

News at random

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The Swiss Observer

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NEWS AT RANDOM

At the beginning of September the Federal Council authorised the Federal corn administration to deliver two hundred waggons of corn from reserves to millers, against the undertaking that they should not raise the price of bread and flour by more than two francs per one hundred kilos. The measure was intended to help small millers who have been unable to constitute reserves. As from 15th September the price of bread was raised by two centimes per kilo loaf.

On the 30th August the "Bund" stated that no corn had been imported into Switzerland since the 10th June and that owing to increased transport charges, the price of the latest imported corn had risen by fifteen francs to forty francs. Till then, thanks to reserves, it had been possible to avoid an increase in corn prices and the release of further reserves will ease the rise which inevitably must come. The price of bread is still lower in Switzerland than in other countries and below the 1914/18 price level.

The decree forbidding the sale of new bread has not lowered consumption to the extent anticipated.

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On the 3rd September the "Bund" announced that the Canton of Berne has approved a labour creation programme totalling seventy-five million francs. The report of the cantonal council states that the commission proceeded on the principle that it is undesirable to create emergency work and that it is preferable to create opportunities for employment in existing or projected industrial, agricultural transport and touristic undertakings where possible, and it is only in the absence of these that unessential public works are being considered. The projects include arterial and alpine roads and bridges, regulating of rivers, rebuilding of public buildings and public utility undertakings, reclamation and drainage of agricultural land and forests.

* * *

Further news is now available about the proposals made by the Union of Swiss peasants at the beginning of September in a memorandum addressed to the Federal Department for Public Economy. The memorandum urges further rationalising of agriculture which would lead to increased production and wider employment. It points to the present labour shortage on the land and to the need for reforming living conditions of the Swiss farm worker, notably continuity of employment throughout the year, cheaper dwellings, allotments and better social legislation. It is emphasised that there is need for creating new small holdings, but that an essential condition for this is

that production be made worth while. The memorandum stresses discrepancy between costs and prices and that while a self-supporting policy is impossible, Switzerland might produce much that is now imported. It is estimated that the agricultural area might be increased by 250,000 acres and the 404,000 persons at present employed on agricultural work would be increased by another 50,000. The memorandum adds that Swiss agriculture spends 480,000,000 francs yearly on buildings, repairs and machinery and that an increase in agricultural workers would create industrial opportunities.

* * *

There is much talk in Central Switzerland of the construction of a roadway on the left side of the Vierwaldstättersee being counted amongst labour creation projects. It is estimated that it would cost Frs. 15,000,000. The proposition is favoured by the cantons of Lucerne, Nidwald and Uri, whereas Obwald would prefer the route to pass through the Titlis massif. Canton Schwyz fears the competition of such a route.

It is said in Federal Palace circles that Federal Councillor Etter has little sympathy for such a proposition, so at least writes a correspondent from Uri to the "Bund." However, it is judged that the creation of an artery Lucerne-Hergiswil-Stans-Beckenried-Seelisberg-Bauen joined to the Gotthard route would be of great touristic and economic interest.

* * *

Direct telephonic communications between Switzerland and Japan were opened on September 27th when the director of the Swiss Posts and Telegraphs spoke to the Swiss Minister in Tokyo.

* * *

On the 31st August in Langendorf near Solothurn, Dr. Rudolf Probst passed away at the age of 86. Apart from the practice of his profession as a doctor, he had devoted his time to geological and botanical studies and was an authority on the Jura flora. He was made Honorary Member of the English Society of Botany, in recognition of his works thereon.

* * *

The "Statistical News" published by the Authorities of the town of Zurich contain quite a number of interesting details about the movements of the population, immigration, births, deaths and so on.

One learns from the latest issue that between 1934 and 1938 Zurich increased its population by 16,486 inhabitants, Lausanne by 7,463, Winterthur by 4,615, Berne by 2,973 and Lucerne by 2,951. Lausanne therefore appears to be the town with the biggest proportional increase.

On the other hand, Geneva, La Chaux-de-Fonds and St. Gall have lost, during the same period, 3,214, 1,456 and 571 inhabitants respectively. During the year 1939 the population of Zurich increased by 7,384,

i.e. 22.1 per thousand, and Lausanne 23 per thousand. In Zurich the number of deaths exceeds the number of births by 443. Lausanne is about the same position. Zurich represents an interesting case with regard to the distribution of the sexes. Of its 337,164 inhabitants, at the end of 1939 182,234 were women and 154,930 men. That is to say there were 1,176 women per 1,000 men. The number of weddings is however comparatively high, but in 707 cases the brides came from other localities and in 563 instances (one in every six), from abroad. The last figure is considered somewhat alarming in view of the efforts in progress to maintain the integrity of our national character. The "Journal de Genève" adds that the inclination of the German Swiss to marry women of other countries has nevertheless often produced very happy results.

Another figure of some interest is revealed, namely that the city of Zwingli contains more than 200,000 Catholics and has therefore become the biggest Catholic town in Switzerland.

It is announced that great pressure on the wireless services is delaying the transmission of messages, particularly between Switzerland and London.

The rate of exchange with Germany has been fixed at 173.01 francs for 100 Reichsmarks. The new rate took effect as from October 9th and will remain in force until further notice.

The laborious task of translating the Swiss penal code into Romansch, the fourth national language of Switzerland; has just been completed by Professor P. Tuor.

Comments on Swiss topics have claimed little space in English contemporaries during the last fortnight and it would almost seem that Switzerland has gone off the map. Our problems of imports are dealt with in an article in "The Times," October 9th; since its publication the deliberations referred to have made considerable progress, the British Government having agreed to release Swiss cargo ships and to permit coal imports from the United States.

The Swiss trade delegation in London — led by Dr. Keller, of the Department of Public Economy — continues its friendly discussions with the British Government, both sides treading softly among the peculiarly delicate problems.

Since the Anglo-Swiss War Trade Agreement was signed earlier this year Switzerland's position has greatly changed. Formerly a country with free access to foreign markets, she found herself almost overnight surrounded by countries either hostile to Great Britain or (like France) dependent on Great Britain's enemies. Information reaching London shows that the Germans have quickly sought to profit by the change.

Although the Swiss have not taken up some of Germany's more extreme suggestions, the Germans have prepared a scheme which will give them a large measure of control over all Swiss exports.

The exports are being divided into three classes. In the first class, by far the most valuable, consisting of the renowned Swiss precision instruments, fine machinery, and milk products, nothing may be exported except with a *Geleitschein*, given by Ger-

man consular officials in Switzerland. In theory a *Geleitschein* is like a British Navicert; in practice it will exert an iron control over Swiss exports of this important class, to no matter what destination. Germany, it may be noted, has herself great need of all goods in this class.

In the second class are goods which can be exported freely so long as transport facilities exist. This seems promising until the class is found to consist of only the lightest goods and produce, such as dessert fruit, embroidery, straw and baste, hat shapes, untrimmed hats, and light domestic utensils.

In the third class, not so important as the first, are goods neither covered by a *Geleitschein* nor put on the "free list"; this third class of goods can be exported in "normal quantities," based on the years 1937 or 1938, whichever is the greater.

* * *

The rising costs of living are the subject of another article in the same paper of October 15th:

Swiss public opinion is much concerned at the continued rise in the cost of living. At the end of September the index figure was 153, against 129 before the war started — an increase of 18 per cent., a rate only reached in the last War in January, 1916, after hostilities had lasted 18 months.

The increase is felt more in cities like Zurich, Basle, and Berne, where, for example, since 1936, when the rise began, the prices of foodstuffs have increased by 20 per cent., while coke shows a rise of 97 per cent. and Belgian coal of 50 per cent.

The Federal Office for Price Control, which has so far been most successful, is now finding difficulties in preventing or moderating new increases in prices, due, on the one hand, to a scarcity of certain products, and, on the other hand, to the extra prices demanded by foreign exporters of articles to Switzerland, and also in some cases to the failure of the cantonal and communal authorities to stop a rise in the price of wood for heating. This has already increased by 25 per cent., and is still rising at the rate of 8 per cent. a month. State officials are now asking for increased salaries to meet the extra cost of living and the Government have agreed to discuss the question with representatives of the employees. Similar claims are likely to be put forward by the industrial workers.

SWISS BANK CORPORATION,

(A Company limited by Shares incorporated in Switzerland)

99, GRESHAM STREET, E.C.2.

and 11c, REGENT STREET, S.W. 1.

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Reserves - - s.f. 32,000,000
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NEW YORK AGENCY
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The economic situation is becoming difficult. Sufficient foodstuffs and petrol are lacking and the Government is encouraging the use of wood as fuel for motor-cars. The scarcity of raw materials, however, may in the near future compel many workshops to close down, with a consequent rapid rise in the rate of unemployment, unless some arrangement can be made with the countries placing orders with Swiss manufacturers to supply them with the necessary materials.

* * *

The import and export figures for the first six months of the current year are published in the "*Economist*," October 5th:

Swiss Imports (in Sw. Frs. 1,000,000)						
	Jan.	Feb.	March	April	May	June
1939	122	130	146	141	163	160
1940	178	200	236	249	201	130
Swiss Exports (in Sw. Frs. 1,000,000)						
	Jan.	Feb.	March	April	May	June
1939	102	107	121	112	117	112
1940	99	110	121	131	89	86

Up to the *Blitzkrieg* Swiss foreign trade showed a rising tendency. Imports were considerably higher than in the corresponding period of 1939, even if a certain rise in prices is taken into account, and exports in January to April increased by about Frs. 20 millions. But, from the moment of the campaign in France and Italy's entry into the war, transport difficulties were great. The Mediterranean, which in the days of Italy's non-belligerency had remained Switzerland's principal trade route overseas, became a military sphere; and Swiss foreign trade, which is dependent on normal transport conditions, dropped considerably.

By the end of June total imports had exceeded exports by Frs. 556 millions. Switzerland normally has an unfavourable trade balance, but this has always been offset by interest on foreign investments and particularly by the tourist trade which is virtually at an end. The heavy import trade had naturally caused a heavy demand for foreign currency to be made on the National Bank, but, with the transport difficulties, orders have been cancelled and letters of credit suspended so that the demand has come to an end. Moreover, confidence in the Swiss franc has increased of late, and currency has been returning to the National Bank.

Switzerland's troubles are not of her making, and the only thing she can do is to wait and to try to adjust her economy to the present situation. It is not a question of cutting down this or that or of forgoing luxuries. It is quite simply a question of existence.

* * *

The relations between Ireland and our country are most friendly and mutually beneficial thanks to the appointment of M. Charles Benziger, but although he took office in Dublin as Chargé d'Affaires as far back as June 1939, the counterpart in Switzerland has remained vacant. The Irish Dail has now passed a supplementary estimate necessary to establish an Irish Legation in Berne and the "*Irish Independent*," October 2nd, brings the news with the following descriptive matter:

The news that Eire is about to establish formally a Legation in Switzerland will, in all probability, mean the transfer of Mr. Cremin — so far Irish Representative to the League of Nations — to Berne as Chargé d'Affaires.

It is a very pleasant and, at the same time, a very beautiful city, this least pretentious of all European capitals. Fountains everywhere enliven the arched streets.

The happy river Aar winds itself lustily along the rocks bursting now and then for sheer joy into a cascade.

Berne is a most soothing place to live in. The cobblestoned streets, with their delightful old houses, have a style of their own. The capital of a peasant country has remained a peasant's capital thereby foregoing no metropolitan charms. These peasants are the finest in Europe, of sturdy character, of great culture, and of jolly disposition.

The city's great attraction is its famous Clock Tower. To recall its play when the sun shines on the picturesque streets makes one pine for those blessed years of peace, the leisure of easy days.

Few tourists, spoilt by a country packed to the sky with scenic attractions, take the trouble to do the sights of its capital. The Cathedral is an architectural gem with a magnificent Last Judgment round its main entrance.

Its architect — Matthaeus Ensinger — looks up in effigy from the wall to his own creation.

Of the Swiss, John Evelyn wrote, some centuries ago, that "they live in great tranquillity and simplicity." I know of no other government building where a flower and vegetable market takes place on its very doorstep every day, and I know no other government offices from which one has so awespiring a view as on a late autumn afternoon from Berne — the setting sun caressing in a radiant, rosy blaze, the snow-capped peaks of the Bernese Oberland in the far distance.

The Irish and the Swiss have much in common. Their essential tolerance is one common meeting-ground.

Their quiet, forceful patriotism is another. The Swiss citizen never forgets that he is a soldier, nor the Swiss soldier that he is a citizen. They are not a militaristic, but a military nation — in a peaceful way, if one may use such an obvious paradox. Their natural sense of discipline is exemplary.

To quote John Evelyn again: "The whole country is well disciplined and indeed, impregnable."

There is discipline, too, of daily life. Here German, French, and Italian-speaking citizens live together in peace, order and understanding. Catholics and Protestants have no quarrel. Political parties think alike on all fundamental questions. Such unity does not exclude variety, but it has provided an exemplary stability.

To study Switzerland means to admire her sturdy common sense. In that she can teach Ireland. She had centuries to grow organically what over here had to be achieved in as many decades.

After this war has spent its ravishes, well may Europe find itself with but a few such islands of sanity.

What is news to most of our readers is the discovery of a fifth language in Switzerland called "Matten English" and it has been unearthed among the conservative people of Berne. We do not propose to enrich the columns of the Swiss Observer by its inclusion but the "*Manchester Guardian*," October 1st, gives us the following introduction and perhaps a reader can supply some of the "curses" of which this hybrid language is said to be so rich.

Swiss philologists, still glowing from their triumph in getting the Government to declare Romansch the fourth Swiss language, have emerged with a new language with which to confound non-Swiss linguists — "Matten English." The distinguishing feature about Matten English is that there is not a word of English, or anything approaching English, in it. Even Professor O. von Greyerz, of Berne University, who is the outstanding authority on Matten English, has no hope of ever obtaining the same recognition for it which his fellow-philologists have obtained for Romansch.

Some Italians suggested that Romansch was only a distorted form of Italian. No nation could claim Matten English. No nation would want to, for of all the complex, hybrid languages Matten English is probably the worst. It is spoken more or less fluently by many old people and a few young people in the canton of Berne.

It originated with Swiss mercenary troops who travelled throughout Europe in the Middle Ages, lending their arms to any king or country who could pay well for them. Using the words picked from foreign lands, the mercenary warriors slowly developed a secret language of their own and brought it home. Roots of ancient Latin and Greek are found in it, with an incomprehensible mixture of the Balkan, Scandinavian, Germanic, and Romance languages. As might be expected from its origin, Matten English has no literature but it is rich in cuss-words.

* * *

Another amusing piece of news is enlarged upon in "*The Times*," October 1st, based on experiments made for the purpose of curing whooping-cough by aeroplane flights.

Whooping-cough is likely to become a favourite complaint among Swiss children. Our Geneva Correspondent has sent news of the cure or alleviation of whooping-cough by taking the sufferer into high altitudes by aeroplane. Such a chance for joy-riding is not likely to be missed. The invalids will not only be passionately envied by the healthy; they will also be imitated. The cough of whooping-cough is very easy to imitate; and, though the farther symptoms are as unpleasant to the sufferer as to those in charge of him, childhood is not likely to shrink from the utmost self-induced sacrifice in order to achieve so glorious a cure. In passing, it is comfortable to think that, while flying is being called upon to cure evils far worse than whooping-cough and by more drastic methods than mere change of air, there is a country in Europe where it may still be employed in the peaceful preservation of health and the cure of childish ailments. But it will certainly have the effect of popularizing any complaint for which it may be found remedial; and

Swiss doctors, nurses, and mothers will have to keep a sharp eye open for the malingering at which childhood is even more adept than doghood.

Joy-riding in an aeroplane is a prize worth all the woes of a genuine and bad attack of whooping-cough. But the lesser illnesses of infancy each had its desirable compensation; and even jaundice was known to be worth having for the sake of some special diet superior to the regular nourishing but uninteresting fare of the nursery or the preparatory school. There were little luxuries like a fire in the bedroom, nicely flavoured jujubes, or a new game or a new picture-book, which painted the lily and gilded the refined gold of the one incomparable luxury of not having to get up in the morning. To nothing should childhood be so grateful as to the clinical thermometer, which, when in a good mood, rules decisively and without appeal that there must be no getting up. It may become tiresome to have to stay in bed as the day draws on and the outer world calls; but, especially in winter-time, only an extreme of peevishness would complain that the price was too high. To those who were not ill, at any rate, and could show no good reason why the thermometer should be put under the ready tongue, having a temperature seemed an enviable stroke of good fortune. But merely staying in bed on a cold morning is nothing compared with a flight in an aeroplane; and all childhood will hope that whooping-cough is not the only illness for which flying is found to be a cure.

THE "NATIONAL MOVEMENT."

In the last issue of our publication we published some comment which appeared in the English press about an interview which M. Pilet-Golaz, the President of the Swiss Confederation, granted to a small delegation representing the so-called "National Movement."

The audience lasted about 1½ hours and the spokesman of the trio was Jakob Schaffner, an author, who for some years has been propagating a new conception of political life in Switzerland; quite recently an article from his pen entitled "Switzerland in New Europe" appeared in the German periodical "*Das Reich*." Ernst Hoffmann was identified with the "Bund Freier Eidgenossen" and its spurious publications "*Schweizervolk*," "*Schweizer Degen*" and "*Angriff*" all of which were suppressed on November 15th, 1938, by decree of the Federal Council. The third in this constellation was Dr. Max Leo Keller who was the spiritus rector behind the defunct "*Neue Basler Zeitung*" whose short existence was embargoed by the Swiss Army Command after it had been proved that both intellectually and financially it was sponsored from foreign sources.

The episode has been adversely criticised in the Swiss Press, the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* accusing M. Pilet-Golaz of having contacted people with a criminal record. The various political parties have also expressed their disapproval in an unmistakable manner but nothing else has since transpired so that the incident may be considered closed.