

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: - (1946)

Heft: 1047

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.

Telephone: CLERKENWELL 2321/2.

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

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

Telegrams: FREPRINCO, LONDON.

VOL. 28. No. 1047.

FRIDAY, APRIL 26th, 1946.

PRICE 6d.

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NEWS AT RANDOM

Federal

Minister Dr. Walter Stucki resigned his post in our foreign office which he has held since January 1945. Though nothing official has transpired it is disclosed in the Swiss press that he did not always see eye to eye with his elder colleague, Fed. Councillor Petitpierre. Until the end of 1944, Dr. Stucki was Swiss Minister to France and history is not likely to overlook the prominent part he played at the time of General Petain's exit. The wide experience and valuable services of Minister Stucki are being retained by the Federal Council for a possible appointment abroad.

* * *

The ordinary accounts of the Confederation for the twelve months to 31st December, 1945, close with a deficit of 214.4 million francs which, added to the extra-ordinary expenditure of 862 millions (mobilisation and other war measures), increases the total deficit for the year to over a milliard francs. The indebtedness of the Confederation has thereby reached an amount of 8,475.5 million francs.

* * *

An official proposal in the National Council to shorten deliberations by cutting by about a third the time allowed for speeches is unlikely to find favour. So far an orator was permitted half an hour; in future he would have to compress his say into 20 minutes and if he rises again on the same matter no more than ten minutes can be claimed.

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Sensational rumours about incidents during the war which, it is asserted, are repressed for political reasons are finding their way into some of the Swiss press. The latest one is a report — probably spurious — that Allied army commands have discovered in Berlin a list of Swiss, compiled in 1940, who in the event of an invasion were deemed to be friendly to a Nazi régime. The Federal Council is said to be in possession of a duplicate list; its publication would, of course, strengthen the already persistent demand by certain political circles for a general purge of our civil administration.

* * *

A conversion loan of 450 million francs at 3½% was submitted by the Confederation at the beginning

of this month and was oversubscribed by over 50%, the total being 690 million; the success is the more remarkable as the rate of interest offered has never been as low.

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The negotiations in Washington in an endeavour to settle the allied claim on German assets in Switzerland have not been concluded yet and, at the time of writing, seem to be no nearer to a settlement. The following article is taken from the well-informed "Economist" and was published on April 6th; it puts the whole dispute in a nutshell:

"The first round of the Washington talks on the question of German assets in neutral countries has confirmed the general expectation that the negotiations would prove to be both difficult and protracted. The discussions originated from the fiat of the Allied Powers in Germany which, on October 30th, passed Law No. 5, known as the Potsdam Law, vesting all German external property in the Allied Control Council. This decision was communicated to the neutral Governments, with the request that each in turn should discuss the matter with representatives of the Western Allies — the United States, Britain and France — in Washington. The talks with Switzerland, the first neutral on the list, opened a fortnight ago; but it has been learned this week that discussion has been interrupted by the return of the Swiss representative, M. Stucki, head of the Swiss Foreign Office, to Switzerland for fresh instructions.

Quarters in touch with the negotiations deprecate any suggestion that a deadlock has been reached. It seems clear that there has been no actual breakdown, but the position was really one of deadlock before the talks opened. The Allied standpoint, deriving from the Potsdam Agreement, is that all

CITY SWISS CLUB

Members are informed that a dinner has been arranged at the **Dorchester Hotel** for **Sunday, May 12th, 1946**, at **6.30 for 7 p.m.**, to welcome the Swiss Football Team and representatives of the Committee of the Swiss Book Exhibition.

Those members wishing to take part should inform the Manager, Dorchester Hotel, Park Lane, W.1, in writing, but not later than May 8th, 1946.

THE COMMITTEE.

German overseas assets are reserved for reparations or restitution of looted property. The neutral attitude, plainly revealed in press and public discussions, is that the Allies have no legal basis for their demand. The neutrals affirm their willingness to surrender any assets that can be shown to have been looted — such as art treasures, the history of which can be readily traced — but otherwise contend that German assets in their countries should in any case be considered in relation to their own claims on Germany.

If this last point were conceded without qualification, the demand for surrender would cease to have practical significance, for in most cases the neutral claims on Germany exceed the German claims upon them. The total of German assets disclosed by the Swiss census was rather under Sw. frs. 1 milliard, but is likely to be put at Sw. frs. 1.2 milliard when the results of the investigation of safe deposits is known. A full census of Swiss claims on Germany has not yet been taken, but the total is tentatively estimated at rather over Sw. frs. 4 milliard. Evidently, it is highly improbable that the Allies would agree to the set-off argument. Their attitude is that old claims rank low in the scale against reparations, and that during the war they repeatedly emphasised that war period claims would have a very low priority indeed. The Swiss credit balance in the clearing with Germany, totalling rather more than Sw. frs. 950 millions, would obviously fall into this category. Hence there seems little chance of an agreed settlement unless the neutrals can bring themselves to accept in principle the linking of German overseas assets with reparations. And until a settlement is reached, the freezing of the neutrals' assets in the United States and other disabilities from which they still suffer are likely to continue. Meanwhile, if press reports are accurate, the U.S. reiteration of suggestions that the total of German assets is in fact much larger than the Swiss investigation has revealed, and that an independent check may be desirable, is hardly calculated to promote an amicable settlement."

Dr. Walter Stucki, the leader of our delegation, has had to return to Berne several times and it is to be hoped that a mutually satisfactory basis or formula can be found. Nothing official has been allowed to reach the Swiss press with perhaps the exception that we have waived, as a gesture of goodwill, our own claim on Germany of over £60 million, which is the debit balance on the wartime clearing account. It is authoritatively stated that this approximately represents the total of the German assets claimed by the Allies, but the figure is by no means accepted, in fact three to four times the amount is demanded. Though the findings of the official Swiss commission have not been investigated by the other side the lack of confidence in the accuracy of their estimates have naturally been resented. Some irritation is also caused by the continued wartime blocking of Swiss assets in the U.S.A. (said to be about £375 million) and the enforcement of the last remnants of the offensive black list.

* * *

Federal Councillor Petitpierre took the opportunity of acquainting the National Council with the views of the Federal Council on U.N.O. when the League of Nations was being wound up. He said (according to "The Times" correspondent) that he did not envisage

any discussions about Switzerland's admission to U.N.O. The Federal Government was still examining the question; any decision would involve not only political but military and economic considerations. The Federal Government took the view that if Switzerland could have no part in the peace settlement, she desired to take part in the reconstruction of the post-war world. But Switzerland could not seek admission to U.N.O., since she might be required to undertake obligations incompatible with her international position. The preservation of Swiss neutrality would be of greater service to the world than her participation in sanctions. Switzerland hoped she might be allowed to make her contribution by participating in certain organs of U.N.O., such as the International Court, and in the form of humanitarian services. The Swiss Government was glad to welcome the U.N.O. delegation and would facilitate the establishment in Switzerland of any of the international organs of U.N.O. and the International Labour Office that might wish to settle there.

Cantonal

Over the week-end of March 23rd/24th electors in the canton Zurich were busy in recording their votes on a number of proposals. In the first instance, the members of the parish councils (Gemeinderat) had to be elected for a new period of four years. In Zurich itself a violent election campaign was set going by the two parties of the left, the socialists and the party of labour (also described as communists or nicolists) who had formed a "popular front" though before they had

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never been on friendly terms. Their slogan was the cry "a red Zurich" as the cantonal council had already a socialist majority. Whoever took an active interest in politics was submitted by the opposing side to a merciless scrutiny and was fortunate if he was allowed to retain a fraction of his reputation or respectability. The result of the voting was a decided victory of the party of labour, who mustered 19 out of the 125 seats captured from their partners, the socialists, and to a larger extent from the "Landesring" (Duttweiler). The socialist strength was reduced from 48 to 38 mandates and the Landesring lost 16 of his former 37 councillors; the liberals slightly increased their number from 23 to 25. The parties of the left are six seats short of their target of controlling the council.

Of the nine seats in the Stadtrat seven found favour again, i.e., five socialists, one liberal and one Landesring; of the two new ones, both at the bottom of the poll, one is a liberal and the other one belongs to the party of labour.

A readjustment of the dental practice and the creation of a special department in the cantonal health ministry was sanctioned by an overwhelming majority. Another proposal to continue cantonal old-age pensions in addition to the Federal old-age and dependants insurance benefits was passed with a seven to one majority; the Federal scheme will become law in the near future.

In Zurich the poll was exceptionally heavy, viz. 87%.

In Winterthur the elections showed a similar picture to the one at Zurich. Only a narrow margin pre-

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vented the two parties of the left from gaining control of the Gemeinderat. The socialists lost two mandates to the communists, who for the first time take possession of four seats; the democrats and the Landesring are two respectively three members short in the new council.

Latest statistics give the population of the canton of Zurich as 674,505, of whom 74.5% are protestants (in 1930 — 74.2%), 22.3% catholics (21.7%), 0.9% israelites (1%) and 2.3% "philosophers" (3.1%).

The Grosse Rat has conferred the honorary citizenship of the canton Berne on General Guisan and his chief of staff Colonel Huber.

At the end of last year the city of Berne provided the amenities of 413 catering establishments, of which 30 were hotels and six people's kitchens.

A socialist proposal in Olten to pay a bonus to citizens who had been engaged on military duties during the war time was sanctioned by the electors by a small majority; an amount of about 100,000 francs will thus be distributed.

Schaffhausen does not wish to forget the 1st of April, 1944, when the town was mistakenly and tragically visited by American bombers; the Stadtrat has ordered the bells of the cathedral to be rung on that date five minutes before eleven in the morning.

A sum of 200,000 francs is being put aside by the canton Valais towards repairing the damage by the earthquake of January 25th last. In many parts of Switzerland appeals for funds are being launched in order to re-establish several local institutions whose activities have been interrupted, temporarily it is hoped.

Neuchâtel, renowned for its educational advancement, is to delete the compulsory ninth school year if an initiative demand will find the necessary support.

Traffic

A regular dispatch of goods between the Scandinavian countries and Switzerland is taking place weekly. Trucks are ferried across to Denmark and assembled into trains of as many as 50 sealed railway wagons which travel through the British and French occupied zones to Basle.

A concession has been granted to the American "Transcontinental Air" for the use of the Geneva airfield Cointrin on their service from Washington to Cairo.

The inauguration of the new air service Geneva-New York took place on Monday evening, April 8th, when the first giant plane of the "Transworld Air Line" arrived at Cointrin. Apart from the American

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Minister and officials the ceremony was marked by the presence of Federal Councillors Celio and Petitpierre.

* * *

The slight concession approved by the British Treasury in making a uniform deduction of £25 from the £100 holiday money for tickets in non-sterling currencies seems to have given an impetus to air travel. The heavy traffic has enabled the Swissair to reduce the return fare from London to Zurich by £4 10s. 0d. to £30; another daily service is likely to be in operation in the near future by the European Division of the B.O.A.C. All the travelling agencies are advertising 14 to 16 days' holiday trips at £30 to £36, fare, hotel, excursions and tips included. An eight-day Easter holiday at a Lucerne hotel with accommodation for 50 people has been offered for 18 guineas, everything included; the journey is by rail from Victoria and takes about 20 hours.

* * *

Zurich, i.e., Dübendorf, as the most important airfield in Switzerland, will have to mind its laurels. Basle and Geneva are adapting themselves very quickly to modern requirements. Here is a cutting from the "Evening Standard," March 27th, about likely developments at Cointrin:

"Geneva is likely to become the air-taxi rank of Europe if hopes of the new company Tarsa (Transport Aeriens Rapides Sa) are fulfilled.

This company, in collaboration with three British air service companies and Aviontaxi of France, intend to use Europe's largest airfield at

Cointrin, Geneva, as a base for all Europe's air-taxi services.

Geneva being on the new trans-atlantic line, New York, Rome, Cairo and India, will become the centre for all European traffic between these landing places.

London will be within four hours' flight at any time of the day or night, without awaiting the over-crowded regular services and at little extra cost.

British and French four-seater airplanes will be used for this service. Several machines and pilots will always be ready at a moment's notice to take the air, and there will be dormitories for pilots close to the airfield.

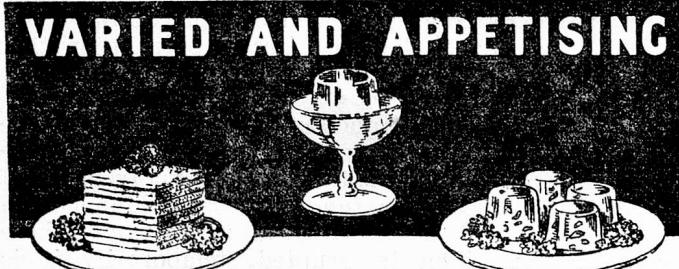
If the service is successful, helicopters will be used for landing passengers in towns and villages or at mountain resorts.

Economics

Federal Councillor Stampfli, in referring in the National Council to our economic measures, stated that the expansion of our export trade during the last few months was not the outcome of the credits granted to several States. It was to be expected that Switzerland, with its plant and industry intact, would be counted upon to assist in the reconstruction work necessary in the war-damaged countries. As these countries, for some time to come, would be unable to counterbalance such exports either by remittances or goods these credits were a vital preliminary in an effort to ultimately adjust such transactions. A number of these countries would in time become valuable sources for the provision of raw materials essential to us and there was no justification for the apprehension that we were creating foreign competition. The granting of credits remained limited as large amounts — restrictive for us — were involved. It was, he added, the opinion of the Federal Council that the present "boom" should be no invitation to the manufacturers to enlarge existing installations as the inevitable retrograde trade movement should not be overlooked. The largest share in the export trade went to the credit of the watch industry which from 241 million francs in 1938 recorded 493 million in 1945. Most of the watches went to the U.S.A. and there is not the slightest reason to believe that the 1945 trade figures can be maintained. The American watch manufacturers had petitioned their Government to enforce a reduction of the imports from nine million pieces (in 1945) to three million. The Federal Council had to negotiate in the matter as it was not considered good policy to insist on the existing trade agreement; the result was that for the current year an import quantity of seven million pieces was compromised upon — still considerably more than in a normal year. Another problem was the export of watch-making tools and machinery to America and England, the latter country being more particularly pressing on that point as the lack of this industry in England had hampered national defence at the beginning of the war. A large watch-making industry was now being established and Switzerland could not refuse co-operation, the more so as an assurance had been given that Swiss watches would not be shut out from the British markets.

* * *

The excessive price of petrol (Benzin) formed the subject of an interpellation at Berne. Pure petrol is bought in America at 5½ cts. per litre and the Benzin



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is sold in Swiss garages at 90 cts. per litre. The American oil undergoes a certain treatment in our country by the admixture of home-produced "Ersatz"; this practice seems to be inexpedient now.

The import of motor cars is steadily rising, the number of 232 for February being twice as large as the one for the previous month. It is noteworthy that, according to Swiss statistics, English makes do no more top the list; the Americans have 98 to their credit against 92 British machines. Even the French managed to send 24 across the border, and we wonder whether we shall ever hear of any Swiss makes again.

Shortage of labour is also a so far uncured malady in Switzerland. In March the number of totally unemployed registered was as low as 3,115, while the vacancies recorded at labour exchanges reached 10,480. The lack of labour is causing discontent among the farmers, in the building and catering trades and in the domestic service. The import of foreign labour has been sanctioned but the usually cumbersome completion of forms is impeding relief.

According to a statement made in the House of Commons domestic staff from friendly countries is allowed to accept employment in hospitals and household. The engagement is subject to certain conditions and is limited to one year.

Ten electric locomotives have been ordered by the Dutch railways. The mechanical parts will be built by the Winterthur company and the electrical gear by the Maschinenfabrik Oerlikon.

Here is what the "Manchester Guardian," April 11th, says about the new watch industry to be created in this country:

"Ingersoll, Ltd., announces to-day a new issue of £35,750 of ordinary shares. The background of this issue was given a few days ago by the chairman of the company, who gave an interesting account of the progress being made with the establishment of a British watch industry. Two factories are to make mass-produced watches, and production is to begin this year. This virtually amounts to the birth of a new industry, for up to the present only a few

watches have been made in this country (unless one goes back to the eighteenth century, when the art passed to the Swiss). Ingersoll, Ltd., has joined with Smiths English Clocks and Vickers-Armstrong to finance the new industry.

The factories, one of which is in South Wales and the other near Newcastle, are being rented from the Government at low rates. Both factories were operated by the Government during the war to make fuses and precision instruments. In leasing them at low rents the Government is paying a subsidy to encourage a strategic industry, and is at the same time establishing a new light industry in what were two of the worst 'depressed areas.' The venture is ambitious, for much of the labour will have to be trained from scratch, and, despite the application of mass-production methods, it will be some time before the watches will be able to compete in price with watches of a similar quality from Switzerland and America. In view of recent talk about the efficiency of British industry it will be interesting to see how cheaply they can be produced. The fact that the industry is of strategic importance is no reason why the public should have to pay high prices for its watches."

A year ago, when the forces of the Wehrmacht were chased out of Alsace, their hurried departure did not prevent them from destroying two important Rhine bridges, one near Brisach and the other at Chalampé-Neuenburg.

These destructions were no longer of any military value, but after the end of hostilities, they considerably hampered the traffic between France and its zone of occupation in Baden. In addition, the wreckage of these bridges paralysed the navigation on the Rhine, thus obstructing one of the essential commercial lines of Switzerland. It was therefore in the interests of France, as well as of Switzerland, to reconstruct, first the bridges, and then to clear the obstacles from the waterways.

A further problem which is of no less importance to the two countries concerns the electric power station at Kembs, situated about three km. from Basle, which

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was seriously damaged on the occasion of an attack by British Lancasters. To complete the destruction the Germans in their retreat razed the power station to the ground.

For this reason, shortly after the liberation of Alsace, Swiss circles interested in the Rhine navigation and supply of electric power, entered into negotiations with the competent French authorities with a view to entrust Swiss engineers with the reconstruction of the bridges and power station, in which both countries were interested. This proposal met with a favourable reception.

As soon as hostilities had ended, Swiss concerns got busy. In collaboration with French experts and competent undertakings, Swiss engineering specialists started their work aided by both French and English workmen. Engineers of the two countries worked out plans how to proceed with the reconstruction. The large iron spans were hoisted out of the water and were replaced on the pillars which were still in a serviceable condition. The Basle harbour authorities undertook to re-float the large barges which were sunk by the Germans.

In spite of numerous and often almost unsurmountable difficulties, the work made rapid progress, thanks to the efficiency of the Swiss concerns charged with the reconstruction, and the friendly collaboration between Swiss and French engineers and workmen. At the moment the power station at Kembs is in full working order, and the work on the bridges at Brisach and near Chatampé is nearing completion.

The friendly relations between France and Switzerland, which have manifested themselves on many former occasions, have, once more, been affirmed in enterprises concerning a common interest.

Humanitarian

During the war 294,000 civil and military refugees have found sanctuary in Switzerland for varying periods. The highest number sheltered was in May 1945, when more than 115,000 were taken care of.

* * *

The total of the "Don Suisse" to the end of last year amounted to about 144 million francs, of which

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100 million was contributed by the Confederation and the remainder collected from local bodies and private individuals. Over 23 millions has been spent so far on reconstruction work in war-damaged areas abroad; the fund is likely to be exhausted during the present year.

—oo—

The centenary of the present Swiss Confederation in 1948 will be celebrated in conjunction with the Federal Choral Festival (Eidgen. Sängerfest). Among the many attractions will be a historic play for which Swiss authors are invited to submit schemes or sketches by August 31st this year. The six best ideas will be awarded a prize of Frs. 1,000 each; three additional prizes of Frs. 6,000, 2,000 and 1,000 are offered for the completion by 31st March, 1947, of the representations finally accepted.

* * *

The million questionnaires distributed last month in order to ascertain feeling on topical controversial problems have aroused little interest, no more than about 6,000 responses having been received.

* * *

A climbing record has been achieved by two Zermatt guides, Alexander and Alois Graven, who, in spite of deep snow, effected the first ascent of the Matterhorn so early in the year — about eight weeks earlier than usual.

* * *

The indefatigable efforts of Mr. Chr. Kunzle for treating juvenile T.B. sufferers, particularly children of Birmingham, are attracting wide circles and it is hoped that the Ministry of Health will officially sponsor a new and larger scheme to further extend his alpine homes on the slopes of Davos-Dorf. On his next visit to Davos, Mr. Kunzle will be accompanied by Alderman Shurmer, M.P., one of his many supporters. A glimpse of the early life of our compatriot is revealed by the following from the "Birmingham Mail," March 25th :

"During a visit to the House of Commons, when he discussed with Alderman Shurmer a scheme for taking sick children from Birmingham and other towns in this country to Switzerland, Mr. Christian Kunzle recalled in conversation with a colleague being employed as an assistant confectioner in the Palace of Westminster 46 years ago. Then in 1900 he made rice puddings for Lord Salisbury at a wage of 7s. a week; when he asked for a rise he was offered 9s. a week. The time had come for Mr. Kunzle to think about his future, and he left to take up a career in business for himself that led to the founding of the chocolate firm which bears his name today.

He now hopes to expand the work which he carried out more modestly before the war of sending the sick children of poor people to recuperate in the glorious air of the Alps."

* * *

Mr. Charles Morgan, the author and former Dramatic Critic of "The Times," who served in the Admiralty during the war, is visiting Switzerland at the invitation of the Rector of Lausanne University.

During his stay he will lecture in the principal cities under the auspices of the British Council on "The Artist in the Community," "Is the Human Experiment Failing To-day?" and other subjects. Mr. Morgan's play, "The Flashing Stream," is being produced in Switzerland this year.