News at random

Objekttyp: **Group**

Zeitschrift: **The Swiss observer : the journal of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK**

Band (Jahr): **- (1939)**

Heft 939

PDF erstellt am: **19.03.2024**

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The Swiss Observer

FOUNDED BY MR. P. F. BOEHRINGER.

The Official Organ of the Swiss Colony in Great Britain.

EDITED WITH THE CO-OPERATION OF THE LONDON COLONY.

Telephone: Clerkenwell 2321/2. Published every Friday at 23, LEONARD ST., E.C.2. Telegrams: FREPRINCO, LONDON.

VOL. 21—No. 939. LONDON, 18th NOVEMBER, 1939. PRICE 3d.

PREPAID SUBSCRIPTION RATES.

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NEWS AT RANDOM

A partial moratorium based on a decree of August 30th has come into operation in several industries where it can be shown that existing obligations cannot be met on account of the present emergency. This applies particularly to the hotel and embroidery industries; some of the funicular and mountain railways are also affected.

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A welcome decree, though perhaps delicate in its application, has been enacted by the Federal Council. It forbids importers to submit to any foreign control or to declare the use for which goods purchased abroad are intended.

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In pursuance of a former order of the Army Command prohibiting the export of maps, some of the large booksellers have been compelled to surrender the whole of their stock; this confiscation has also been extended to the propaganda matter of touring offices and hotels where local topography is illustrated.

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The export of watches from Switzerland has according to recent statistics experienced a considerable set-back; during the last nine months nearly four million less have found a market abroad.

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The Federal budget for 1940 balances with a deficit of 73 million francs; included is an amount of over 89 million francs for amortisation, adjustment of former deficits, depreciations (Railways) and extraordinary army credits. Not included is the cost of mobilisation and the expenditure incurred by the present emergency. The amount of over 134 million francs earmarked for the military department represents about 23% of the total expenditure.

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Members of the consultative commission recently formed for supervising imports and exports are at present staying in London to confer with Board of Trade officials. They are Dr. Hans Sulzer (President), Prof. Paul Keller and Dr. A. Koch; the three were entertained at luncheon at the Savoy Hotel by Lord Luke, the British Chairman of the International Chamber of Commerce.

The budgets of all the cantonal governments are badly affected by the present crisis, thus next year's deficit for St. Gall is over 1.7 million francs and for Thurgau just under half a million francs. Berne tops the list with 3.6 million francs.

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Prof. Rud. Staehelin whose report on alleged cases of mustard gas poisoning in Poland was the subject of an interpellation in the Basle Grosse Rat has now been vindicated; the president stated that there was no reason to doubt the bona fides of the professor though his action did not altogether recommend itself. Prof. Staehelin further stated that at the time he happened to be in Berlin and could not very well decline the request made to him by the German officials.

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The shortage of employees mainly due to mobilisation is being overcome by the Basle municipal tramways by the training of lady conductors (Billetteuses).

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An appeal is made throughout Switzerland to register for blood transfusion so that particulars may be available to the army command in case of need.

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The creation of a Swiss Legation in Ireland, which was decided upon by the Federal Assembly in June last, has now, on the expiry of the referendum delay, become effective. The Consular General in Dublin, which was set up in 1935, is thus raised to Legation status. Dr. C. F. Benzinger, the first Swiss Consul General to Ireland, is the Chargé d'Affaires; and in receiving his credentials Mr. de Valera expressed his great satisfaction at the appointment and the hope that the many ideals common to both countries would result in a happy and fruitful co-operation.

SWISS MINISTER'S FAREWELL DINNER

(WITH PRESENTATION)

at the

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on FRIDAY, DECEMBER 15th, at 6 p.m.

(Day Dress)

Tickets at **7/6** each (excl. of refreshments) may be obtained from the Hon. Secretary of the Organising Committee, Mr. H. Bingguely, 187a, Tottenham Court Rd., London, W.1.

Oberleut. Gebhard Federer died in Basle at the age of 53; he was born in Berneck (Rheintal) and was an engineer by profession.

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Prof. Dr. Hans Fehr, lecturer on law at the Berne University, has been appointed temporary chief of the special division of the political department in succession to the late Minister Charles Lardy.

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An audit by experts of the accounts of the Val de Travers Railway Company has disclosed defalcations to the tune of frs.210,000 said to have been committed by a former manager now deceased.

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An unusual sight was witnessed at Thoune when 12,000 litres of red wine flowed out of the railway station through an overturned truck suddenly unloading its consignment of barrels; a broken axle is said to be the cause.

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A small group of national socialists in the canton of Solothurn were sentenced by the local court to short terms of imprisonment for unconstitutional propaganda.

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A free-lance medico in Herisau was sentenced to four days imprisonment for making fraudulent statements in a propaganda leaflet. He had advertised no less than 1,366 preparations for 777 different ailments. Medical practice in the canton Appenzell A.Rh. is not subject to professional qualifications as elsewhere.

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When it is common knowledge that something like 25,000 persons are under constant observation by the Federal Police for activities contravening the "Spitzel" decree it is no small achievement to secure undisputed evidence for a conviction. Swift justice was doled out last week to a quartet of these undesirables by the Federal criminal court in Geneva after three days' trial mostly held in camera. The principal of the gang was Virginia Capt-Rota, a foreigner who had taken the precaution of marrying a Ticinese; by profession a dancer, her somewhat fading charms enabled her to gain the confidence of otherwise respectable citizens, obtain plans and particulars of defence works and smuggle them abroad concealed in her intimate lingerie; she was sentenced to five years hard labour. Her chief confederate was Roger Noël, a young Vaudois, who was employed in a Geneva munition firm as draughtsman; though he had taken the usual oath important plans were made available by his help for the friends of his charmer; he was given three years and dismissed from the Swiss army. Paul Rochat, a private enquiry agent and a popular figure in Geneva supplied valuable information of an economic character and earned himself 15 months; his 22 year old pretty wife said to be separated from him was bound over for three years for complicity.

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LE MUSEE SUISSE DES CHEMINS DE FER.

Ce musée, qui possède déjà des collections de grand prix concernant les débuts de nos chemins de fer, se trouve installé à la gare aux marchandises de Zurich, en attendant qu'on puisse le loger dans des locaux mieux appropriés. Le musée est une institution publique, de sorte que chacun y a accès.

Ces jours-ci, la collection provenant de la succession de Nicolas Riggenbach, l'inventeur des chemins de fer à crémaillère, s'est enrichie d'un complément précieux; il s'agit, outre des plans, des figures et des brochures, de divers modèles de chemins de fer à crémaillère dont l'inventeur s'est servi pour ses expériences. Une roue dentée, de grandeur naturelle, qui avait été laissée pendant 40 ans dans un jardin, a maintenant trouvé place dans le musée.

Nous devons ces précieux objets et témoignages au neveu du célèbre pionnier et autodidacte, au docteur Rodolphe Riggenbach de Bâle et à ses frères et sœurs qui, les ayant conservés avec soin pendant de nombreuses années, les ont remis maintenant au musée des chemins de fer, de sorte que cet héritage est assuré de rester propriété de la patrie de l'inventeur. Autant que les conditions le permettront, cette collection sera exposée dans une salle spéciale du musée et rendue accessible au public.

Il y a lieu de rappeler que c'est Riggenbach (originaire de Bâle, né le 21 mai 1817 à Gebweiler en Alsace) qui exécuta en 1847 sur le tronçon Zurich-Schlieren la course d'essai du premier chemin de fer en Suisse. A cette époque, il travaillait comme mécanicien à la fabrique de locomotives Kessler à Carlsruhe. C'est en France, le 12 août 1863, qu'il obtint son premier brevet pour le système de chemin de fer à crémaillère dont il était l'inventeur. Il a écrit dans ses souvenirs: "Pour gagner à mon idée les spécialistes et les autorités, il aurait déjà fallu que je fusse un étranger. Me disant que, peut-être, j'aurais plus de chances d'être pris pour un prophète en dehors de ma patrie, je me rendis avec mes modèles à Stuttgart où avait lieu une réunion d'ingénieurs. Mais je n'y eus pas plus de succès." On lui fit même sentir qu'on doutait de son équilibre mental.

Ajoutons que le premier chemin de fer à crémaillère (régime mixte: adhésion et crémaillère) d'Europe fut mis en service en 1870 à la carrière d'Ostermundigen. Les deux locomotives nécessaires provenaient des ateliers principaux d'Olten (compagnie du Central suisse) dont Riggenbach était chef depuis 1853. L'année suivante eut lieu l'inauguration du chemin de fer Vitznau-Rigi, qui apportait la preuve que le problème du transport des voyageurs sur de très fortes rampes pouvait être résolu par les locomotives à crémaillère. Après bien des déceptions, compensées par de nombreux succès dans sa patrie et à l'étranger, le créateur du système des chemins de fer à crémaillère, l'ingénieur Nicolas Riggenbach, mourut à Olten le 25 juillet 1899, à l'âge de 82 ans, après une vie mouvementée et féconde.

(Bulletin des C.F.F.)