

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

Herausgeber: Federation of Swiss Societies in the United Kingdom

Band: - (1943)

Heft: 1016

Rubrik: News at random

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The Swiss Observer

FOUNDED BY P. F. BOEHRINGER.

The Official Organ of the Swiss Colony in Great Britain.

EDITED WITH THE CO-OPERATION OF MEMBERS OF THE LONDON COLONY.

Telephone : Clerkenwell 2321/2.

Published Monthly at 23, LEONARD STREET, E.C.2.

Telegrams : FREPRINCO, LONDON.

VOL. 25 — No. 1016.

LONDON, SEPTEMBER 24th, 1943.

PRICE 6d.

PREPAID SUBSCRIPTION RATES.

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NEWS AT RANDOM

Federal

The impression brought about in our country by the latest developments in the theatre of war is reflected by a leader in the "Neue Zürcher Zeitung," of September 9th, from which the following is an extract: At a moment when Italy, already sorely tried, faces new trials, Switzerland feels the deepest compassion for a neighbour to whom she owes so much of a spiritual and cultural nature. We can only respect the longing of the Italian people for peace which has been demonstrated in the decisions taken by the Government ...

For Switzerland the watchword is again "Supreme readiness, unshakeable determination" ... As a first measure the frontier troops have been called up ... and it is clear to every Swiss that extreme military vigilance is necessary. Each step that brings the war nearer to our frontiers can only strengthen the determination of the Government and the people to maintain the integrity of the Swiss Confederation no matter who may threaten it.

* * *

A recent broadcast from the Schwarzenburg station stated that our country was now entirely surrounded by German troops which seems to indicate that traffic with our southern neighbour would be temporarily interrupted. In fact it was reported at different times that the frontier was "closed" and "re-opened;" the harbour of Genoa will naturally be no more available for Swiss shipping which once again will have to be diverted to overland routes via Portugal, Spain and France. There is no justification for the statement printed first by the *Daily Express* that the German government has demanded the use of our railways for the war transport to Northern Italy and it is to be regretted that the B.B.C. in a German broadcast repeated it with comments. We know the news from the B.B.C. is welcomed by our people at home for their truthfulness and this "Canard" is likely to create doubts in their veracity.

* * *

After a meeting of the Federal Council on September 21st dealing with questions arising from occur-

rences along the Italo-Swiss frontier it was stated that refugees in civilian clothes carrying weapons will be refused admittance.

* * *

The competent Committees of the Federal Chambers have studied the petition supported by ten thousand signatures, to grant an amnesty to a few communists who had been condemned by the Federal Tribunal and also a demand for the annulment of the interdiction of the communist party and its press. The Committee of the National Council was nearly unanimous in the rejection of the amnesty and by a two-thirds majority also rejected the demand for the annulment of the party and its press prohibition. There is no doubt that the Committee of the States Council and afterwards the two Chambers themselves will decide in a similar manner.

* * *

The party conference of the Swiss Socialists held at Winterthur passed a resolution by 440 against eight protesting against the Government suspension of the Fédération Socialiste Suisse (Nicole's communist party) and its affiliated associations. Another resolution passed by a three to one majority insisted that any communist must renounce his membership of the latter before he could be admitted to the socialist party.

* * *

In a speech delivered on August 21st, at Rapperswil, Federal Councillor von Steiger stated that during the war 32,000 Swiss had returned from abroad; of these 6,000 managed to resume their vocations abroad while 26,000 had to remain in the country. He could not give the total number of Swiss citizens residing in foreign countries but estimated that about 100,000 were living in France, 45,000 in Germany and 15,000 in Italy.

CITY SWISS CLUB.

Messieurs les Membres sont avisés que

L'ASSEMBLEE MENSUELLE

aura lieu mardi le 5 octobre à 7h.15 et sera précédée d'un dîner à 6h. précises au Dorchester Hotel, Park Lane, W.1.

ORDRE DU JOUR:

| | | |
|----------------|-------|-------------|
| Procès-verbal. | | Démissions. |
| Admissions. | | Divers. |

Cette Assemblée sera en forme d'un "Bierabig mit Esse."
Les Membres sont priés de s'inscrire pour le dîner par écrit au plus tard le 2 octobre auprès de Mons. P. A. Moehr, Hon. Sec., Imperial House, Kingsway, W.C.2. Prière de s'abstenir de téléphoner.

LE COMITE.

Elections for a Swiss Parliament will take place on October 31st on the basis of the 1941 census. Already a large number of prominent and experienced councillors have expressed their intention of not seeking re-election. One of them is Dr. Gottfried Keller, for 31 years a member of the State Council (Ständerat) and the distinguished father of an equally distinguished member of our Colony. Dr. Keller celebrated his 70th birthday on September 4th, and the three principal political parties of the canton Aargau have decided to nominate as his successor his brother Emil Keller, who is the president (speaker) of the present National Council.

Cantonal

The Rifle Society of Schwyz celebrated on August the 22nd its 500th anniversary. The first document referring to the Society is dated 1447.

New regulations affecting naturalisation in Zurich make it compulsory for applicants to possess a knowledge of a German-Swiss dialect; the age limit is 64.

The Zurich town council has made a donation of Frs.50,000 to the International Red Cross.

The hotel on the Uetliberg, built in 1875 and acquired in 1927 by the city of Zurich, is to be demolished. It was latterly used as an open-air school

and it is now intended to establish on the grounds facilities for glider practice.

National Councillor Gottlieb Bühler died in Frutigen after a short illness at the age of 58.

Statistics tabulating the causes of deaths during the last five years in the canton of Berne show that the emergency conditions due to war have exercised practically no influence. Influenza has claimed only 48 victims in 1942 against 124 in 1938, but fatal road accidents, in spite of the reduced motor traffic, are about the same as before the war.

Trolleybuses operating in Biel have been equipped with loudspeakers through which the driver announces the stopping places and gives other information. This has been found to give considerable relief to the conductor.

The recently deceased widow of the former Regierungsrat, von Arx, in Solothurn, has bequeathed a sum of Frs.35,000 the income from which is to be used for clothing and feeding necessitous school children.

What is stated to be the biggest conflagration in Basle for twenty years destroyed in the night of August 13th the timber yard of Schmidt Söhne A.G., in the Kleinhünigerstrasse. The damage is estimated to exceed one million francs and the valuable stock of timber is irreplaceable under present conditions. The tram service along the adjoining road was temporarily interrupted as the heat from the fire had melted down the over-head wires.

A new monster tram car has recently earned the sweeping admiration of the Balois; it carries a hundred passengers (27 sitting and 73 standing) and had been lent for a week by the Zurich administration in order to demonstrate its practicable use on the Basle system.

Franz Schmid, aged 34, a well-known alpine guide, was killed by lightning on the "Amselturm" (2,772m.) between Davos and the Mayenfelder Furka) at the moment when he took the golden book from the metallic box where it was kept; his companion was thrown to the ground but recovered and was able to descend to the valley.

Joseph Pollinger, another well-known guide, died at Saint Niklaus, in the Zermatt Valley, aged 70.

Thanks to the facilities created under recent legislation the number of naturalisations in the canton Aargau have jumped from 74 in 1941 to 259 in 1942; of these 202 were German and 42 Italian nationals.

Catastrophic damage has been caused in some districts of the canton Aargau by the larva of the cockchafer (Maikäfer). In the Wynen and Suhren valleys parts of fields have been totally destroyed while potato plants and fruit trees have been devoured root and branch. A premium of 50cts. per litre has been offered for the collection of the larvæ; in the commune of Kirchleerau over 5,000 litre of the grub has been gathered by the farmers assisted by the school children.



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On the Meisenegg-Alp (Eggiwil) ten cattle which were resting near a barbed wire fence were killed by lightning.

* * *

Arrests in connection with the black market trade in ration cards have led to the discovery of a secret printing plant in a private house on the outskirts of Lausanne which specialised in the production of faked sugar coupons.

* * *

A pocket of the glacier of Hérens, at the foot of the Dent Blanche (Valais) burst and carried away with it great quantities of stones, earth and tree trunks, which caused grave damage near Haudères. One of the bridges of the Arola route was carried away; shortly afterwards a saw-mill, a bakery and four barns were carried away by the floods. A second bridge and the one of Evolène are in grave danger. The alarm was given in all the villages throughout the valley. The electricity in the whole region is cut off. During the night of the 22nd August a second pocket burst. No victims have been reported but the damage is considerable.

* * *

A record harvest of apricots is reported from the canton of Valais.

Army

By the accidental crashing of a military plane near the Greifensee, the pilot and observer were killed; they are Capt. Lucien Boudry, age 33, and Lt. Lucien Beckert, age 30. Two soldiers also lost their lives during alpine manoeuvres in the Bernese Oberland; one is Ferdinand Kürzi, age 33 from Weesen, and the other Peter Hess, age 21 from Burgdorf.

* * *

During manoeuvres in the Tschingelhorn area two gunners made a fatal fall; they are Albert Moor, age 21, from Winterthur, and Hans Bohren, age 26, from Berne.

* * *

Artillery exercises were responsible for the death of Corp. Adolf Baumann, age 26, from Glattburg.

* * *

Four American Fortresses made a forced landing on September 6th, one came down near Magadino and the other three near Dübendorf. Another machine crashed on the Lake of Constance near Romanshorn; nine of the crew, all hurt, were saved by approaching fishermen.

* * *

Events along our southern frontier have prompted our authorities to mobilise a number of military units in order to strengthen the existing garrisons at the alpine passes and tunnels. No incident has been reported yet. For some days there was a steady stream of fugitives chiefly Italians. Some papers reported that near Geneva a company of Italian soldiers crossed the frontier fully armed. At other sectors, notably on the Ticinese frontier, soldiers discarded their uniforms and presented themselves as civilians; there were also a number of British, Serbian and Greek prisoners who had escaped from near-by camps. There is no reliable news of their fate; the last we heard is that they sat beside their hand luggage while the fron-

tier authorities were waiting for instructions from Berne. On the other hand papers say that members of the Italian Royal family and other notable persons were passed through without hindrance.

Rationing

The warm dry weather had made it possible to bring in the hay but the absence of rainfall has been damaging to pasture land. Should the dry weather continue the milk will certainly not be as abundant as it has been so far during the war. Another consequence of the drought is that the meat supply is again more abundant. It had been decided that after September 1st there is to be only one meatless day in the week, Friday, in private homes and two, Wednesday and Friday, in catering establishments.

* * *

Anent the "telephone menus" referred to in our July issue "The Daily Herald," August 23rd, publishes the following report from its Berne correspondent:

"Daily menus over the telephone to suit all tastes and fit all purses is the latest Swiss method of assisting housewives to cope with rationing problems.

Housewives dial "75430," a girl dictates two menus — one for lunch, one for dinner.

The menus are not unrealisable daydreams of a pre-war gourmand!

Every dish has been carefully pondered on and adapted to the season as well as the budget of the average Swiss middle-class family of four.

To-morrow's lunch will be vegetable soup; cabbage and barley with sausage and boiled potatoes.

Dinner will be mixed apple and potato pulp made a little more tasty by putting slices of toasted bread on top. Then follows coffee and milk with bread and whey-cheese.

This innovation has been brought into existence by the collective effort of the telephone administration and the Zurich municipal gas company.

The menus are composed by a group of experts paying the most careful attention to rationing prescriptions and nutritive substance."

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Economical

One of the greatest economic wonders of our days is the fact that Switzerland possesses the largest Re-insurance Company in the world. In spite of the isolated position of our country, the Swiss Re-insurance Company in Zurich has not only been able to keep up its business, of which more than 90% is derived from abroad, but reached last year the highest premium receipts since its foundation with an amount of 360 million francs. The result from the foreign activities of the Company is for our economy of the utmost importance, as from them it pays in direct taxation annually more to the Swiss exchequer than what it earns in an average year from its home business. The undertaking owes its existence to private initiative and personal enterprise, but its prestige to Swiss ability, reliability and trustworthiness, which in these uncertain days are appreciated all over the world.

* * *

Whilst almost the whole world is aflame and the already existing difficult position in many countries is made even worse through labour troubles, our little country enjoys not only external peace, but also an almost undisturbed labour concord. According to official statistics only 19 labour disputes have occurred during the last year by demands for an increase of wages, causing strikes of short duration. As a result of these difficulties merely 7,000 working days were lost. Only four strikes, involving 400 strikers and 1,700 working days occurred at firms belonging to employers organisations. This low number of lost working days bears witness of the sense of responsibility of workmen and employers alike and of the conviction that peace in industry is of the greatest importance for Swiss economy.

* * *

It is probably unique in the whole world that all the members belonging to an industry take their holidays at the same time. This happens actually in the Swiss watch industry now for some years past. In this way all the watch factories close down in the first week in August. In the canton of Neuchâtel alone roughly 40,000 watchmakers, men and women, have had their well-earned and fully paid holidays.

* * *

Rarely experienced favourable living conditions were afforded to vermin in field and garden by last winter's mild weather, so that they were able to do great damage to growing crops. In many districts there is for some months past a real plague of mice which can only be combated by organised communal action. In other places the meadows and fields show large brown patches of dried up plants. When the top layer of the soil is taken up, countless larva of the cockchafer are found, which have eaten off the roots of the plants. The Colorado beetle which eat off the leaves of the potato plant is combated only by systematically spraying the affected fields. In the canton of Baselland the phylloxera has lately devastated the vineyards.

* * *

The wool position in our country is dealt with in an article in the "*Manchester Guardian*," September 6th, of which the following is a reprint:—

The Swiss wool textile industry appears to have fared surprisingly well during the war. The recently

published annual report of the Swiss Federation of Wool Industrialists pointed out that the average dividend distributed in 1942 amounted to 5.08 per cent. For the larger concerns alone the average dividend in 1942 worked out at as much as 7.48 per cent. This compares with an average of 4.54 per cent. in 1939, which was by no means a poor year. Moreover, the employment figures of the industry have so far been better than could have been expected. The average number of wool textile workers in 1942 was 9,640, which is nearly 600 less than the war "peak" of 10,221 reached in 1940, but about as much more than the 9,052 workers employed in 1939.

It must, however, be pointed out that during the war the average working hours of the industry have declined considerably. While in 1939 the number of workers employed for the full 48-hour week was 7,613, it fell to 5,745 in 1942. It is likely that this year both the number of workers employed and the average working week of the industry will contract more heavily. The reason is the growing shortage of raw wool. During 1943 imports of raw wool into Switzerland have fallen to a negligible figure, after having declined very heavily ever since 1940. For instance, in 1942 the average monthly imports did not exceed 154 tons, against 412 tons in 1941 and 1,275 tons in the period from January to August, 1939. The reserves accumulated from imports since 1938 have now been largely used, and domestic production — there are 30,000 sheep farmers, but only 195,500 sheep in Switzerland — is far too small to meet demand. The use of synthetic admixtures to wool products has already become general and cannot be extended much further.

Traffic

Mr. H. Huber, Assistant to the Chief Engineer for Traction, has been appointed to succeed Mr. W. Müller, who retired on June 30th, as Chief of the Traction & Workshop Division. Mr. Müller, who is well known as an expert on braking questions, has seen 41 years' service with the Federal Railways system or its constituents. He was Chief Engineer for Traction of the former 5th Division at Lucerne from 1915 to 1923; and he was concerned intimately with the introduction of electric traction on the Gotthard route.

* * *

Here is a short reference to an inspection tour recently arranged by S.F.R.; it is taken from the "*Railway Gazette*," September 3rd:

"The Swiss Federal Railways and the Swiss National Tourist Department recently organised a tour by some 30 British and American press representatives, which included an inspection of the modern and comprehensive loud-speaker installation in Zurich Main Station, and demonstration of the working of the automatic train-control system which has been extended since 1933 to all Federal electrified lines. A brief explanatory lecture was given by Ingénieur Felber, of the Federal Railways, in a special Red Arrow railcar standing in Zurich Station, after which the car was taken on to the Winterthur line and stopped at signals between Oerlikon and Effretikon to afford an opportunity of inspecting the track magnets and corresponding equipment on the railcars and engines. A recent development was demonstrated, consisting in a portable track-magnet, which can be

fitted on the track at any point, and which is used to supplement the usual warning-signals requiring slow running for permanent-way repairs. This ensures that, should a driver fail to observe the warning signals and to press the "acknowledgment" button, a train would stop before reaching the section concerned."

* * *

The same weekly brings some interesting particulars about the railway library:

"Twenty years ago the Swiss Federal Railways established a library under the direction of Herr E. Mathys (who now has two assistants), with the object of helping the staff to obtain a knowledge of every aspect of railway engineering, operation, and economics. The collection has been increased year by year until it comprises 7,500 books, 3,000 pamphlets and booklets, and 22,000 volumes of periodicals, official reports and statistics. Last year it was used by 3,000 members of the railway staff and 500 other persons; about 12,000 items were issued on loan.

Until the outbreak of war the library received about 300 periodicals. It is the practice to circulate literature of this type to certain departments and offices: any reader who does not find the normal time-allowance sufficient for the study of an article indicates on a label his wish to have the journal concerned sent to him a second time. Special attention has been given to the making of a complete card-index of all but the most insignificant items in the periodicals, enabling the articles therein to be turned up rapidly, and the trouble of searching through the yearly or half-yearly indexes in the volumes to be avoided. About a quarter-of-a-million cards so far have been prepared."

* * *

At the present moment our high sea fleet which was only started since the beginning of the war consists of twelve ships with a total of 66,000 register tons, of which the largest has a capacity of 9,300 tons. In the past year the total tonnage carried by these steamers amounted to 750,000 tons, equal to 55 grammes per day and per head of our population. The steamers which are all of the tramp class of eight to ten knots fly the Swiss flag and have on each side in 2 metre high letters the word "Switzerland," which at night are illuminated by searchlights, in order to show the nationality to the U boats. At a fixed time every day each ship by wireless makes its exact position known in order to inform the admiralties of the belligerent nations of the course of the Swiss boats. The boat-crews consist mainly of subjects of neutral states. Only one boat is in charge of a Swiss captain, the Bernese Gerber, but all the wireless operators on board are Swiss and gradually an all-Swiss crew who has already proved to be sea-worthy is being trained on a Swiss training ship. The first serious loss has been chronicled a fortnight ago when the steamer "Maloja" (2,000 tons) loaded to capacity with copra and oil was torpedoed in the Mediterranean; the boat sank but the majority of the crew were saved. The "Maloja" happened to be near the firing line during a skirmish between German U-boats and Italian warships off the coast of Corsica. Another smaller vessel, the Chasseral, carrying a mixed cargo of copra, cocoa, coffee, etc., caught fire in the harbour of Lisbon on Saturday, August 21st; the ship was towed to the middle of the Tagus and the fire extinguished the same evening.

Humanitarian

The Council of the Swiss National Foundation for assistance to soldiers and their families (Don National), working under the presidency of General Guisan, has recently submitted the final account of the various collections made during last year. It shows total receipts of 7,088,700frs., of which 6½ millions were obtained through general collections and about half a million through army days. In these results are included the donations made by the Swiss abroad. From the Americas (north, central and south) nearly frs.60,000 were collected, from Africa roughly frs.40,000, from Asia nearly frs.11,000, and from European countries about frs.71,000 were sent, in all 181,600 frs. Since the start of the mobilisation to end of 1942 the Swiss abroad have contributed to the Don National frs.1,360,300 and thus have given tangible proof of their loyalty to the homeland.

At the beginning of this month no less than 150 trucks of ten tons each containing several millions of prisoners' parcels had accumulated in the Geneva railway sheds waiting to be despatched to their destination; they were sent from the U.S.A., Great Britain and Canada. In the first quarter of this year well over 30,000 tons of Red Cross relief parcels for prisoners of war or civilian internees left Geneva. Steps are being taken to ensure larger and more regular consignments of parcels to non-interned civilians, as it has been found that trial parcels sent to non-interned British, Norwegian, Polish, Dutch, Czechoslovak, French, and Belgian subjects have reached them.

The delegates meeting of the Swiss Alpine Club, held at Pontresina, voted a credit of Frs.68,500 for the reconstruction of the huts on the Lüderne and Blümlisalp. It was also decided to admit the professional guides to the benefits of the Club's accident insurance by increasing the members' contribution by one franc.

* * *

To further commemorate the centenary of the first issue of Swiss postage stamps another jubilee stamp has been issued by the Federal Post Office. It depicts what is commonly known as the "double Geneva," the stamp issued in 1943 by the canton; the net proceeds will be earmarked for the funds of the Swiss Red Cross.

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