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NEWS AT RANDOM

Federal

The Federal Budget for 1947, in spite of stringent economies and putting the axe on expenditure, shows a deficit of 100 million francs. (The deficit was at one time estimated to be in the neighbourhood of 400 million francs.)

The major part of this debit balance consists of expenses for military purposes and various subventions. The military budget alone takes 3.2 per cent of the country's revenue.

Since the termination of the war Switzerland has granted credits to foreign countries to the amount of 775 million francs.

* * *

Federal Customs receipts during the year 1946 have reached a grand total of 271.4 million francs, or 186.9 million francs more than in 1945. Not included in these figures are the custom receipts from tobacco, which are given as 66.2 million francs. (1945: 18.2 million francs.)

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Colonel Hermann Flückiger, Swiss Minister in Moscow, has paid his first visit to Monsieur Molotov, Russia's Foreign Minister.

* * *

The Swiss Minister in Rome, Monsieur de Weck, was received by the Pope at the Vatican.

* * *

A Rumanian Trade Delegation has arrived in Berne, in order to conclude a new trade agreement between the two countries, Dr. Max Tröndle, Delegate for Commercial Treaties, will lead the Swiss Delegation.

* * *

The Chilian Minister in Berne, Monsieur Carlos, Morla Lynch, has informed the Federal Council of his approaching departure. It is reported, that his recall has no connection with the gold smuggling affair of the former commercial Attaché at the Chilian Legation.

Cantonal

An explosion which occurred at the Luminat works in Zurich-Affoltern caused the death of one workman, another was badly burned and had to be taken to hospital.

* * *

Miss Margaret Bondfield, head of the Ministry of Labour in the 1929-1931 Labour Administration, has given a series of lectures on "British women in public life" at the Kongress Haus in Zurich.

* * *

An additional credit of ten million francs has been voted by the town Council of Zurich, to combat the scarcity of housing accommodation, this brings the total of credits earmarked for this purpose since 1942 to 33 million francs.

* * *

Accidents caused through reckless driving have reached alarming dimensions. In Zurich, a three year old girl was killed and a twelve year old girl seriously injured by a motorist, who, as stated, drove with undue care.

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The death is reported from Berne, after a long illness, of Dr. Emil Bürgi, late Professor of pharmacology and medical chemistry of the University in Berne, at the age of 75. He was the inventor of Phyllosan.

* * *

The central post office in Biel was the scene of a well-planned robbery. Two local malefactors, enlightened by a third one who for a short time was employed at this post office, managed to hide in the spacious localities on Saturday night, January 25th. The elderly post-master having absented himself for a moment was, on his return, knocked down, tied, gagged and locked in the lavatory. Well acquainted with the disposition of the safes and keys, the intruders quickly helped themselves to 335,000 francs in notes and cash, reached the open and were later on joined by the third of the trio. Swiftly the police were on their track and by Sunday night they were all under lock and key. They were arrested at different frontier stations where in separate parties and in the company of the conventional lady friends they tried to escape into France. The loot, a few thousand francs excepted, was recovered and the post-master, M. Audetat, resumed his duties again the following Wednesday.

* * *

Two schoolboys from Lugano noticed a couple of men swimming in the lake near Gandria and informed the local police. A small submarine made of india-

rubber and driven by a motor was found. According to reports it contained 2½ tons of Salami and while this was being secured the two navigators found time to dive and swim away.

* * *

A fire which broke out at the Electrical Power station of the "Compagnie Vaudoise des Forces de Joux" caused considerable damage.

* * *

A Neuchâtel practitioner, Dr. Pierre Hulliger, of the Mont-Riant clinic, is claiming to have devised a chemical serum which cures tuberculosis and can be administered at any hospital, high altitudes being no more a necessity. The treatment, he states, has proved successful but public health officials have so far declined his offer of demonstrating his secret method at a cantonal hospital.

* * *

A man, who was about to be convicted on a charge of house-breaking, attempted to commit suicide by cutting his wrist with a piece of glass at the "Palais de Justice" in Geneva. He was taken to hospital in a serious condition.

Army

Lieutenant-Colonel George Zublin has been appointed Commander of the "Zentralschulen" of the Swiss Army.

Traffic

In order to cope with the steadily increasing goods traffic Swissair is flying special freighters to London and back twice a week, i.e., on Tuesdays and Fridays.

* * *

A contract made between Oberland tourist centre and "Chartair Ltd." provides for a three times a week service between Croydon and Interlaken. The planes — Airspeed Consul — carry five passengers and a crew of two.

* * *

An ever increasing traffic is reported from the Zurich-Dübendorf Aerodrome. During 1946, 5,437 machines have landed, carrying 79,872 passengers, a total of 297 tons of post, 466.5 tons of freight, and 1,487 tons of passenger luggage have been dispatched.

* * *

That there is not only an electrical power shortage in this country, but also in Switzerland, can be gathered from the following extract, which appeared in the January issue of the "Railway Gazette":—

"One of the results of the abnormally dry weather experienced in Switzerland this winter, and the consequent strain upon the hydro-electric power stations, has been the return to Switzerland of the Swiss Federal Railways Brown-Boveri gas turbine locomotive. This locomotive had been on loan to the French National Railways since October, 1945, and had been working on the Strasbourg-Basle main line. It is now running between Basle and Zurich, as one of several measures undertaken to economise electric power consumption. Another step has been the temporary abandonment of electric locomotives for shunting, their place having been taken by the steam locomotives which are kept in reserve for emergencies. On some lines, steam locomotives are being used in place of electric for hauling passenger and goods trains. The length of trains has been reduced to a minimum, and restrictions have been imposed on the operation of sports and excursion services. Heating of trains has been reduced substantially, the current used for this purpose in nor-



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mal circumstances approximating to 13 per cent. of the total electric power consumption of the Swiss Federal Railways during winter."

According to the "*Northampton Chronicle*," Switzerland might become the owner of a "Seaport":

"A canal to link Lago Maggiore in northern Italy with both the Gulf of Genoa and the Adriatic is being planned according to Swiss radio, which said that a Swiss-Italian technical commission recently met in Milan to study details.

Such a canal would give Switzerland a water-borne outlet to the Mediterranean.

An official announcement stated that the technical conditions for building the first part of the canal, running south-east from Lake Maggiore to Milan, a distance of just over 30 miles, were examined.

The plan is of great interest to Switzerland, which has no seaport and imports sea-borne goods largely through Genoa. The northernmost end of Lake Maggiore with the town of Locarno, is in Switzerland.

Economics

The Swiss Bank Corporation announce that the accounts for the year ended 31st December, 1946, show net profits of Frs.13,387,663 including the carry forward from the previous year, as compared with Frs.10,627,647 for 1945. The total assets now amount to Frs.2,139,391,383 against Frs.1,826,427,161 in 1945. At the General Meeting which is to be held on the 28th February, 1947, in Basle, it will be proposed to make an extraordinary contribution of Frs.1,000,000 to the Pension Fund, to pay a dividend of 5% against 4% last year and to carry forward an amount of Frs.4,387,663 against Frs.4,227,647.

From time to time rumours about a possible devaluation of the Swiss Franc appear in the Daily Press. The "*Toronto Globe*" writes in their issue of December 30th, 1946:—

"European advices indicate that Switzerland is even less likely than last summer to follow the example of Canada and Sweden in revaluing her currency. The authorities were subject to the same

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propaganda from outside that the Swiss franc was undervalued but the Swiss preferred to look at the situation expected when the present world state of unbalance ends. A London comment follows: "As there is no lack of evidence that both Canada and Sweden regret their precipitate action, the Swiss authorities seem to have been justified. Revaluations are no longer fashionable."

For Switzerland a revaluation would deter tourists and increase the burden of the internal debt. In a measure that is true here though Canada is helped by prices which on many goods have been lower than in the United States."

The "*Montreal Daily Star*" (December 26th, 1946 issue) writes about the boom in the Swiss Textile industry:—

"Even though shortages of coal and labour keep down production, Switzerland's textile mills are prospering to-day as they have not done since before the war. Most of them used the war years, when lack of raw materials kept them idle for long periods, to modernize their machinery. To-day they are working an average of forty-eight hours a week as against thirty or less in war time, and while they are not selling as much abroad as they did in the late 1930's, they are getting prices that are three to four times as high.

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As justification for these prices, the manufacturers point out that they were buying cotton at about twelve cents a pound in 1938, and to-day are paying about thirty-three cents. Within the year the price has gone as high as forty cents. More than fifty per cent of all the cotton that goes into Switzerland's fine laces and embroideries or organdies and muslins comes from Egypt. The other half of the country's raw cotton supply is about equally divided between the United States and South America.

Prices of labour in the country's textile mills have more than doubled since 1938, they say, as they were somewhat below general Swiss wage levels in the pre-war years. To-day Swiss textile labour is highly organized and has been able practically without strikes, to sign collective contracts with the mill owners at wages 130 to 140 per cent. higher than the 1938 levels. This is because the country's machine and metallurgical industries were off to an earlier post-war start in the current export boom than the textile mills were. Shipment of Egyptian cotton did not begin to arrive here in bulk until December 1945, and it is only recently that the cotton textile production here has begun to soar.

The other industries drew away thousands of workers from the textile mills, which have had to compete by wage rises to get them back again. Then too, the textile manufacturers are lamenting the fact that about 45,000 servant girls in Swiss households who used to be drawn to the country from Germany, Austria and Czechoslovakia, are now Swiss, and these girls will not be available for work in the mills until the girls from Central Europe return. The mills are getting a few Italian workers, whom they did not have before the war, but not enough for their needs.

The total of Swiss textile production, it is estimated here, runs about 70 per cent of its pre-war level. The collapse of Germany and the havoc of war in the Balkans have forced the Swiss to look for new markets, but they are getting them easily, because of world-wide shortages in what they are making. Before the war Germany took about one-third of all Swiss cotton goods, and now takes practically nothing. Hungary, Roumania, Yugoslavia and Italy were also good customers, but these markets have almost disappeared.

In their place the Swiss are benefiting by increased exports to the United States, particularly in embroidery — edgings and trimmings — and in lace on net or underwear. They are also doing a fine business with Latin America — particularly with Argentina, Brazil and Mexico. In Europe only Sweden is proving a good customer for the high quality Swiss textiles, as the other countries, flattened by bombardments, are giving priorities on export to other types of goods. They do not want embroideries, they want bridges.

During the war the artificial silk mills were kept running here when the cotton mills closed down. One result is that there are new artificial silk products — such as an imitation straw for straw hats — whereas there has been very little progress in design or the creation of anything new in the cotton mills."

* * *

Soft fruit to the value of 190 million francs has

been gathered last year in our country. Of this, 45,000 tons of desert fruit worth about 25,000 million francs has been exported to practically all European countries, including England.

* * *

A.-G. Leu, Zürich, another of the "big five" propose to the General Meeting, which will be held on March the 1st, to pay a dividend of 4 per cent. (1945: 4%.)

* * *

The following Swiss Banks have declared their dividends: Schweizerische Volksbank, 4 per cent. (1945: 3%); Genossenschaftliche Zentralbank Basel, 4 per cent. (1945: 4%); Leihkasse, Neumünster, Zürich, 5 per cent. (1945: 5%).

* * *

Chemical and pharmaceutical products are included in a list of commodities to be supplied by Switzerland to Argentina under a new commercial agreement signed recently. Argentina will ship edible oils, raw materials and quebracho extract.

Humanitarian

As the result of an appeal, by the committee "Help for Polish children" "three tons of provisions, and 500,000 tablets of soap have been dispatched to children's Sanatoriums in Poland.

* * *

The Swiss Red Cross reports that 450 Austrian children have arrived at Buchs for a three months stay in Switzerland. They will be distributed amongst Swiss families.

* * *

The Central Office for Prisoners of War in Geneva has, by the end of December 1946, dispatched the 60th million communication to P.O.W. and their relations.

Thus, from 1939-1946, a total of 60 million postal communications have left Geneva to bring news about Prisoner of War to their families all over the world. At one time as many as 450,000 postcards and letters were dispatched daily.

—oOo—

A great number of English schools, which were transferred to England at the beginning of the last war, have now returned to Switzerland.

* * *

The Swiss Press strongly denies the allegations contained in a report made by the International Committee for the study of European questions.

The suggestion that large numbers of former Nazis, especially officers, have taken refuge in Switzerland, whence they are continuing Nazi Propaganda and helping to obstruct the Allied administration in Germany, is emphatically denied, and the figures adduced by the report are declared to be wholly inaccurate since they are in excess of the total number of Germans in Switzerland.

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Since the conclusion of the war there has been an investigation of Nazi organisations and nearly 4,000 Germans have been deported.

Minister Stucki, at a Press Conference, to which Foreign and Swiss Journalist were invited, said, that the Government at the end of the war blocked all German owned accounts, and that those still remain blocked, the allegation, that considerable sums are still at the disposal of the Nazis in Switzerland, were absolutely unfounded. He remarked that the expulsions ordered by the Swiss Government during the last two years did result in suppressing all Nazi organisations of importance.

* * *

By way of introduction to the centenary celebrations of the opening of the first railway in Switzerland, which will be held throughout the country this year, a travelling exhibition of railway drawings by children is to be held in 14 Swiss towns. An invitation had been extended to Swiss children by the Swiss Federal Railways to tell in drawings their impressions of railways. Some 10,000 drawings were received, and these have been sifted by a jury composed of members of the Swiss Society of Drawing Teachers. The best drawings are to be shown in the exhibition, and 10 per cent. of them will be granted prizes. The travelling exhibition will have the official title of "La jeunesse et les Chemins de fer" (Youth and Railways).

* * *

Thirty-three persons have been arrested in Vuillafans near Pontarlier, in connection with the circulation of forged Swiss banknotes. More arrests are expected.

* * *

A number of Swiss Journalists have arrived in Vienna to study conditions in connection with food supply for the population of Vienna. A reception, in their honour was held by the Swiss Minister, Monsieur Feldscher, at which the Austrian President, Dr. Renner and the Austrian Minister of Food were present.

* * *

Reports from various parts of Switzerland announce heavy snow falls and low temperature. The "Aegerisee" as well as the "Murtensee" are completely frozen over. A part of the lake of Bienné, between Neuenstadt and the St. Peter's island, and the "Untersee" from Ermatingen to the outlet of the Rhine, are also frozen.

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