News at random

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NEWS AT RANDOM

On the 1st August the Swiss Broadcasting station gave a programme from all the transmitters in Switzerland, consisting in the main of Folk Songs. From 10-11 o'clock in the evening, a special transmission was given on the short wave for Swiss abroad, including speeches by M. Pilet-Golaz, the Swiss Consul General in New York, M. Naef, and General Guisan. Patriotic songs were given by various male choirs.

M. Pilet-Golaz addressed a special greeting to the Swiss Army, the women and the youth of Switzerland. In variation of a well-known proverb, he stressed inter alia " S'il est beau de mourir pour la patrie, il faut avoir d'abord le courage de vivre pour elle."

Consul General Naef in New York spoke in the name of the Swiss abroad and underlined their gratitude to their country and above all to the Swiss Army, which in the hour of danger stood ready at the frontier — and is still ready. He also expressed their thankfulness that Switzerland had succeeded in remaining free from direct entanglements.

General Guisan's speech was relayed in German and consisted of a repetition of what he had said earlier in the day regarding the military preparedness of Switzerland and loyalty to the flag.

The Federal Fête was celebrated, as was stressed by the speaker from Beromünster, in a dignified manner, as fitted the graveness of the hour. In most towns, passages from the Federal letter were read out by wish of the Federal Government, and were supplemented by an address by a representative of the local government. In most speeches the democratic and peace loving ideals of Switzerland were underlined. A patriotic meeting took place in Geneva in honour of those who fell serving their country. Perfect weather crowned the day.

The B.B.C. in London mentioned the Swiss Fête day and gave five minutes of Swiss music. A programme of music ranging from Folk Songs to a modern composition by Arthur Honegger, was broadcast. The B.B.C. announcer in a few sympathetic words said that Switzerland was the best proof that various minorities could live together in perfect harmony.

In the evening a big military Federal fête took place, in which a whole Brigade took part. General Guisan was present, as well as members of the Cantonal Governments of St. Gall, Glarus and Graubünden. The outstanding feature was military sport. The Commander of the Brigade gave an address and General Guisan read out the order of the day.

According to information received, the 1st of August was particularly well celebrated in the Swiss colonies in New York, Berlin and in Madrid. In Berlin more Swiss took part than in peace time. In New York about 8,000 persons participated.

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The Turkish and Egyptian Chargé d'affaires presented their credentials to M. Pilet-Golaz on Saturday, August 3rd.

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The Département Fédéral de l'Economie Publique have given out a ruling which will come into force on the 8th, according to which steam rollers over 8 tons in weight are prohibited. The explanation for this measure is given as being the shortage of liquid fuel.

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The President of the German Red Cross stayed in Geneva for a few days last week and visited the Central Agency for War Prisoners, Civil internees and Refugees of all countries.

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On August 2nd, the General Secretary of the League of Nations was received in audience by M. Pilet-Golaz at 12 o'clock, to take his leave. A luncheon was given by the Federal Council to the departing diplomat.

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On the 6th of August the Federal Council drew up a draft for a decree on the subject of measures against communist and anarchist activities. Every form of propaganda, including individual propaganda, is forbidden in this draft and the punishment may be prison up to three years and/or fines up to Frs. 5,000.

On the same day, the Federal Council made a decree for the protection of the Silk Ribbon Industry, the export markets having suffered serious decline through the war. The duty is being increased from 400 to 2,000 Frs.

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The Government of Schaffhausen has welcomed a social democratic motion demanding the creation of a Labour Council as well as a committee for the regulation (standardisation) of prices.

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The Government of Canton Graubünden have elected Dr. Canova, a member of the Social Democratic party, as President.

The Borough Council of Bühren, Canton Solothurn, has conferred the Honorary Citizenship of Bühren on Federal Councillor Stämpfli.

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The Government Council of Canton Zurich has asked for a credit of Frs.950,000 for water works in the district of the Borough of Wald. The town council of Zurich has asked for a similar credit for the extension of the Limmat valley road.

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A lecturer of the University of Freiburg has been appointed head of the Geneva Hospital.

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The well-known Mountain Guide, Fritz Steuri, celebrated his 25th Jubilee by taking part in the 1,000th climbing of the Jungfrau peak.

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The wonderful weather last Sunday brought the Swiss railways, mountain railways and steamships a record number of visitors. Steamships on the lake of Zurich alone transported over 27,000 persons.

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Since Thursday, August 1st, it has once more been possible to send telegrams to Luxembourg.

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The bodies of two tourists of Lausanne, who undertook to climb the Weisshorn from Randa and who fell and were killed, have been recovered.

In view of the latest developments there is little prospect that the long promised resumption of the mail service between our two countries will become a *fait accompli*. The following are a few additional news items gleaned from the English press.

The "*Evening News*," August 1st, gives a resumé of a speech made by General Guisan on that date:

"We thank God who has given us His protection through the centuries," he said.

"To-day's anniversary finds us armed to the teeth. For the armistice is not yet a peace and every man is at his post to defend the liberty and independence of the country.

"We must remain faithful to our age-old freedom. We must act as true Swiss and remain so. That is the sole means of safeguarding our independence.

"Some who have seen the recent battles have been wondering whether we should be able to resist an attack.

"Even to put such a question is not worthy of a Swiss.

"Only the man who knows how to defend himself and has the will to do it is respected.

"Those who founded Switzerland swore to help against whoever should attempt to violate their country.

"To-day, faithful to this oath, we shall continue to fulfil this mission.

"We have sworn to defend to the death the flag and the country and we are bound by that oath."

Some comment on his address is contained in the "*Irish News*," Aug 2nd, under the heading "The Spirit of Tell":—

On several occasions during the past ten months Switzerland has found herself face to face with the menace of invasion, and as by a miracle escaped the fate of Holland and Belgium. Once again danger has come close, although an attack on France by way of Switzerland is no longer needed, and only the lust for oppression could explain any future attempt to bring the Swiss into bondage.

Yesterday was the anniversary of the foundation of the Swiss Confederation on August 1st, 1291, a period with which many of the legends of William Tell are associated. During the six and a half centuries that have passed since the Everlasting League of the free Swiss was established Switzerland, as the country came to be known in later years, had many long struggles to secure the liberty she to-day possesses. Tell may have been nothing but a folklore hero, but as a symbol of the hate that persisted against Austrian oppression he has always been very real. Again, not until the downfall of Napoleon, to whom she was forced to pay a "blood tax" by giving soldiers to his armies, was Switzerland able to break clean from French domination, which lasted in one form or another for three centuries.

At yesterday's commemoration, General Guisan, Commander-in-Chief of the Swiss Army, spoke of Switzerland's determination to fight to the death for her flag and country. "Some who have seen the recent battles," he said, "have been wondering whether we should be able to resist an attack. Even to put such a question is not worthy of a Swiss."

It is possible that Switzerland may once more escape. But if she does not, and in the light of happenings in Europe during the past few months, General Guisan's words may seem to many foolhardy and of no great value. But to the small countries that are left and are in earnest about the defence of their freedom they will act as an inspiration. To safeguard liberty, which Tell, either as man or myth, forever typifies, cannot be a worthless undertaking, be the consequence what it will.

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The tension in connection with the far-reaching demands said to have been made by Germany still continues. "*Time and Tide*," August 3rd, is rather comprehensive on this subject:—

Reports of a German ultimatum to Switzerland, accompanied by far-reaching demands upon the Confederation for access to the Swiss stocks of oil, food and the country's gold reserves, have been strongly denied in Berne. There is no reason to doubt the accuracy of this denial, insofar as it concerns the materials specified. Nevertheless, it is clear that Switzerland is being subjected to severe political and economic pressure by the Axis Powers. Since the defeat of France, Switzerland finds herself virtually surrounded, and it appears that despite the terms of the armistice, German troops are still holding a number of key positions in unoccupied France. It is reliably reported that a considerable number of German troops are concentrated near Geneva, in the so-called "free zone" of Savoy.

Germany undoubtedly intends to overcome the strong spirit of resistance to National-Socialist domination that exists among the Swiss people, and to obtain an economic stranglehold upon the country's resources (even if invasion is not at present

under contemplation). Thus the last stronghold of freedom and independent sovereignty on the Continent, the last island of true democracy, is in the gravest danger. The Swiss authorities are indeed faced with a desperate situation; how far they will be successful in their efforts to maintain the integrity of their country it is impossible to forecast. Germany is using the weapon of propaganda in an attempt to destroy national unity, supported by military precautions against the very considerable armed strength of the Confederation. Switzerland's dependence on foreign trade, and her precarious position with regard to raw materials, most of which have to be imported, add to the difficulties of a perilous situation.

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The "*Daily Mirror*," August 5th, cites a somewhat obscure Swiss paper the "Democrat" and reprints the following:—

"Our compatriots will be unanimous, we believe, in declining Germany's invitation with thanks. The position of the Confederation between three great Powers, each of which have a sea coast, is by no means desperate, and we see no reason to change the system."

Switzerland's main hope was that the Confederation can walk the tightrope between Rome and Berlin, with what economic aid she can get from defeated France, without joining either camp.

"The present state of affairs makes our trade with Germany take first place in our foreign trade, but we have no intention of placing all our eggs in one basket.

"After having traded with five continents, we have the right to come home at night and sit down to our little jug of wine, saying with the poet, 'My glass is small, but I drink in my own glass.'"

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But we raise our hat high to the "*Daily Mirror*," which on August 6th THANKS A LOT that:—

In these days of appeasement, when once proud nations vie with one another in crawling to swashbucklers, it is like a refreshing breeze to listen to the bold and uncompromising words in which the people of little Switzerland assert their right to lead their own lives.

Hemmed in though they are by Axis-dominated Powers, they hold their heads high and are unafraid. They have no desire for territory or loot at the expense of their neighbours, which rather discredits them in the eyes of Totalitarian races, but they have a burning love of liberty and a passion to defend it against all assailants. William Tell may be a myth; his spirit is real and vital.

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The serious position of our imports is referred to in the August number of "*Shipping*"; since the publication of this article we have heard it stated that immense quantities of goods for Switzerland are lying in Mediterranean ports, specially Marseilles, awaiting to be released for their final destination:—

Attention has been drawn to the problem facing Switzerland in connection with the Greek tramp vessels she chartered to care for essential imports and to be based upon Mediterranean ports, originally intended to trade as Swiss vessels. Swiss imports had previously been seriously impeded by transport difficulties preceding the German attack through Belgium, the subsequent closing of the route through Belgian and French Atlantic ports, and finally extension of the war to the Mediterranean.

The last development caused the holding up at United States and Canary Island ports of the vessels which had been acquired to overcome the earlier and less serious difficulties.

Negotiations which Switzerland has entered into with the Belligerents are now believed likely to permit them to carry out the intended movements through Marseilles, Genoa and Savona. Italy is stated to have agreed to permit the traffic and British contraband control will allow the passage through the Straits of Gibraltar. The solution, however, cannot deal with interruption of Italian rail transport to Switzerland which may arise from R.A.F: action in Italy.

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Some explanation for the non-arrival of mails may be found in the following notice of the "*Daily Telegraph*," Aug 5th; the region referred to is probably the last link in our frontier which gave us access to the outside world unless an exit can be established via Italy:—

The German occupation authorities in Pays de Gex, through which runs the main highway from Switzerland to Paris, have closed the frontier from to-day.

People living in France and working in Geneva, and vice versa, cannot cross the borders. They must renounce their work or change their homes.

Postal, telegraphic and telephone communications have been cut off, and already to-night luggage and sacks of mail are mounting up on the platforms of frontier stations.

* * *

That there are still some people left whose labour and energy are not concentrated on war work is shown by an important discovery made by a Swiss scientist and disclosed by a report in the "*News Chronicle*," August 6th:—

A young Swiss radiologist has announced the discovery of what he claims to be the last of the world's missing known elements, completing the list of 92 which science has been trying to fill in since 1789.

He calls it Helvetium.

Dr. Walter Minder, aged 35, chief of the Radium Institute in Berne, said he had isolated the element by radium disintegration securing a speck no bigger than one 10,000th of a milligram.

"The quantity so far," he added, "is too small to make practical experiments on possible uses of the new element."

Dr Mindar said its properties would perhaps be discovered first in the United States because larger amounts of radium are available for examination there.