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The Swiss Observer

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NEWS AT RANDOM

The Home News in this issue are somewhat scanty as no papers from Switzerland have reached us for over four weeks.

* * *

On the 20th of October an order was published which ensures food supplies compelling those not engaged in defence to produce their own requirements of potatoes and vegetables. A paragraph of the order referred to requires private and communal growers as well as economic enterprises to increase their own home-grown produce. Private cultivators who do not produce sufficient for themselves are to be organised.

Those engaged in compulsory labour may be released for a certain number of hours each week. Economic enterprises employing a hundred or more hands must co-operate in extending the acreage of land under cultivation to enable their workers and employees to produce sufficient potatoes and vegetables for their own consumption.

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The Swiss Press on the Blockade-situation: Radio Schwarzenburg announced on the 3rd October that the "Neue Zürcher Zeitung" in discussing the British restrictions on goods for Switzerland says that these restrictions are evidently the result of circumstances, and that Britain wishes to prevent goods from reaching Germany. The "Vaterland" a Catholic paper, says these restrictions may not be too stiff as Great Britain has said Switzerland's needs will be taken into consideration. The "Berner Tageblatt," a socialist paper, says that if the pressure is not too severe, Switzerland may well be thankful for her lot. Sacrifices will be required. The "Bund" of Berne says that the major powers have recognised Switzerland's neutrality and special situation. Switzerland has always insisted on free trade and now further restrictions have been placed on Swiss economy. It is reassuring to note that some import of raw materials will be allowed but it is disquieting to think of the effect on employment, if industry should come to a standstill through lack of raw materials. We trust there will be comprehension of this in London. The way for negotiations between the two friendly countries is open. The eyes of Switzerland are on London.

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The problem of prices is at present receiving great attention from the authorities and the public. The Federal Commission for Economic Research finds that the rise in prices is mainly due to factors of foreign origin, and in particular to the increase in transport costs. Part of the rise is due to financial influences.

It is only right that a rise in salaries should follow the general increased cost of living. The rise in prices amounts to some 30% since the beginning of the war and would justify an increase in salaries from 10% to 15%.

* * *

Prices and wages were discussed at a meeting of the Federal Council on the 30th September and it was generally felt that the poorer classes and big families should receive either a bonus from their employer, or State support, in view of the increased cost of living. It was decided not to increase milk prices for another six months, and to maintain the present prices of butter and cheese.

* * *

At a further meeting on October 3rd, the Swiss Federal Council discussed Government subsidies to needy persons. It was agreed that the prices of cereals grown in the mountains should be increased by Frs.1 per 100 kg. for cereals grown at altitudes between 801 and 899 m. and by Frs.2 for cereals grown above 900 m. The Council decided that up to 30th November working hours would remain as at present. Between then and Christmas work would also be done between 14.00 and 17.00. All offices would be shut between 25th and 28th December and on 1st and 4th January, 1942. From the 5th January the lunch hour would be reduced to half an hour. Until further notice offices would be closed on Saturdays.

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On the 14th October the regulations of the Federal Bureau for Wartime Food supplies concerning food rations for November were published. During the summer the rations had been somewhat reduced. The rations for November comply with cold-weather conditions. The butter ration will be cut by 50 grammes so that the consumer will obtain only an additional

CITY SWISS CLUB.

Messieurs les membres sont avisés que

L'ASSEMBLEE MENSUELLE

aura lieu Samedi, le 1er Nov. à 12.45 p.m. au Brown's Hotel, Dover Street, (near Green Park Tube Station).

ORDRE DU JOUR :

Procès-verbal.

Démissions.

Admissions.

Divers. *

Déjeuner 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.

50 grammes of fats. The cheese ration remains unchanged, except that for a 100 gramme cheese coupon 150 grammes of full-cream cheese can now be obtained as compared with 125 grammes previously. Newly-born infants and young mothers will be in a better position. As from 1st November newly-born children will obtain a children's ration card.

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The increased cost of living is illustrated by the following statistics: in 1938 we imported a monthly average of 61,500 trucks (about ten tons each) of the value of 134 million francs. In 1940 this figure dropped by 10,000 trucks but the cost increased by over 20 million francs. In the current year the monthly average fell to 39,000 trucks for which 160 million francs had to be paid. The price per load works out at Frs.4,060 against Frs.1,178 in 1938.

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An increase in the price of milk of two cts. per litre comes into force at the beginning of next month; thanks to considerable stocks the accompanying increase in butter and cheese will be delayed but it is expected that early in 1942 these two milk products will exact another 50cts. and 24cts. per kilo respectively. Bread has so far escaped as the Federal treasury is shouldering the extra cost of imported cereals by contributing six million francs; to maintain the cost of bread at its present level is costing the Government annually about 100 million francs.

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According to figures compiled by the "Schweiz. Obstverband" there are 12½ million fruit trees in Switzerland. Five million apple-trees and 3½ million pear-trees are filling nearly 100,000 trucks of ten tons each to the value of 120 million francs and constitute a precious instrument in bargaining for the essential imports.

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The Federal Council is to increase subsidies to the unemployed from Frs.11,000,000 to Frs.18,000,000 and to increase subsidies to small enterprises. Employers will be expected to increase employees' salaries in proportion to the increased cost of living.

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Some damage to the potato crops has been caused by the appearance of the Colorado beetle which has so far invaded 1,166 communes. The unwelcome visitor is believed to have been blown over the Jura by heavy West winds from France.

* * *

It was announced on the 6th October, that the blackout in Switzerland will begin at 22.00 instead of at 23.00 and last until 05.00. This regulation comes into force on and after the night of Friday 10th to Saturday 11th, and will remain so until further notice.

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Sugar beet plantations in this year covered in all 3,600 hectares — 260 more than last year. The crop is not exceptionally plentiful but of first class quality.

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The Portuguese ship *Corte Real* carrying Swiss products was sunk in the Atlantic.

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The iron ore deposits in the Jura will be exploited again. The old mines were closed in 1926 as the cost of extraction exceeded the price at which the ore could

be imported. The shafts are 135m. deep and electric pumps are now working day and night to clear the water.

* * *

Swiss Customs revenue totalled Frs.14,425,000 in September 1941. This amount exceeds by Frs.16,000 the figure for last September. However a decrease of about Frs.65,000,000 during the first nine months of this year is shown as compared with the corresponding period of last year.

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The Regierungsrat of Canton Zug has sent a suggestion to carry out emergency legislation for the benefit of the poor to the Kantonsrat. Three quarters of the cost are to be borne by the Canton and one quarter by the Bezirksbehörden.

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Lighting in Zurich will be restricted to one-third during the winter months in order to save electricity.

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The Federal Government has approved the project of the Holzverzuckerung A.-G., of Graubünden, for the erection of a plant for the manufacture of liquid fuel from saw mills waste. The scheme provides for the making of a crude wood alcohol containing acetone under the trade name of "Alketone," and also refined methyl alcohol, the sales of which will be undertaken by the Government, which will purchase the entire output of the company at cost during the term of an agreement which expires in 1955. The quantity of wood required as raw material is estimated at about 30,000 tons per annum, or about 1 per cent. of the total production of timber in Switzerland.

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The majority of the Swiss papers have adversely criticised the action of the Federal Council in sending an official representative last July to the International Film Convention (Filmkammer) held in Berlin. The commercial character of this body originally conceived and created by the German film industry has now been extended to the political field. The activities of the Swiss studios are contingent on the importation of the film material; the former supply from America is likely to be disturbed so that the producers have to rely on the raw material from Germany. On the other hand the finished Swiss film must find a market abroad as the heavy cost of production cannot be wholly recovered from the limited Swiss market. According to the chairman's opening address at the Berlin meeting certain reforms have become necessary such as limiting the markets, the prevention of the manufacture and exhibition of films contrary to the New Order, the elimination of undesirable elements and methods, etc. The Federal Council has stated that the Swiss delegate, Dr. Masnata, has attended merely as an observer and reporter and has not committed himself in any way but that the whole matter requires serious consideration.

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Measures are being taken to remedy the housing shortage. The Government will requisition any houses which are not occupied.

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After short negotiations a trade agreement has been signed with Hungary and came into force on the 1st of this month; particulars are not yet available.

Another commercial treaty has been signed with Spain in Madrid; the terms have not yet been published.

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The official opening of the new Bern-Wielernfeld deviation line referred to in our last issue is described in the "Railway Gazette," October 3rd, as follows: "On September 7th, the four-track deviation in the city of Berne was officially inaugurated in connection with the celebration of the city's 750th anniversary. The authorities, guests, and press representatives travelled over the line in an appropriately decorated twin-unit Red Arrow railcar, in which an address of welcome by Dr. Paschoud, the General Manager of the Swiss Federal Railways, and a description of the work by Dr. Eggenberger, Chief Engineer, were broadcast to all the compartments by means of loud-speaker equipment, with which this train — specially built for excursion traffic — is provided. The new layouts at both ends of the line were inspected on foot, the guests being conducted by Federal Railways engineers. Federal Councillors Celio, head of the Post-Office & Railways Department, and von Steiger, were present, and speakers at the subsequent dinner included Dr. Meile, President of the Federal Railways administration, who stressed the ever-increasing burden borne by the railways and their staffs under abnormal conditions; representatives of the Canton and Commune of Berne also spoke. Two tracks of the new line had actually been in service since July 23, and all four tracks since August 31st. The removal of the old route has already begun.

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A few days after the inauguration last month of the new railway bridge in Berne — the largest of its kind in Europe — a similar bridge was completed in St. Gall over the Sittertobel, thus giving direct access to Bruggen. The 550 m. long bridge carries in the centre over a width of 14 m. the heavy traffic whilst each side of 3.5 m. is reserved for cyclists and pedestrians. The cost was about 3½ million francs.

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On the 4th October an appeal by the Swiss Federal Railways to unload and load goods at the earliest possible convenience, — weekends included — was broadcast. There is a shortage of trucks owing to increased autumn traffic and to the fact that vital goods imported to Switzerland are now being transported from the frontier in Swiss trucks.

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At a recent meeting of the Society for Shipping in north-eastern Switzerland it was announced that a resolution welcoming the endeavours of the Swiss authorities to make the Rhone navigable between Gijon and Geneva was passed. This project is being pursued in collaboration with the French and other authorities. A paper was also read to the meeting on making the Rhine navigable between Basle and Lake Constance.

* * *

Though there seems little immediate prospect of keeping the fleet of transatlantic steamers acquired by our Government in full service two further Swiss shipping companies have been formed. One registered at Lausanne has a capital of Frs.100,000 under the promising name of "La Suisse Atlantique"; another one has been formed at Lisbon with the help of Swiss industrialists and banking circles.

The Society for Historical research in Berne recently celebrated its hundredth anniversary.

* * *

According to the Swiss Radio bombs from unidentified aircraft were dropped in the evening of October 12th in the canton of Thurgau about 10 miles south of the Lake of Constance. One bomb fell on a house killing a little girl, her mother and grandmother. Other bombs were found in neighbouring fields.

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The explosion for an unknown reason of a land mine near the castle of Chillon killed six people and caused considerable damage. The large mass of rock thrown up obstructed the Simplon line and severed the electric conduit in a wide district including Montreux.

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A century old dispute between the two Vaudois villages Agiez and Bofflens about the ownership of a spring or well has at last been settled; the event was joyfully celebrated by holding the traditional "fête" at which young and old disported themselves to their heart's desire.

* * *

A Bienn watchmaker is reported to have discovered by a new "radio-technic" process a gold deposit in the Val d'Annivier and has obtained a concession for its exploitation from the Valais authorities. He has staked a square kilometre of supposedly gold-bearing ground and anticipates to separate 10 grams of gold from each ton of earth and rock.



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