

News at random

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NEWS AT RANDOM

Federal

No letters or printed matter have reached us from Switzerland since our last issue and it is evident that the accumulated mail held up "somewhere" will require time for clearing. It was stated officially in Berne on 2nd November that the letter and parcel posts to Great Britain have been resumed via France, Spain and Portugal.

On December the 8th,* the National Council discussed the budgeted expenses of the Confederation for 1943. One of the questions, that of the tax on interest, was taken up by M. Etter, the President of the Confederation, who said the Government was examining the matter very closely, and would probably make a statement in the near future.

The Budget of the Swiss Federal Railways for the coming year was discussed by the Council of States. M. Celio spoke on the healthier financial situation of the Swiss Federal Railways and said that provision had been made in the Budget for the fact that road traffic was recovering slowly thanks to fuel substitutes. The Budget of the S.F.R. for 1943 was unanimously adopted.

In the course of lectures on political science delivered in Solothurn, the President of the Federal Council, spoke on the cultural policy of the Federal Council. He pointed out that the basis of Swiss culture was the free Swiss. Great importance therefore attached to the Council's policy of respecting the rights, the honour and freedom of the individual. The second pillar of Swiss culture was the Swiss family. Equal importance devolved upon local government. In no other country was the autonomy of the community developed to such an extent as in Switzerland. The main task of the Council was not to unify the spiritual life of the country but to defend and foster its cultural riches. Wherever necessary cultural activities led by private initiative or local authorities should be aided by the Federal Council. The quadrilingual Confederation had never yet experienced a divergency over the language question; this was a proof of the unifying quality of the Swiss spirit. The President referred

to the peaceful co-operation between Church and State and the cultural importance of the Church. "Peace between Church and State and between the various creeds must under all circumstances be maintained."

The Central Committee of the Socialist Party examined a project regarding the social organisation of the State, as well as certain fundamentals for the revision of the Federal Constitution. As far as salaries and prices are concerned, the Committee points out that the situation has clearly become worse. It adopted the point of view taken by the "Union Syndicale Suisse" which invites all people, especially workers, to make use of all political means to remedy the position. Another resolution condemned an increase in the twin-war tax and demanded that the workers should be exempt from the National Defence contribution. A protest was also lodged against the principle of preventive arrest.

The Committee of the Swiss Trade Union Federation met under the Chairmanship of National Councilor Bratschi at Berne. After a memorandum about wages policy a discussion took place and various details were approved. It was stressed that price control should be exercised in such a way that the incomes of contractors would be subject to the general war restrictions, and that very high incomes should be reduced. A general control of prices, however, would meet with difficulties because it was incompatible with the present economic order. Increased cost of living should be balanced by increased wages. The Federation also demanded the creation of an Institute for Social Statistics.

A new agreement regulating mainly traffic questions has been concluded with Italy and will remain in force until the end of 1943.

At the end of June 1942, more than 146,000 postal banking accounts (Giro) were registered, which means an increase of 4,000 as compared with last year. The aggregate circulation of postal cheques and transfers amounted to 4½ milliard Swiss francs, as against 3.8 milliards for the same period last year.

When the whole story about the "unchaining" of war prisoners will be told we shall realise that the Swiss diplomatic representatives in the two capitals concerned have scored a notable victory.

It is stated that the British Government has now met the claim arising out of the damage caused earlier in the year by R.A.F. bombs dropped in the neighbourhood of Basle.

Cantonal

The Council of the Association of the Swiss towns (Schweizerischer Staedteverband) dealt with prices and wages at its meeting on 24th November. Professor Boehler of the Swiss Technical Academy in Zurich attended the session. The Council strongly advocated relative stabilisation of prices, maximum co-ordination of the actual income between industry and agriculture, in particular a regulation of the problem of peasants with small holdings, and further development of social welfare and especially of public health services. The following information was given on this year's vegetable crop. According to preliminary estimates, this year's potato harvest amounts of 125,000 wagons of ten tons each, as against 81,000 wagons in 1938. This rich harvest has to be stored in various parts of the country, so as to permit a speedy distribution whenever the need should arise. The production of vegetables before the war amounted to about 23,000 wagons, while approximately 6,000 wagons of vegetables were imported. This year's vegetable harvest is estimated at about 50,000 to 60,000 wagons. The area under vegetable cultivation has been nearly doubled since 1940.

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Quite unexpectedly the voters of the canton of Zurich rescinded the continuity of a special crisis tax by a narrow majority of 55,556 to 54,131. The tax was originally imposed some four years ago in order to combat unemployment and was levied unilaterally from taxpayers whose annual income exceeded Frs.8,000. The adverse conditions on the labour market have since disappeared and the cantonal finances exhibit an exceptionally healthy picture but the socialist element which controls the council was determined to prolong the impost for another two years in order to accumulate a reserve for the future.

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In the elections for the Grand Conseil in Geneva the "Landesring" (Duttweiler party) secured for the first time a representation obtaining no less than 17 seats at the expense of the other parties with the exception of the radicals who retained their former 34 mandates. No more than 60% of the citizens troubled to record their votes.

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Amounts totalling about six million francs have been voted by the Grosse Rat in Basle for additional subsistence allowances to the civil service and supplementing pensions. Apart from this the 1943 budget already anticipates a deficit of about 13 million francs.

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Whilst building a new slaughter-house in Basle, the town has for account of the Confederation, included a Federal Vaccine Institute, in which a vaccine against foot and mouth disease is prepared. The institute which was handed over to the Federal authorities some little time ago, makes Switzerland completely independent of the import of this remedial substance. The building is fitted with the most modern achievements and is built in such a manner as to be immune to any contagious disease, so that as far as it appears to be humanly possible, a spreading of cattle disease is completely excluded.

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The compulsory notification or registration of empty houses and flats has been introduced in Basle.

In the canton of Schwyz it has been an offence ever since 1884 to frequent inns or restaurants on Sundays during the time church services were held; a proposal to abolish this time-honoured restriction has been favourably debated in the Kantonsrat.

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A few days ago the "road of youth" was handed over to the government of the canton of Geneva. About 10,000 youngsters of all classes of the population worked voluntarily at it. The road is part of a connection between the future port of the Rhone and a goods station. It represents the practical contribution by the young to the future navigation of the Rhone from the lake of Geneva to the Mediterranean.

* * *

Youth organisations in the canton of Vaud have started a "farmhouse for the youth of the Vaud," which will be built in the newly recovered areable land in the plateau of the Rhone. It is intended that on this farm the youth of the towns of the canton should pass their holidays in communal agricultural work. Further, unemployed young men shall be given temporary useful work, so as to assist them to become skilled farm workers.

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Dr. Ernest Chuard died in Lausanne at the age of 85. Originally a lecturer at the local university he was elected to the National Council in 1907 and was a member of the Federal Council from 1919 to 1928 where he was in charge of the "Home" office. In 1927 he officiated as President of the Confederation.

* * *

With the death in Geneva of Dr. Albert Wuarin, at the age of 63, a man of European fame passed away. Lawyer by profession his interests in life were manifold though he never took an active part in politics. During the last war he offered his services to the Red Cross in Belgium; he spent eight years in Athens as judge where he was instrumental in settling many differences between Greece and Bulgaria. Elsewhere he was called upon to act as an international arbitrator.

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Dr. Anton Suter, the prominent leader and exponent of the co-operative movement in Switzerland, died in Lausanne at the age of 80.

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Fritz Steiner, who died in Berne, was municipal architect in that town from 1910 to 1920. He subsequently started a firm of contractors in his own name and undertook the planing and construction of several important engineering projects, notably the new building in Berne for the National Library.

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Jacques Dicker, a formerly prominent political celebrity, died in Geneva at the age of 63. Born in Russia, he settled down early in life in Geneva as a lawyer where he specialised in criminal cases and soon acquired a large practice. He was a socialist and for several years closely associated with Leon Nicole. For over 12 years he was a member of the local Grand Conseil and occupied a seat in the National Council during two electoral periods.

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The living accommodation and the stables of the station restaurant at Salez (St. Gall) were completely destroyed by a fire which broke out on Sunday night, November 22nd, two sons of the proprietor, Hans and

Christian Egli, being unable to extricate themselves were burnt to death.

Damage to the amount of Frs.200,000 was caused by a fire which broke out in the oil refineries of "Snar-Avion" at Serrières (Neuchâtel).

Army

The sentences of another court martial are given in a telegraphed report from "The Times," November 30th, correspondent which we reprint under reserve as their is no confirmation available at the time of going to press:

For the second time within about a month a Swiss military court has sentenced another batch of traitors to death.

Lieutenant Charles Reinmann, of Basle, and Lieutenant Peter Kulli, of Olten, were sentenced to be shot for handing over to a foreign Power military secrets and information and samples of objects of military importance. Private E. Philipp, of Basle, and Sergeant J. Schweger, of Hergiswil, were also sentenced to death on similar charges. Schweger is now abroad, having, in addition, refused to serve.

Five n.c.o.s and privates, who supplied a foreign country with military information and had been identified with the activities of an organization for collecting political information, were sentenced to expulsion from the army and loss of civil rights.

Our A. A. batteries have been offered unique facilities during the last few weeks of exhibiting their prowess and efficiency. Germany continues to threaten our country with dire consequences unless "military" measures were taken to stop these expeditions. The "Basler Nachrichten" has put the matter in a nutshell when it retorts: "British planes certainly do not reach Switzerland from nowhere. They must cross entire German-Occupied France on their way to Italy. "Does Berlin really expect Swiss A.A. guns to do something German guns obviously cannot do?" We should like to add that the R.A.F. does not claim a monopoly of violating neutral air space; it has been done by the other side long before without much ado.

Thrown by his horse during manœuvres the chaplain to the 27th Infantry Regiment, Capt. Heinrich Gartmann, succumbed to his injuries in the cantonal hospital at Wald; he was the vicar of a catholic church at Zurich.

A number of soldiers were seriously injured on November 13th during exercises with flame-throwers in the region of Sotto-Ceneri. Two of them have since died; they are Valentino Ghirlanda from Sonvico and Enrico Salvade from Castel San Pietro.

Economical

The preparatory work for providing employment during and after the war period is to-day so well advanced, that one may safely say that never, since the state has undertaken the combating of a crisis, has our country been so well prepared to meet it. The directions of the Federal Council for the great planing contain the principle, that the Confederation, in connection with the cantons and with private enterprise, will undertake measures to combat unemployment if, and

when, private enterprise is unable to provide of its own efforts sufficient employment possibilities. Work is now under survey to the amount of 5,100 million francs. In this sum, the cantons are shouldering projects amounting to 1,000 millions, the Federal Railways are interested with 760 millions, the share of private transport institutions is 250 millions, Post, Telegraph and Telephone have projects costing 420 millions, road making will amount to 500 millions, and melioration programs require 800 millions. Further measures are planned for the Export industry, the Hotel industry and agriculture. This gigantic program will of course not be started all at once, but will be translated into action when and as required by the necessity of providing work and thus preventing a crisis, and in the framework of the financial possibilities.

In order to stretch the continually diminishing stocks of wool and cotton for textile purposes, the Swiss Viscose Society which already holds a leading position on the Continent for the manufacture of artificial silk has, with the assistance of the Federal exchequer taken up the making of artificial wool (Zellwolle) from cellulose. The annual import of 30 million kg. of cotton and 10 million kg. of wool fell in 1941 to 21 million kg. of cotton and 5 million kg. of wool and for more than a year navycerts for the import of cotton could not be obtained. The result was a great restriction of manufacture and the prospect of a total stoppage in the Swiss textile industry with its 150,000 employees. The new factories, which manufacture a high quality fibre are producing annually 10 million kg. of cellulose wool, which is mixed with wool or cotton, but is also used spun or woven by itself. The fabric is distinguished by an even fibre which dyes very evenly and by a special process can be made non-creasing and waterproof. The cellulose fabrics are, with all these advantages, considerably cheaper than woollen or cotton goods and no doubt will be able to hold their own for certain purposes, even when the possibilities of import are again restored.

It is reported that experiments with a view to the smelting of indigenous iron ore with peat gas have resulted in the production of pig iron of satisfactory quality. Hitherto the Swiss iron ore was sent to Germany for smelting, and it is said that 20 to 30 wagons of ore daily with an iron content of 20 to 25 per cent. could be used with the help of local peat gas.

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Rationing

Since the beginning of this month a slight increase in most of the food rations has taken place. Restaurant coupons have been augmented by 20%; bread, milk, sugar, butter and coffee are obtainable in larger quantities and the meat ration has also been increased. Rations are fixed for short periods, generally from month to month.

Traffic

The following belated particulars about our motor road service to and from Lisbon are published in the "Railway Gazette," November 20th.

The road transport service across Spanish territory from the Portuguese to the French frontiers is organised by the Swiss Autotransit Genossenschaft. It is a non-profit making concern and the Swiss Federal Government has guaranteed two-thirds of the share capital in the event of loss.

From August 16th to December 31st, 1941, Swiss lorries made 255 trips and transported nearly 2,500 metric tons of goods. Recently the operations have been handicapped by fuel shortage, and steps are being taken to maintain the service with substitute fuels.

The Swiss Government has agreed that the 200 covered railway wagons which are used exclusively for carrying imports from Portugal and Spain to the French frontier, in transit for Switzerland, should be repaired and maintained at Swiss expense in order to assist the Spanish railways.

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The first electric trains on the newly converted section of the Swiss Federal Railways from Neuchâtel to Verrières, on the Franco-Swiss frontier, ran on November 22.

Humanitarian

The town authorities of Geneva have placed the former Hotel Carlton, free of all charges, at the disposal of the Section for children's aid of the Swiss Red Cross, as a home for those children from the war ravaged countries who are coming to Switzerland for a three months stay. On October 20th, 800 children from the unoccupied part of France stayed as first guests at the big house, which in memory of the founder of the Red Cross, Henry Dunant, is now called Henry Dunant Home. From this home the children are distributed to the respective families who have offered to receive them. In the last seven months already 25,000 children from belligerent countries have come into our country for a long convalescence.

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The following are reprinted from "The Times," November 28th and December 8th respectively:

Since the occupation of France there has been a new influx into Switzerland of political refugees and Jews.

Quite recently a number of persons crossed the Alpine passes between Haute Savoie and the Valais, and the small town of Martigny is now welcoming a number of refugees whose names are well known, pending a decision being taken concerning their future residence. Among them are Señor Azaña, former President of the Spanish Republic, and several Republican ex-Ministers; a former Prime Minister of Czechoslovakia; and a number of French politicians hostile to Laval who are fleeing from their own country before a general purge is made. Swiss frontier police have rescued more than 30 refugees in the mountains in a single day.

* * *

The Swiss military court has passed sentences ranging from 20 days to three months' imprisonment and imposed fines ranging from 300 to 400 Swiss francs on 13 Frenchmen of the Haute Savoie region for smuggling refugees into Switzerland. The influx of foreign refugees, which had abated, is now increasing again. Most are now French, but there are some British and American among them.

The international football match in Zurich on Sunday, November 15th, between Sweden and our country resulted in a three to one victory for the Swiss. An enthusiastic crowd of over 25,000 witnessed the contest at which Ballabio (in the goal), Minelli and Amado distinguished themselves. This is the first international success after the recent defeats suffered against Germany and Hungary.

* * *

Some amusing news items about German propaganda have recently appeared in the London dailies. One of them in the "Evening Standard," November 27th, states that "a fleet of cinema trucks called Schneider's Travelling Talkies, which smells of German backing, have been touring Swiss villages since last month showing, at low prices, German feature films and newsreels (including shots of British corpses at Dieppe, which cinemagoers in Basle last month shouted down and forced the authorities to withdraw from circulation) to peasants.

They have promised to put shop owners and photographers into the cinema business at a ridiculously cheap rate if they undertake to show German films exclusively.

If they refuse the Germans threaten to cut off film and camera supplies."

Talking about films, here is another extract from the "Daily Sketch," November 27th: "Telegrams urgently recalling consignments of films circulated by Germany's Ufa company have been received by film distributors in Switzerland, Spain, Portugal and Sweden. The consignments were marked "XP 1367/42." Swiss authorities therefore opened one of the consignments and found in it a full-length news reel entitled "Victory in Africa." Examination showed that the film was made by German news-reel men during Rommel's summer drive into Egypt, before his present defeat. The Gestapo are now trying to find out whether it was sent out at this particular moment by mistake or whether it was deliberate "sabotage" in a new form."