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The Swiss Observer

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NEWS AT RANDOM

Federal

The Gold reserve of the Confederation which in July 1947 stood at its highest at 1258.4 million Frs., was by January 1948 reduced to 247.2 millions and by 15th July had sunk to 159.1 millions Frs.

* * *

The barometer of employment in the first quarter of 1948 stood, compared with 100 in 1938, in the building industry at 117 (fourth quarter 1947=101, third quarter 1947=136); in the cotton industry at 100 (100 resp. 98); in the silk industry at 128 (132 resp. 133); in the embroidery industry at 102 (101 resp. 104); in the metal industry at 152 (150 resp. 149); in the watch industry at 136 (137 resp. 136); in the chemical industry at 179 (178 resp. 179) and in the provision industry at 132 (134 resp. 130).

* * *

The latest statistical tables of mortality published by the Federal Statistical Department show a renewed decline of mortality. After the observation made during the period 1929/32 the average duration of life for a boy born during that time was 59 years, for a girl 63 years. The latest mensurations are allotting to a newly born boy an average duration of life of 63 years and to a girl as many as 67 years. These prolongations of life are in no way due to the decline of mortality of some individual age groups, but are registered in all ages from the newly born to the aged. Particularly great is the increase of expectation of life of men between 30 and 50, and women between 10 and 40.

* * *

United Press reports from Buenos Aires that the Swiss Minister, Mr. Feer, had a two hours conference with the Argentine Foreign Minister, Bramuglia. He afterwards stated that the relations between Argentina and Switzerland had reached a very difficult stage. The different interpretations of the commercial agreement between the two countries arrived at in 1947 has led to this tension, as Argentina insists upon the immediate liberation of its outstanding credits or roughly 200 million Frs., whereas Switzerland persists in its atti-

tude that these credits were only payable after the expiration of the agreement in 1951.

* * *

The Department for Justice, Finance and Traffic arrangements of the Federal Political Department in Berne is at present carrying out investigations in respect of Swiss interests prejudiced by the nationalisation, confiscation, agrar-reforms, etc., in Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Poland and Roumania. Swiss owners and Creditors, who have suffered financial losses and who have not yet reported these losses to the Political Department are requested to do so at once.

* * *

On August 14th, on the eve of the first Indian independence anniversary, the Swiss Envoy to India, Minister A. Daeniker, signed with the Indian Prime Minister, Pandit Nehru, in New Delhi, on behalf of Switzerland a friendship and right of domicile treaty. It is thus the first foreign agreement which India has concluded.

The treaty contains the reciprocal promise of continual peace and imperturbable friendship and settles the diplomatic and consular representations of both countries. It regulates in concise form the fundamental questions of domicile and commerce, in that it assures to both states the most favoured nation agreement.

It provides that a special agreement for payment regulations for goods be completed as soon as possible.

The treaty has yet to be ratified and the Federal Council will ask the two Chambers for their consent.

* * *

The customs receipt for the first half year 1948 amounted to 225.9 million Frs., compared with 189.18 millions in 1947, with 125.9 millions in 1946, and only 25.2 millions in 1945.

The gross receipts of the Federation from taxes in the first quarter of 1948 amounted to 341.1 million

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Frs., of which 301 million Frs. went to the Federal Exchequer. In detail these taxes were:— Turnover tax 124.3 mill. (Federal Exch. 124.3), stamp duties 21.2 mill. (Fed. 17 mill.), the compensation tax 50.8 mill. (Fed. 50.8 mill.), luxuries tax 6.29 mill. (Fed. 6.33 mill.), military tax 92.6 mill. (Fed. 64.77 mill.), 1st and 2nd military sacrifice 21.45 mill. (Fed. 19.29 mill.), the war profit tax 21.13 mill. (Fed. 15.26 mill.).

The Postal cheque and Giro transactions in the first six months of 1948 amounted to a total turnover of 49.6 milliards as compared to 43.6 milliards in 1947. Of the total 40.9 milliards (36 in 1947) were book transactions instead of cash payments. The total credit of the 203,226 accounts on June 30th amounted to 978.6 million francs.

Cantonal

On Wednesday, 19th August, about 10.30 a.m., a fire in the munition dumps at Göschenen was reported by two employees. These dumps, four in number, are galleries cut into the mountain side, just opposite the railway station. The furthest gallery to the south, nearest the St. Gotthard tunnel, was the one affected. The employees left and closed the steel doors and gave the alarm. At first it was only a fire, but later on it reached high explosives stored in the gallery and caused explosions which increased during the afternoon. The fire brigade and A.R.P. personnel from Göschenen at once went into action.

The civil population of Göschenen was evacuated into the tunnels of the Schöllenen railway and others

were directed to the Göschenen alp. The electric current of the railway was cut off from Wasen in the north to Airolo in the south. All road traffic was stopped. By evening the population was allowed to return to their homes and the rail and road traffic restored, but under observation of the strictest control.

No lives were lost, nor any damage outside the gallery occurred.

Experts who are also dealing with the inquiry into the recent case of Mitholz, together with the two directors of the federal munitions factories, Thun and Altdorf, are investigating the cause of the outbreak. The precautions taken since the case of Mitholz have proved themselves justified in this case. [A.T.S.]

* * *

After the recent snow-falls an avalanche fell over the mountain pastures of Vieux-Emosson in the district of Barberine (Martigny-Châtellard). Out of a herd of 228 sheep, 218 belonging to farmers of Finhaut, were killed. The damage which is not insured amounts to over 25,000frs. [A.T.S.]

* * *

A fortnight ago, in the early hours of Monday, a speed-boat, occupied by two young men, ran full speed against a marking-post of the embankment at Rapperswil and was wrecked. The twenty-five-year-old hotel porter, Joseph Maechler, from Vorduthal (Schwyz) was thrown against the wind-screen of the boat, fell bleeding into the water and was drowned. His body has not yet been recovered. The driver, the nineteen-year-old commercial apprentice, Paul Huber, who had no driving licence, was also thrown into the water, but was saved. He used the boat without permission. On the previous day he raced about the lake for hours and several complaints were lodged with the police. The boat, which is a total wreck, belonged to his brother, Eugen Huber, who is at present abroad. The value of the boat is round about 20,000.—frs. Paul Huber was taken into custody by the police. [A.T.S.]

* * *

An extra-ordinary district meeting at Kussnacht (Schwyz) decided to erect a new school-building in Mertischachen at a cost of frs.200,000.—. The district council's project was estimated at frs.250,000.—

[A.T.S.]

* * *

The Government of the canton Lucerne has bought the Hotel Eden in Arosa in order to convert it into a Sanatorium for tuberculosis sufferers of the canton Lucerne. The Grand Council, however, has yet to sanction the purchase, which has now brought to realization a ten-year-old proposal. [A.T.S.]

* * *

During the federal wrestling and Alpine festival, Lucerne experienced such an enormous traffic of vehicles and pedestrians as it never knew before. In the stadium were about 26,000 spectators, and the performances in the hall were witnessed by some 6,000 people. In the vicinity of the stadium nearly 1,500 vehicles were parked. [A.T.S.]

* * *

According to the report of the statistical Department, the number of inhabitants of Zurich has grown to 380,000. The excess of births over deaths amounted in July to 160, the excess of ingress over egress was 350 persons, so that at the end of July the number of inhabitants registered was 380,248. [A.T.S.]



In the night of 17th to 18th August, a fire broke out in the large factory and storage building at the corner of the Sihlquay—Austellungsstrasse in Zurich. The fire originated apparently in a furniture store on the ground floor, in the centre of the building which is approximately 60m. long. The fire took such rapid hold of the building that the caretaker and his wife, who occupied a flat at the top of the building, could not use the staircase to get away, but had to be rescued by the fire brigade by way of a ladder escape. All their possessions had to be abandoned.

Through the fire the whole of the building, with the exception of the offices facing the railway station, was destroyed. Over 500 new motor-cycles were lost, a large furniture store and a stock of electrical goods, a number of workshops and storage rooms fell a prey of the flames.

A large number of firemen were on the site and at one time about twenty lines of hose directed water onto the blaze. The fire raged from 1 a.m. and at 6 a.m. the interior was still ablaze, but the fear of it spreading to adjoining buildings was considerably lessened. The fire was visible from all over the town. The property, which was formerly occupied by the firm of Knechtli & Co., ironmongers, was bought last year by the town of Zurich for 1.1 million francs. The damage to the contents of the building has been officially estimated to amount to over four million francs. [A.T.S.]

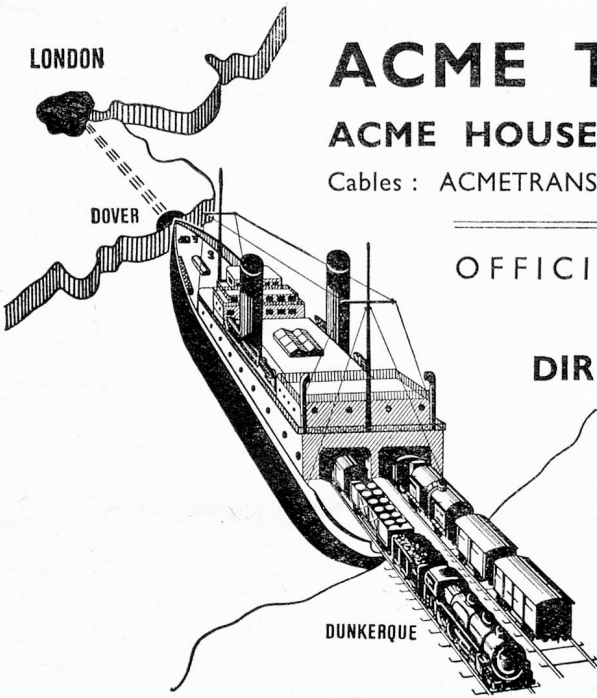
The forty-three-year old dentist, Dr. Klaus Eichler-Sigrist, from Zurich, and his mother-in-law, Mrs. Karoline Sigrist-Zurkirchen, from Lucerne, met with a fatal accident in France. After a holiday spent in the

Bretagne, they intended to return to Switzerland by car. Between Auxerre and Chablis, in the Department Yonne, a tyre-burst caused the car to overturn. Dr. Eichler was killed instantly and Mrs. Sigrist died after a few days in hospital. [A.T.S.]

In the stable of a farmer in Wildberg, near Winterthur, a calf was born with an abnormally big head, two mouths and three eyes, of which the middle one is larger than the other two. The rest of the body is normal and the animal is fit to live. [A.T.S.]

The police in Winterthur surprised a German student from Bonn, who was manipulating an automatic machine at the railway station with Pfennig pieces. He had crossed the Swiss frontier at Basle only that day, and when handed over to the examining magistrate, for acting surreptitiously he stated, that he was told the "modus operandi" by a colleague in Germany. [A.T.S.]

On account of the rapidly spreading scarlet-fever epidemic, it was decided to close all Kindergarten-schools, as well as primary schools in the canton of Basle-Stadt. About 12,000 children are thus staying away from school. In a district in the west of the town, the cases are particularly numerous so that the secondary schools there have also closed down. The number of cases in the hospitals are about 300, and the Isaak Iselin school-house has been fitted up as an emergency hospital, as the childrens' emergency hospitals are completely full up. At present the epidemic is of rather a harmless character owing to the treatment with Penicillin.



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In order to stop the spreading of the epidemic into the canton of Baselland, the Education Authority there has decided that the schools in the districts of Allschwil, Brünigen and Brisfelden, which are under its authority are to be closed. [A.T.S.]

At the International Postage Stamps Exhibition, which opened in Basle on August 21st, some very great rarities are to be seen. Next to the treasures from the Swiss Postal Museum, the collections from the King of England, Cardinal Spellmann, the Paris dealer Champion, and others, are the 1st postage stamps in the world, the smallest stamp (Victoria 8 x 12mm.) the largest one (Newspaper stamp U.S.A.), round stamp (Egypt) and a large number of world renown single pieces. [A.T.S.]

(Ed.—What an opportunity for the London Swiss Philatelic members now in Switzerland.)

At the customs office between Switzerland and Alsace on the Burgfelderstrasse, a lady entering Switzerland gave rise to some suspicion. She had to undergo a complete inspection. The French lady customs-officer discovered rolls of French bank notes to the value of 165,000 French francs, stowed under the armpits of the traveller. [A.T.S.]

The police of Basle are looking out for a commercial apprentice who was asked by his firm to fetch frs.20,000 from the bank and has absconded with the money.

[A.T.S.]

On the journey to Cologne, a number of high Roman-Catholic dignitaries of the Papal Court who were sent as a deputation to the seventh centenary of the completion of the town, passed through Basle, where they changed into a railway carriage sent by the occupation power to take them to their destination. They were met at the station by the Bishop of Basle and Solothurn. [A.T.S.]

The twenty-seven-year-old glider pilot, Peter Ledergerber, from Grosan (St. Gall) crashed with his glider at Baurist, when intending to fly from the aerodrome Altersrhein to Reineck. He forgot to release the starting cable, which fouled a high tension wire and thus was pulled to earth. He suffered a severe concussion, lost the right eye and broke a leg. The glider is a complete wreck. [A.T.S.]

About three weeks ago, two young men from Männedorf rode on a tandem to the Schwägalp at the foot of the Säntis. On the way down into the Toggenburg, they overtook a motor-car and on the steep road were thrown from their machine. The motor-car, which was immediately behind them and which on the gravelled road could not stop at once, ran over them. Both cyclists were taken to hospital with heavy injuries, where the twenty-three-year-old carpenter, Ernst Schlumpf, died. His colleague suffered a broken pelvis and broken leg. One leg has already been amputated. [A.T.S.]

The Council of Administration of the funicular railway St. Gall-Mühleck has proposed to the General Meeting of Shareholders to reconstruct the line into a rack railway with electric motor. The cost is estimated to amount to about 320,000frs. The funicular

railway, built in 1893, is up to the present day still worked by water tanks. [A.T.S.]

The abnormal weather of late is having a game with the seasons. In Zurzach a pear tree blossomed three times this year. After the spring blossoms had developed and the fruit was half way ripe, new blossoms appeared in June. Now, end of August, the tree produced blossoms for a third time. [A.T.S.]

The Government of the Canton Argovie has submitted a law to the Grand Council of the canton, which aims at the furthering and extension of the hospitals in the canton. First of all there are various annexes to be erected to the cantonal hospital at Aarau, such as nurses' quarters, an eye clinic, an X-ray institute, etc. The Grand Council is to decide the chronological order of the erection of these buildings and is to be empowered to take up the necessary loans. For new buildings and extensions of district hospitals, the canton should be empowered to grant subsidies from 26 to 50% of the costs. These subsidies by the canton to the district hospitals will amount to frs.400,000.— per annum.

A further demand by the Cantonal Government to the Grand Council is a credit of frs.20,000.— to open new rooms in the cantonal library. [A.T.S.]

A young postman was arrested in Chiasso for opening letters and stealing the money contained therein. His last act before arrest brought him 500.—frs. which he took out of a registered letter.

[A.T.S.]

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Three young fellows intended to break into the jeweller's shop belonging to Roman-Mayer on the Place St. François in Lausanne. Early in the morning, one of the three entered the house, followed at two minutes interval by the other two. The police had information that the attempt would be made and were able, after a severe struggle to arrest all the three red-handed. One of the burglars had an automatic pistol on him and another a large knife with a fixable blade.

[A.T.S.]

The Finance Committee of the Grand Council of the canton of Vaud stated in its report of the states accounts, that the surplus of receipts for 1947 was exceeded by more than nine million francs over expenditure. The Committee, however, warned the Grand Council, that the canton, in spite of the surplus of receipts is faced with a serious finance situation. The application of the new status of the employees and the law of the Old Age insurance would cause a considerably higher expenditure. Further a reduction of tax receipts must be expected. [A.T.S.]

The "Voix ouvrier" made a statement in a report of a speech made on July 25th by René Albert Honrich, Secretary of the Valais group of the "Partei der Arbeiter" (Communist) at a meeting in La Batiaz, which was considered by the States Councillors Gard and Pittelond to be personal libels. They therefore instituted proceedings against Honrich for libel. At the Court at Martigny when the cases were heard on August 13th, Honrich apologised and signed the following explanation: "The undersigned, René-Albert

Honrich, residing at Bex, declares that his statement made at La Batiaz was directed against some employees charged with offences, but not against the States Councillors Gard and Pittelond, whose honesty he did not question. [A.T.S.]

Two mountaineers from Sierre ascended the Dent Blanche from the Mountet Hut. On their way down over the Seipécle ridge, Paul Darioli, an employee of the S.B.B., slipped and fell several hundreds of meters. His companion brought the news into Haudères, from where a recovering column set out and brought the body back for burial. [A.T.S.]

Owing to the recent heavy rains the Areuse and its tributaries are in flood. The Areuse once more rose above its embankments and the whole district between the villages of Motiers, Boveresse and Couvet are under water. The damage to meadows and fields is considerable. [A.T.S.]

The World Federation of the Reformed Churches has decided to move the seat of the Federation from Edinburgh to Geneva and to divide the Federation into an eastern and a western section. [A.T.S.]

From the beginning of September, Swissair will extend its activities. There will be a weekly service to the U.S.A. consecutively from Geneva and Kloten.

[A.T.S.]

The Conference for a General Agreement about customs duties and commerce, now sitting at Geneva, elected as its President, Mr. Dana Wilgress (Canada) and as Vice-President, Mr. M. Speekenbrick (Holland). The conference refused a proposal by Czechoslovakia which would exclude countries which are militarily occupied from a general agreement on customs duties.

[A.T.S.]

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Our next issue will be published on Friday, September 24th, 1948.

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