

News at random

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NEWS AT RANDOM

Federal

No official statement has been issued by the G.P.O. to the effect that the services to Switzerland are interrupted. Airmail letters take about four weeks but ordinary post and especially parcels are subject to considerable delay, due, it is said, to congestion on the French railways.

* * *

Our Parliamentary session came to an end on June 23rd when the National Council passed a credit of Frs. 280,000 towards the purchase for experimental purposes of a large farm in the canton Vaud. In the States Council an amount of 12 million francs was voted for improvements and additions in the Postal administration during the coming year.

* * *

The freedom and political liberties guaranteed under our Constitution formed the subject of a lively discussion in the National Council. The speaker from the government bench insisted that these privileges were still respected and protected but that Communist activities were dangerous to the State. This decision was a purely internal affair and was not influenced by developments elsewhere.

* * *

Following the diplomatic break between U.S.A. and Finland our country will look after American interests in Finland.

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Owing to the exceptionally heavy call on our telephone system the Postal administration has appealed to the public to concentrate their conversations to the hours of noon to seven so as to free the lines for the use of the troops.

* * *

Since the middle of June four National Day Celebration stamps are on sale with a surtax at the Swiss Post offices. These stamps are sold in favour of the Swiss Red Cross. The 5cts. stamp shows a view of Heiden, the small township in which Henri Dunant, the founder of the Red Cross, died. The 10cts. is a reminder of the battle of St. Jakob a/Birs, (1444), bearing the picture of the famous chapel, and the 30cts. gives a

view of the Basle Cathedral and the Pfalz. The 20cts. stamp presents a view of the old castle of Mesocco in the Grisons.

Cantonal

A strike has been declared by the window-cleaners of Zürich in order to enforce a demand for increased wages; at present their emoluments average two francs an hour. (They do not seem to appreciate the privilege of finding windows to clean.—Ed. S.O.)

* * *

Mgr. Marius Besson, the Bishop of Lausanne, Geneva and Fribourg, has been given the freedom of the city of Fribourg. The honour is paid as he enters his twenty-fifth year as Bishop, and is in recognition of his services to the city and Canton.

* * *

Striking of the old church clock at Meiringen which dates back to the year 1761 has been discontinued as a crack in the bell has made its appearance.

* * *

Baselstadt has voted an amount of 1.2 million francs towards the construction of additional tenement houses (Council flats).

* * *

Prof. Ludwig Zehnder, who is still lecturing occasionally at the Basle University, celebrated his 90th anniversary; he was in his earlier days part originator and noted exponent of the X-rays.

* * *

In Schaffhausen the Socialist Party launched a successful initiative for the election of the Grosse Rat on the basis of proportional representation.

* * *

In recognition of courageous and unselfish deeds among the youth of Schaffhausen during the recent bombardment, the Stadtrat has presented two young

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sters—15-year-old H. Eberlin and 13-year-old Margrit Huber—with savings books containing a credit of Frs. 1000 each; they will also receive the cantonal life saving medal.

* * *

A publishing firm (Unionsdruckerei A.G.) in Schaffhausen has issued in book form a full report of the bombardment of April 1st. Carefully selected illustrations showing damage and rescue work, lists of names and personal data of the dead and wounded, tables of material damage, said to be about 35 million francs, etc., will keep the memory of this tragic day alive.

* * *

The Grand Hotel at St. Moritz, wellknown to skiers, was practically burned out during the night of Thursday-Friday, June 29-30; no loss of life has been reported.

* * *

A spectacular conflagration destroyed the offices, work-stores, and extensive timber yards of the "Bau- und Holz A.G." in Zofingen; the fire also devoured adjoining structures belonging to "Gyger-Brack," building contractors. Six families were rendered homeless. The damage, estimated to exceed a million francs, is only partly covered by insurance.

* * *

A novel method for establishing a cordial and compliant relationship between ministers and parliament is being tried out in the canton of Thurgau. When the newly elected Grosse Rat met for the first time at Frauenfeld and had disposed of the tedious formalities

of validating, Dr. Stähelin, the president of the Regierungsrat (Government), rose to invite all those present including the journalists, reporters and beadles to a "Mittagsmahl." The town fathers with their train of attendants adjourned to the "Hôtel zur Traube," where a "Bernerplatte," amply flavoured with "Bachtobler" helped to create the foundation of the desirable atmosphere. Dr. Stähelin in his speech stressed the wish of his government to make personal contact with all the members as the rigid and formal procedure in the council chamber was not always conducive to a speedy dispatch of state business; he added that unlike the numerous and protracted sessions in other cantons they would have few meetings only, though he gave no hint that "refreshment after labour" would continue to be the order of the day at future sittings. The valiant and venerable councillors soon gave way to all-round fraternising and even those who only a few weeks ago had indulged in mortal party strife began to thee and thou each other. The president of the Grosse Rat, in returning thanks, assured the head of the government of their unstinted whole-hearted support; he was not aware that the cost of the Berner Platte and the Bachtobler was provided for in the budget but he was bold enough to state that when the annual accounts were submitted for their approval no awkward questions would be asked.

* * *

The Grand Conseil of the canton Vaud has voted an annual contribution of Frs. 25,000 for the next six years in favour of the Comptoir Suisse.

* * *

La Chaux-de-Fonds has granted a credit of half a million francs for the construction of a residential building comprising sixteen self-contained flats.

* * *

A building scheme now under consideration by the municipality of Neuchâtel anticipates an expenditure of six million francs.

* * *

The cantonal exhibition displaying Neuchâtel produce and manufacture was visited by over six million people.

* * *

The commune of Fontaines in the canton Neuchâtel may become part-owner of the Casino-Lido in Cairo after 99 years. The original proprietor, Henri Meyer, who died last year, in Locarno, bequeathed his present interest to his birthplace which in the meantime will be entitled to ten per cent. of the annual takings.

Army

Our own airmen have plenty of opportunity of demonstrating their prowess though it is always a one-sided combat; they are the only part of our army that is trained under something like actual war conditions. Their "enemy" are nearly always Americans as shown by the following few incidents: An American heavy bomber, with two of its engines out of action, was forced to land at Payerne on 28th June. The crew have been interned. Seven American bombers were forced down on July 11th, two at Altenrhein and five at Dübendorf; all the crews were unhurt. Four more were forced to land on July 13th; three wheeled in at Dübendorf and the fourth one crashed somewhere inland, the crew having previously baled out. Out of thirty aeroplanes that violated Swiss air on July 17th one was intercepted by our fighters and brought down.



Traffic

The Swiss Federal Railways are continually improving their service, keeping in mind the expected post-war rush to our health and tourist centres. "Modern Transport," July 1st, refers to the latest development:

"In 1937 the Swiss Federal Railways placed in service the first of a very excellent type of lightweight welded steel coach for fast internal passenger traffic, in which a number of breaks were made with existing conventions of Continental carriage design. The vehicles quickly became popular with the Swiss travelling public. We ourselves have had favourable experience of them, and observed how, in a train of mixed stock, these coaches fill up before the older type. There has now been introduced a class of light dining-car built on the same lines, in which the tare is 33 tonnes compared with the latest vehicles of the Swiss Restaurant Car Company, weighing 48 tonnes, and those of the International Sleeping Car Company, which weigh 57 tonnes. Six of the new cars, which are operated by arrangement with the Swiss Restaurant Car Company, were under construction during the early part of this year, and of these four began running with the inauguration of the summer time-table on May 8. Each car contains 48 dining seats, four to a table, distributed over two main saloons. There is additionally a staff dining section with four seats, which can be used for public service during times of pressure. The cooking is all electric, and during normal running current is provided by the electric locomotive hauling the train; it is stepped down from 1,000 to 220 volts by a transformer mounted under the car. During shunting operations, or when the car is standing, current is taken from the 15,000-volt contact line by a pantograph on the roof of the passenger section, a roof-mounted transformer being employed in the circuit.

* * *

Here is a short article from "Flight," June 29th, dealing with our aircraft industry: "Hardly noticed by the outside world, the Swiss Aircraft industry has grown during the past few years from modest beginnings to a relatively considerable size. To-day it employs 5,000 workers, mostly specialists, and 650 engineers, technicians and administrative staff.

The production of the aircraft departments maintained by different industries to-day covers a wide field, ranging through fuselages, wings, undercarriages, engines, airscrews, controls, wireless equipment and armament.

At present the *raison d'être* of this development is the orders for the Swiss Air Force and the absence of foreign competition; there is little doubt that the new industry has acquired a quite considerable position in the Swiss economy.

The problem of maintaining the industry after the war, and the readjustment of the industry to post-war civilian requirements, is now being considered with some apprehension.

A memorandum of the Association of Swiss Aircraft Manufacturers, which embraces about a dozen firms, lays down the requirements of the industry for possible post-war development.

Stating that aircraft production is particularly suited to Swiss technical skill and workmanship, the memorandum rejects any idea of limiting its scope to component production. Only complete production can spur on the industry to a sustained progress, it is said.

The memorandum points out that difficulties are presented, not by technical problems, but by marketing. Without purposeful State assistance the small Swiss market cannot provide a durable basis for Swiss aircraft production. But while the idea of direct subsidies is strongly objected to, the memorandum suggests that all orders of public bodies should be placed with the local industry, provided the latter is capable of delivering products of a quality equal or similar to that of foreign firms. These proposals are on the lines of the policy of public transport companies, such as the Swiss Federal Railways, which procure their rolling stock and transport vehicles from local first rate firms.

The memorandum demands that a construction programme for the entire aircraft industry should be adopted with the co-operation of the Swiss Government. For this purpose the formation of a special committee is advocated, to be composed of representatives of the Federal departments concerned, industrial and scientific bodies, which should have sufficient powers to make decisions, including financial ones, and to supervise the development of technical research.

More instructive is a technical paper recently read before the Swiss Aero Club by a noted Swiss air expert; it has been widely quoted and the following extracts from Dr. W. Dollfus' discourse are reproduced from "Aeroplane," June 30th): "The price of a Douglas DC-3 which was used by "Swissair" for the Zürich-London route was 650,000 Swiss francs, including one reserve motor. This price is almost the same as that of an electric railway engine which has to be written off in between 25 and 30 years, while the life-

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time of the DC-3 is hardly longer than five years.

Comparing the ton-kilometres operating costs of sea, railway and air transport, the following figures will be obtained:—Sea, between Swiss Fr. 0.025 and 0.05; railway, Fr. 0.8; air transport, in U.S.A. Fr. 1.88, in Switzerland Fr. 1.95. American experts predicted that, after the War, the operating cost of one ton-kilometre by air may be lowered to Fr. 0.42, but Dr. Dollfus was doubtful whether a correspondingly drastic cut will be possible in Switzerland. In his opinion, the operating cost of one ton-kilometre will be around Fr. 1.68, and that of one passenger kilometre around Fr. 0.28.

Dr. Dollfus also spoke of the chances which Switzerland may have when inter-continental air transport is resumed after the cessation of hostilities. Assuming that, after the War, about 50 per cent. of all trans-Atlantic passengers who travelled first, cabin and second class between Europe and America before September, 1939, will cross the ocean by air, accommodation will be required for about 600 a day. If Switzerland started a bi-weekly service to America with 40-seat passenger aeroplanes, the total of 160 seats would amount to only 3.8 per cent. of the 4,200 seats per week. About the profitability of such a service, however, Dr. Dollfus did not give any indications.

Economical

In considering the additional grant of one centime per kilo milk delivered the association of milk producers expressed the opinion that this was hardly sufficient to secure an increased supply of milk—in fact it constituted an injustice to those regions which were badly hit by the persisting drought. The association is demanding from the Government an additional subsidy of two centimes per kilo delivered during the coming winter season.

* * *

Official figures issued by the Federal Statistical Bureau reveal that the cost of living in our country has increased by 50.4 per cent. since March, 1939. During the present war the rise in the price structure has been less abrupt than it was over the 1914-1918 period, thanks to the control measures adopted at the very outbreak of war. For instance, the rise after four years of war as from June, 1914, was 104 per cent. The increase varies from one group of items to another: 102 per cent. for clothing, 62.3 per cent. for foodstuffs, 36 per cent. for heating and lighting and only 0.3 per cent. for rents.

* * *

The trepidation so far displayed by our film renters and cinema proprietors seems to have given way to definite action if the following report from the "Daily Mail" correspondent, June 30th, represents the true facts. Our Government was unable and perhaps unwilling under pressure to arrest this one-sided propaganda and the trade forced by public opinion is putting up a fight. Here is the report: "Germany's stranglehold on the Swiss cinema industry was broken at a conference of combined Swiss film and cinema concerns to-day. On the initiative of John Stoll, director of the E.O.S. and Paramount distributing organisations, the conference decided that from August 1 they will not show, buy, or rent any films of German origin until the large stocks of Anglo-American films lying at Lisbon for many months are allowed free transit to

Switzerland. No British-American films have been permitted by the Germans to enter Switzerland since July last year. Even Swedish films were banned. Since the occupation of France the export of all French films, except those made under German control, was entirely suspended. The transit of Anglo-American films was immediately stopped when the Germans invaded the free zone. Attempts were made to divert the traffic via Genoa, but this channel was rapidly blocked by German pressure on the Italian Government. Energetic action by the Swiss Government for a time made this route again available, but when the Fascists collapsed the Germans again closed Switzerland to foreign films. The Germans have been unable to give the Swiss market what it wants because the subjects of their films are superficial or impregnated with Nazi ideology. For a long time past Swiss cinema audiences refused to patronise houses where Nazi films were shown.

—00—

A group of Swiss alpinists, under the presidency of M. Egmond d'Arcis, president of the International Union of Alpine Associations, have formed an association named the "Centre Alpin de Zermatt." Documents concerning the Zermatt region will be collected, and one section, in a chalet to be called Whympers House, will be devoted to British pioneers and alpinism in general—"The Times."

* * *

In our last issue we referred to the distinction bestowed in this country on a well-known Swiss geologist and are pleased to record that a similar honour has a few days ago been conferred upon another compatriot: Mr. Leonard Forrer has received the medal of the Royal Numismatic Society of London, and is thus the second Swiss holding this coveted medal; the late Dr. F. Imhof, also of Winterthur, was the first recipient. Mr. Forrer, who now resides in this country, is the author of several books dealing with numismatic topics.

* * *

A somewhat startling observation by a compatriot of ours is reported by the "West Herts & Watford Observer" June 23rd. A gala day to supplement the resources of the local Forces Comforts Fund was held

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at King's Langley; it included a dog show, boxing displays by Home Guards and N.F.S. teams. According to our contemporary the fête was declared open by Dr. Erich Hubermann from Basle, said to be studying in this country. Our learned compatriot commenced his oration with the remark that being a neutral he could not say *we ought to win the war*, he could say that he knew we would. We admire the good taste of the H.G. and A.T.S. people present in listening to this imposition goodheartedly, but we think our visitor would have brought more honour to himself and our country had he left the war alone.

* * *

A golden wedding in these hazardous times is a noteworthy event and this is what our Birmingham friends, Mr. and Mrs. George Ellison-Burkhardt, of 67 Lady Byron Lane, Knowle (Warwickshire), celebrated on the 21st of this month. Mrs. Ellison has been an occasional contributor to our paper and her charm and personality has just missed in transforming her English husband into an immaculate Balois; if we remember rightly, he speaks our elegant Baslerdütsch with astonishing perfection and conquering fluency. Hearty congratulations!

* * *

We regret to report that our popular friend, Henry Binggely of 167 Clapham Road, S.W.9, has lost his father who died last week at Clarens s/Montreux at the age of 77. Many members of the Colony will remember the old couple who, some ten years ago, stayed with their son and his good lady in London for a few weeks.



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Switzerland cannot be described as living in peacetime conditions. She used to be very much a country of foreign connections, of hospitality, of export and import, of intellectual interchange. To-day she is affected economically by the blockade, politically by encirclement by countries of totalitarian or semi-totalitarian régimes and by a voluntary defensive seclusion. Yet in many ways she still is a country of "the small League of Nations" or the "forecast of the Europe of the future," as she has been so often described. In quite a new sense she expresses the thoughts of many countries or peoples whose voices have been silenced; she is the only recognised centre of democracy on the Continent whither all the streams of democratic thought flow and whence, in turn, radiate the messages of hope and confidence to the oppressed. As never before she has become a haven for escaped prisoners and exiles of all races and nations, and enables them to live as full a life as possible under the circumstances. There is a Polish university in which exiles and interned fugitive soldiers are allowed to study. It is hardly necessary to stress the vast amount of work put in by Swiss effort to ameliorate the lot of prisoners on both sides, particularly through the Red Cross.

Switzerland has continued her own stable democratic political life, although the Government have received extraordinary emergency powers. The country lives in a state of permanent mobilisation and keeps a large part of the men under arms—with all the disorganisation it entails in the life of a nation. But it also has advanced in progressive thought despite the emergency. There were general elections last year resulting in a big increase of social democratic votes, and for the first time in Swiss history a socialist entered the Government, which consists of eight members. The Socialists are now the strongest of the political parties. It is characteristic of this unrevolutionary, independent nation that, while around her the governments have swung to the extreme revolutionary right, it moved toward the left.

There have been novelties in social legislation. Old age pensions are being enacted, and plans of social security and full employment are made. The Swiss are very interested in what is done and planned in Britain. The Beveridge plan has been widely discussed; there is probably not a paper in Switzerland which has not published one or several articles on it. It has appeared there in booklet form, and the German translation has run into a second edition. Education is as widely discussed as in this country. Legislation is mostly an affair of the 25 cantons, but the "Archive for Swiss Education" indicates that all the authorities agree to raise the school-leaving age as soon as possible, to reduce the numbers of pupils in the classes, to establish a transition period for young people after they leave school when work should be combined with education. Reforms usually hinge on the financial situation of the different cantons. Zürich town has already decided to raise the school-leaving age to 15, while some of the French-Swiss cantons propose to do so in the near future. In many respects Switzerland faces problems of siege economy common to many European countries. Her economy is uneven; there is over-employment in the metal industry, for example, while the hotel indus-