

News at random

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NEWS AT RANDOM

Federal

An ardent appeal was sent over the Swiss radio on March 22nd calling on our people to approach the future with a spirit of sacrifice and determination as the iron belt round our country would probably be pulled tighter still. The experience of a Swiss doctor was cited who during his mission in a Finnish military camp had to amputate the leg of a young soldier. He was trying to find suitable words to express his sympathy when the Finn interrupted him by saying "Sir, I know what you would like to say and I thank you, but for My Finland I would gladly sacrifice the other leg." Federal Councillor von Steiger stated in a recent speech at Zurich that the coming six months would be the most critical period which our country had ever faced.

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In the National Council the consideration of a Federal decree authorising the canton of Geneva to restrict on clearly defined lines the right of other Swiss citizens to take up residence in its territory produced an animated discussion. Geneva is in fact in a very delicate position. The great frontier town has to protect herself against a double danger, firstly from the influx encouraged by her traditional spirit of hospitality of a large number of undesirable people from abroad who wish to settle down for the time being and secondly from receiving confederates whose limited financial resources may ultimately render them a burden to the State which is already taxed to the utmost in sustaining the many charitable organisations working from this centre. The new decree is a denial of the constitutional right guaranteed to every Swiss and which allows him to take up his residence in whatever canton he chooses. The Council finally accepted the alteration in our Constitution with a majority of 89 to 57.

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On the resumption of the debate on the Nicole petition in the National Council, Mr. Delberg (Radical, Berne) maintained that the ban on the Swiss Socialist Federation was legally correct. No new development justified a change in the attitude of the Governments which had to watch over the security of the country.

The spokesman of the minority of the committee, Mr. Leuenberger (Socialist, Zurich) remarked that the measure aimed at the suppression of the opposition; he also considered that the interference was stronger towards the extreme left than towards the extreme right. Another socialist put forward a motion to give a hearing to Nicole's petition for the removal of the ban affecting the communist party, the Swiss Socialist Federation and the papers "*Le Travail*" and "*La Droit du Peuple*." Communism would gain less adherents if social justice were less disregarded. Mr. Albert Picot defended the policy of the Geneva authorities, which was very concerned about its obligations towards the social order. In this respect Geneva was not behind the other cantons. In his opinion the political influence of Mr. Nicole was greatly exaggerated. The Geneva authorities were not in favour of exceptional measures.

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The introduction of control numbers for bicycles was proposed in the National Council. M. von Steiger admitted that the wide use of bicycles increased road danger. The Police Department is of opinion that a solution in co-operation with the cantons will be arrived at. The proposal was accepted.

* * *

The recent issue of 150,000,000frs. of 3½ per Cent. Federal Loan and 150,000,000frs. of 2½ per Cent. Treasury Bonds has been heavily oversubscribed. The Federal Council has decided to accept the full amount of the subscriptions, namely 232,000,000frs. of the 3½ per Cent. Loan and 255,000,000frs. of the 2½ per Cent. Bonds.

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In answer to a petition presented by Leon Nicole and his associates to the executive of the Swiss Socialist Party, the latter has definitely declined to un-

CITY SWISS CLUB.

Messieurs les Membres sont avisés que

L'ASSEMBLEE MENSUELLE

aura lieu Mardi, le 4ème mai, 1943, à 6 p.m., au Brown's Hotel, Dover Street, W.1, (near Green Park Tube Station).

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LE COMITE.

dertake or encourage any steps to bring about the cancellation of the existing Federal ban on communist activities and propaganda.

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The office hours in the Federal Administration from April 1st to September 30th were fixed as from 7.30 to noon and from 2 p.m. to 6 p.m. Saturday afternoon being free. The Staff Union had suggested to start at seven in the morning and finish at 5 in the evening so as to allow more time for them to attend to their vegetable gardens; the administration has met this demand by granting extra hours when opportunity for this purpose not exceeding a total of 17 hours.

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The board of the Schweiz. Depeschagentur (Agence Télégraphique Suisse) has elected Dr. Siegfried Frey to the post of director in place of Dr. Rudolf Lüdi who died about four months ago. Dr. Frey studied at Swiss and Italian universities, was born in 1901 and it at present chief editor of the radical "*Luzerner Tagblatt*" which office he will relinquish on the 1st of July. The appointment was originally advertised and no less than thirty candidates sent in applications from whom the board selected three names Dr. Frey's being among them; however, a special commission was nominated to approach an outside party who possessed the necessary qualifications with the result that the vacancy was offered to Col. Roger Masson who holds an important position on the Army Staff. After due consideration the Colonel declined.

* * *

The newly married Prince and Princess of Lichtenstein paid an official visit to the Federal Council at Berne which latter subsequently entertained them to luncheon.

It is twenty years since an agreement was signed with the Principality of Lichtenstein establishing a customs union. The pact came into force on January 1st, 1924, contributing to and strengthening the existing friendly relations between the Principality and Switzerland.

Cantonal

The canton of Uri is contributing about Frs.160,000 towards the reconstruction scheme of the Lake of Lucerne Navigation company; about Frs.100,000 are a loan free of interest and the remaining Frs.60,000 à fonds perdu.

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The Grosse Rat of Uri has granted a credit of Fr.50,000 to alleviate the housing scarcity.

* * *

In the canton of Obwalden the educational authorities have introduced a four weeks' course in order to instruct the young generation in the virtues of "greeting, thanking and serving."

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The International Music Week will be held this year at Lucerne at the end of August. Famous Swiss and foreign conductors and soloists will be engaged for this festival. Besides the great symphonic concerts and other artistic presentations, it is expected that Beethoven's "Missa Solemnis" will be presented twice.

At its last legislative session the Grosse Rat of Zurich voted Frs.135,000 (the profit of a lottery) for participating in the purchase of Conrad Ferdinand Meyer's estate in Kilchberg.

The Commune of Kilchberg near Zurich contemplates acquiring the estate of Conrad Ferdinand Meyer. The local council has earmarked Frs.150,000, the profit of a lottery, towards the cost.

* * *

The accounts of the canton of Zurich for 1942 show receipts of over 167 million francs and a surplus of Frs.778,000. On the disbursement side amortisations figure with 17 million francs, and 4 million francs have been placed to a special reserve to cover future possible deficits.

* * *

The accounts for 1942 of Zurich (town) balance with a surplus of over 1½ million francs of which one million has been added to the "housing fund for large families."

* * *

The management of the Zurich Stadttheater has succeeded in reducing a former annual deficit of over Frs.637,486 to the negligible sum of 1,700 francs. By catering for the tastes of a larger circle of theatre-goers an average of 73% of the seats available have been occupied (previously 53%); considerable credit is due to the Federal Railways which ran special theatre trains from and to Schaffhausen, Aarau, Zug, Glarus, etc.

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A question raised in the Zurich Kantonsrat asked for a report as to the measures contemplated in order to remove school teachers known to harbour frontist or fascist beliefs.

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In the canton of Zurich the working hours during the summer in the offices of the civil administrations have been fixed from seven in the morning till noon and from two till five in the afternoon, the Saturday afternoon being free.

* * *

The Zurich authorities have enacted a new law regarding the elementary schools. The duration for compulsory education is eight years in every municipality but the children will be allowed to attend school for nine years. The proposal anticipates marked improvements in medical and dental services. Married women cannot be teachers and those getting married have to resign their appointments. The age limit has been lowered from 70 to 65 years with an option to retire at the age of 62. The law prescribes that the teachers have to be appointed by the local school authorities.

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Mr. Conradi, Chief of the Public Works Department, stated that the question of the enlargement of the aerodrome in Dübendorf had been taken into consideration but no decision had been made yet.

* * *

The municipality of Winterthur is seeking powers for building new roads and extending existing ones at a cost of about 3½ million francs.

* * *

Glarus is one of the few cantons which has managed to balance its accounts for the last year, in fact a surplus of over Frs.99,000 has been reported against a budgeted deficit of over Frs.664,000.

The Director for Public works in Berne disclosed that 460 apartments are urgently needed. Designs for the construction of houses were held up as the building sites were often quite unsuitable.

Four Government bills which were submitted to the Basle electors on Sunday, March 21st, were rejected with overwhelming majorities. In the first one the members of the Grosse Rat sought to extend their mandate from three to four years, the second one proposed increases in the income tax rate and the price of gas, the raising of the 10% tax on tickets (Billetsteuer) to 15% was the object of the third bill and lastly the construction of a temporary aviation field in the "Hard" did not find favour. The outcome of the voting is taken to indicate the general disavowal of the financial policy of the cantonal government.

Jean Joerin-Suter died in Basle at the age of 85; he was one of the pioneers of the Rhine navigation movement and a leading personality in the coal trade.

350 members were present at a special meeting of the Swiss Mercantile Society in Basle held on March 28th to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the admission of women to membership of the society. Several addresses were given notably by Prof. Schiess, lecturer in Lausanne, who spoke on the measures contemplated by the Confederation in order to create opportunities for employment. He pointed out in particular that if women were to be put on an equal footing with men it would be necessary to reinstate employees subtracted from agriculture.

The school-teacher, Karl Meyer, in Schaffhausen whose frontist views and utterances have repeatedly invited official censure has now been summarily dismissed from his position.

In St. Gall the building of a sports arena in the "Kreuzbleiche" costing about Frs.415,000 was negatived by the electors by a four to seven majority.

Prof. Dr. Gust. Ruetschi died in St. Gall after a protracted illness at the age of 66. He was a popular teacher at the cantonal school, a prolific writer and a keen musician.

The Swiss fishermen along the Swiss shores of the Bodensee had record catches during the past year. They caught over 300,000 kg. of fish at a value of nearly one million francs. Practically two thirds were Blaufelchen, the remainder were Egli, Gangfisch, pike and trout. The fishing industry to-day still provides the main earnings of about 130 families on the Swiss side of the lake.

The Grosse Rat of Aarau granted the teaching profession an allowance towards the cost of living; it also adopted a socialist proposal to combat unemployment.

In the best of health, both mentally and physically, Frau Anna Rosina Müller-Senn, the oldest citizen in Zofingen, began on March 17th last her centenary; she has been a widow since the age of 51.

Reputed to be one of the oldest Swiss, Johann Tschui (better known as Tschui-Aetti) died in Grenchen at the age of 101½ years; in his time he was a baker, miller, watchmaker, farmer and contractor.

Though a deficit of nearly six million francs was originally budgeted for the accounts for 1942 of Lausanne close with a debit balance of only 1.8 million francs. Better results in the municipal undertakings and a sharper control in and application of the taxation system are stated to be mainly responsible.

The title of "Doctor honoris causa" was bestowed on Monsieur Ernest Ansermet, Conductor of the "Orchestre de la Suisse romande," at the occasion of his 60th birthday.

M. Emile Blanchet, a noted pianist, who was for some years director of the Lausanne Conservatoire, has died, aged 66. He was a great alpinist, and had climbed all the 49 Swiss peaks more than 12,000ft. high, many by new routes and some in company with the late General C. G. Bruce.

Three men — Fernand Ischy, Fritz Joss and Robert Marnier — were sentenced by the criminal court at Payerne to life-long penal servitude for murdering last October a local cattle dealer named Bloch; his body was cut into pieces and buried in a forest. Two accomplices, one a minor, received sentences of 15 and 20 years respectively. The crime is said to

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have been instigated by a pastor Lugin who organised a secret crusade against jews and who has fled to Germany.

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During a ceremony in the conference hall of the University in Neuchâtel, the rector, for the first time, was solemnly invested with the insignia of his post, consisting of the robe cap and chain which he will wear on all official occasions.

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The Town Council of Geneva in a sitting on April 2nd proceeded with the examination of the accounts for 1942. M. Jules Peney, Administrative Councillor, indicated that the extra-ordinary war expenses had risen during the last year to Frs.15,000,000. The Town Council then voted a credit of Frs.40,000 for the renovation of the old houses in the upper town (haute ville).

* * *

The accountant of the Geneva tramway company, J. Mongero-Lorenzo, has been placed under arrest on suspicion of having substracted considerable sums of money during the last few years; a preliminary investigation proved defalcations to the tune of Frs.100,000 in the last twelve months. Some reports state that the accused has admitted defalcations exceeding half a million francs in the course of 15 years.

* * *

The municipal council of Geneva has granted a credit of Frs.4,000 to participate in the guarantee fund in connection with the Swiss Musical Festival which takes place in that town on May 29/30th. For the "Quinzaine de l'Elegance" (a fashion week) probably held in August Frs.35,000 has been voted.

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A "Ferdinand Hodler" monument is to be erected in Geneva and the Federal Council will contribute 25% towards the cost.

* * *

Brushwood fires generated by the excessive heat caused considerable damage in the country round Geneva on Sunday, April 18th; three hectares of forest were completely destroyed near Aire-la-Ville and Cartigny.

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Dr. Guglielminetti, from Brigue, better known under the name of Dr. Goudron, died in Geneva at the

age of 80. He was a great authority on traffic matters and the first one to recommend covering roads with tar to combat the dust nuisance.

Army

No less than seventeen persons appeared before the territorial tribunal IIIA charged with various offences against the security of the State. Three of them were condemned to death but only one is within the reach of the law, he is Fridolin Bähler from Chenis (St. Gall) who used to be employed as a baker in Adliswil (Zurich). He was accused of visiting and inspecting military installations and depots and furnish regular reports against payment to a foreign power; he was shot on the 20th inst. Three others were sentenced to life imprisonment: Cpl. Johann Benzi from Disentis living in Lucerne and Johann Zwerbich, age 63, a former hotel keeper from Sissikon; the third one is living abroad. The remaining eleven received varying sentences of imprisonment ranging from one to twenty years; nine of the seventeen accused were Swiss.

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It is officially announced that early on April 15th a British Wellington bomber crashed in flames in the neighbourhood of Birmenstorf, near Brugg, after flying over several places. No damage was done to property by the fall of the aircraft, but the bomber itself was completely burnt out. The crew of five men escaped by parachute, and have been interned by the military authorities.

Rationing

The food situation has improved since the beginning of this month. Cheese, milk and meat rations have been increased and actually eight eggs have been distributed against four originally fixed for April. A new coupon is being issued entitling the holder to buy either oil, butter or fat.

* * *

The introduction of potato bread may come up for consideration in the near future. In order to gain some experience and indications the Federal Food Office has tried out this tentative war product for several weeks on a number of students of the Basle University who have voluntarily subjected themselves to this experiment. They all have survived the ordeal in fact it is stated that the high nutritive and physiological value of potato bread has been unequivocally established.

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Chocolate is likely to be rationed in the near future. It is stated that the demand has increased far beyond pre-war figures and that the present distribution is unsatisfactory.

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Since March 1st the wholesale supply of paper and board has been limited to 80% of the quantity taken during 1941.

* * *

The mysterious halo which surrounds the popular sausage has to some extent been dispersed by the Federal Food Office which in a recent decree enumerates the creatures whose flesh must *not* be used in their manufacture; these are: rabbits, fish, game, crustaceans, mollusks, frogs and tortoises.

Traffic

Parties interested in international aviation have for a long time past planned the erection of a central aerodrome which would allow the landing of the largest air liners. The plain in the communes of Ersigen and Utzensdorf, between Burgdorf and Solothurn is considered as a particularly suitable country site. The construction of the aerodrome, however, would require about 900 ha., of the most fruitful soil and beautiful woods. Although acknowledging the necessity of an international air connection, the farmers of that particular district which is considered the bernese granary, are opposing the destruction of their fields, meadows and woods. More than 350 ground owners at a meeting declared that they would never give up their land voluntarily for an aerodrome and that they would resist an expropriation with every legal means possible.

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It is reported that another freighter has recently been acquired by Swiss interest; it is the Finnish Ship "Ergo" now lying in Lisbon harbour and which has been renamed "Zurich." It is a 2,800 ton vessel which will increase the total tonnage of our merchant fleet to about 70,000 tons.

* * *

By common agreement between the Federal railways and the railways of the Reich the slow goods traffic for Porrentruy is side-tracked via Basle, St. Louis, Pfettershausen and Bonfol. This measure was taken in order to accelerate the completion of the repairs in the tunnel of La Croix.

Economical

As no one knows if and for how long it will be possible to continue to import foodstuffs, the soil has to be worked still more intensely than ever before. Already last year the Federal Council imposed on agriculture the duty to put a further 100,000 ha. under the plough. This request of increased cultivation includes mainly melioration undertakings, forest clearing and similar work, which requires many thousands of extra hands. Agriculture alone cannot possibly carry out this undertaking with the labour at present at its disposal and which is called up now and again for military service. Forestry equally requires a great amount of assistance, as double the quantity of wood is needed. Finally the construction of nationally important works such as fortifications, roads and power stations require an extra 25-30,000 workers, so that in all roughly 150,000 workers have to be found for agricultural, forestry and structural works. These hands can only partly be withdrawn from industry. The compulsory work service introduced at the beginning of the war will have to be intensified. It is a task of actual national necessity, which no one can be allowed to avoid. In an increased manner the young will be placed at the service of the country. Older school-boys, apprentices and students of both sexes are compelled to work for three weeks on the land. Besides individual boardings at farms, the formation of camps is intended, where the youthful helpers are housed during the night. Unemployed from industry and trades, the number of which is gradually increasing owing to the lack of raw materials, are also compelled to undertake such work. Group leaders are being trained who then will act as camp leaders. The seriousness of the hour

is realized by the whole population as is expressed in the readiness of general helpfulness.

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The Wages Recommendation Committee of the Swiss Economic Department recommends for reasons of the altered conditions of consumption and the cost of living the following wages alteration: To a pre-war wage or salary up to frs.3,000. an increase of 36%, in case of 3-4,000frs. pre-war an increase of 29% and decreasing to 23% on incomes of frs.6,000 pre-war.

* * *

The Federal Council declared Working Agreement observed in the organised hairdressing trade to be compulsory throughout the country. It regulates not only the wages, but also the working hours, meal hours, holidays, health insurance, employers' obligations in case of accidents, etc. Similar agreements have already been approved and declared to be compulsory in other trades; others are in preparation, but the one referring to hairdressing is the first to be applied in every canton.

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The Federal Council took an important decision regarding the Swiss Newsreel which has to be shown in all Swiss cinemas since 1940 in order to counteract foreign propaganda. No booking charge was insisted upon but a fixed fee is now levied and it is also laid down that the film industry is to give financial support towards the cost of its production which amounts to about half a million francs annually.

* * *

The gross profit of the Swiss National Bank for 1942 was Frs.14 millions, against Frs.12 millions in 1941, and a net profit of Frs.5.41 (Frs.5.25) millions. The dividend is again 5 per cent., with an extra 1 per cent. The Federal Treasury receives Frs.3.41 millions (Frs.3.25 millions). The note circulation at December 31st was Frs.300 millions more at Frs.2,640 millions.

* * *

Owing to intensification of agriculture and higher prices for agricultural produce, the number of policies of the Swiss Hail Insurance Co. last year rose to 120,000 against 108,000 in 1941, with sums insured frs.240 millions against frs.191 millions. The company has had the worst claims experience in its 63 years' existence. The premium income was frs.6,690,000 (1941, frs.5,380,000) but claims rose to frs.10,250,000 (1941 frs.2,960,000), giving a claims ratio of 153% against 55% in 1941. This has caused a net loss of frs.1,210,000, whereas there was a profit of frs.840,000

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in 1941; consequently general reserves have fallen to frs. 7,100,000. The directors are considering means of restoring the reserves to be able to meet future catastrophe years.

* * *

The National Accident Insurance Fund celebrated its 25th anniversary. Since its foundation the institution has dealt with more than 3 million accidents among them 90,000 cases of permanent disability and pension payments were made to nearly 3,000 dependants. The expenses for hospital treatment and annuities have amounted to a total of 1,400 million francs.

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It is stated that coal production last year was three times what it was the year before. Swiss industries now find more than half their coal at home. The increased production is attributed, not only to the opening of new mines, but also to better mining methods.

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The sale of electrical heating apparatus increased substantially in 1941, a recent report shows. From 1937 to 1939, the average number of units sold annually was 130,000; in 1941, the total was approximately 250,000.

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The shortage of raw materials has made it necessary to utilise the natural resources of the country, however small they may be, to the fullest possible extent. Thus, extraction of phosphates from deposits discovered in the Jura mountains has been started.

* * *

The Federal Tribunal has confirmed the judgments of the lower courts according to which the board of the Swiss Co-operative (A.C.V.) must be constituted from representatives of affiliated societies. The competing concern "Migros" (Duttweiler) had succeeded in securing the election of some of its nominees who are now compelled to either resign their seats or sever their connection with the Migros.

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The "Manchester Guardian," April 6th says: There is a report that the Swiss are preparing to pull down their older hotels and start building newer and better ones. It seems a long time since anyone in this country ventured to think of a holiday in Switzerland, but the charming and immediate enterprise suggests that the Swiss themselves evidently count on our return. They must also count on our having the money to pay the bills for a sojourn in their improved hotels. So far as one remembers there are no provisions for Swiss holidays in the Beveridge Scheme, but there must be an idea abroad in Europe that we shall presently be able to manage not only social security but a few extra trimmings as well. Naturally, the Swiss must also be counting on tourists from other countries, but it will be a queer hotel that does not include its quota of English visitors.

Humanitarian

On Wednesday, March 24th, the Hungarian Minister for Switzerland in Berne, Monsieur Jean Wettstein in company with the General Consul paid an official visit to the International Red Cross Committee. They were received by the President and other members of the I.R.C.C. After visiting various departments of the Central Office for Prisoners of War, the Minister remarked to Monsieur Huber, the President of the I.R.C.C., the interest he felt during this visit and expressed his admiration for the humanitarian work which is being carried out in Geneva.

* * *

The Federal Council has accepted the resignation of Col. Henri and has thanked him for his services as Commissioner for Internment. His duties have included dealing with the internment of Polish soldiers in the French Army who entered Switzerland in June 1940. These men form the largest contingent of interned soldiers in Switzerland.

* * *

At the beginning of last July a Swiss mission, led by the General Secretary of the Swiss Red Cross, Dr. v. Fischer went to Greece to organise help for children to prevent these from dying from hunger. The mission took with them for distribution in the first place the provisions collected by the Swiss aid for Children organisation. These consisted of peas and pea soup, milk and milk products, figs and cod liver oil, to the value of 1.3 million francs. Besides that, the mission Fischer distributed large sums of money provided by the International Red Cross Committee in order to buy provisions. The center of the mission was first in Athens and the Piraeus and later at Salonica, the Provinces of the interior and the Greek islands. Fortunately Canada has promised a monthly supply of 1,000 tons of milk and if this help should arrive undisturbed, the work of saving the Children will be greatly furthered, even if, for obvious reasons practically no milk can be sent from European countries.

* * *

Geneva has constructed for the use of the International Red Cross Committee a large warehouse in which can be stored 5,000 tons of clothing. Messrs. Casain, town counsellor and Burckhardt, member of the I.R.C.C. were present at a small ceremony to mark the completion of the work.

* * *

To avoid military service for Germany, several hundreds of young Alsations have crossed the Swiss frontiers. The fugitives have been interned in a militarily guarded reception camp. The frontier guards have been increased.

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The sending of foreign children to Switzerland has now been stopped. Several thousand French children could not be sent back for some time owing to the occupation of the whole of France, but the last batch of one thousand has now left Geneva, thus putting an end to that work.

Since 1940 Switzerland has cared for the well-being, health, and feeding of over 25,000 French, Belgian, Yugoslav, Greek, and other children, who each spent three months in Swiss homes or welfare centres, mostly in the mountains. All their expenses were met, thanks to voluntary contributions in money and foodstuffs.

Drink delicious "Ovaltine"
at every meal - for Health!

We referred in our last issue to the newly created Swiss Institute (also described as a "Verein") for the study of foreign countries; the constitution of the Committee is now available and it would appear that practically all the members are university professors of whom Prof. Dr. Lätt alone has had some experience abroad.

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The 10th anniversary of school radio broadcasts was held on April 2nd in Lausanne. Speeches were made by M. Fischer and M. Perret, cantonal councillors; M. Schenk, President of the Committee of Swiss School Radio Broadcasting Service; M. de Reding and M. Besançon, respectively directors of the Swiss Radio Broadcasting studios in Lausanne and Geneva. M. Jaccard, Chief of Elementary Education, gave a historical narrative of the school service. Pasteur Mayor-de Rham, Morges, explained the preparations necessary for these school services.

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A singular dispute occupied the time of the Federal Tribunal a few weeks ago. The owner of a large excursion coach stored his vehicle in a local garage at Lausanne in the winter of 1940. As in spite of repeated application he omitted to pay the agreed monthly charge the garage proprietor informed him by letter that unless the amount overdue was settled by a certain date he would move the coach into the road. Nothing transpired and the threat was duly carried out. Owing to the freezing of the water in the radiator a cylinder crack developed and the coach owner promptly sued the garage for damages. The Federal Tribunal upheld the claim on the ground that either the garage should have removed the water from the radiator or applied to the local court for directions.

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An institute for research into avalanches and snow conditions was opened on April 16th by the Swiss Government on the Weissfluhjoch (8,000ft.), above Davos.

The Institute, which has been created by private enterprise, is the first of its kind, and the value of its researches may be measured by the fact that during the past half-century Switzerland has spent over 16,000,000 francs on defence against avalanches. This work is a very important part of Swiss national defence. Thanks to the better knowledge of snow conditions and avalanches which is available to-day, army casualties have been reduced to small proportions in spite of the fact that half the Swiss army lives permanently in the Alps in order to guard them.

("The Times.")

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Twenty British naval officers who were taken prisoner during the combined operations attack on St. Nazaire a year ago have been supplied with watches by a Swiss firm on a promise to pay for them after the war.

This unusual story of trust in the Royal Navy's word of honour comes from Lieut. S. P. Highton, R.N., whose father lives at Laneslaw Bridge, Colne.

During the action the officers lost their watches and as a last resort one of the party wrote to a Swiss firm asking for a supply of new ones, but pointing out that the only security they could give was their word of honour to pay at the end of the war.

In due course the watches, valued about £200, arrived at the prisoners' camp.

("News Chronicle," April 3rd.)

LA SUISSE, L'U.R.S.S. ET LE COMMUNISME.

Depuis quelque temps le problème du communisme est de nouveau à l'ordre du jour en Suisse. Les uns proposent de lever l'interdiction qui pèse sur tous les groupements qui se réclament plus ou moins directement de la doctrine bolchéviste. Les autres — et souvent les mêmes — préconisent une reprise immédiate des relations diplomatiques avec les Soviets. On a tendance à lier ces deux questions. En apparence connexes, elles sont fort différentes en réalité. En effet, pendant longtemps, nous avons eu un parti communiste en Suisse, sans que pour autant notre pays reconnaisse le gouvernement de Moscou. On pourrait tout aussi bien imaginer une situation contraire, où l'on verrait le Conseil fédéral déléguer un ministre en Russie, tandis que le parti d'extrême-gauche resterait frappé d'interdit. Il convient donc d'examiner ces deux problèmes séparément.

La Suisse n'a jamais reconnu le régime bolchéviste. En 1918, alors qu'elle s'app préparait à le faire, elle avait reçu sur son territoire une mission officieuse qui, normalement, aurait dû se transformer tôt ou tard en légation. Mais cette mission joua un rôle important dans la grève générale et les troubles de novembre 1918. Elle s'ingéra dans nos affaires intérieures. Elle fut reconduite à la frontière sans autre forme de procès. C'est la raison pour laquelle les relations diplomatiques n'ont jamais été établies. Le Conseil fédéral a pensé fort justement que nous ne pourrions nous résigner à accréditer une légation russe à Berne, tant que nous n'aurons pas la garantie qu'elle restera strictement dans son rôle et qu'elle ne se mêlera pas de notre politique intérieure. Aussi longtemps qu'il y a identité entre le gouvernement soviétique et le Komintern, il ne faut pas songer à obtenir cette garantie.

Malgré tout, la question est toujours restée ouverte. Elle a été portée à plus d'une reprise à la tribune parlementaire. La presse s'en est occupée périodiquement. Le Conseil fédéral, par la bouche de M. Motta, a déclaré chaque fois que l'attitude de la Confédération était sujette à révision. En bon diplomate, il évitait de prononcer le mot "jamais." Il réservait l'avenir. Mais, d'accord avec ses collègues, approuvé par les Chambres, il n'a jamais pu se résoudre à faire un geste qui, du point de vue de la sécurité intérieure, aurait pu nous coûter cher, sans d'ailleurs que notre position internationale y gagnât rien de substantiel.

Cela n'a pas empêché les commerçants et les industriels suisses de procéder à des échanges avec l'U.R.S.S. Et l'on se souvient qu'en 1941, une délégation suisse s'était rendue à Moscou pour négocier un arrangement commercial. C'était l'époque où notre approvisionnement se heurtait à des difficultés toujours plus grandes. La Russie pouvait nous fournir des denrées et des matières premières. On conclut un arrangement qui, d'ailleurs, ne portait pas reconnaissance mutuelle des deux gouvernements. Il est assez clair cependant que ce premier contact aurait logiquement mené à une reprise des relations diplomatiques, s'il avait été suivi d'effet. Il ne le fut pas, parce que les hostilités éclatèrent peu après entre l'U.R.S.S. et l'Allemagne. Il était inexécutable.

Dans les circonstances actuelles, nous n'avons raison de changer de politique. Dans cet ordre d'idées, la neutralité nous impose des devoirs très stricts. Si l'on veut que notre politique extérieure inspire con-