

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: - (1961)

Heft: 1387

Rubrik: News at random

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LETTER FROM SWITZERLAND

The Swiss government recently published the provisional budget figures for 1960, which showed a surplus of 715 million Swiss francs. The statement made at the time stressed the fact that the 4th period of economic prosperity since the war, which started in 1959, has been still further increased. New records have been set up, in both production and employment, in many branches of Swiss industry. Export, investments, and home consumption have all contributed to this development.

Receipts totalled well over 3,000 million Swiss francs during the calendar and financial year 1960 under review. This is an increase of about 20 per cent over the 1959 figures. About one-third of the receipts came from customs duties, which went up by approximately 15 per cent as compared with 1959. This increase took place in spite of the reduction in customs duties made in conformity with the agreement come to with the European Free Trade Association. The second-biggest source of revenue was turnover tax, which showed an increase of 10 per cent on last year's receipts.

Expenditure in 1960 was scarcely 10 per cent more than in 1959. It amounted to 2,600 million Swiss francs. Defence was the biggest item, amounting to about one-third of the entire budget expenditure. An interesting point is that the cost of maintaining existing military equipment came to more than double the appropriations for new outlays. Subsidies were the next-biggest item on the expenditures list, and, although no detailed figures are available for them, it may be presumed that they have increased by about 13 per cent. There will probably be a good deal of discussion about the estimated 13 per cent increase in subsidies. In Switzerland, the question of subsidies always divides the House. The Socialists call for state aid for various purposes, while the Conservatives emphasize the importance of private funds for such purposes. They support this argument by saying that the worker should also have to help finance the increased governmental burden from his own pocket. Over the last ten years, state subsidies have gone up three times, and more than half the appropriations go to agriculture.

The favourable budget for 1960, with its surplus of 715 million Swiss francs, was greeted with satisfaction by the Swiss public and provides further proof of certain financial reforms, which were brought in about two years ago.

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NEWS AT

Federal

In 1960, Switzerland's birthrate, including 1,091 still-born, was 95,542, compared with 94,088 including 1,115 still-born in the previous year. The number of deaths rose from 50,077 to 52,055 and there were 41,404 marriages.

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HYSPA, the second Swiss exhibition of hygiene, sport and gymnastics, has opened in Bern. It will continue until 17th July.

* * *

The Federal Council has approved a Swiss contribution of an international aid fund which will be granted to communist Yugoslavia. Under this agreement the Confederation will lend 22 million fr. to Belgrade for ten years at a rate of interest of 5.5 per cent.

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The Swiss Post office have issued five "Pro Patria" stamps. The issue, a regular custom, will be valid until 31st December.

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Since 1938, cinemas in the whole of Switzerland have doubled in number. There are now 645.

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The two-year crisis of the Touring Club of Switzerland has been temporarily cooled off with a plan for a commission of inquiry. The commission is to look into charges of misuse of funds and to report back to the board of directors as quickly as possible.

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Hermann Geiger, the Swiss Alpine pilot, has made another rescue. He landed his light plane on a glacier at 3,000 metres to transport an injured German climber to a valley hospital.

* * *

Cantonal

Mr. Pierre Schumacher, deputy from Cossonays, has been elected to succeed Mr. Gabriel Desplands in Vaud's State Council.

* * *

Hannes Keller, the Swiss deep-dive expert, has set up another depth record. At Toulon, in the water-filled compartment of a French Navy diving bell, he reached a depth of nearly 300 metres.

* * *

A large exhibition of drawings by Paul Klee has been organized in Pully.

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Inexpensive home-making will be the keynote of the 42nd Lausanne Fair (Comptoir Suisse) to be held from 9th to 24th September. One of the "stands" will be a completely built, full-scale apartment of three-and-a-half rooms, fully furnished and equipped.

* * *

To-day Zurich numbers nearly a thousand millionaires amongst its inhabitants.

RANDOM

The Rev. Jörg Rothermundt, of Stuttgart, has succeeded the Rev. Jürgen Roloff as assistant to the director of the Department of Theology of Lutheran World Federation in Geneva.

* * *

National councillor Adolf Doswald died in Baden at the age of 67. Mr. Doswald was a member of the Alliance des Indépendants.

* * *

The go-ahead has been given to build 39 new blocks containing 680 flats in Geneva over the next year. These will be added to a total of 94,443 flats in the whole of the canton — of which 650 were built in the past year.

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Mr. Franz Jost, a teacher at Luzern's cantonal school, has been invited by the University of Colorado to give a course on comparative literature at Boulder (U.S.A.).

* * *

Plans are going ahead in Lausanne to build the "Tour Sarasin", which is to be a 28-storey tower, to house the University of Lausanne. The site which has been chosen is near the Comptoir Suisse at Beaulieu on the west side of town.

* * *

Administrative offices of the commune of La Chaux-de-Fonds have adopted a five-day working week.

* * *

Only 192 firms out of a total of 9,010 are foreign owned, stated Mr. Edouard Chamay, president of the State Council of the Geneva Department of Finance. At least 70 per cent of the staff of these firms are Swiss and it is noticeable that they are turning over more and more to Swiss employees.

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In Zurich, ten dance halls, at present closing at midnight, may be allowed to stay open one hour longer.

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Mr. Hans Fleig, editor on the foreign service of Zurich's daily "Die Tat", has retired. We may remember that Mr. Fleig was the paper's London correspondent from 1948 to 1950.

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The cold-blooded murder in a tobacconist shop of an assistant, Miss Lina Wiget, has shaken Luzern. The police have not yet discovered any apparent motive for the crime.

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The oldest inhabitant of Valais, Mrs. Philomene Martinelli, has died in Sierre at the age of 103.

(Most of the above items were received from the A.T.S. News Service.)

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THE GREAT FIRE OF GLARUS

It was a springtime of really bad weather, when the authorities of the community of Glarus decided to postpone the annual "Landsgemeinde" to May 9th, 1861. But the weather brightened up and the traditional open-air meeting took place with a good attendance, discussing and voting on the problems of the Canton Glarus. As usual, in the communities, there were the regular fire-prevention drills and exercises, except in the cantonal capital of Glarus, where they were postponed for a few days. It was a fateful decision, as during the afternoon the dangerous wind from the south, the gusty "Foehn", was already blowing quite strongly.

The fire-guards were alarmed and made the rounds, when suddenly the fire alarm was given from Councilman Christian Tschudi's house; the church bells were tolling; warning horns were blown and the firemen with the water pump wagons got into action. But the wind was now blowing fiercely and as more of the wooden buildings in the centre of Glarus caught fire, it looked like a real conflagration. Firemen with their equipment came rushing from surrounding villages to help extinguish the big blaze, but within the short time of an hour some 150 houses of Glarus were on fire or had already burned down. The battle to limit the fire lasted all day and the following night; then the "Foehn" wind subsided and so did the fires. Glarus was a town in smouldering ruins and ashes.

This major catastrophe of 10th May 1861 has been commemorated this year, the first centenary of the Great Fire of Glarus. To-day, better safeguards to prevent such windblown fires have been installed in many alpine villages and thus reduced the number of such dangerous fires. With the help of collections in money and goods in all Switzerland, the town of Glarus was rebuilt in Glarner house style, and now has the pleasant appearance of a nice, clean and typical Swiss community.

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