

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: - (1948)
Heft: 1101

Artikel: Switzerland and Western Union
Autor: Cranston, Maurice
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-694877>

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

Download PDF: 13.09.2025

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

au service actif ont droit au remboursement des frais de voyage, jusqu'à la frontière suisse, en troisième classe de chemin de fer, en deuxième classe de bateau.

Les représentations suisses sont autorisées à délivrer un billet aux militaires indigents tenus de rejoindre leur corps ou à leur accorder une avance convenable pour les frais de voyage.

Art. 7

Les militaires empêchés pour des raisons majeures de rejoindre leur corps adresseront à la représentation suisse compétente une demande de dispense accompagnée des pièces justificatives nécessaires (certificat médical, etc.).

La représentation règle provisoirement le cas sous réserve de la décision du département militaire fédéral.

Art. 8

Le présent arrêté entre en vigueur le 1er décembre 1948.

Il abroge à cette date toutes les dispositions contraires, notamment l'arrêté du Conseil fédéral du 23 septembre 1938/19 avril 1939 concernant l'obligation des militaires à l'étranger de rejoindre leur corps en cas de mobilisation de l'armée.

Le département militaire est chargé de son exécution.

Berne, le 10 septembre 1948.

Au nom du Conseil fédéral suisse :

Le président de la Confédération,

CELIO

Le chancelier de la Confédération,

LEIMGRUBER.



Swissair

For summer holidays or business travel

IN SWITZERLAND

Direct daily services from London to Zurich, Basle, Geneva.
From 14th June—18th September there will also be an additional service from London to Berne, three times a week.

For information please apply to

BRITISH EUROPEAN AIRWAYS

SWISS BOOKINGS, DORLAND HALL, LOWER REGENT STREET, LONDON, S.W.1

Telephone: GERrard 9833

SWITZERLAND AND WESTERN UNION.

By MAURICE CRANSTON.

The following article is reproduced from the October issue of "Time and Tide" by the courtesy of the Editor.

If you travel on the international express which crosses from France into Switzerland at Delle, you will stop for a while at that small forlorn French village while railway workers change the locomotive and customs officers climb aboard to ask their usual questions. The landscape there is shabby, for it is a corner of France the French have fought for, but never spent much care to cultivate. The buildings have a drab, unpainted aspect; the farms are poor; the people, the few there are of them, shuffle gloomily about their work. Two wars have not improved the looks of the place. Not far away in the Haute-Savoie there are vineyards, flourishing and gay, and there have been new mines and factories opened in the province since the Liberation, but Delle gets bleaker as the years go by. Bleak beyond words it seems, when you are a mile away from it. For after the steam-engine of the French *chemin de fer* has been taken off and the Swiss electric locomotive coupled, your train moves out of Delle towards a pretty pink house marked *Douane Suisse*, and suddenly everything is different.

Green meadows and white roads surround you, and farms as bright as toys, fir trees neatly planted, and little wooden chalets in picture-postcard photograph. On the hills above you may catch a glimpse of a soldier in grey and of guns that guard the frontier. You are in Switzerland. It is so different, so conspicuously different from what you have left behind you, that is somehow seems unreal. Whether you go by rail or road, whether you cross from Austria or France or Germany or Italy, the experience is much the same. The feeling is of passing from one world into another. Since 1939, Switzerland, geographically the centre of Europe, has been, by an irony of history, an island of prosperity and plenty in an alien sea of troubles. And nowadays, with its echo of a half-forgotten past, its curious new resemblance to America, its freedom first from war and then from the conflicts of Left and Right which have plagued the rest of Europe since the war was won, Switzerland is comfortably, if perhaps a little anxiously, remote.

The boundary of Switzerland is an arbitrary line drawn in 1815 at the Congress of Vienna; but insubstantial as it is, that line has separated peace from war, security from peril, freedom from slavery, well-being



from misery. Neutrality was always the goal of Swiss diplomacy, and since the fall of Napoleon I it has had uninterrupted success. It has brought the Swiss prodigious dividends, more than any country ever won in war. Not many generations back the Swiss were among the poorest people in Europe. Their land, for the greater part, is of no use for cultivation: their natural resources are exiguous. Yet the President of Switzerland was able to say, at the recent celebration of the federal settlement a hundred years ago, that Switzerland was the only country in Europe which was financially independent of East and West alike. Switzerland became a Marshall Plan nation to help in the economic reconstruction of Europe, but she did not need to seek American aid for herself. Technically, Switzerland is better equipped than any other European nation. The Swiss franc, of all currencies in the world, is now the most keenly coveted.

Of all European peoples the Swiss are the most businesslike. They are a nation of craftsmen, not artists; of journalists, not poets; of tradesmen, not noblemen; of farmers, not adventurers; of engineers, not saints. Their most remarkable achievements are technical: the Simplon and Gotthard tunnels, the scores of lifts and bridges on the Alpine ravines. Swiss engineers hope soon to drive a line through Mont Blanc and thus to cut by hours the journey from London to Rome. They would like to make a waterway from Locarno on Lake Maggiore to Milan to link up with the Italian project for a ship canal along the River Po to the Adriatic, for Switzerland would then have a more substantial outlet to the sea than Basle provides as an "ocean port" on the Rhine.

In terms of social economy the only European country which shares the post-war prosperity of Switzerland is Sweden, seven hundred miles away by air from frontier to frontier. Like Switzerland, Sweden is an industrial democracy; like Switzerland, she took no part in the two world wars. Yet, of course, Sweden is far richer in territory and natural resources; her population is nearly seven millions where Switzerland's is less than four and a half millions. There is one Swedish race and one Swedish tongue. There is no Swiss race, but Germans, French and Italians united by hazards of history; no Swiss language, but four different languages spoken in Switzerland, Sweden has a Socialist Government. Switzerland has a national coalition with Democratic Republicans as the largest party. Sweden is a kingdom. Switzerland is a federal republic.

Still, they are important characteristics, the two that Switzerland has in common with Sweden: industrialization and a century or more of peace. They are the keys to Switzerland's present prosperity. If she had not to spend so much on national defence, she could do even more for her people's welfare. For not everyone in Switzerland is at present economically secure. The cost of living has gone up as elsewhere since 1939; for the Swiss the rise is officially 62 per cent. and in practice rather more. While there has been an augmentation of wages, it has not kept pace. The Swiss Winter Help still has to solicit funds from the generous for the aid of families who suffer special deprivations or illness. Social security lags markedly amid the general conservatism of Swiss politics. In Government programmes for social betterment, Switzerland has a long way to catch up with Sweden or Britain or even other supposedly less developed countries like Mexico.

Foreigners never hear of Swiss politics. That the system is exemplary most of us accept. For the rest, since good news is no news, silence. I am told that no British or American newspaper maintains a staff reporter in Berne, although several have correspondents in Geneva and one or two in Zürich. The simple explanation of this is that Swiss politics are dull. They are largely decentralized, and the federal politics are not usually more important than cantonal politics, village politics and even family politics. At the federal level, political differences tend to be settled by compromise. Of the national party struggles that exist in Britain and France and America, for example, Switzerland knows very little.

In local politics, the Swiss are more combative than most peoples. But the conflicts rarely follow the set pattern of Left versus Right. Issues are argued on their merits, and personalities count for much. Outside a few industrial centres such as Zürich, Basle and Chaux-de-Fonds, the prevailing political sentiment of the Swiss generally is Capitalist. The trade unions are Conservative, the Socialists are of the less Radical kind. But the Communists, who call themselves in Switzerland the Labour Party, won several seats at the 1947 Election, and are nowadays a force to be considered.

Swiss patriotism is conspicuous. I know of no other country, save Russia, where the national flag is so often exhibited. Oddly enough, their constant contact with the world, through its travelling representa-

M·A·T TRANSPORT LIMITED

FORMERLY MACHINERY & TECHNICAL TRANSPORT LIMITED

INTERNATIONAL SHIPPING & FORWARDING AGENTS

LING HOUSE, DOMINION STREET, LONDON, E.C.2

Telephone: MONARCH 7174

Telegrams: MACANTECH, PHONE, LONDON

ALLIED HOUSES:

BASLE

M·A·T TRANSPORT A.G., 13 Centralbahnplatz
PHONE: 27982

ZURICH

M·A·T TRANSPORT A.G., London House, Bahnhofstrasse
PHONE: 258994

tives, has not given the Swiss people any real international outlook.

Membership of UNESCO, however, has been an interesting experiment for the Swiss people, and especially for the more world-minded minority. It may even be a step towards membership of the United Nations itself. Before 1935, when the League of Nations had its headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland was a member with reservations guarding her neutrality; she would not enter a system of collective security. Since the emergence of UNO, and especially since the Marshall Plan, Switzerland has been called upon once more to consider her relations with the rest of Europe. Reservations remain, even concerning the project of a customs union between Western European nations. When recently the Foreign Minister, M. Max Petitpierre, gave his consent to the examination of a customs union, and pledged Swiss support that far, he had to defer to the unreadiness of his countrymen to go any length towards international co-operation.

At the time I write, the crucial issue in international affairs is Western Union. It was at Zürich in 1946 that Mr. Winston Churchill first adumbrated the plan for which he has since secured European-wide support and to which, in principle, Mr. Bevin later committed the British Government. Switzerland's place in any Western Union is of particular significance. For Switzerland is already in herself a Western Union in miniature: a centre of French, German and Italian unity which might be the nucleus of a Federal Europe. On the other hand, Switzerland is a rich country while her neighbours are, in consequence of the second world war, poor countries. Western Union

would never be a real union unless there were economic as well as political unity, a single or freely exchangeable currency and an end to customs barriers. Such changes would inevitably mean for Switzerland at any rate a short-term loss, and it is hard at present to visualize their coming.

So there is something of a paradox about Switzerland's position in post-war Europe; she affords a practical model for European unity and yet, because of the very success of her system, she will not easily fit into a wider pattern of Western Union.

Still, the more important factor is Switzerland's unique experience of federal government; and that experience is relevant to the situation of every European people and especially to those greater European Powers which have vainly sought security through national sovereignty and national defence. Necessity drove the Swiss cantons together in the thirteenth century and after; will the same necessity seal the union of Europe in the present century?

OUR NEXT ISSUE.

Our next issue will be published on Friday, November 26th, 1948.

We take the opportunity of thanking the following subscribers for their kind and helpful donations over and above their subscriptions: L. W. Krucker, H. Schenkel, E. P. Dick, W. Walter, A. Muller, C. Devegney, R. J. Helfenstein, E. Frey, W. Wagner, A. A. Bodenehr, P. Eichenberger, J. Zimmermann, C. J. Bernheim.

**Gang lueg d'Heimat a !
Va revoir ton beau Pays !
Va a vedere il tuo Paese !
Va a vera teis Pajais !.....**

.....and tell your English friends making holiday plans of the warm and sincere Welcome awaiting them in Switzerland.

Application for the "Basic Allowance" (maximum for adults £35.0.0., children under 16 £25.0.0.) should be made on the 16th of the month preceding the month of travel to the "Authorisation Office for Travel to Switzerland", 11c, Regent Street, S.W.1. (Office of the Swiss Bank Corporation where Travellers' Cheques and Swiss Money are obtainable).

Travel accommodation by Rail or Air should be applied for as early as possible.

For full particulars of fares and Services, please apply to :

**SWISS FEDERAL RAILWAYS and
SWISS STATE TRAVEL BUREAU,
11B, REGENT STREET,
LONDON - S.W.1.**

STOP !!

Do not buy that Christmas Present till you have been to our

Grand Christmas Bazaar

To be held by the Sezione Femminile of the Unione Ticinese at :—

SWISS HOUSE, 35, FITZROY SQUARE, W.1

on

SATURDAY, 27th NOVEMBER, 1948 at 2 p.m.

(Make a note of the Date)

There will be colourful Gifts from Switzerland including, Brooches, Scarves, Woodcraft, Leather Goods, etc. Also Embroidery, Knitwear, Painting, Handcraft and Household Goods.

**USEFUL AND ATTRACTIVE PRESENTS
FOR EACH MEMBER OF THE FAMILY**

Bring your friends and don't forget to bring the Kiddies to our 'Lucky Dip'.