News at random

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The Swiss Observer

FOUNDED BY MR. P. F. BOEHRINGER.

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NEWS AT RANDOM

Some details about the Swiss Mercantile Fleet have now been officially published by the Federal Council. Altogether 15 ships with a tonnage of 115,000 have been chartered for the duration of the war; eight of them are already in service whilst the remaining seven will be delivered before the end of the year. The belligerent powers have given an undertaking not to interfere with this seaborne traffic; the Swiss Cross and the name Switzerland will be painted on the sides of the ships which will, of course, carry goods solely for the provisioning of our country. Two London ship brokers will act as managers for the Swiss Government. Most of the unloading will probably be effected at Marseilles.

* * *

Foreign aircraft are flying over Swiss territory with impunity as the disinclination of the defence batteries to fire seems to be taken advantage of. One German plane penetrated as far inland as the canton of Zug, dropping leaflets which were addressed to recipients on the other side of the Rhine.

* * *

A national vote will be taken during the week-end on a legislative decree reorganising and placing on a sound footing the employment of the 54,000 civil servants of the Confederation. This new measure aims in particular to dispose of an amount of over one milliard francs — the accrued deficits of the pension fund — by increased contributions of the employees and by new taxation spread over the next sixty years. The referendum secured 40,500 signatures but the bill is supported by most of the political parties.

* * *

All Swiss of military age born in France will be considered French and become liable for military service unless within three months a formal declaration is made re-affirming Swiss nationality.

* * *

Copious rain has caused serious damage in many parts of our country. Some of the rivers are overflowing their banks, necessitating the evacuation of adjoining buildings. In the Muota valley (Schwyz) the inundations are said to be the worst since 1910. Near Brienz (Berne) some of the roads were temporarily closed to traffic on account of the accumulation of sand and boulders. In Wallenstadt, basements and the ground floors of houses were filled with water and the approach to the railway station was cut off. A catastrophe visited the little village of Fully in the canton Valais, half of which was covered ten to fifteen metres deep by an avalanche of stone deposited by the surging mountain streams; no lives were lost but a large number of cattle could not be extricated in time. The damage is said to exceed a million francs.

* * *

An exciting Saturday afternoon was spent by the Basle people when close to the frontier a French bomber was chased back by German anti-aircraft guns. The unwelcome intruder got away scot-free but two shop-girls in Kleinhüningen whose curiosity led them into the open road received serious injuries which made an immediate operation necessary. Buildings in the neighbourhood and in Riehen were slightly damaged.

* * *

Among the tractanda for the forthcoming Landsgemeinde in the canton Glarus is a proposal to levy a special tax from foreigners; it is pointed out by legal authorities that the imposition of such a tax can only be decreed by the Federal government.

* * *

Most of the communal electricity works in the Rheintal (St. Gall) are deriving considerable profits from their undertakings, thus Buchs has netted an amount of Frs.85,000; critics are of the opinion that such gains represent an indirect tax on the consumer who should obtain the electric current at cost price.

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An interesting experiment was brought to a successful issue when 202 tons of wheat were drawn out

CITY SWISS CLUB.

Messieurs les membres sont avisés que

L'ASSEMBLEE MENSUELLE

aura lieu Mardi le 5 Décembre à 5.30 h. précises au Restaurant PAGANI 42, Great Portland Street, W.1.

ORDRE DU JOUR:

Procès-verbal.	Démissions.
Admissions.	Divers.

Le souper est facultatif et les participants sont priés de bien vouloir s'inscrire au plus tôt auprès de Monsieur P. F. Boehringer, 23, Leonard Street, E.C.2. (Téléphone: Clerkenwell 2321/2).

Le Comité

by suction from a specially constructed and hermetically sealed tank which was deposited last June in the Thunersee near Därligen; the wheat after four and a-half months' immersion proved to be in excellent condition. This war measure was originally suggested by National Councillor G. Duttweiler.

* * *

Among the stewards of the mined Dutch liner "Simon Bolivar" were four Swiss: Oskar Hoffmann, Bernard Torgler, Otto Kilcher and E. Imhof; they all lost their papers and personal belongings. The first three were wounded and are being cared for in an English hospital.

* * *

Sentences ranging from two to twelve months imprisonment are announced by the Federal Penal Court on five members of the "Volksbund" for conspiring against the security of the state. Two only were present in court, the other three having taken French leave in good time. This is another scurrilous circle directed by the notorious Leonhardt from somewhere across the border.

THE SWISS ELECTIONS.

(*The "Economist"* 18.11.39.)

Switzerland is one of the best-governed countries in Europe. Its cantons and communes make up a democracy about which we in England know only too little. Switzerland is a Confederation. Its Federal Parliament consists of a Nation Council, elected by the whole male population, and a Council of States, to which each canton sends two representatives — with several half-cantons each sending one. These two bodies are elected every four years; and since they then join together as a National Assembly to choose the seven Federal Councillors who will govern the country for the next four years, the fact that the latest Swiss national elections took place on the 29th of last month is a matter of no mean interest when democracy and dictatorship are at war just over the Swiss borders.

From the beginning of the war Switzerland has been fully mobilised to defend her neutrality. This means, since Swiss women do not vote, that a very large proportion of the electors were on duty on the frontier when the polls were held. Some people in Switzerland were in favour of automatically returning the old Chambers, without any voting, for another four years. It was in fact agreed that this should be done in eight cantons, including Lucerne, Vaud and Ticino, and also in one of the Appenzell half-cantons. In the other Appenzell, in Uri and the Unterwaldens, formal but unopposed voting took place. Out of 187 members of the National Council, 57 of those elected in 1935 were automatically returned or replaced this autumn; they included 21 Radicals, or *Freisinnige* as they are actually called by the German Swiss, 17 Catholics and 11 Social Democrats.

These, Radicals, Catholics and Social Democrats, are the three main political parties. They had 48, 42 and 50 deputies, respectively, in the National Council elected in 1935, and Agrarian or Peasants' Party coming next with 21. The main executive body, the Federal Council of seven members, was then composed of four Radicals, two Catholics and one Agrarian, with the Social Democrats more or less occupying the rôle of official Opposition.

Each of the bigger parties had its young and progressive enthusiasts in 1935, Young Liberals, Young Catholics and Young Peasants, who were ready — especially, for instance, the Young Catholics of Lucerne — to co-operate with the parties of the Left. The Young Peasants, led by Dr. Hans Müller, were strong in the canton of Berne, and succeeded in 1935 in returning an independent group of seven deputies to the National Council. Two other unprecedented events took place in the 1935 voting, mainly in the Canton of Zürich. One was the election of a group of seven deputies representing the *Landesring der Unabhängigen*, the other the election of Dr. Richard Tobler. The seven deputies of the *Landesring* were the followers of a certain Herr Gottfried Duttweiler, a successful pioneer with American business methods who had established the so-called "Migros" big stores, and claimed not only to stand for the interests of consumers, but also for the amateur element in politics. Dr. Tobler, on the other hand, was the leader of the *Nationale Front* which, with many cries for Swiss regeneration, preached anti-Semitism and anti-Marxism and praised both the domestic and foreign policy of Herr Hitler; from the spring of 1934 the

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