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: - (1944)

Heft: 1031

Artikel: Xmas thoughts and wishes

Autor: [s.n.]

DOI: https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-689597

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almost complete by recent military events on the continent. In order to avoid paralysis of their relief work, the International Committee have been planning a scheme of transport by motor trucks.

For almost three months past, the ships sailing under the International Committee's flag have been unable to put into Marseilles. Under the supervision of a delegate of the International Committee, they docked at Barcelona, and their cargoes were unloaded and warehoused there. The International Committee applied to the American Red Cross who agreed to supply fifty trucks. These vehicles arrived recently on board the ships " Caritas I " and " Caritas II ".

These are seven-ton trucks, of up-to-date build, fitted with all accessories and the necessary equipment for up-keep. They will be driven by Swiss drivers and on each trip accompanied by a convoy agent of the International Committee.

As soon as these road transports are actually running, they will enable the consignments which are forwarded by the International Committee by rail from Geneva to Germany to prisoners of war and civilian internees to be kept up at their usual rate.

* * *

Four message forms addressed by the next-of-kin to Dutch prisoners of war detained in a camp in Borneo were returned to the Central Prisoners of War Agency through the delegation of the International Committee of the Red Cross in Tokyo. The forms which left Geneva in September 1943, were sent off from Borneo on 20th February, 1944. They reached Geneva last August. The route they followed there and back therefore took less than a year.

* * *

Based upon the article inserted into the Constitution in 1925, the Federal authorities and a Committee of experts are now working out the draft of a bill for an old age insurance, which it is hoped will meet with a better reception than did the project for a compulsory people's insurance, rejected by the Swiss people in 1929. To-day there is already a Federal fund in existence amounting to 250 million francs, which will be increased annually by an amount of about 60 millions derived from the alcohol and tobacco tax. To this must be added 2 per cent of the wages of the insured and a similar amount contributed by the employer. With a uniform old age pension of frs. 50 per month (married couples frs. 100) the annual expenditure would amount to about 400 million francs.

* * *

Dr. Max Huber, who has been a member of the International Red Cross Committee since 1923 and its president since 1928, has announced his decision to resign the presidency at the end of the year, when he will be 70, though he will continue his Red Cross work in Geneva.

At a meeting on December 4th the Committee appointed Dr. Carl J. Burckhardt to be the new president. When his mandate as High Commissioner in Danzig was terminated in 1939, Dr. Burckhardt joined the Red Cross Committee, and has been particularly identified with its relief scheme. For several years he has acted as deputy to the president, and has conducted many negotiations with both groups of belligerents.

Two additional delegates have been appointed and will be attached to the London office; they are Major Fred. Bieri and Dr. J. Imfeld.

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XMAS THOUGHTS AND WISHES.

In my last Xmas homily, twelve months ago, I expressed the hope that this Xmas would see the end of hostilities, and that the Angel of Peace would once again spread her wings over a war weary world.

It was not to be, still the spectre of war hovers unmercifully over the four continents of the earth. Hate, despair, and sorrow, are still predominant factors, sweat and tears are once more the keynote for this Xmas, 1944.

The days when we were able to celebrate Xmas with gaiety, merriment, and a carefree heart in the intimate circle of family or friends, lie far behind us, and many have almost forgotten that sacred message " Peace and Goodwill on Earth ", with which this festive season used to be heralded in.

Instead of the bells which used to ring so joyfully in the towns, villages and hamlets, we hear the sound of distant guns, the stillness of the night is rudely broken by the piercing noise of the sirens, and the thunderous vibrations of exploding bombs.

Heavy are our hearts, and disturbed are our minds, and try as we like, we cannot feel happy and merry as of old, whilst millions of our fellow men are making the supreme sacrifice, undergoing endless privations, sufferings and hardship.

The once so happy family circle is broken, their members dispersed and scattered far and wide, many of the hearts that throbbed so gaily have ceased to beat, many of the faces that shone so brightly have ceased to

glow, the hands we have grasped have grown cold, the eyes which sparkled have hidden their lustre in the grave.

From the long and dreary hours of sleepless nights, from the desolate and bloody battlefields, comes the one agonising cry " How long, oh Lord? "

In this past darkness seemingly devoid of almost any redeeming feature, there still lingers in our hearts a glimmer of hope that the day will and must come when the heavy clouds will be pierced, and the golden rays of sunshine will spread their light into a happier and brighter future.

The hour will and must strike, when the noise over the battlefield will abate and cease, when non-combatants can enjoy an undisturbed rest after their daily toils.

Then from the desolation and out of the ruins, let us hope, a better and happier world will emerge, and that the sacrifices will not have been made in vain. This we owe to the glorious dead, who have given their lives, so that we may live in peace, and enjoy the short span of life which is allotted to each of us.

Once again, during this time, our thoughts are wandering back to our country and to our dear ones at home. A deep feeling of gratitude fills our hearts, that owing to a merciful Providence our homeland has again been spared the horrors and miseries of war.

Through the partial liberation of one of our neighbouring countries the position has eased somewhat, the iron ring which had surrounded our frontiers for so long has been broken in parts, and communications with the outer world have once more been made possible, although most of the cumbersome restrictions still remain, and those of us who had nourished the hope of spending Xmas Day " back home ", will have to exercise patience.

The departing year has been a trying one for our country, it is evident that a world struggle of such magnitude will and must have its repercussions even in countries which are not at war.

Two factors, scarcity of food and raw materials, are still causing deep concern to our Federal Government, the restrictions, especially in the sphere of food supplies have not been relaxed, and have become even more stringent than in this country. Unemployment, owing to reduced imports of raw materials, so essential to our industries, looms darkly on the horizon.

Our Government is making tremendous efforts to procure the bare necessities of life for our population, which through prisoners of war and refugees has been greatly increased.

In spite of these hardships, Switzerland, true to its tradition, is still tendering a helping hand to all the belligerent nations. The International Red Cross Committee in Geneva, has increased its efforts to soften the blows which this terrible war is inflicting on mankind.

Thousands of children from occupied countries or from the immediate war zones have been invited to recuperate within the borders of the Confederation. Large numbers of sick and wounded soldiers are nursed back to health and strength in the various hospitals and clinics throughout the land. Considerable sums, either from private or official sources are being collected and distributed to alleviate the sufferings of thousands who are broken both in spirit and body.

Acting as protecting power for almost all the belligerent nations, the Swiss Government has, through its diplomatic representations abroad, been able to effect and aid the exchange of wounded and sick combatants, as well as of civilian internees, it is looking after the welfare of many thousands of prisoners of war and civilian internees, etc., etc. These efforts have been gratefully acknowledged by all the respective nations.

Our country thus plays a noble and unselfish part in this greatest struggle the world has ever witnessed. Our people have willingly made sacrifices and have without any grudge borne hardship, to help all those who are in need of care and succour.

Contrary to statements made at one time or another that Switzerland is benefitting financially through this war, it must be stated that Switzerland is not, and has never been a rich country, and will emerge from this war considerably poorer, but, thank God, so much richer in esteem for its great humanitarian work.

In this tragic hour of need, destruction and misery, our country has fulfilled a mission of mercy, a mission which will go down in history as one of the redeeming features of this world war.

We Swiss abroad, in testifying anew our deep attachment to our beloved country, wish to express our solemn gratitude to the Federal Government, for their incessant and untiring labours for the welfare of our own people and for having guided the ship of State wisely and courageously past the dangerous rocks of a surging sea.

We equally owe to this country, which has always extended to us a generous hospitality, and has given to many of us a second home, deep gratitude.

In the past, and at present we share to a great extent the dangers of its inhabitants, and also in no slight measure a part of its duties, we do this willingly and whole-heartedly in the knowledge that they not only fight their own battle, but the battle for Freedom and Liberty, ideals which are dear to us and which are the very foundation of our constitution.

Many of the sons and brothers of our countrymen living in this great Empire are fighting with H.M. forces in the various theatres of the war, some, alas, will not return, but all of them we shall remember in grateful memory for their services given to their adopted country.

Amidst the roaring of the guns and the thunder of exploding bombs, the year 1945 is about to make its entry, what is it bringing us? Will it bring Peace, which we all wish so fervently, or is the slaughter, with its accompanying misery and sorrow to go on to its last day? Do we have to empty the cup to the bitter end, and shoulder the cares and sorrows of the world, witnessing the wildest savageries and cruelties, or will the voice of Peace and Goodwill on Earth be heard once more?

Whatever it will be, our hearts must be stout, with an unbending determination we must look into the future which, let us hope, will be purified and sanctified through almost superhuman sacrifices, hoping that out of the ashes of a terrible past, will emerge a better and healthier world, a world in which the great human family can live in peace and brotherly love.

Let us then, dear compatriots, pray humbly and sincerely to God Almighty, that this hour be near, and may it find us ready and willing to play, each of us, our part nobly and faithfully.

ST.