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The Swiss Observer

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NEWS AT RANDOM

Federal

Dr. jur. Joseph Condrau has been elected President of the National Council in succession to Mr. Paul Burgdorfer. He was born in Disentis (Ct. Grisons) in 1894, and for several years held the post of President of the commune of Disentis. The new President is since 1923, a member of the Grand Council of the canton of Grisons, over which he presided in 1930. He entered the National Council in 1935. Dr. Condrau is the Editor of the "Gazetta Romantscha".

The States Council has elected as its President, Dr. jur. Kurt Schoch, in succession to Mr. Rudolf Weber. He was born in Schleithelm (Ct. Schaffhausen) in 1904. He studied law at various Universities at home and abroad, after which he held the post as a district judge.

In 1944, Dr. Schoch became a member of the Government of the canton of Schaffhausen. He entered the States Council in 1946.

Dr. jur. Fritz Staehli has been elected Vice-President of the States Council. Born in 1895 in Siebnen (Ct. Schwyz) he studied law at Swiss and German Universities. After having practised for some time as a lawyer, he was elected President of the Tribunal Schwyz. From 1928 — 1939, he sat in the National Council, and in 1940, he entered the States Council.

After a statement on defence by M. Paul Chaudet, the member of the Federal Council responsible for military affairs, the Second Chamber of the Swiss Parliament approved a decree enabling the Federal Council to call up troops for periods of three weeks in case of emergency.

As a result of the development taking place in Swiss foreign trade, the receipts of the Swiss Customs Administration continue to go up steadily. For the first ten months of the current year, Swiss Customs'

receipts attained nearly 550 million francs, which represents an increase of more than 10 per cent in comparison with the corresponding period in 1955.

Switzerland will put a federal maritime law into force next January. Our country began trading under her own flag as an emergency measure during the last war. At the end of last year Switzerland's Merchant Marine comprised 31 ships, totalling 185,000 tons.

The Swiss Government has introduced a general ban on Sunday motoring until further notice.

Monsieur Alexandre Contoumas, the newly appointed Minister Plenipotentiary and Envoy Extraordinary of the Kingdom of Greece, has presented his credentials to Dr. Markus Feldman, President of the Swiss Confederation, at the Palais Fédéral in Berne.

In view of the International situation the Swiss Parliament has decided to shelve for the moment the proposal for a Swiss loan to the World Bank.

The two Popular initiatives for a reduction in military expenditure, and for the appropriation of the sums thus rendered free for social schemes, both at home and abroad, generally known as the "Chevalier Initiatives", that being the name of their originator, have been called off, and thus will not be put to the vote.

This year, exports of Swiss capital have not attained the level of those in the corresponding period of 1955. At the end of October, issues of foreign loans

CITY SWISS CLUB

Will members kindly note that the next

MONTHLY MEETING

takes place on Tuesday January 15th, 1957, at 6.30 p.m. for 7 p.m. at the **Dorchester Hotel, Park Lane, W.1.** (Orchid Room).

The Dinner will be followed by a talk by **Monsieur Salvador de Madriaga**, on "La rôle de la Suisse dans la vie internationale".

THE COMMITTEE.

totalled nearly 300 million francs, i.e. about a hundred million less than in 1955. This decline can be explained by the tension which has recently prevailed on the Swiss Money Market and Capital Market, whereas the situation during the previous years had been characterised by greater liquidity.

VARIOUS.

The construction of the highest dam of the world progresses.

Switzerland needs a great deal of electricity — to meet this need it is constructing numerous hydro-electric dams in its mountains. It is now more than 5 years since the beginning of work on the dam of the Grande-Dixence in a side valley of the Rhône. This dam, with a height of over 900 feet, will be the highest in the world. The dimensions of this undertaking are vast — the mass of the dam will represent more than 6 million cubic metres of concrete. Situated at a height of more than 6,000 feet, it will hold back an artificial Lake of about 400 million cubic metres of water. This dam will by itself produce one-tenth of the energy Switzerland needs today. An interesting landmark in the work of building the dam was reached the other day, when the completion of the pouring of the second million cubic metres of concrete was celebrated. It is estimated that it will take the 1,000 workmen another ten years to complete this dam — the greatest single concentration of volume ever brought about by man.

The Swiss-Brazilian commercial relations.

Mr. Jose-Maria Alkmin, the Brazilian Finance Minister, recently paid an official visit to Switzerland. He had talks with the Swiss Government with a view to stepping-up exchange of goods between the two countries. Another subject discussed was the question of a loan. The economic structures of the two countries complement each other, and it would seem that this is a good omen for more exchange of goods; Brazil could export more goods of primary importance, such as foodstuffs — and Switzerland for her part could furnish equipment, and also credit for

investment which this vast South American country needs.

Swiss agriculture has suffered from bad weather this year.

The very bad weather this summer has wrought havoc among most of the harvest. As a result, Switzerland has had to increase considerably her grain imports: by the end of September these had reached more than 600,000 cwt. Two-thirds of these cereals came from Canada. During the same period in 1955 Switzerland imported hardly one-sixth of this quantity, home production providing the rest.

The vine-harvest has also suffered very badly. It is estimated that, for the whole of Switzerland, the yield will be scarcely 500,000 hectolitres of wine. The average annual yield over the last 5 years has been considerably more than 800,000 hl. In certain parts of the country about 80% of the grapes were destroyed by the extreme cold at the beginning of the year and the high rainfall during the summer.

Natural riches in Switzerland.

Switzerland, it is generally known, is a country poor in natural resources, the only natural wealth, which is abundantly exploited, being water. Yet, in one of the mountainous regions of Switzerland, there is a Swiss industry which is very little known, although it plays an important part. This is a mine of natural asphalt which has been exploited for more than 200 years. Natural asphalt is chalk entirely impregnated with bitumen. It has many uses, chiefly in the building industry. It is used for resurfacing roads so that they stay dust-free. There are many roads still surfaced with asphalt in spite of the coming into use of reinforced concrete, and this is why the asphalt mine in the Val de Travers is still being exploited — in fact it is being developed. About 25,000 tons a year are extracted, according to demand — for asphalt cannot be stored. The mine is worked only by Swiss and provides hundreds of families in the mountains with their livelihood.

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