for boots and shoes in certain stores), are being checked by public opinion, the Press and the police. But in spite of the efforts to keep prices down the cost of living has been rising constantly. Only rents stand at pre-war level. The general rise in prices is, in addition to the reasons stated, due to the cost of maintaining the army and bringing its equipment up to modern standards. The sum spent and proposed until the end of this year for this purpose will reach the astronomical figure (for Switzerland) of 2.8 milliards of francs, of which only a fraction can be secured through current taxation, such as an emergency tax for the express purpose of keeping the army intact (*"Wehrpuffer"*). Side by side with the army Swiss authorities now place agriculture as the means of keeping the country independent of imports. For this purpose about Wahlen, the head of the Agricultural Section of the Swiss War Food Department, commanded wide support when he outlined a new War Agriculture Programme, now generally referred to as the *"Wahlen Programme"*. Its aim is the ploughing up of all available land, so that in the course of the next three or four years Switzerland may become independent of imports. For this purpose about 100,000 men would be needed who would have to go back to the land. The difficulties in obtaining this agricultural labour out of the ranks of industrial labour are fully realised. The peasants themselves have offered full co-operation in this scheme. The army co-operates by releasing agricultural labourers from army service unless they are very urgently needed for defence purposes.

The spirit of co-operation on a voluntary basis is a factor which counts even more than the various official efforts at making the country independent of the outside world as far as possible. Important as it is that old iron- and coal-mines are worked again, that low-grade ores are being won, that artificial silk is being produced on a larger scale than before, that new power-stations on the Upper Rhine, the Aar and so on are being built or planned, all these efforts would avail little if the old democratic spirit of this little free country did not surge up in the midst of the dangers that surround it. Not only are all the peasant organisations supporting the policy of independence by offering their voluntary co-operation, but also the labourers have offered their share by asking to be accepted into the Government (*"Bundesrat"*) in a resolution passed by the Executive of the Swiss Trade Unions. The nation stands united in the defence of its liberty.

An obituary on the late Prof. Richard Bär whose death we have already reported is published by *"Nature"*, May 3rd:

Swiss physics and Swiss physicists suffered a severe loss, when, on December 13th, 1940, Prof. Richard Bär died in his home in Zurich (where he had been professor of physics in the University) — a home whose hospitality many of his colleagues from all parts of the world will remember, having

passed the friendly town on pleasure trips to the Alps and having met there not only with the friendliest reception but with one of the most distinguished of Switzerland's learned and literary circles.

Only now, after his premature death, it has been known how lavishly R. Bär had used his wealth to alleviate the lot of the distressed — in the first place of those uprooted by any kind of spiritual intolerance. He had a sort of shyness of giving and would, ostensibly, deny his assistance but send the applicants to a friend of his, pretending that his friend was in charge of an ample assistance fund (which he actually was, but the fund was supplied by R. Bär). I am told that the reception of about thirty displaced scholars at Istanbul was mainly due to R. Bär's initiative, who seized the prospect as soon as it turned up and arranged matters by a personal visit to Istanbul, to which he invited two influential friends.

To most physicists R. Bär is best known by his vigorous and fully successful attempt to disprove by clear and decisive experiments the doubts which F. Ehrenhaft (Vienna) had thrown on the reality of the "elementary quantum of electricity." The doubts were serious, and a detailed experimental refutation was needed to support our theoretical convictions. His later work included important discoveries in the domain of electrical discharge through gases, of the Raman effect and of ultra-sonic waves. It was right in the middle of very beautiful results on the latter phenomenon — diffraction of light by a liquid that is permeated by ultra-sonic waves and thereby turned into a diffraction grating — that his untimely death has occurred. To all this work of his a singular fact, which seldom occurs, gave a peculiarly inspiring tinge: he had begun as a pure mathematician (he had been David Hilbert's assistant during 1916-17) and ended up as an experimental physicist.

* * *

At the International Student Service Conference held at the beginning of this month and reputed to have been addressed by speakers with intimate knowledge, the Swiss representative is reported to have made the following statement which bears the palm for its infirmity:

Mr. F. E. Z. said that in Switzerland there were 24 cantons, three different races and four different languages. The policy of the government was to give the cantons as much liberty as possible. In some cantons the father who disagreed with the form of teaching his child received could appeal to the mayor and a plebiscite could be held if the father could get 5,000 signatures demanding it. Plebiscites had in certain cases censored text books.

* * *

Where Onions are Plentiful is revealed by the "Weekly Telegraph," April 26th:

English housewives, worried by the shortage of onions, will envy the women of Berne, capital of Switzerland, who can, once a year, buy as many as they desire on Onion Market Day.

On one day in each twelve months the city throws open its sidewalks and markets to peasants from Wistenlach, a French-speaking district between Lakes Morat and Neuchâtel, who invade it

with huge supplies of late season vegetables, and onions by the thousand!

Stalls are garlanded with them. Piles of onions dwarf supplies of leeks, celery, and cabbages. Restaurants and private houses concentrate at meal times on onion dishes. Onion pies, onion soups, and onion sausages are eaten by everybody, while even confectioners reap a fine harvest by selling sweetmeat onions, or sweets packed in onion-shaped ornaments or caskets.

The origin of Onion Market Day, the only one of its kind in the calendar, dates back to the Middle Ages, when the people of Berne were at war and were short of food. They would have been starved into submission, but the peasants of Wistenlach brought them vegetables — especially onions — throughout the severe winter.

When the war ended this quaint marketing privilege was granted them, and has been jealously observed ever since.

* * *

Dancing on Eggs is a discovery claimed by "Scots Pictorial," April 14th. If any of our readers can give us chapter and verse we shall be interested though we hardly think that this dance is likely to become fashionable in Mayfair circles just yet.

Swiss statesmen, who have had to walk very warily in recent years, may have learned something from one of their local Easter Monday customs. Some hundreds of eggs (you may dimly remember what they are like) are spread over a level space and lightly covered with sand; then the young men and women perform a dance round them. The couple who finish the dance without breaking a single egg receive a marriage dowry, and, if willing, are married the same day.

* * *

Yodelling in the United States is likely to become a feature of the new order in America if the "Manchester Guardian," May 1st, has been correctly informed:

For forty years the Swiss Maennerchor Society of Dallas, Texas, has cultivated the art of Alpine yodelling by encouraging its members to practise and to appreciate the traditional vocal speciality of their ancestors. But the present generation of American Swiss has lost all interest in the accomplishment, and, as the young folks cannot be induced to join the society, it has just held its last meeting, perishing for lack of new recruits.

There is, however, an interesting survival of yodelling even within sight of New York's skyscrapers. By special permission of the Essex County Parks Commissioners, who control Eagle Rock, a famous view-point of the New Jersey Hills, Mr. Carl J. Kress, of Orange, New Jersey, is empowered to ascend the rock every morning between 8 and 8.45 and yodel without let or hindrance. This permission was only secured after considerable conflict with the authorities, for singing and the playing of musical instruments are forbidden in the Eagle Rock reservation. The commissioners, however, eventually became convinced that the residents below the rock would find a pleasure in hearing of a morning the sound of yodelling from the heights above, and so an exception to the regulations was made in the case of the enthusiastic Mr. Kress.

LA SUISSE ET LES EVENEMENTS.

A chaque fois qu'un petit peuple se trouve entraîné malgré lui dans la guerre, il est naturel que les Suisses éprouvent un vif sentiment de solidarité avec ces nouvelles victimes du conflit. Certes, sur le plan politique, notre pays a adopté dès longtemps une attitude d'abstention complète, la seule possible en dernière analyse. Mais, sur le plan simplement humain, rien ne peut nous empêcher, tout nous commande au contraire d'exprimer notre sympathie à ceux qui désiraient la paix, qui ne voulaient pas se mêler des querelles des grandes puissances, qui désiraient conserver leur bien le plus précieux, l'indépendance nationale, et qui brusquement ont été arrachés à leur quiétude.

Cette solidarité et cette sympathie, nous les avons éprouvées en 1914, quand la Belgique dut subir l'invasion. Nous les avons éprouvées de nouveau quand le Danemark et la Norvège, puis la Belgique et les Pays-Bas, en dépit de leurs démarches désintéressées pour rétablir la paix en Europe, c'est-à-dire pour sauver le continent, virent d'une heure à l'autre leur territoire compris dans le champ des opérations militaires. Nous l'éprouvons aujourd'hui pour la Grèce et la Yougoslavie qui ont préféré une lutte peut-être sans espoir à la perte de la dignité et de l'honneur national.

La contemplation d'une carte de l'Europe est bien faite aujourd'hui pour nous inspirer de graves méditations. Nous ne voyons que des territoires conquis militairement ou soumis politiquement, livrés à la direction d'une puissance qui réclame pour soi le droit de commander aux destinées du continent. C'en est fait du rêve de nations égales. L'évolution de ces dernières années tend à rétablir une hiérarchie entre les peuples, les uns faits pour commander, les autres pour jouer le rôle peu glorieux de satellites. C'en est fait de l'équilibre européen qui permettait aux petites nations de vivre à côté de grandes puissances dont les forces se faisaient équilibre. A part deux Etats dirigeants, on trouve des protectorats, des territoires annexés, des alliés de bon ou de mauvais gré. Seuls ont réussi jusqu'ici à conserver une indépendance totale et à n'adhérer à aucun groupement international — à part la Finlande qui a déjà payé un lourd tribut à l'impérialisme —, la Suède, le Portugal et la Suisse.

Il ne nous appartient pas de dire dans quelle mesure cette évolution est définitive ou de prévoir comment les positions perdues seront éventuellement reconquises. Si l'on s'en tient à un examen objectif de la situation, si l'on se contente d'apprécier les forces militaires et les succès diplomatiques remportés de part et d'autre, il faut pour le moins convenir que la partie est loin d'être jouée et que rien n'exclut de nouveaux succès, temporaires ou définitifs, réels ou illusoire, à l'actif des vainqueurs de ces derniers mois.

Dans ces conditions, nous avons de très petits pays qui ont réussi à sauvegarder leur indépendance totale, en particulier à la Suisse. Certes, il faut se dire que l'impérialisme, quel qu'il soit, se contente mal de demi-mesures et qu'il n'aime point ce qui fait exception à la règle. Nous en avons fait l'expérience sous Napoléon, ce qui nous a valu quinze ans de domination étrangère. Nous pouvons en faire demain de nouveau l'expérience.

Cependant, sans se laisser bercer par de douces illusions, on doit dire et répéter que la Suisse possède dans son jeu de très appréciables atouts.

Il y a tout d'abord ceci que notre situation internationale n'est comparable à nulle autre. La neu-