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The Swiss Observer

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NEWS AT RANDOM

Federal

Backed by lists containing over 100,000 signatures the socialist member Reinhardt tabled a motion urging the Federal Council to restore normal diplomatic relations with Russia. In the National Council Federal Councillor Pilet-Golaz, delivered on March 29th, a protracted and well-prepared statement reviewing — and dwelling on — the different phases of Russia's history since October 1917. Our Foreign Minister was non-committal and gave the impression of regarding any change in our pre-war diplomatic relations with an uneasy mind lest such a change might be regarded as a departure from our policy of strict neutrality. We hope to reproduce in full the very interesting statement in a future issue. On April 3rd Swiss Radio announced that the Federal Council while upholding the existing trade pact declines to extend official recognition to the Soviet Union. The decision is said to be based on the neutrality declaration of 1939 which laid down that no changes in the diplomatic relations with other countries could be made during the war.

The existing trade agreement with Germany concluded for periods of three months last October and establishing a clearing payment system has been extended till June next.

The total indebtedness of the Confederation at the end of 1943 was 5553.6 million francs, an increase of 1116.7 million francs compared with the previous period.

The 550 million francs loan submitted for public subscription from March 31st to April 14th in three different denominations found an extremely well-disposed market, the total amount applied for reaching 960 million francs which with the exception of 15 million is being retained by the Government.

Cantonal

Considerable damage was caused when the agricultural establishment including a distillery, large stables and stock, machinery, etc., belonging to the communal councillor

Anton Büeler, in Hasli near Seewen (Schwyz) was practically reduced to ashes on Friday night, February 11th.

Based on judicial and technical opinion, the government of the canton of Grisons has refused the requested concession for the erection of the great power plant foreseen in the Hinterrheintal, which would have put the villages of Splügen, Medels and Nufenen under water. Instead of this great plant several smaller ones are to be erected much to the satisfaction of the inhabitants of the threatened valley.

The municipal theatre in Lucerne is to receive a subsidy of Frs.205,000 for the next winter season. A further considerable sum has also been voted by the town fathers to enable the steamship company on the lake to carry on; for the last twenty-five years this undertaking has been enjoying financial tonics.

In spite of signs to the contrary the comparatively healthy economic conditions in the western part of our country are reflected by the accounts of the municipality of Berne. A deficit of about five million francs was anticipated but the accounts to the end of last year showed a surplus of Frs.25,000.

An avalanche descended at the beginning of this month along the lake of Brienz and the Brünig line had to be worked by a shuttle service.

The canton of Fribourg in view of the anticipated post-war boom conditions has decided to make a strong bid for attracting tourism to its regions.

The huntsmen and gamekeepers in the canton Solothurn have had a record year as well as the cantonal treasury which netted nearly a hundred thousand francs for "Patents."

A new political party has come into being in Basle and styles itself "Partei der Arbeit;" it is a counterpart of a new group in Geneva under the name "Parti Ouvrier Suisse" and promises to support the socialists whenever possible.

The influenza epidemic in Basle has made it necessary to adapt one of the local school buildings as an emergency hospital.

April 1st, 1944, will be recorded in our history books as a black-letter day: at about eleven in the morning Schaffhausen was heavily bombed by foreign aircraft. Two American Liberator formations of about

30 machines crossed the Rhine and flew over the canton of Thurgau in bad weather; when recrossing they were attacked by our A.A. guns and also, according to non-official reports, by unidentified aircraft. One Liberator dropped a load of bombs hitting the Schaffhausen railway station, several adjoining blocks of buildings and factories; some old picturesque houses in this part of the town as well as the museum were badly damaged. A wall of the local prison was also damaged; a number of inmates stepped out to help in the rescue work and then returned to their cells. A superficial knowledge of the local geography on the part of the American pilots may have contributed to this calamity; Schaffhausen stands on the German side of the Rhine and the canton forms an enclave surrounded by the Reich with the exception of a small gap in the south. The casualty list is heavy: thirty-six people killed (twenty of them while queueing for tickets at the station), thirty-six injured and taken to hospitals, and about three hundred were rendered homeless. The railway service was temporarily suspended and telephonic messages with the canton were reserved for several days for the use of the victims. The tragic fate of our northernmost canton has aroused deep sympathy throughout the country. Headed by the Federal Council all the cantonal and municipal authorities that happened to be in session have sent first-aid monetary contributions.

The burial of the dead on the following Tuesday at the St. Jakob church had the character of a manifestation. The Federal Council, the cantonal governments, the army and the large towns were officially represented; church bells in villages and places in the

adjoining cantons of St. Gall and Zurich were sounded during the cortege. Energetic protests have been lodged with the U.S. government who has promised full reparations and the diplomatic representatives both in Washington and Berne have expressed their sincere regrets; the Swiss Radio, on April 4th, even mentioned that Monsieur Thurnheer, our Minister in London, had personally received the American Ambassador, Mr. Winant, and Lieut. General Spaatz of the European Strategic Bombing Force, tendering their regrets and assurances that all measures had been taken to prevent a similar occurrence.

* * *

According to an official statement made subsequently in the municipal council, 41 separate fires broke out soon after the bombardment; altogether 331 incendiary and H.E. bombs were dropped.

* * *

According to Swiss Radio the American Minister has handed, on the 11th inst., to the Political Department in Berne, a cheque for one million dollars as a first instalment while the full damage is being assessed.

* * *

At the forthcoming Landsgemeinde at Herisau a supplementary cantonal tax of 20% will be proposed by the government.

* * *

St. Gall is repaying a 3½% loan of twelve million francs contracted in September, 1932; no fresh issue or conversion is announced.

* * *

National Councillor Alfred Baumgartner died in St. Gall at the age of 49. He was keenly interested in cantonal politics and was particularly identified with the growth of the local Kaufm. Verein and the development of its school. His seat in the Council will be taken by Dr. Rolf Bühler (Uzwil).

* * *

The district court in Aarau sentenced sixteen young communists to various terms of imprisonment — the leader Emil Arnold from Basle to three months — for having distributed after dark propaganda literature containing slanderous statements against local residents.

* * *

In the Grossrat elections in the canton of Thurgau on March 26th the socialists more than regained the seats which they lost three years ago and are now holding 32 mandates (24) out of a total of 116. The chief losers were the liberals and the liberal bloc has now lost the absolute majority in the council.

* * *

In the memory of man no such drought has been experienced in the canton Ticino as that which has prevailed since last November. In consequence forest fires have been numerous and destructive. In spite of all efforts, fires have been sweeping the mountain slopes and ravaging the fine fir and chestnut forests above Ascona.

* * *

The former Federal Judge E. Garbani-Nerini died in Lugano at the age of 76.

* * *

Inoculation against diphtheria has been made compulsory in the canton Vaud for all children up to twelve years.

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National Councillor Pierre Rochat lost his life in a cycle accident. Barrister by profession he edited "La Revue" and was a member of the municipal Council of Lausanne. He was forty-five years old, entered the National Council in 1931 and was chairman of the radical-democratic parliamentary group.

The former National Councillor Eugene Nasson who, when the communist party was officially dissolved in 1941 suffered expulsion from the National Council, died in Lausanne at the age of 67; he had held in his time several important offices in the administration of the Canton Vaud.

The cultivation of tobacco in the canton Valais is receiving increased attention; so far about 12% of the total area of 940 hectar devoted to the growing of the "weed" in our country is found in the Valais. Ticino, the home of the brissago, is still an easy first, producing nearly as much as Fribourg and the Valais put together.

Professor P. E. Bonjour, an authority on education, compiler of text books and teacher for nearly fifty years at the Ecole Commerciale in Neuchâtel, died at the age of 82 at St. Blaise.

Professor William Rappard celebrated on Saturday, March 18th, the 30th anniversary of his lectureship at the University of Geneva; the ceremony was attended by a large number of distinguished personages.

The maximum penalty of 7½ years penal servitude was inflicted on the chief accountant, Mongero, of the Geneva Tramway Company; he had succeeded in the course of fifteen years in abstracting for his own personal use a sum of nearly half a million francs.

Army

With the approval of the Federal Council the Army Command has issued a general warning to the population to clear the highway and take shelter whenever an alert is sounded. It is also pointed out that the picking up of fragments from foreign aircraft or the acceptance of "souvenirs" from members of a crew that may have baled out leads to a prosecution for theft as such scraps or attachments are the property of the foreign power concerned.

It is now confirmed that Major Ernst Hans Pfister who was charged with high treason has been executed by a firing squad, his appeal for mercy having been rejected by Parliament with 210 against 15 votes.

No less than twenty-two accused were dealt with by the Territorial Tribunal IIb; they were all charged with systematic military spying and belonged to a very mixed organisation. Some of the incriminating documents were secured by house-breaking. Two were sentenced to be shot, one hailing from the Principality of Liechtenstein and the other from Zug, i.e., the 24 year old Kurt Johann Roos; four earned penal servitude for life and five hard labour from twenty years downwards. Of the remainder six were beyond the reach of justice one of them, also from Liechtenstein, being condemned to death.

Capt. Fritz Burkhalter, from Langenthal, a military attaché at our Legation in Italy, was killed during a recent air raid on Bologna.

Lieut. Roland Müller born at Untersiggenthal (Aargau) in 1918 was accidentally killed during military exercises in the Broye vaudoise.

During manœuvres a military plane had to make a forced landing near the Greifensee causing the death of the two pilots, Willi Zwahlen, age 26, from Matten, and Walter Thoma, age 22, from Kaltbrunn.

Two aviation instructors crashed into a heavy snow barrage near Lungern and were killed on the spot; they are Major E. M. G. Jean Walker, from Ried near Brigue, and Capt. Walter Wagner, from Berne.

As air warfare soars in intensity forced landings in neutral countries are the order of the day though it is not often that a whole squadron appears "in corpore." On April 13th no less than 13 American bombers singled out the hospitable fields of the Dübendorf aerodrome or its neighbourhood.

At an inspection of troops in the region of the St. Gotthard, General Guisan addressed a battalion, extraction of which we are giving here in translation:

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The order of the hour is still : redoubled watchfulness, the rifle firmly in hand.

You all, soldiers in the army, countrymen from near and far you will all readily understand what this means and why I am addressing you from the heights of the St. Gotthard, from the place where the history of our country had its beginning.

Seven hundred years ago a bridge was erected across the gorge of the Reuss, which not only signified the beginning of our political organism, but contained already the nucleus of our state in the most profound sense.

For the St. Gotthard is for us the centre of our multiformed, free country. On the borders of the rivers which have their sources at the St. Gotthard are the abodes of the races which form our people.

But the St. Gotthard is also the symbol of the alpine passes which belong to us and which we are guarding and which, if necessary, we shall defend with everything which we have.

Soldiers you all know, why you are ready with weapon in hand. You know what it means to be at the ready.

Experience is expensive, war experience the most costly, because it costs our means and our blood.

Out of the roar of the Reuss on that bridge then built I can hear the warning : in the year 1799 here on this spot two foreign armies fought for the possession of this bridge. In those years our country was devastated and could recover from the heavy blows only after decades.

To-day our country has greater strength, our army is stronger, better armed and better trained than ever before. Again new arms have been invented and introduced. I will only mention the new anti-tank gun and the valuable flat trajectory gun. My confidence in our people and our army is unshakeable. As hard as the granite on which we are standing, is our will to remain an independent, neutral and humane people and country.

Let us never forget, particularly in times of great danger, that we as soldiers are guaranteeing the independence and liberty of our country. We do not know what the future has in store. One only knows : God. He will have the last word. Therefore we have every confidence and in the fifth war year we remain confident, true and firm.

Traffic

A slight collision in the Pully station between a passenger and a goods train caused a temporary interruption of traffic ; though one of the passenger coaches was derailed none of the twenty-five casualties proved to be hospital cases.

* * *

As the time may not be far off when we can see our own country again, some of our readers may like to ponder already now over some of the extras that will be extracted from us in the shape of increased prices of railway tickets. The following from the "Railway Gazette," April 7th, is certainly not discouraging : " In connection with the increases in fares and rates on Swiss railways which became effective on April 1st, an official statement issued on behalf of the Swiss Federal and the privately-owned railways as well as shipping services on the lakes says that the raising of the age limits

from four to six years for children travelling free and from twelve to sixteen years for travel at half fare has now been adopted, and also came into force on April 1st. Revised details now available indicate that single fares are increased by twenty per cent., with maxima of fr. 3, 2.10, and 1.50 for first, second, and third-class fares respectively. For return tickets the increase is ten per cent., with maxima of fr. 2.40, 1.70, and 1.20 respectively. For Sunday return tickets the same increase applies as for single fares. For Sunday and holiday tickets, as well as ten-day circular tickets, the increase is the same as for ordinary return tickets, with the same maxima. For school parties the increase on return tickets is ten per cent. with a maxima of 60 centimes (third-class). There is no increase on family tickets. General season tickets (for the whole of Switzerland) are increased by ten per cent. for eight-day to monthly seasons, and by five per cent. for annual tickets.

The ten per cent. increase in ordinary and express goods rates, luggage, and livestock rates, came into force on March 1st. No increase is applied in respect of distances over 150 km. (93 miles), so that actually the increase works out to be 8 per cent. for a distance of 200 km. (124 miles), or 6 per cent. for 300 km. (186 miles.)"

Rationing

Just over 26 kg. meat per head has been consumed in our country during last year. Over a million animals were slaughtered of which about 35% were cows, 15% calves, 11% oxen and 20% pigs. The figures are only slightly lower than those for the previous period but practically no meat in any form has been imported.

* * *

According to a recent statistic for 1943, about 110 million kilos of rationed food articles were consumed by the people of Zurich in their homes, and 17 million kilos in restaurants, cafés, etc.

* * *

Rubber shortage has caused the suspension of all motor traffic, both private and public, on Sundays.

* * *

In spite of the reduced supply of cocoa and sugar the quantity of chocolate retailed in our country in 1943 has been the same as in 1938.

* * *

About seventy persons are said to be involved in the distribution of false meal coupons ; these coupons supposed to have been effectively cancelled were originally delivered to a paper mill in Tecero (Ticino) for pulping.

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With the end of this month the admixture of potato flour to our bread will be discontinued as the surplus stock of "spuds" has become exhausted.

Humanitarian

The coming First of August collection will be earmarked for the Swiss Red Cross. The official badges are manufactured in the workshops of the "Entre'Aide aux Jeunes par le Travail" at Grandson. The four special stamps will record episodes from the battle of St. Jakob a/d Birs.

* * *

The great work of the winter assistance (Winterhilfe) touched a new record. The collection including the contribution of the Confederation, the cantons and the communes reached roughly 3.3 million francs. In addition very generous donations in kind were made, particularly by the agricultural population.

The firm of Escher-Wyss & Co., in Zurich which for over 100 years has been building turbines has just produced a propeller for aircraft, which is able to brake an aeroplane on landing in an uncommonly short distance. The landing strip on an aerodrome can, thanks to this adjustable propeller, be reduced from 300 to 100 metres.

* * *

The tiny islet of Campione on the Swiss shores of Lago Maggiore still supplies the lighter side of the war news. In peaceful times the Campionesi prospered without tiring efforts on the prodigality of the visitors to Lugano and are now complaining bitterly; they are not satisfied that so far the war has left them alone. Here is a typical reference which appeared in the "Sunday Pictorial," March 26th: A tiny state with only 600 population is planning to go to war! And for the very odd reason that it wants to be neutral.

It's like this. Campione, little island State on the Swiss-Italian frontier, recently overthrew its Fascist rulers.

It asked Switzerland to take it over so that it would be in no risk of getting into the real war.

Switzerland, wanting no bother with Italy or anybody else, said: "We won't have you."

Now the saucy Campionesi say they are going to make war on Switzerland so that the Swiss will be compelled to occupy their country!

But there's another reason at the back of their cunning minds. Campione is "broke" and Switzerland is pretty prosperous now.

Poor Switzerland's in a jam.

If she takes over Campione there'll be a row with Italy — and of course with Germany.

If she doesn't, the Campionesi will still force her into a row with Italy — and of course, Germany!

A leading article in the "Manchester Guardian," April 14th, contains the following pleasantry: "The British are sincerely missed, not only for their pounds (for which the Swiss have a deep respect) but for themselves." We believe that even after the war the British *will* be missed — and we think a good many of our London compatriots too — as long as the Swiss respect for the pound manifests itself so poorly.

* * *

A correspondent of the "Edinburgh Evening News," April 3rd, has discovered a new club at Berne and a very exclusive one; this is what we are told: "One of the strangest social clubs in the world has been formed in Berne. It is the Anglo-American Club for interned fliers, with premises at the Hotel Schweizerhof.

The club is another example of the pleasant conditions which men who have made forced landings on Swiss territory enjoy. People in Britain who have received news that their husbands or sons are interned in Switzerland can rest content that they are enjoying the most comfortable conditions to be found in Europe to-day.

Actually, British and American airmen are not even interned in the strict sense of the word. They are asked to give their word they will not try to escape, then they are allowed to live where they like. Those who are injured, either during operational action or when landing, receive medical treatment in the nearest hospital. On the radio they can hear British and U.S. broadcasts.

The idea of the club, at which airmen of the British and U.S. Forces could meet, was due to American initiative. Although I am not allowed to give the number of members, I can say that the total makes the club a busy centre of Anglo-American amity."

* * *

The credit of another discovery goes to the "Evening Standard," March 29th. Another country not as pacific as Switzerland would have gone to war to preserve a settlement where you bought your wine by the clock.

"The more pacific inhabitants of Bessarabia include the Swiss and the Lipovani. Far down in the south, a few miles from the old Turkish fortress of Akerman, lies the village of Shaba, the only Swiss colony in the world.

It owes its foundation to M. de la Harpe, the French tutor of Alexander the First, who travelled about in Russia when his services were no longer required. Near ruined Akerman he noticed that the red colour and texture of the soil resembled that where vines are grown in his native Canton de Vaud. The Tsar agreed to invite de la Harpe's Swiss compatriots to settle there; they would be exempt from taxation for a long period and from military service.

When de la Harpe went home and tried to enlist recruits they decided to send one man to spy out the land. His report was favourable and a number of families proceeded by road to Vienna and thence down the Danube. In a few years the local wine was so much in demand in Russia that Shaba became very prosperous and German-Swiss joined those who spoke French.

The captain of the football team told me that he did not issue his orders in the two languages, but in Russian, when Shaba was Russian, and afterwards in Rumanian.

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

They had a pleasant custom of selling wine by the hour — all the wine a man could drink in an hour cost him seven lei, equivalent to about threepence; for the second hour the charge was six lei. If he fell asleep the drinker went on paying at the same rate until he could sleep without incurring any debt. Life in Shaba must have been very agreeable."

It is to be hoped that when this distant colony has to find another home they will settle down somewhere within easy motoring reach of the London Colony.

* * *

Musical Boxes are in great demand according to the following from the "*Evening Standard*," March 25th; we know a friend who had one or two hidden away on the loft; we think their music was somewhat on the "Jazz" side but at boom time anything will sell. "There is a big demand and phenomenal prices for musical boxes made by Swiss cottagers a hundred years or so ago.

At Sotheby's one fetched £52. A finer example was bought at Christie's by a dealer who says he could have "resold it at a handsome profit for this sum." At Phillips, Son and Neale another dealer gave ten guineas for a musical box "so commonplace that 50s. would have got it before the war." It played only two or three common tunes.

The Victoria musical box was an elaboration of the musical snuff-boxes with which eighteenth-century dandies amused themselves. The Swiss makers built

mechanism into the boxes, some of which played up to a dozen tunes — including opera.

"Toy figures were sometimes added, and these danced to the music," said a collector.

Examples sold recently by Frank, Knight and Rutley have included a church spire, with birds flying to the chime of bells; a monkey in a glass case playing a guitar; and a waiter carrying a tray with mice scurrying about. Scores of pounds were given for these musical "boxes."

This also reminds us of a journalist friend who was editing the "*Briefkasten*" of a well-known Swiss paper; he had a flair for adapting the clock mechanism to all sorts of humorous contraptions. We had dinner at his place one day and when the cheese dish was passed round it started playing "Von ferne sei herzlich grüßet."

* * *

The death of a prominent compatriot who also had many friends in the London colony is reported in "*The Irish Press*," April 13th, as follows:

Col. Charles Ziegler, noted officer of the Swiss Cavalry, and the man responsible for the establishment by the Royal Dublin Society, of the international military jumping competitions at Ballsbridge, has died at his home at Thoun, near Berne, Switzerland.

As chief buyer for the Swiss Government, Col. Ziegler bought thousands of horses in this country during the thirty years he had been coming here.

Mr. W. E. Wylie said to an *Irish Press* reporter that Col. Ziegler was unquestionably a man of great vision in the horse world, and a true friend of Ireland. "I met him in the Shelbourne Hotel in 1925," said Mr. Wylie, "and he suggested that the R.D.S. should initiate international military jumping competitions. He said that it would be a good thing for the country and the horse-breeding industry.

"The R.D.S. took up the idea and the first competition was held in 1926. Col. Ziegler brought over a Swiss team that year and they came every year afterwards until the outbreak of this war."

Mr. Wylie added that Col. Ziegler was at that time buying about 1,000 horses a year in this country.

In 1938, Col. Ziegler purchased for himself the champion hunter at the R.D.S. Horse Show. He was then arranging to rent a place here as a part-time residence.

It was due to the representations he made to his Government that a Swiss Consulate, now a Legation, was established in Dublin in 1935.

He took pleasure in recounting his experiences here in the past, especially an incident that took place in Waterford in 1922, when the Republican forces delayed the blowing up of a bridge until he had crossed it.

OUR NEXT ISSUE.

We hope to go to press again on May 26th and gratefully acknowledge "donations" from the following subscribers: M. Gysin, Dr. H. Fritsche, H. Oswald, M. E. Lichtensteiger, A. Hinderling, L. Chapuis, E. Hofstetter, W. Gysler.



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