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The Swiss Observer

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NEWS AT RANDOM

At the 650th anniversary of the Swiss Confederation on the Rütli, President Dr. Wetter said that Swiss people to-day must protect freedom and independence in foreign relations and honour and justice within the country. That was the reason for Switzerland's compulsory military service. Her neutrality demanded great self discipline from her people, so that the outer world should never doubt its will for neutrality. Switzerland, he said, was a democratic country by tradition; democracy in Switzerland was no foreign growth. Though to-day democracy had apparently lost much of its prestige in the world, yet Swiss democracy should not be confused with the form of Government in any other country.

In a full and justifying statement the Federal Council is recommending the rejection of the constitutional reforms demanded by the "Landesring" (Initiative Pfaendler) and which will probably be submitted for final decision to a popular vote. The official attitude to the scheme which contains five separate proposals is defined as follows: (1) The increase of the election quota from 22,000 to 30,000 would reduce the membership of the National Council from 187 to 139 councillors thereby seriously affecting a fair representation; in several cantons deserving minorities would lose their member. (2) The interchanging of lists (Kumulation) has found favour with all the political parties the exception being the canton of Grisons. This much disputed practice — peculiarly Swiss — is enabling leading citizens not closely identified with party politics to secure election and is assisting political parties not sufficiently strong in their particular district to obtain representation for groups of partisans interested in economic fields. (3) By limiting the life of a National Councillor to twelve years one third of the present members would have to retire to oblivion. The Council and the country would thereby lose the services of outstanding personalities who by their wide experience and acknowledged integrity alone had practically become entitled to their membership. It is pointed out that in the 1935 elections 56 "novices" (subsequently increased by 26 due to deaths and resignations) entered the National Council while the present parliamentary session had so far welcomed 33 freshmen. (4) The publication of directorships or business interests of prospective candidates needed no government decree; the opposing political parties made ample use of this publicity. It had always been a recognised principle to invite and encourage leaders in industry, agriculture and trade to

take an active part in the legislature on account of their close and practical contact with national economy; their association should therefore not be made an object for political invective. (5) The re-election of the whole of the National Council under existing war conditions would constitute a grave and unpardonable interference with the true interests of the country. — In his message the Federal Council adds that at an opportune time government reforms on a wide basis may become a matter of necessity.

The National Council by 114 votes against one excluded the four communist members from its body; they are Nat. Coun. Nicole, Dicker, Gloor and Masson. This will necessitate by-elections in the cantons Geneva and Valais.

After lengthy and difficult negotiations a new economic agreement has been concluded with Germany towards the end of last month. The main item is an increased supply of coal: monthly deliveries of 200,000 tons are guaranteed which is about a third more than we received so far. We are also to receive 13,500 tons of iron per month in addition to the special deliveries for carrying out certain German orders in our factories. Mineral oils — petrol and lubricating — have also been promised to the tune of 14,500 tons per month. The fulfilment of these undertakings depend to a large measure on an improvement of existing transport facilities. On the other hand no definite statement is available of the obligations imposed on Switzerland. Exports are to be encouraged with the financial backing of the Government up to a limit of £23 million which amount will be added to the large German debt already owing. These exports will presumably consist of cattle, fruit, dairy produce and condensed milk.

CITY SWISS CLUB.

Messieurs les membres sont avisés que

L'ASSEMBLEE MENSUELLE

aura lieu Samedi, le 6 Sept. à 12.45 p.m. au Brown's Hotel, Dover Street, (near Green Park Tube Station).

ORDRE DU JOUR:

Procès-verbal.
Admissions.
Démissions.

Proposition de
changement de Statuts.
Divers.

Déjeuner à 1.0 h. précises. Comme il est question de modifier quelques Articles des Statuts du Club le Comité espère que de nombreux Membres viendront prendre part à ces discussions. Les participants sont priés de bien vouloir s'inscrire au plus tôt auprès de Mons. H. Binggely, 167, Clapham Road, S.W.9. (Téléphone: Reliance 4150).

Le Comité

The Turkish Government has definitely renounced prolongation of the trade and payment agreement of May 1940 with Switzerland which ended on 31st July. To protect Swiss export and other demands on Turkey the Federal Council passed a decree for the temporary arrangement of payments between Switzerland and Turkey pending a new economic agreement. This temporary regulation will merely be valid until a new agreement is in force. The Federal Council's decrees of April 1938 concerning payments between Switzerland and Turkey and that of May 1940 concerning the application of the earlier decree are no longer valid.

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The department for power and heat of the Federal War Industry and Labour Office has been transferred from Berne to Bienne.

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Home produced cereals in 1940 show a reduction of 4.6% as compared with the 1939 harvest. Under the war legislation the growers are under an obligation to surrender the whole of their crop to the Federal authorities but the decrease in such deliveries amounts to 19.3%, 8,150 truck loads having been handed over as against 10,000 in 1939.

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The sharp drop in imports from our former suppliers is uncomfortably illustrated by the figures published for the first six months of the present year. Customs duties amounted to just over 82 million francs, which compared with the same period last year shows a loss of 61 million francs.

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On the 13th August it was announced that Professor Karl Burckhardt and Eduard Haller of the International Red Cross in Geneva visited the President of the German Red Cross and stayed for several days in Berlin. The question of the treatment of prisoners of war, which has gained particular importance owing to the war in the East, was examined. The two Swiss delegates visited a prisoners' camp, where some thousands Russian prisoners are interned.

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In the elections for the 80 members of the Landrat of Baselland all parties have had to sacrifice seats in favour of the "Landesring."

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The construction of a new cantonal hospital in Zurich at an estimated cost of 49 million francs has been sanctioned by a popular vote; it is to include a research and lecturing department.

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The Neuchâteloises are going to have a say in municipal matters unless their gallant spouses refuse to endorse a proposal to give them the vote which the Grand Conseil has passed by a timid majority of 46 to 42.

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The reconstruction of the city church of Glaris which was partly destroyed by fire in April 1940 is now completed; it has thus resumed its unique mission of welcoming both catholic and protestant followers, the respective services being held alternately. The cost of rebuilding amounted to Frs.460,000 of which Frs. 400,000 was covered by insurance; the new organ has not been installed yet.

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The 'Sanatorio Popolare Cantonale' in the Ticino is now completed. Originally it was the 'Sanatorio del Gottardo' started by Dr. Massi in 1900. At

the beginning the sanatorium flourished but already in the first decade of its existence the venture had to face financial difficulties. In 1919 the Canton Ticino bought up the whole concern for half a million Francs and after building a few annexes, which were most urgently required, it was opened in 1921 as the 'Sanatorio Popolare Cantonale.' These alterations cost the Canton Frs.200,000 and a further Frs.600,000 were spent on the buildings since 1939.

The normal charge for patients is Frs.5 per person but anyone unable to pay this sum is granted a reduction of up to Frs.3. The sanatorium contains 130 beds and has a staff of 30 in attendance. Situated about one hour's journey below Airolo at an altitude of 1170m. its climate is exceedingly mild.

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A sanatorium exclusively for the use of Valaisan people has been opened near Montana at an altitude of 1350 metres. It has room for 78 male and 42 female patients; the cost of construction was over two million francs.

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The canton St. Gall is to receive a Federal subsidy of 15 million francs towards the cost of amelioration, estimated at 25 million, of the Rhine plain between Oberriet and Au. The work will take about ten years to complete and an area of 6,500 hectares will be reclaimed and rendered suitable for agriculture.

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The villagers in Ragnatsch (St. Gall Oberland) have been ordered to evacuate temporarily their houses during night time on account of the progressive movement of the Gspaltenberg. Heavy rains are assisting the breaking-away of rock and some of the adjoining meadows have been covered with stone and slime.

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The Confederation has become the owner of another steamer named "Chasseral." This 4,200 tons boat will carry piece goods from New York to Genoa: she was bought from Honduras for about £125,000 and has already 44 years' service to her credit. The price works out at about £27 per ton, the figure ruling before the war being at £5 per ton. Her companion, the St. Gothard, is about the same size though twelve years younger. The other two ships forming the nucleus of the Swiss Merchant Fleet — the Calanda (4163 tons, built in 1913) and the Maloja (1788 tons, built in 1902) — belong to the Compagnie Suisse de Navigation of Basle.

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The recent railway accident at Münsingen (Berne) when eleven heavy trucks were smashed and the line badly damaged is stated to have been due to the snapping of an axle. The train in the direction of the Lötschberg, heavily loaded, contained a large number of foreign trucks in a bad state of repair.

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The serious accident which took place on July 29th sustains the dangers to which our railway lines and staff are exposed by the constant transit of overloaded goods trains made up of dilapidated foreign trucks badly greased. We reprint the report telegraphed by the Berne correspondent of the "Evening Standard."

The St. Gothard railway, which has recently been carrying heavy traffic between Germany and Italy, is likely to be blocked to traffic for at least two days as the result of an amazing accident.

A heavily-laden freight train was descending the steepest part of the line, where it runs down the

valley towards the Italian border, when the brakes failed to hold.

Most of the trucks were whipped off the track at a sharp corner and parted from the rest of the train. They crashed down on to the lower level northbound tracks, which were completely blocked.

The front part of the train hurtled on until another car broke off at the entrance of Pianotodo tunnel, crashed through guards' huts and several buildings and military barracks at the side of the line.

The barracks caught fire and three soldiers were killed and several hurt. Other cars piled up in the tunnel mouth, jamming it with wreckage.

But the locomotive tore on through the tunnel towards Giornico until it crashed into the back of a stationary train.

One member of the crew of three was thrown clear, but the bodies of the others have not yet been recovered.

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The Swiss Federal Railways continue to show highly satisfactory traffic results, the total takings for the month of April amounting to nearly 40 million francs while the expenses were just below 20 millions.

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The immense snow drifts on the Grimsel pass connecting the Hasli and Rhone valleys have only recently been cleared. The popular postal autos will not be seen this year on this beautiful alpine route.

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Regular railway traffic between Geneva and Lyon has been resumed. The track between Geneva and Bellegard was removed for some distance by the army of occupation but after many months of interruption has been relaid. Thus a second line of railway communication with France has become available the other one being the route via Annecy and Annemasse.

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Coal transports will be considerably facilitated by the re-opening of the Rhine-Rhone Kanal between Strassburg and Basle the heavy war damage having been repaired. The Kanal route is preferred on account of the saving of fuel as compared with navigation on the Rhine.

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July 23rd witnessed the last train passing over the old railway bridge in Berne. The new four-line iron-beton bridge whose 150 metre arch is said to be the largest in Europe will be officially opened on September 6th.

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Something like a thousand necessitous Swiss children from France, Germany, Italy and Belgium have already arrived in our country to spend a few weeks holiday; they are being cared for by the institution "Schweizerhilfe." At the invitation and cost of the management of the Swiss Federal Railways, German and French railway workers' unions have been asked to send a hundred children each who for two months will enjoy Swiss hospitality mostly in the Bernese Oberland. Later on in the year a hundred bambini from Italy will be similarly entertained. The Swiss originators of this idea hope to further and uphold the spirit of solidarity which should exist in different countries between the workers of like trades.

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Towards the end of 1940 over 300 children of families immigrated into Switzerland during 1938 had received help from the Swiss Benevolent Fund for

refugee children. Furthermore 135 children of political refugees during 1939 were receiving assistance. Some of these enjoyed either part or whole upkeep, whilst many were being provided with necessary clothing, additional nourishment and medicines as well as schooling, etc. Many of those living in homes were provided for by this institution and about 57 of these refugees are living at the cost of friends or relatives. During the school holidays about 63 children were received by families in various parts of Switzerland and in spite of increasing difficulties, about 46 children, many of them refugees from Germany, were able to leave Switzerland in 1940. They left our Country mentally and physically restored and not without regrets.

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The Zurich section for Refugees has also provided about 52 children emigrated from Austria and Germany with money and clothes. The home opened for these refugees has now been closed as its 43 inmates have been able to enter state schools where they fit into the normal routine with difficulty. Children whose parents have been deported or are temporarily in camps are being looked after financially and the expenses of children in the care of foster-parents and at boarding schools are being covered from these funds.

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The recent house-collection in favour of the International Red Cross has brought in 1.6 million francs to which is to be added Frs.550,000 from the sale of one franc badges. It is estimated that the work of thousands of volunteers at the Geneva office is equivalent to an annual contribution of two million francs.

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A Grant of Sw.Frs.900,000 has been made by the Federal Dept. of Economics to the Uhrenindustrie AG. The grant is from the money provided for fostering export industries.

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The cost of living index to end of May last has been officially calculated to be 171.2 (June 1914=100), an increase of 24.8 as compared with August 1939.

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To commemorate the 50th anniversary of its foundation the well-known engineering firm of Brown Boverie & Co., in Baden, proposes to allocate the whole of last year's profit (over one million francs) to welfare institutions serving the staff of this great undertaking. In its first year the firm started with a staff of 70 hands and employs now 5,700 workpeople and 1,700 clerks on the administrative side.

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Francesco Chiesa, the Ticinese poet, who has recently been decorated by the Italian Academy, is celebrating his 70th anniversary.

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The "Winkelriedstiftung" in Berne, an institution which supports the families of those who died whilst on military service, celebrates its 75th anniversary; at present more than 200 families are receiving regular pensions. The bounty owes its blessings mainly to the benefaction of the late Dr. Hans Weber, of Utzenstorf, who died in 1915 and bequeathed the whole of his estate (about 3 million francs) to the fund.

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About a hundred people are under arrest charged either with political espionage or with activities endangering the independence of the State; most of

them were seized in Zurich which is said to be the centre for totalitarian propaganda. The lengthy and delicate enquiries will delay their trial but two cases have already been handed over to the military tribunals.

Col. Arnold Isler, the director of the Federal Civil Aviation Office, died in Bern at the age of 60. During the last war he was captain and later on a major in the Air Force and when civil aviation was placed under Government control in April 1920 he was put in charge. It was Col. Isler who decided to use American machines for our long distance passenger routes and the establishment of the regular whole-year air-line from London to Basle and Zurich was one of his outstanding achievements.

Armand Dufaux, the holder of the first Swiss long-distance aviation record died in Geneva. He was born on January 13th, 1888, son of the painter Frédéric Dufaux, and from 1900 onwards he devoted himself to the theoretical and practical study of aviation problems. Together with his brother Henri he founded the renowned "Motosacoeche" and built a 120 H.P. motor weighing only 85 kilos which at that time was considered a masterpiece. In a double-decker of his own construction he flew in 1910 across the Lac Lemán in 56 minutes the distance being 66 km.; this record earned him a prize of Frs.5,000.

With the recent death in New York of Paderewski our country has lost a great friend and passionate admirer. At the end of the last century this distinguished statesman and musician acquired a large estate on the Lake of Geneva — Riond-Boisson near Morges — which soon developed into a centre of cultural activities. Already frail in health he abandoned his retirement last autumn in the endeavour to enlist American sympathy for the plight of his own country. He was an honorary citizen of Lausanne, Morges and Vevey: but Lausanne is specially indebted to Paderewski for his constant endeavour to further the musical aspirations of this city. On many occasions he gave concerts the proceeds of which he offered to a fund for constructing an adequate concert hall. However, although this project has agitated the minds of the Lausannois for something like a hundred years they have not yet been able to agree upon a particular plan.

The Federal Mint has issued 100,000 special jubilee five-franc pieces to commemorate the 650th anniversary. One side depicts three confederates from different periods taking the oath, and the other reproduces in Latin a sentence from the 1291 protocol. The "Fünflieber" is legal tender.

The barracks at Sion (Valais) are to be considerably enlarged at a cost of nearly three million francs, and at the expense of the canton.

Though the National Physical Laboratory (Kew) which undertakes official tests of time-pieces submitted does not at present publish the usual report, we hear that the best performance scoring 97 marks has gone to Messrs. Louis Brandt & Frère of Geneva, for an Omega Deck watch. Four other Swiss firms are stated to have submitted wristlet watches which showed the highest degree of accuracy so far attained for this class of watches.

A Geneva watchmaker, P. R. Jaccard, claims to have produced the ideal watch spring which guarantees a constantly invariable and permanent driving power.

A highly-prized exhibit in the Basle Historical Museum has been presented to the canton Uri as part of this year's First of August Celebration. It is the oldest "Harsthorn" — the battle-cry of the men of Uri when fighting the battles in Upper Italy; the "Uristier" after centuries of straying has thus returned to its own home. Schwyz, the seat of the new Federal Record Office, will receive from the Basle authorities artistic door furniture and Ob- and Nidwalden coats of arms worked in stained glass for their respective town-halls.

Observations of Glacier movements have shown that during the past year 15 out of the 100 Glaciers under observation have expanded as compared to 14 in 1939, 6 have remained unaltered (5 last year) and 79 have receded (81 in 1939).

Pressing want alone is obviously responsible for the discovery by the management of our National Bank that the printing craft in our country is fully capable of producing bank notes; thus far the order for large notes (Frs.100 and over) was invariably placed with an English printing firm.

An attack has been made on the traditional "Café Kirsch" by a pressing appeal, in the interest of national health, to consume cherries fresh or preserve them for the winter months when fruit is likely to be very scarce.

The legend of the falling birth rate in our country seems to find some explanation in the official figures recently published by the Federal Statistical Office. During the last four years the number of marriages and births shows a steady if small increase the frequency of deaths however is in the ascendancy and if the present ratio continues we shall reach a turning point in about twenty years. The progressing mortality is said to be due to an increased ageing of the Swiss population. The following are the figures for the last four years of births (a), deaths (b) and excess of the former (c):

	(a)	(b)	(c)
1937	62,480	47,274	15,206
1938	63,790	48,576	15,214
1939	63,837	49,484	14,353
1940	64,060	50,676	13,384

Serious restrictions are foreshadowed for the coming winter one of them being the rationing of milk. Sunday cycling will be forbidden to economise rubber; new-tyres are issued against coupons only and to persons who can prove that their cycles are used for business purposes solely.

Part of this year's First of August collection will be used to defray the cost of printing a simple history book for the benefit of Swiss children; it will be distributed free to all children between the ages of six and 15 years including those residing abroad. The editor is teacher Fritz Aebly of Zurich and the volume is to appear in the four national languages. (We suggest that the youth in both British and American Colonies would appreciate an English edition).