Home news

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HOME NEWS

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FEDERAL.

SWITZERLAND ON GUARD.

The "*Observer*" writes:—

The Swiss will tell you proudly that their country owed its neutrality in the world war to the fact that the Kaiser attended the Swiss Grand Army manoeuvres in 1913, and was much impressed by what he saw.

To-day they are in an even better state of preparedness than they were in 1914. Their army, admirably trained and equipped, is capable of being expanded into something more than 400,000 men.

A special defence force, composed of men inhabiting frontier regions, is ready for immediate service. They keep their full equipment at home with them; and each man knows just where to report and what he is to do if trouble starts. Last year, when a special test was made, they were at their posts, almost to a man, within a few hours.

In the event of an invasion it will be the task of this frontier force to retard the advance of an enemy for at least twenty-four hours, so that other units of the army can have time to mobilise.

Hard Task for Invader.

But the fulfilment of this task will not be left entirely to man-power. Some idea of what an invader may expect can be gleaned from the preparations made last September at the time of the Munich crisis. Every road or bridge leading into the country was heavily mined, and all preparations made to blow them up at a moment's notice.

Tank traps have been installed on nearly all the Swiss highways. If you motor through the country to-day you will notice in the roadway patches of concrete studded with rows of miniature "manhole-covers." In time of emergency these covers are removed and thick steel posts, embedded in the layers of concrete beneath. No tank in existence could plough a way through these posts.

The traps are invariably placed at points in the road where no detour is possible, and where protective bluffs or other features of the terrain offer ideal emplacements for deadly anti-tank guns.

All Passes Fortified.

Though you might never suspect it, the mountain that rises majestically before you probably shelters impregnable fortifications sunk deep in its flanks. Such, for instance, is the case at St. Maurice, which commands the upper reaches of the Rhone Valley. The St. Gothard, St. Bernard, and other alpine passes all are heavily fortified; and, within the last two years, the defences along the German frontier have been greatly strengthened.

The Swiss have only a small air force; but they are plentifully supplied with anti-aircraft equipment, and their anti-aircraft guns are said to excel those of almost every other country in Europe.

Within the past two years the army has been completely reorganised. A few weeks ago the Federal Council reduced the minimum age for service from twenty to eighteen years, and at the same time it provided for the recruiting of men between the ages of forty-eight and sixty for service in the Landwehr.

On the whole, Switzerland faces the future with calm. If war comes she is determined not to be caught napping; and the Swiss people are in entire agreement with the Federal Council's recent declaration that Switzerland is prepared to defend the inviolability of her territory "to the last drop of blood."

A.R.P. IN SWITZERLAND.

A.R.P. in Switzerland is placed under the direction of a special Federal Service in Berne. Every house, public building, factory, and workshop has its own A.R.P. organization placed under the command of a "house chief," who is under the command of the local branch of the Service.

The personnel of the Service is formed of men who, for any number of a variety of reasons, are not liable to be called to the Colours in case of mobilization. All of them frequently undergo periods of training or of instruction, and they have a special uniform, including a steel helmet and gas-mask.

So far the civil population has not been supplied with gas-masks, but they can be purchased at a cost of about 13s. each. Every house is supplied with sand and fire-extinguishing devices, the attics, under the supervision of the police, have been cleared of all rubbish and inflammable goods and furniture, and all necessary measures have been taken for the black-out of buildings, for which every house-owner is responsible.

Switzerland is a great believer in the efficacy of the "black-out." Experiments made last year, first in some sections of certain towns, then in whole towns, then in a third of the country, and finally (for 12 long hours) in the whole of Switzerland, have proved most satisfactory.

The Government are against evacuation (except in case of territorial invasion) on the ground that it would bring about too much confusion and disorder.

A.R.P. costs are shared by the Confederation, the Cantons, and the Communes so long as they derive from Government orders or decrees, but every citizen has to pay for the black-out of his flat or house and for fire-extinguishing equipment.

SWISS PRECAUTIONS.

Military precautions have been taken as in September last. All the mines intended to blow up bridges, roads, and railways along the frontier have been recharged, and the necessary Army units for these operations have been called up. The Federal Government have authorized the Military Department to call up for six days' training in the course of the year all men born between 1891 and 1903, including those belonging to motorized units.

As these measures caused some nervousness in certain frontier districts, the Government issued a statement declaring that there is no danger for the moment, but explaining that the precautions were necessary in case the international situation should suddenly become worse. The statements ends with an urgent appeal for calm.

NEW LEGATIONS.

The Federal Council has put a proposal to the two Chambers to raise the General Consulates in Caracas (Peru) and Dublin to the status of a Legation to be in charge of a Chargé d'Affaires.

BASLE FAIR.

Federal-Councillor, Dr. E. Wetter, made a remarkable speech at the Official Day of the Basle Fair; in reviewing the financial and economic situation of Switzerland he said that the public debt stood at 1,990,000,000f. (about £99,500,000) at the end of 1938, and that it would rise to 4,000,000,000f. (about £200,000,000), or 1,000f. (about £50) per head of the population within the four coming years. The increase would be due to the redemption of the railways debt and to expenditure on big public works and on national defence. National defence had cost more than 1,000,000,000f. (about £50,000,000) during the past three years. The Swiss people, he said, were ready to make all the necessary sacrifices for their defence, as only independence could enable them to carry out the Government's economic and financial programme. They wanted their small home to remain completely free.

A GENEROUS GIFT.

The firm of Nestle's has given an amount of 20,000 frs. towards the new building for a childrens' hospital in Zurich.

SWISS BANKS' SEND GOLD ABROAD.

Disquieted by German troop concentrations in the region of Lake Constance, banks in Basle, Schaffhausen, Zurich, Lucerne and other cities of Northern Switzerland are shipping gold out of the country or to Geneva and Lausanne.

More than £2,000,000 worth of gold was received from these sources by banks in Geneva. All of it was brought to Geneva under guard in motor lorries. Within the last week shipments of considerable value have been made by aeroplane to Paris and London.

Nearly 60 per cent. of the Government's gold reserves, totalling more than £150,000,000, has been sent to London or New York. This action was taken soon after the German occupation of Czechoslovakia.

The remainder, slightly more than 40 per cent., which under Swiss law must be kept within the country, as coverage for currency in circulation, is reported to have been stored in the St. Gothard fortifications.

SWISS BUYING IRISH HORSES.

The Swiss Government Remount Commission, M. von Gunten and Captain Egli, are at present in Ireland, where they are buying a large number of selected horses for the Swiss Army.

REFUGEE JESUITS IN SWITZERLAND.

Permission has been given by the Federal Government for the teachers and pupils of the Canisianum, the Jesuit College at Innsbruck, of which the buildings were expropriated by the Germans last year, to remain in Switzerland until July 15th, 1940. Although the Canton of Valais is willing that the college should remain at Sion-Sitten, Jesuits have been banned in Switzerland since 1848. Most of the students who came from Innsbruck are Americans, and will have finished their courses and gone before July, 1940.

SWISS-CZECH PAYMENTS SUSPENDED.

The Swiss Government has decided to suspend payment of sums owed by Swiss debtors to Bohemia, Moravia and Slovakia. Henceforth payments will be made into the Swiss National Bank, later to be transferred after agreement has been reached with Germany.

NEW SWISS RADIO SCHEDULE.

The temporary 100-watt transmitter which is being tested by the Swiss Federal Communications Company (Radio Section) at Schwarzenburg is now broadcasting regularly every weekday on 31.46 m. (9.535 mc/s) from G.M.T. 18.00-19.00; on 19.6 m. (15.305 mc/s) from G.M.T. 22.45-00.45, and on 25.28 m. (11.865 mc/s) from G.M.T. 01.00-02.00. Other channels to be tested are 11.7 m. (25.64 mc/s); 13.94 m. (21.52 mc/s); 16.87 m .(17.784 mc/s), and 49.55 m. (6.055 mc/s). The station will shortly be endowed with a 25-kilowatt transmitter.

NEW CABLEWAY PROJECTED IN SWITZERLAND.

Quite a paper war has recently been waged between those who support the decision of the Zermatt Commune to build a cableway from Riffelberg, near Zermatt, to the Gandegg, close to the Italo-Swiss frontier, and those who oppose its construction on æsthetic or other grounds. The amount of correspondence in *The Times* on the subject has brought forth a joint letter from the President and the Secretary of the Commune giving the objects and nature of the projected line; the Commune considers that the line will not spoil the beauty of the High Alps. One correspondent adduces the military reasons against the building of the railway, contending that in wartime it would assist a surprise Italian attack — the Italians already have two cable lines up their side of the Theodul Pass, which crosses the frontier. Another correspondent answers the "æsthetes" by stating that most visitors to the Alps are more interested in getting good skiing than in enjoying scenery — the most prosperous Alpine centres to-day are those which provide good downhill ski-runs rather than magnificent scenery. Presumably, unless the Federal authorities see in the projected line a threat to Switzerland's security, the last word rests with the Council of the Zermatt Commune, which consists of seven able and respected villagers who are hardly likely to act against the wishes of the inhabitants and the interests of the district.

FEDERAL SHOOTING COMPETITION IN LUCERNE.

In connection with this year's Federal Shooting Competition, which will take place in Lucerne from June 30th-July 11th, an international shooting competition will be held at which fourteen different nations will be represented.

LOCAL.

ZURICH.

The death is reported from Zurich of M. John Syz, proprietor of the "Baumwollweberei, Syz & Co.," in Dietikon, at the age of 80.

The deceased played an eminent part in the commercial sphere of the canton of Zurich, he was for nearly twenty years President of the Chamber of Commerce in Zurich, and during the Great War he was sent by the Swiss government to the United States. From 1909-1917 M. Syz sat in the "Kantonsrat," he was also a Member of Parliament. (Nat. Council).

LUCERNE.

The B.B.C. announces that Sir Adrian Boult has been invited to take part in the Lucerne Festival next August, when he will share the conducting with Toscanini and Bruno Walter.

* * *

M. Andreas Zimmermann, the well-known dialect writer has celebrated his 70th birthday in Weggis. Amongst his best known plays are: "De Landsturm-lütenant;" "D'Aelplerchilbi;" "De Wittlig" and the "Dr Adlerjäger vo Uri."

BASLE-COUNTRY.

Dr. Adolf Seiler, a member of the government of the canton Basle Country, has intimated that he wishes to retire from his post in the near future. Dr. Seiler entered the government in 1922, he is also a member of Parliament. (National Council).

SCHAFFHAUSEN.

On the occasion of the 50th Jubilee of the "Aluminium Industrie, A.G. Neuhausen," an amount of 1,5 million francs has been voted by the Board for the Pension Fund of the personnel.

OBWALDEN.

M. Arnold Röthlin, since 1924 a member of the government of the canton Obwalden is vacating his office. He was "Landammann in 1934 and 1936.

VAUD.

The death is announced from Lutry of M. Charles Patru, a Director of the "Publicitas" at the age of 47.

VALAIS.

A fire broke out at the Agricultural School at Viège during the night.

The inmates numbering 58 students hurriedly had to leave their rooms, some in their night attire only, five amongst them were more or less seriously injured.

* * *

M. Jules Couchepin, late National-Councillor, has died in Martigny at the age of 64.

The deceased was a member of the Grand Council of the canton of Valais for the last thirty years; in the army he reached the rank of colonel of infantry. M. Couchepin played an important rôle in the political sphere of the canton of Valais.

LA POLITIQUE.

Le nombre des conseillers fédéraux.

Un nombre déjà relativement considérable de groupements politiques se sont prononcés, récemment, sur l'initiative tendant à faire élire le Conseil fédéral par le peuple, et ont décidé de s'y opposer. Parmi eux, on trouve les radicaux bernois et schwyzois, les libéraux vaudois, les chrétiens-sociaux de Lucerne, — pour n'en citer que quelques-uns. Il semble donc que l'initiative, même lorsqu'on l'aura abondamment couverte de signatures du côté socialiste, ne rencontrera pas une très grande faveur devant le corps électoral. Les minorités se sont aperçues d'emblée qu'elles risquaient de faire les frais de la "réforme" envisagée, et cela malgré les garanties, plus apparentes que réelles, par lesquelles on s'est efforcé de les séduire. Quant aux grands cantons, ils n'ont pas d'intérêt à soutenir la revision, puisque, même sous le régime actuel, leur représentation est, en fait, assurée.

L'initiative, en confiant au peuple le soin d'élire le directoire helvétique, porte aussi à neuf le nombre des magistrats. Elle inclut donc, dans la réforme qu'elle préconise, la proposition faite aux Chambres par les motions Müller-Amriswil et Wettstein, — inscrites à l'ordre du jour de la dernière session, mais qui n'ont pu être discutées en raison de la maladie du président de la Confédération, M. Etter, heureusement remis depuis lors.

Parmi les adversaires de l'élection du Conseil fédéral par le peuple, il en est qui seraient assez favorables à l'augmentation du nombre des sièges. Selon eux, ce serait le moyen le plus pratique et le plus simple de permettre la participation socialiste au gouvernement, sans préjudice pour aucun des partis formant la majorité actuelle.

D'ailleurs, l'initiative elle-même n'a probablement été lancée que pour assurer, fût-ce par d'autres moyens, cette participation. Il n'est pas impossible qu'elle soit retirée le jour où l'objectif principal, c'est-à-dire l'accession de l'extrême-gauche au pouvoir, serait atteint. On doit s'attendre à ce que de nombreux représentants des partis nationaux, persuadés qu'il faut éviter l'élection par le peuple, mais qu'il faut faire appel au concours socialiste pour la direction des affaires, s'attachent aux motions Müller et Wettstein comme à une bouée de sauvetage. Leur avis l'emportera-t-il sur celui des partisans du *statu quo*? C'est ce qu'il est difficile de prévoir. Il est cependant très probable que la motion Wettstein sera rejetée aux Etats, et que la motion Müller rencontrera malgré tout une forte opposition au National.

Tous les arguments par lesquels on peut combattre l'augmentation du nombre des conseillers fédéraux ont déjà été exposés. Celui de la cohésion gouvernementale, plus que jamais nécessaire dans la période difficile que nous traversons, notamment au point de vue des relations extérieures, n'est certes pas le plus négligeable. A ce propos, il convient d'ajouter que le collège directorial, composé de neuf membres, aurait plus de peine que celui de sept à se réunir au complet. Ce motif paraîtra peut-être bizarre au premier abord; mais il n'est pas indifférent. Il y a des problèmes qui, soit parce qu'ils touchent aux intérêts généraux du pays, soit parce qu'ils intéressent tous les départements, ne peuvent être discutés et résolus que lorsque le Conseil fédéral siège au complet.

Or il est moins facile qu'on ne l'imagine, même avec sept membres, de réaliser cette condition. Les membres du gouvernement sont fréquemment appelés à prendre part aux travaux de commissions parlementaires, où leur présence est nécessaire. Bien qu'on ait sagement réduit le nombre des manifestations auxquelles le Conseil fédéral envoie un délégué, il en reste encore beaucoup. Maintes autres obligations éloignent momentanément de Berne un conseiller fédéral. Il faut tenir compte aussi du délai qui s'écoule souvent entre l'élection d'un nouveau magistrat et son entrée en fonctions. M. Wetter, par exemple, élu en décembre, n'a pris possession de son département qu'en février. Les séances où le Conseil fédéral est au complet sont donc plus rares qu'en ne serait enclin à le supposer, et cela pour des motifs majeurs.

De toute évidence, il serait encore moins facile d'obtenir la présence de neuf membres que de sept; si bien qu'en voulant rendre plus aisée la tâche du Conseil fédéral, on la compliquerait en réalité, parce qu'il faudrait, en certains cas, renvoyer indéfiniment une consultation générale sur un objet important.

Pour être d'ordre secondaire, l'objection n'est pas sans poids.

Léon Savary.

(Tribune de Genève.)

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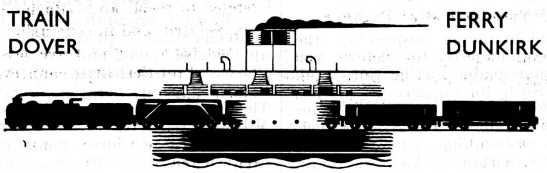


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