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The Swiss Observer

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NEWS AT RANDOM

To repay the 4½% loans of 1927 and 1930 as well as to procure new finance, the Federation opened a new 3½% subscription list for 400 million francs. The loan is termed for 12 years, but the Federation reserves itself the right to terminate it after 7 years. The response has been a complete success. The holders of the recalled 4% 1927 and 1930 loans have made such full use of their conversion rights, that the cash subscriptions had to be considerably reduced. This success is considered as a sign of confidence in the federal finance policy. The satisfaction is even more justified if one recalls that the Federation has launched last year two loans, one in May of 300 millions with nearly 600 millions subscribed and in November one of 580 millions. By this is clearly expressed the people's will to assist the state to weather the financial difficulties of the time.

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After Denmark had increased the value of the Kroner by 8.3%, voices in Switzerland were heard to increase the value of the franc, which owing to the devaluation of the French franc in 1936 was reduced in value. There are a great number of reasons against such an operation so that for a considerable time to come this must appear as impossible. An arbitrary value increase of the franc would not be acceptable to those countries with which Switzerland has entered into commercial and financial agreements. Moreover, even at only a 10% value increase the loss suffered by the National Bank would amount to frs.350 million, as the gain on the devaluation has been almost used up to finance state expenditure.

* * *

Another war measure is the re-introduction of summer time as from May 4th. Last year's experience has not satisfied agricultural interests, as the advance of the clock meant for the farmer simply a prolongation of work. But this arrangement was beneficial for the town and industrial worker and enabled these to cultivate a garden. The better adaptation of work to solar time makes it possible to save a considerable amount of electric current and also serves to harmonise rail-post-telegraph and telephone connections with the

neighbouring countries which have all introduced summer time.

* * *

The many economic agreements concluded with Italy since 1935 regulating payments and import and export quotas have been denounced by the latter country as from June next. The Italian government has expressed its willingness to enter into new agreements which must come into line with the new situation.

* * *

In the elections for the Grosse Rat of the canton St. Gall none of the five parties obtained a working majority. Of the 178 members of this council 77 are conservatives (against 74 in the old council), 46 liberals (49), 24 socialists (27), 21 independants and free democrats (14) and nine "Jungbauern" (10). The independants (Duttweiler) have increased their strength by about 50% due chiefly, it is reported, to an aggressive and well-organised electioneering campaign.

* * *

A reproach addressed by the cantonal authorities to the parish council of Boudry (Neuchâtel) resulted in a queer sequence. In accordance with the national plan to increase cultivation the parish was ordered to place land at the disposal of prospective allotment holders. The village fathers decided to earmark an old cemetery for this purpose and in due course commenced to clear and prepare the ground. Spirited protests against this profanation were raised at a subsequent meeting of the Conseil Général upon which the Boudry parish council resigned in corpore. The latter has now been ordered to replace the tomb stones and replant the trees so arbitrarily removed.

* * *

The Governments of the cantons of Baselland and Baselstadt have submitted to the Federal Council a request for a concession to build a power works on the

CITY SWISS CLUB.

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Le Comité.

Rhine near Birsfelden. The works are to be erected in five years, cost round 50 millions and produce annually 300 million Kwh. (Kilowatt hours). By arrangement with Germany, the erection of the works shall be entirely a matter for Switzerland although almost half of the riverhead belongs to Germany. The weir-dam right across the Rhine is projected with five big openings and will be so constructed that Rhine steamers of all sizes will be able to pass through.

* * *

At the spring session of the Swiss Parliament which lasted this time only one week, Federal Councilor Stampfli, chief of the Economic Department, made an impressive statement about the position of supplies in Switzerland. According to this report the coal situation should now be getting easier with the advent of warmer weather and the decrease of traffic difficulties; Germany has also promised a more regular supply of the 2.4 million tons annually contracted for. This, however, is only half of the yearly requirements. Home produced coal amounts to about 12,000 tons per month. The electric current production by next winter will be increased by 800 million Kwh. or 10% by the new power works or Innertkirchen and Verbois. Cause for alarm is, however, the heavy drop in the import of textile raw materials. The supply of boots is secure for another year, but rubber stocks have to be reserved almost totally for the army. The position in the supply of iron is such that new undertakings which require this metal as raw materials as well as the use of iron in buildings are now controlled and have to have permits prior to starting work. The import of sugar and rice is equally low but fats and oils are easier. As no more American vessels can be chartered, our own shipping space is not sufficient for the transport of cereals. The 114,000 tons which we were allowed by England to import could up to now not be increased. No Swiss ships or ships flying the Swiss flag have been sunk.

* * *

Last year's home harvest was with 12,000 trucks about 4,000 trucks short of the record year 1938, so that 3,600 trucks had to be imported monthly. The increase in arable acreage ordered by the Federal Council raises the arable land by 30,000 ha. to 310,000 ha., but to be self-sufficient in cereals and root crops a total of about 500,000 ha. should be put under the plough. About 60,000 ha. could be gained by converting alpine meadows into potato fields and a further 20,000 ha. by uprooting forests. The missing 90,000 ha. would have to be gained by melioration works, but to do this at least two years are required, so that only by 1944 and then only by very hard and arduous labours will this be possible.

* * *

The town of Zurich has just opened an installation which produces methyl gas from the mud of the sewers. Up to now the gas which accumulated in the so-called fermenting chambers was led into the town's gas works and mixed with the lighting gas. The new installation now purifies and compresses the gas, so that it can be used for starting up motors instead of benzine. By this method about 70,000 cubic metres of clarified gas can be obtained which is equal to about 45,000 litres of benzine. This gas is now used in the first place to drive the dust carts and such vehicles which generally do not go outside the town's boundaries. The price is considerably lower than the present price of Benzine, it amounts to about 77cts. per cubic metre of Methyl-

gas and will thereby enable the amortisation of the installation within four years. The residue of the mud makes an excellent manure, so that the whole installation is of considerable economic importance.

* * *

In a prison in the St. Gall Rheintal, interesting experiments were made last year to cultivate vegetables in flat bottomed water containers which showed surprising results. In three such containers of 3m. length, 75ctm. wide and 20ctm., deep to which the necessary chemicals were added and which were placed in a green-house, tomatoes and cucumbers were raised. The tomatoes which grew in the water reached a height of three metres and produced fruit over double the amount than a plant grown in the usual way, and from two containers 268 cucumbers of a total weight of 125 kg. were harvested. In similar containers in the open and of an area of 2.5m. roughly 12 kg. of beans were obtained and potatoes showed almost double the result than ground cultivation. The trials are being continued this year in a bigger way in the gardens of the town. Should these trials prove equally successful a great deal would be gained for the provisioning of the country, as the several vegetables and fruits are said to be of excellent quality.

* * *

The continued drought and cold has caused a further retrenchment in the use of electricity, firstly all hot water storage tanks of all sizes had to be put out of circuit. Only families with children under one year of age are permitted to use boilers from Friday evening to Saturday evening. Certain industries with reserves of finished products or which produce goods of not absolute necessity were forced to close for eight or fourteen days. So for example 40 Swiss Paper Mills employing about 7,000 people had to close their doors for a fortnight. The workers received unemployment benefit from the State.

* * *

From March 1st an addition of 10% of barley is added to wheat and home grown cereals. The insecure and difficult transport conditions make this arrangement necessary in order to conserve the stocks of wheat as much as possible, as the insufficient harvest does not allow an admixture of potato flour. This new people's bread will make the provisioning until the next harvest possible. A Federal subsidy will reduce the price of bread by 25cts. per kilo.

* * *

To give consumers a possibility to have their own price control, the retailers in every kind of business have to mark in plain figures the price of every article exhibited for sale. Until now this duty only devolved upon dealers in the most essential food stuffs and clothing.

* * *

Under the existing meat rationing regulations the popular "Cervelas" is likely to become a war victim. The price for the 100 gr. sausage is no more than 39 cts, but 75 point coupons have to be surrendered. Slightly smaller cervelas weighing 90 gr. are also on sale at 35 cts. each plus 50 point coupons.

* * *

The census of December 1941 has shown a population of round 4,256,000, an increase since 1930 of 190,000. As the surplus of births amounted to about 194,000 in the last 11 years there is a loss of about 4,000 people. The surplus of births is only about half

as much as in the ten years 1900-1910 and 30% smaller than in 1920/30. The natural increase of population in Switzerland has therefore reached a new stand-still.

The migration of the population in the interior, however, has extended greatly. It is the reason why of about 3,000 communes 1,300 have lost people, which is particularly the case with rural parishes. In the cantons of Glaris, Vaud and Neuchâtel about two-thirds of the communes are in that position. Even in the cantons of Berne and Zurich almost every other parish has lost some of its inhabitants. Those who profit by this migration are the towns. In the 31 municipalities with more than 10,000 inhabitants the population increased by 124,000 since the last census. This means that about two-thirds of the increase of population was distributed over the towns, particularly Zurich, Basle, Berne and Lausanne. Some changes in order of precedence according to number have also taken place. After Zurich and Basle, Geneva is no longer in third place, but Berne, Fribourg is now in front of Neuchâtel as eleventh and Herisau has been overtaken by Olten, Könitz and Aarau. Lausanne itself grew much more than the rest of the whole canton Vaud. Against this, three east and three west towns show a passive balance compared with the last census. These are St. Gall, Herisau and Rorschach, La Chaux-de-Fonds, le Locle and Vevey.

Our democracy has its roots in the political conscience and freedom of the individual, as is proved by the fact that each of the 3,087 communes form an independent link with self-government in the organisation of the State. According to the last census there are still twenty communes with less than fifty inhabitants. The smallest of all is the commune of Illens in the canton of Fribourg with fourteen souls. This is exactly twice as many as at the census of 1930. The canton of Berne has now only one midget commune as against 55 in 1930. Fribourg still has three, Solothurn two, the Grisons three, Ticino two, and Vaud still nine.

An official enquiry has been ordered into certain irregularities — not accidental — which occurred in connection with the recent Federal Census at Chiasso. The number of inhabitants was then computed as 6,168 whilst according to other reliable sources the figure does not exceed 5,700.

Mobilisation exercises have been going on in various parts of the country and by various troops, and have proved very satisfactory. In each case the troops were assembled in a very short time and ready for their task. General Guisan expressed his thanks to the troops and the communes for the discipline and understanding shown to the exercises. Further exercises are for the time being suspended owing to the necessity for concentration on agriculture.

The cantonal Rifle Association of Berne, which is the biggest section of the Swiss Rifle Association was able to increase its members by nearly 4,000 members last year to 45,300. In the Bernese Oberland alone which was always the home of riflemen, the Association counts 170 sections.

Due to bad visibility an army plane out on exercise crashed against a mountain slope north of the Pilatus. Both occupants were killed; they are: Lieut-

Hermann Schneider, age 24, a law student from Zurich and Lieut. Rudolf Weniger, age 24, a vicar of Bruggen (St. Gall).

By agreement with the belligerent parties, Switzerland was able to charter a fleet of about 114,000 tons, mostly Greek vessels, to enable her to carry provisions for herself. Up to now both parties have respected this agreement. Not a single ship carrying the Swiss flag or showing the Swiss coat of arms and carrying provisions for Switzerland was either taken out of its course or sunk.

After the latest extension of the war the central office of the Red Cross Committee for prisoners of war has requested all belligerent nations to let them have a list of all their civilian internees. A few days ago a radio telegram from Washington was received giving a list of the interned Germans, Italians and Japanese in one single telegram which amounted to 13,000 words filling 267 pages. It is the longest telegram this office in Geneva has yet received since the outbreak of the war.

Amongst the several thousand voluntary helpers who are assisting the Red Cross Committee in Geneva in the work for the prisoners of war, there are about 400 who are working under particular circumstances. These are business and commercial people who after their ordinary day's task give up their spare time for that work; they are well versed in filing, typewriting and particularly in comparing the handwritten lists and are therefore of great value as assistants to the existing organisation.

The children of Swiss abroad who were in Switzerland for recuperation were presented by the Swiss Federal Railways with a return ticket from their holiday resort to visit the Rütli. About half of these little guests, nearly 900 were able to avail themselves of this offer and numerous letters and cards of thanks prove that this journey to the Rütli will remain an unforgettable experience in the minds of these children.

To procure work for some time to come the Swiss Federal Railways have proposed a project which will cost 760 million francs and will take ten years to complete. It is proposed to make all lines double track, to lay down new lines and transfer some others, to enlarge station buildings, to complete and renew buildings and strengthen bridges, replace level crossings and extend the electrification and renew and replace rolling stock.

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The project to build great power works with immense storage lakes in the Urserental on the St. Gotthard, in the Muotatal in the canton of Schwyz, and in the Rheinwald in the Grisons, are meeting with increasing opposition, although these works would be of the utmost technical advantage. The reasons for the objections are that they would put old and well cultivated ground and even several villages under water. Experience has proved that in spite of substantial assistance, mountain farmers who were deprived of their farms by powerworks, are unable to make good in new settlements. For this reason places are looked for to establish storage lakes where no cultivated land or homesteads have to be destroyed. A Committee which was entrusted with this task has drawn the attention of the Government of the canton of Glaris to the possibility to construct such a storage lake in the district of the source of the Linth. It proposes to build a dam across the tremendous erosion gorge of the Limmerntobel and thus creating an accumulation works without destroying a single square foot of areable land. The water of this lake and that of the Muttensee would be used to create electric energy to the amount of 180,000 h.p. in a power works in Tierfeld about an hour behind Linthal. Particular stress is laid upon the fact that this work could give up current much sooner than the gigantic works proposed on the Hinterrhein or the Urseren works.

Civil aviation which is expected to make tremendous strides after the war is already planning to extend and rebuild aerodromes. Geneva has already started to extend its drome at Cointrin at a cost of 6 million frs. Just before the outbreak of the war Basle was negotiating with France to erect an aerodrome which would partly be situated on Alsation territory, as the Sternenfeld is being encroached upon by the Rhine docks extension at Rheinfelden. Berne is looking for a new ground, as the Belpmoos would not be sufficient for an increased air traffic, and Lausanne is in a similar position. Already prior to the outbreak of war leading experts recommended a centrally situated aerodrome to serve as an international junction.

Particulars about the new Swiss Aircraft Factory at Stans (Nidwalden) are published in the "Aeroplane," April 3rd. The Pilatus Flugzeugwerke A.G. is a subsidiary of the Oerlikon Tool Machine factory, Zurich, which also manufactures shell guns for aircraft. The new aircraft works has a share capital of two million Swiss francs, and, according to the management, has no connection with foreign enterprises.

A factory for building aeroplanes was established by Claude Dornier in Switzerland at Altenrhein soon after the War of 1914-1918, when the production of military aeroplanes in Germany was forbidden. Much design work on bombers was done there for the Secret German Air Force. During 1938 and 1939 this factory produced a number of Do 24 flying-boats.

The collection which is arranged by the "Pro Ticino" to erect a Motta monument and a Motta foundation has already shown good results.

The Chief of the Federal War Provisioning Department, Dr. Josef Käppeli, has just resigned his for the provisioning of the country so important office, for reasons of health and age. From 1913 to 1938, a full

twenty-five years, he was at the head of the agricultural section of the Federal Economic Department. At the same time, 1913 to 1922 he was the chief of the War Provisioning Department. After retiring from that office he arranged with foresight an organisation which at the outbreak of the present war was composed of competent experts. His successor is Dr. Ernst Feisst, who succeeded him as Director of the agricultural section. After his studies in agriculture and economics at the Federal Technical Academy, in Zurich, Dr. Feisst became a collaborator of the Farmer's Secretariat and editor of a farmer's journal, at Brugg, until he entered the service of the Confederation when he became very closely associated with Dr. Käppeli in 1934. He soon proved to be a prominent expert not only in farming and agriculture, but also an excellent negotiator. At the age of 42 he was appointed as Director of the agricultural section in 1939 and now the Federal Council placed with confidence the heavy task of the war provisioning of the civil population into his hands.

* * *

A new Commandant of the Swiss Guards in Rome has been appointed a few weeks ago and the following particulars are taken from our contemporary "The Irish Independent," April 6th:

Georges von Sury d'Astremont, that genial, well-beloved Solothurner has retired from the command of the Swiss Guard. He must be sixty now. The Pope has nominated as his successor Colonel Heinrich Pfyffer von Altshofen, the smallish, fair-haired major, who was next-in-command in my own Roman reporting days.

Colonel Pfyffer is a native of Lucerne, the eleventh of that distinguished patrician family to reach the command of the Vatican Swiss Guards. He was in the Swiss Army as a young man and has its military bearing. His family — and praise to the Swiss for not letting business interfere with class! — are renowned as the most distinguished hoteliers in Europe. His father owned the elegant "Excelsior" in Rome, his cousins ran some of the finest hotels in Switzerland, their business ramifications reach to the London West End.

All that is in the Swiss tradition. As traditionally Swiss as the Guards themselves. They were established in 1506, the year that saw the laying of the first stone of the present St. Peter's. Raphael designed their uniform. Do you remember the thrill is gave you, when having come through the long colonnade of St. Peter's Square, you saw your first Swiss Guard, halberd in hand, guarding, in his quaint colourful costume, the entrance to the Pope's Palace, "Tapfer und Treu," as their motto says, "Brave and Faithful."

By the way, an Irishman, the Marquis MacSwiney of Mashanaglass, is, I believe, the only non-Swiss who has been decorated with the jubilee medal of the Swiss Guards, a fitting tribute to his painstaking history of their corps, probably the only one written in English. Standard work on the subject is, of course, that of a Catholic Swiss, the late State Archivist, Dr. Robert Durrer, one of Europe's most erudite historians.

* * *

The well-known collector of folks songs and creator of many popular soldiers songs entered his 60th year in February last. Hans In der Grund is undoubtedly the most popular singer in Switzerland and his song of "Gilberte de Courgenay" is sung everywhere where

Swiss soldiers meet. The archives for folklore in Basle possess several hundred songs which he has collected particularly in the mountain valleys of the Valais, Grisons and Ticino.

In Elm, in the canton of Glaris, the oldest but one inhabitant of that canton, Regula Bähler died at the biblical age of 103 years. During her long life she left her village only on three occasions to make excursions into the neighbourhood.

The first woman to hold the office of "clerk of the court" is Miss Nelly Furler from Ziefen (Baselland) who has just been appointed to that important office by the High Court in Berne.

When the trial opened in Zurich against a large number of persons accused of espionage, infringing military discipline, spreading illicit political literature, attempting to obtain volunteers to fight against Russia, etc., a letter was read from Ernest Leonhardt stating that he and his associate Franz Burri would be personally present to meet the charges. Both are at present fugitives from justice and are believed to be residing in Berlin; they were the editors of the suppressed "Eidg. Korrespondenz."

The following table shows how widely different were the conceptions in our cantons when, on January 25th, the proposed election of the Federal Council by a direct popular vote was rejected by an overwhelming majority. The attendance at the polls was extremely poor considering the importance of this constitutional change. It will be noted that the cantons with a predominant industrial population (St. Gall and Geneva being notable exceptions) were somewhat amenable to the reform while the catholic and inner cantons stood resolutely behind our old landmarks.

						Percentages of votes recorded.	
						For	Against
Zürich	...	...	...	...	...	39	61
Bern	...	...	...	...	...	45	55
Luzern	...	...	...	...	...	22	78
Uri	...	...	...	...	...	23	77
Schwyz	...	...	...	...	...	24	76
Obwalden	...	...	...	...	...	11	89
Nidwalden	...	...	...	...	...	12	88
Glarus	...	...	...	...	...	25½	74½
Zug	...	...	...	...	...	25	75
Fribourg	...	...	...	...	...	11	89
Solothurn	...	...	...	...	...	37	63
Baselstadt	...	...	...	...	...	43	57
Baselland	...	...	...	...	...	41	59
Schaffhausen	...	...	...	...	...	36	64
Appenzell A.-Rh.	...	...	...	...	...	32	77
Appenzell I.Rh.	...	...	...	...	...	7	93
St. Gallen	...	...	...	...	...	24½	75½
Graubünden	...	...	...	...	...	33	67
Aargau	...	...	...	...	...	35	65
Thurgau	...	...	...	...	...	26	74
Ticino	...	...	...	...	...	30	70
Vaud	...	...	...	...	...	37	63
Valais	...	...	...	...	...	19	81
Neuchâtel	...	...	...	...	...	30	70
Geneva	...	...	...	...	...	31	69
Total	...	...	...	...	...	32½	67½

THE SWISS MISSION AND THE ENGLISH PRESS.

Without exception the little comment which appeared in the English press has been throughout friendly and encouraging to the problems which are now under discussion between the Ministry of Economic Warfare and the Swiss Delegation. An understanding and appreciation of our peculiar position is everywhere manifest. An early article in the "*Manchester Guardian*," March 21st, reveals the kernel of the hard nut to be cracked:

A Swiss trade delegation is arriving here to discuss the future application of the British blockade. Surrounded by Axis territory, Switzerland is in a difficult position. It must import almost all its raw materials, and in order to pay for them it must export. Since last autumn the Allies have stopped all overseas supplies of raw materials to Switzerland, and after the end of April Swiss exports that contain more than 5 per cent. of Axis material will be regarded as contraband. The substantial reserves of raw materials accumulated before the war and during the first war winter are now almost used up. Fresh supplies from Axis countries are allowed in only for the execution of German and Italian orders, with insignificant additions.

The object of the British blockade is not, of course, to prevent a neutral country from satisfying its own needs but to prevent the enemy from obtaining advantages from supplies which pass the blockade. The total blockade of Switzerland indicates, therefore, that the British Government was not convinced last year that fresh supplies would serve exclusively Swiss interests. No doubt the delegation will offer new assurances on this point. Any alleviation in the blockade that might be possible without bringing comfort to the enemy would certainly ease the delicate position of Switzerland in its struggle against envelopment by the "new order."

A less pleasing exposition was published in the "*Daily Mail*," March 24th, and although the arguments might have been expressed differently nothing — in our humble opinion — can be reduced to an actual misrepresentation; the author might be charged with generalisation in a few instances. We Swiss are at times self-willed and ignor Burns' 150-year admonition

Oh wad some Power the giftie gie us
To see oursels as ithers see us!

Here is the article; we ignore the head-line which like most of them is mis-leading. If we in Switzerland have exhausted our savings or reserves we obviously have to work or starve and unfortunately we cannot choose our employer:

A Swiss trade mission is here to negotiate for "vital food supplies" and for a larger goods exchange by which Switzerland would acquire certain raw materials for her reserve. "If stocks are not replenished," says a Swiss official in London, "it will be a serious thing for Swiss industry."

At a time when we are committed to the bombing of working-for-Hitler factories in Occupied Europe, the case of Swiss factories — which we cannot bomb, yet which work full blast for Germany — calls for treatment divorced from sentiment.

The plain fact is that, every allowance made, Swiss industry has been unnecessarily zealous in