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The Swiss Observer

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NEWS AT RANDOM

*Lass uns sein ein Licht auf Erden,
Und ein Beispiel steter Treu;
Frei, wie wir sind, andre werden,
Und zertreißt die Tyrannei!
Gib, dass alle sicher wohnen,
Bis die Zeit die Pforte schliesst;
Bis aus allen Nationen
Eine nur geworden ist.*

J. K. LAVATER.

Federal

On the instructions of the Federal Council all church bells were rung for a quarter of an hour after the official news of the surrender of the German forces had been received. In some of the towns excitement reached a high pitch and despite police prohibition, flags of the Allied nations were hoisted alongside our own.

On May 8th the Federal Council announced that diplomatic relations with the Reich government no longer existed. The Nazi party organisation in our country was dissolved. The few members of the German Legation who have not departed before were handed their passports. The leader of the Swiss branch of the German Nazi party, Wilhelm Stengler was expelled, and after searches in the houses of its members, particularly at St. Gall, several hundreds will have their permits of residence withdrawn. Dr. Ernst Grüding of St. Gall, a well-known exponent of Hitler's Racial Hygiene Laws, has had his Swiss citizenship cancelled.

National Councillor Dr. Ed. Zellweger has been appointed Swiss Minister to Yugoslavia. He studied law at Geneva and Berne and for a number of years was secretary of the Secrétariat des Suisses à l'Étranger of the N.S.H. His successor in the National Council will be Dr. Werner Stocker, secretary of the Socialist party in Switzerland.

According to reliable reports the Swiss Consul General at Hamburg and his wife, Mr. and Mrs. A. L.

Zehnder, were caught in an air-raid and killed on the spot; he was 70 years old and appointed to this honorary post in 1939.

When the Swiss Legation at Budapest was evacuated two of the staff of twenty failed to reach Istanbul; they are M. Feller, Secretary of Legation, who was in charge and Max Meyer, a clerk in the Chancery. All possible enquiries made about their whereabouts have so far remained fruitless.

The U.S.A. have expressed to our Legation at Washington sincere regrets for the aerial attacks on our territory on February 22nd and their willingness to pay full compensation for the damage caused thereby.

Russian bravery and staying power have surprised the whole of the civilized world and their magnitude has been such that perhaps it has restrained any other virtue. This seems to us the only explanation for the utterly unfair and absolutely groundless attacks to which our country has been subjected towards the end of last month. No specific instances were—and could not be—given so that our authorities were deprived of the opportunity of repudiating these vague charges. The following is what the English Labour weekly "The Tribune" of April 27th, 1945, says about this mysterious outburst:

"The Russian pressure against the Swiss continues unabated. Lurid stories of Swiss prisons, prison camps, tortures and other misdeeds are recounted. One Russian broadcast brackets the 1,100 Swiss firms in the American blacklist with the 10,000 Franco volunteers who fought in the Blue Legion against the Russians. The whole thing is so palpably absurd that it is difficult to understand what

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5.30. p.m. sharp, ending about 7. p.m.

The Swiss Minister and Mme. Ruegger will also be present. The Lecture is free to all Swiss (ladies and gentlemen) of the Swiss Colony. There will be no refreshments. Will those wishing to attend kindly send a postcard to the Dorchester Hotel Ltd., Dr. Lindt Lecture, Park Lane, London, W.1, giving their names. The card to be sent not later than 31st May, to enable the Management to make proper seating arrangements.

THE COMMITTEE.

the Russians are getting at. Surely, someone has told them that neither in Britain nor America—or for that matter in France or any other European country—is their story believed, except by extra-credulous Party members.

Almost all the European countries have had first-hand experience of Swiss camps and Swiss treatment. These compare well with any others anywhere. Of course, even the most tolerant camp is an imposition for the normal human being, and some of the Swiss camp commanders, like those elsewhere, have been of the type usually associated with this sort of work.

Russian prisoners arriving in Switzerland were in terrible condition. They usually arrived naked, starved and fearful. The Soviet Government—until recently—disowned all responsibility for Russian escapees in Swiss and also in Allied hands. Unlike other prisoners, the Russians had no one to look after them.

Therefore the Swiss Trade Unions organised a nation-wide campaign for the Russians, and in less than six months spent over £20,000 on about 1,400 prisoners, buying them food, clothes and also arranging that each Russian should spend 4-5 days monthly out of the camp with a Swiss family. The 'pro-facit' Swiss Government also contributed liberally to the fund. Since then, of course, there have been thousands more Russians arriving in Switzerland—if they were not too frightened by the Soviet broadcasts from escaping into the Swiss 'horror.'

Surely, the Soviet Government would enjoy more respect in Europe if it abandoned these back-stair tales of horror, there are enough real grim tragedies discovered at the moment without anyone having to invent more."

* * *

The newly formed association "Switzerland-Soviet Union" held its first meeting at Zurich; over two hundred delegates from all parts of our country attended. A committee of seven members was elected and a resolution passed demanding from the Federal Council immediate permission to print and distribute a monthly journal and other propaganda matter.

* * *

The department for foreign interests (known here as Special Division) employs in the different countries a staff of about 1,150. Something like 130,000 letters and 16,000 telegrams have been dealt with during the last year. The total expenses of this temporary organisation amounted to about 100 million gold francs which are refunded by the belligerent countries concerned.

Cantonal

The last Sunday in April is the traditional day for the Landsgemeinde. "As you were" was the slogan for Appenzell A.-Rh.; the meeting at Hundwil was poorly attended. Landammann Hofstetter, who after holding his office for three years had to retire under the constitution, was replaced by Ständerat Ackermann who had already been honoured twice by this distinction. In Appenzell I.-Rh. the business of the Landsgemeinde was disposed of in just over two hours. Vacancies in the administration were filled without opposition and the Landammann Ständerat Locher changed seats with Colleague Dr. Karl Rusch. At Sarnen (Obwalden) a proposal to render naturalisation for foreigners less prohibitive led to an animated discussion but at voting time a fifty per cent majority preferred the status quo ante. Here also Landammann Infanger surrendered honours to Statthalter Alois Abächerli to whose office he was relegated. The same installation rite was observed at Stans (Nidwalden) between the ruling Landammann Joller and Statthalter Christen; six governmental proposals including an increase in the land tax were passed practically unanimously.

* * *

Amongst recent expatriations decreed by the Federal department of Justice are Dr. H. E. Wechlin born in 1897 at Zurich. His wife and daughter are not included in the ban. Also O. W. Maag (including wife and children) born in 1917 in Bachenbülach (Zurich) whose residence abroad is not known.

* * *

The accounts of Winterthur for 1944 balance on the right side the surplus being over half a million francs.

* * *

Negligence seems to be indicated in the report of a serious accident which cost the lives of seven civilians during A.R.P. exercises. For the last three years the playing fields and a shed, part of the school buildings at Wengi (Aussersihl) had been regularly used for instructing the local population in the fighting of incendiaries. The old wooden shed, according to plan, caught fire, but for some so far unexplained reasons the temporary inmates found their escape shut off. It took some time before the identity of the victims could



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be established as no lists were kept, the attendance at these displays being spontaneous. Here are the names of the seven victims: Gertrud von Schenk, age 20 from Dielsdorf; Luise Weisskopf, age 25 from Pratteln; Hans Zehnder (dental mechanic apprentice), age 17 from Zurich; Sebastian Seiz, 16-year-old schoolboy from Rheineck; Albert Zeller, age 18 living in Zurich; Anna Signer-Adler, age 42 living in Zurich and CH. Egger, age 18 of German nationality.

The town of Zurich has always been in the forefront of social legislation but unfortunately the municipal insurance scheme has not come up to expectation and will have to undergo some reconstruction. The English insurance journal "Review," April 13th, 1945, gives particulars of the intended reconstruction:

"A referendum was being taken in the middle of March to decide the fate of the pensions insurance fund of Zurich, which was founded in 1913. The fund would appear to have been based on far too optimistic mortality tables, especially in view of the improved mortality experience of recent years. It is estimated that on a proper actuarial basis there is a deficit of fr. 81,500,000. It is apparently proposed to cover the deficit by fr. 5,000,000 savings in benefits and a contribution of fr. 66,000,000 from the town council, and fr. 10,000,000 from the assured. The reduction in benefits, which represents about 2% of the actuarially computed liabilities of the fund, will mainly be done by stretching policy conditions so that, for instance, the maximum pension will not be earned until after 35 years' active service, instead of previously 30 years. The fr. 10,000,000 contribution by the assured is to be obtained by raising premium rates on existing policies from 6% to 8% of salaries, which by some observers is considered an unduly high premium rate. For new policies the premium rate will be raised only from 6% to 7%."

Rich, long forgotten aunts and uncles in America with a soft corner in their hearts for poor relations in Europe, now belong to the realm of fiction, but according to the "Evening Standard," May 1st, 1945, such a rare specimen of humanity has been discovered in California:

"Two months ago, the Municipal Council of Greifensee—population 1,000—near Zurich, viewed with alarm their statistics showing that one out of every seven inhabitants married a foreigner and moved away.

They are now less alarmed. One, Regula Walder Albertus, born in Greifensee 95 years ago, who was one of the first to move away after her marriage, died in California and left £7,735 to her native village.

The Council has not yet decided what to do with the money."

A stately ceremony at Basle marked the opening of the railway service on the 14th inst. between that town and Mulhouse. The first train drawn by a locomotive profusely draped with French and Swiss flags deposited at Basle civic and other prominent personalities from Upper Alsace; it was officially received by state councillors and the French Consul General. On its return journey it took back 280 Mulhouse children that had been cared for in Switzerland since the beginning of this year.

Col. Oskar Frey, a former member of the Grosse Stadtrat in Schaffhausen, died in the local hospital at the age of 52 from a heart affection. The colonel was extremely popular in the army and is credited with the excellent morale that our soldiers had exhibited during wartime; actually he was in command of the Basle troops.

Eight days before his death, President Roosevelt wrote a letter to the Mayor of Schaffhausen. In the letter, which has only been recently delivered to the mayor, President Roosevelt expressed his regret for the tragic error which cost the town the lives of innocent victims and the loss of art treasures.

Further eminence has been added to the name of Schaffhausen, now the best advertised town in Switzerland, by the discovery by a Scotch paper the "Evening Express" which wrote on April 26th, 1945:

"Schaffhausen, the Swiss town on Lake Constance which has been in the news lately, has an odd little link with Scotland.

In its public library there is, or at any rate was, one of our rarest and most interesting literary relics, a parchment bearing what is believed to be the oldest Scottish manuscript.

Written in Latin—though many Gaelic names appear in it—it is regarded as the work of Dorbone, a contemporary of Adamnan, one of the monks of Iona, and dates from more than twelve hundred years ago.

Before it reached Schaffhausen the ancient work had many hairbreadth escapes and adventures; and it is quite conceivable that it has had more since then."

SWISS NATIONAL DAY CELEBRATION

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An anticipated deficit of over 4½ million francs for 1944 in the ordinary accounts of St. Gall was converted into an actual surplus of 825,105 francs.

The firm decision of our sovereign to re-affirm his own will even against the united recommendation of all the political parties was shown in the cantonal voting in Aargau when a proposal to increase the daily attendance compensation of the members of the Grosse Rat from Frs 10.— to Frs 15.— was rejected by a small majority.

A party of 30 smugglers was captured by frontier guards near Sant'Abbondio after a short skirmish. One of the guards, the 41 year-old Luigi Meschini from Caviano was killed outright while another one, the 24 year-old G. Pellegrini from Gambarogno is lying in the hospital at Locarno in a serious condition.

Last December the university of Lausanne decided to render all possible assistance to the one at Caen which had badly suffered when war operations swept the town. An amount of Frs 15,000 is to be donated together with half of this year's fees paid by Vaudois students and a number of scientific instruments and books.

A totally different picture is drawn by the recent cantonal elections in Neuchâtel. The new party called "ouvrier populaire" made their debut with no less than 14 mandates. The Grand Conseil is now constituted as follows: Radicals 28 (against 31 in the old Council), Liberals 19 (20), Socialists 31 (33), Prog. Nationals 9 (10), Independents 2 (4) and "parti Ouvrier populaire" 14 (none).

Frost has caused considerable damage particularly in the western part of our country. A preliminary survey in the canton Neuchâtel shows that barely half of the vineyards will be productive this season—a loss of five to six million francs.

A promising diplomatic career was uprooted by the death of Louis Micheli, Conseiller de Légation, which took place at Geneva on April 29th after a pernicious illness. Descendant of an old and distinguished family he inherited a keen desire to place his abilities at the service of his country. He entered the diplomatic service in 1918 and occupied important posts at our Legations in Rome, Vienna, Bucharest, London and Washington; at the latter capital he enjoyed the personal friendship of a great number of leading men among whom was the late President Roosevelt who handed him on his departure a signed photograph with the hope that he would soon see him back again as the head of our Legation in the U.S.A. Micheli's last appointment was at Rome, where after the departure of Minister Ruegger he acted as Chargé d'Affaires facing and dealing successfully with a delicate situation which is said to have undermined his otherwise vigorous health.

Army

The Federal Council decided on the 15th inst. to order gradual demobilisation.

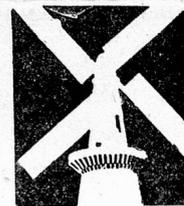
The vigilance of our troops guarding both our northern and southern frontiers has been severely tested these last few weeks. All sorts of disguises and ruses are tried to get into safety, but the thousands of refugees are carefully examined and anyone connected with the old German regime is politely restored to the Reich.

The whole of our northern frontier from Kleinhüningen to Altenrhein (St. Gall) was closed on April 21st, the frontier guards being replaced by army units.

During manœuvres in the region of Luziensteig, a hand grenade exploded accidentally killing fusilier Kaspar Faeh, age 41 of Rüti (Zurich).

General Guisan during an inspection tour of our defences happened to be spotted at the frontier post at Chiasso by a number of Italian partisans and two American soldiers who all presented arms; he had a long talk with his opposites and then returned to Lugano.

A complete novelty is the introduction of army telephone coupons. Civilians may buy them at the rate of 30 centimes each for the exclusive use of the troops.



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Our military tribunals have still plenty of work on hand both on behalf of foreigners and our own nationals, most of the latter residing in the "Grosse Kanton." A gang employed at the German railway station at Basle received heavy sentences for disclosing secret orders concerning our defence.

Three unsavoury Swiss agitators whose activities abroad have on several occasions occupied the time of our military courts have been apprehended when trying to return to the land of their ancestors. Georges Oltramare (alias Dieudonné), the boisterous Genevese, was taken care of at Kreuzlingen together with Paul Bonny, a journalist from Geneva in the service of the Nazis. The third of the trio was René Fonjallaz, son of the defunct colonel and well-known frontist leader; his "mal du pays" was called at Hallau also famous for its vineyards.

Traffic

The improvement shown for 1944 in the financial results of the Swiss Federal Railways, seems to be amazing if the figures published in the "Railway Gazette" April 27th, 1945, are correctly reported:

"Preliminary figures concerning the financial results of the Swiss Federal Railways for 1944 show passenger receipts at fr. 222 million, or nearly fr. 30 million more than for 1943. It is stated that receipts accruing from the fare supplements intro-

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duced in April, 1943, amounted to approximately fr. 31 million.

Goods receipts, at fr. 263 million, were lower by fr. 5,500,000 than those for the preceding year. Miscellaneous receipts were about fr. 18 million.

Total working receipts were fr. 503 million (compared with fr. 479 million). Working expenditure, at fr. 335 million, was fr. 26 million higher, largely on account of the all-round increase in the price of materials and higher wages.

The profit and loss account shows an approximate surplus of fr. 25,000, against a budget estimate of a loss of some fr. 68 million. The considerable improvement thus attained is stated to have been due to the favourable development of passenger and goods traffic, in addition to the fare supplements."

To help France in her economic reconstruction, our Government is lending 500 tank wagons. We are also taking over a large part of French locomotives and rolling stock that require repairing. The work is being done partly at the SFR workshops and partly at the well-known factory at Winterthur.

The civil aviation plan referred to in our last issue is given full publicity in "Flight," May 10th, 1945, from which we reprint with acknowledgment the following:

"The Zurich airport, is to be elevated to the rank of Switzerland's international or central aerodrome. According to a proposal originating with the Zurich Cantonal Government, this is to be located at Klotten, 6.8 miles (11 km.) north of Zurich, on the relief railway line branching off at Oerlikon from the Zurich-Winterthur main railway line and joining the latter again to the west of Effretikon, 5.6 miles (9 km.) to the south of Winterthur. Klotten would replace Dübendorf, the present civil airport of Zurich, and the scheme envisages facilities enabling the airport to deal with machines of up to 40 tons and with the intercontinental airliners of up to 80 tons. The first runway for blind flying to be completed is to be 9,840 ft. long (3,000 metres) and 1,312 ft. (400 metres) wide, in addition to a 328 ft. (100 metres) wide lateral protection zone on each side. The concrete starting runway to be comprised in the above is to be 5,576 ft. (1,700 metres) long. Runways assigned to the Swiss inter-urban traffic are to vary in length between 4,592 ft. and 3,280 ft. (1,400 and 1,000 metres respectively).

The rival scheme concerning the development of the present Dübendorf aerodrome has been dropped, allegedly because of technical difficulties and the special requirements of the adjoining military air-field.

In addition to the aerodromes at Basle, Geneva and Berne, the scheme envisages five minor "regional airports," i.e., Lausanne-Ecublens, La Chaux-de-Fonds-Les Eplatures, Locarno-Magadino, St. Gallen-

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Altenrhein and Samedan (the former Samaden in the Grisons). All these existed already before the war but are to be modernised.

The Lausanne municipality provided already for an extension of 205 acres to the present airport at Ecublens, and the cost of bringing it up to date is envisaged to amount to 6,000,000 francs, of which 4,000,000 is to be contributed by the Federal Government. Work is to be taken in hand as soon as circumstances permit. The Blécherette aerodrome near Lausanne will be disposed of owing to the impossibility of developing it.

The Geneva municipality has shown more initiative and extensions and modernisation of its airport at Cointrin have already been completed. When the Cointrin airport was first established in 1920 it covered an area of 133½ acres (54 hectares); in 1942 it was 235 acres (95 hectares). Its first concrete runway, dating from 1936-1937, was 1,328½ ft. long (405 metres) and 69 ft. wide (21 metres). Despite the war it has been widened to 164 ft. (50 metres) and its length extended first to 3,280 ft. (1,000 metres) and subsequently to 3,936 ft. (1,200 metres) and provision has been made for its ultimate extension to 8,200 ft. (2,500 metres). Of all the Swiss main civil aerodromes the one at Cointrin was found to be most easily extended due to the favourable topographical conditions of the region to the south-west of Geneva, where it is located. A further advantage is that it lies in the path of but one main wind direction, obviating thus the necessity of the usual triangular runway arrangement.

Basle seems to be in a less fortunate position. The present airfield at Sternenfeld, near Birsfelden, is too small and its area has been, in addition, encroached upon by the Rhine port development. Of the various schemes which had been evolved before the war, the scheme for an airport at Allschwil-Burgfelden seemed to have found most favour. This airport would be located to the west of Basle, but its drawback is that according to the plan it would be crossed by the Franco-Swiss border. How this difficulty would have to be solved is unknown so far; the originators of the scheme maintain that the airfield, situated partly in France and partly in Switzerland, would prove an advantage to both countries in addition to its value as an international airport.

The present Berne airport, located near Belpmoos, to the south of Berne, has been found already before the war to be incapable of dealing with intensified air traffic, and the scheme envisages a modern aerodrome near Utzenstorf, to the north-west of Berne, on the Burgdorf-Soleure railway line branching off at Burgdorf from the Zurich-Berne main railway line. The distance from Berne would be 21 miles by rail and 13.6 miles by road. There was once talk that Utzenstorf should become Switzerland's central airport, but preference seems to have been given to Kloten. The original Utzenstorf scheme met also with a certain amount of opposition from farming interests in the area. The area which would be required for an inter-urban aerodrome would, of course, be less extensive than that for an international airport.

Other minor projects concern airports near Bellinzona, Lugano and Mendrisio, intended as local

landing places subsidiary to the projected Locarno-Magadino airport; furthermore, an airport near Davos, subsidiary to the already mentioned Samedan airport, as well as airports near Neuchâtel and Lucerne."

* * *

What was stated to be the first British civil aircraft to arrive in Switzerland for several years, landed there on May 1 to take six Swiss doctors and 12 Swiss nurses to the Belsen camp. Another British plane left Switzerland on May 2 with Swiss doctors and nurses for the Netherlands.

Economical

The cost of living index compiled by the Federal statistical bureau has remained about stationary and was to end of March last 208,8 (Aug. 1939=100).

* * *

A serious rationing of paper, specially newsprint, has been decreed for three months from the 1st of May. Import of raw materials is entirely suspended and home-produced wood pulp is further restricted as wood is required more urgently in other directions. It has also been found expedient to export paper to France—where the scarcity is more pronounced—in exchange for vital goods which at present are not obtainable otherwise. The reduction amounts to 60% of the 1941 deliveries and will chiefly affect newspapers.

Humanitarian

No less than eight large cars entered Switzerland at St. Margarethen when Maréchal Pétain and his retinue traversed our country to give themselves up at Pontarlier. The Maréchal, accompanied by the Federal police, had to make a short stay at Wesen pending receipt of instruction from the French authorities.

* * *

While various reports appeared in the English press that Bastianini, one of Mussolini's former colleagues, had found refuge among monks in the canton Fribourg, the Federal Council stated officially on May 15th that as no extradition demand had been presented the matter did not come under discussion.

* * *

Another supposed war-criminal with a sensational press in this country is Countess Ciano, the late dictator's daughter. Some reporter started the tale that she is living a gay life in Switzerland with the result that other newspaper scouts are after her for "copy." According to reliable information from Switzerland she is an inmate in a well-known mental institution.

* * *

The total of "civilian messages" transmitted by the Central Prisoners of War Agency of the International Red Cross Committee from the beginning of the war to end December 1944 exceeds eighteen million. This particular service created by the I.R.C.C. enabled civilians residing in enemy belligerent countries to exchange, by means of 25 word messages at most, brief news of a strictly family nature.

* * *

The special stamps issued by the Postal authorities in favour of the "Don Suisse" realised 1½ million francs.