

News at random

Objekttyp: **Group**

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

Band (Jahr): **- (1940)**

Heft 978

PDF erstellt am: **19.04.2024**

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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 MEMBERS OF THE LONDON COLONY.

Telephone: Clerkenwell 2321/2.

Published every Friday at 23, LEONARD ST., E.C.2.

Telegrams: FREPRINÇO, LONDON.

VOL. 22—No. 978.

LONDON, AUGUST 17th, 1940.

PRICE 3d.

PREPAID SUBSCRIPTION RATES.

UNITED KINGDOM	{ 3 Months (13 issues, post free)	- - -	3/6
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NEWS AT RANDOM

The Federal Council has signed a new Roumanian—Swiss Transfer Agreement replacing the Agreement of 1937 and all later alterations thereto, and which comes into force immediately. The value and counter-value of all goods purchased from Roumania has to be paid into the Swiss National Bank in Zurich. One hopes that as a consequence of the new agreement the importation of liquid fuel will now be possible in greater quantities. The agreement is valid until the end of March 1941.

The German-Swiss Economic Discussions were terminated successfully on the 9th August, in Berlin. A new financial agreement was signed by Ministerial Director Wild, and Ministerial Councillor Boehne on behalf of Germany and Minister Froelicher and Dr. Hotz on behalf of Switzerland. The agreement is to be valid until the 31st March, 1941, and dates retrospectively from March 31st, 1940. As regards transfers of gold mortgages and travelling facilities, the position remains unchanged. Higher deliveries of coal are to be expected from Germany and Swiss exports to Germany are to be increased. Switzerland will, if necessary, be granted facilities in the clearing whereby the Swiss Labour Market will be eased. The mutual exchange of goods will include the exchange of goods with Poland, which will work on the basis of compensation. A special account will be opened for the General Government. In addition to Dr. Hotz the following were members of the Swiss Delegation at these conferences — Prof. Laur, Director Homberger, Director Schwab, Dr. R. Kohli and Director Hunziker.

Dr. Gadiant has been elected Vice-President of the Government Council of Graubünden.

Professor Dr. Ernst Guhl, who held the Chair for Archeology and Classics at the University of Bâle, died at the age of 64 on the 8th of August.

Dr. Hermann Brand, representative of the Social Democratic party on the National Council, died in Berne at the age of 72 on the 9th August.

Miss Hedwig Scherrer, the well-known painter and patron of the movement for reviving Swiss Costumes, who died recently, bequeathed her home in the Rheintal to the State. She expressed a wish that it might be used as a home for young painters, sculptors and writers.

With regard to the closing of certain frontiers by Germany, it has been agreed that the exchange of tourists between Germany and Switzerland can still take place through St. Margarethen.

The P.T.T. announces that a Japanese steamer will go from Lisbon to East Asia on the 18th August and will also take the mail to British territory in the Near and Far East. From August 8th onwards letters from Switzerland will come four times a week by air-mail via Lisbon to England. The additional fee per letter is 30 centimes.

It is no longer possible to send money in any form to either Estonia, Latvia, or Lithuania.

The Swiss Clearing Office draws attention to the fact that all payments still due to France and its Colonies should be sent to the Swiss National Bank in Zurich.

The Swiss Trade Unions met last week-end in Geneva and adopted a resolution offering their full co-operation in all endeavours to maintain the independence of Switzerland and expressing the hope that the authorities would do all they could to that end.

A Refresher Course for Women ambulance drivers is now taking place. Those who pass the test will be given the most responsible positions in the Ambulance Driver's Corps.

The offices occupied by the Organisation for the Assistance of Prisoners of War have proved to be too small. The Executive of the Canton Geneva have therefore decided to move the Department for War Economics to other quarters, thereby freeing two large rooms to house the Agence des prisonniers de guerre. A daily average of 35,000 letters is received, and as many as 70,000 enquiries have been received in one day recently. During one month alone 300,000 answers to enquiries concerning French and Belgian nationals were dealt with.

The Political Department announces that all those refugees who left Alsace and the upper regions of the Moselle Valley during the German offensive can

now return to their homes. They will, however, have to prove that they were living there on the outbreak of the war.

* * *

The Tessin newspapers "Libera Stampa," "Avanguardia" and "Gazzetta di Locarno" which were forbidden for some time, are now allowed to be published again. It is understood that they published rather one-sided reports about war operations and in doing so used head-lines which were more or less tendentious and offensive towards a foreign power.

* * *

Corrigendum.

It is regretted that owing to bad reception over the air the name of the new Federal Councillor, Dr. Walter Stampfli was erroneously announced as Stämpfli.

All the English papers refer to the new trade agreement concluded with Germany though none of them is able to give any particulars. The Zurich correspondent of the "Daily Telegraph," August 12th, reports as follows:—

A new trade agreement was signed between Switzerland and Germany yesterday. It was made retrospectively valid from the beginning of this month and ends on June 30th next.

It is impossible to form an estimate from the bald official communiqué issued after the prolonged and difficult negotiations to what extent changes have been made. It is clear that Swiss exports to Germany will be substantially increased.

The communiqué explains that to help the Swiss exporter to carry out the "considerable supplementary industrial and agricultural deliveries anticipated in the coming months" the Swiss National Bank, where necessary, will accord clearing loans.

"In this way," adds the communiqué, "valuable new fields of labour will be opened to Switzerland, whereas Germany will be given an opportunity to purchase considerably greater quantities of Swiss goods."

It is emphasised that the new arrangement will increase the trade of both countries. Switzerland

has probably obtained promises of deliveries of coal from Germany, but it is doubtful if the quantities are as great as the Swiss desire, since the communiqué, despite the concern of the Swiss public about coal supplies for the winter, hardly touches on the question. It merely states that it had proved possible to arrive at an "understanding."

* * *

On the Oil Agreement with Rumania the "Daily Mail," August 10th, says:—

The Swiss Federal Council yesterday gave assent to an agreement with Rumania whereby it is hoped to replenish Switzerland's rapidly dwindling stocks of petrol. Transport from Rumania is proving very difficult.

Rumanian petrol, it is hoped, will reach Sweden in 14 days by way of Germany as a result of an agreement between a Scandinavian company and the Rumanian Government. The Swedish company has sent a considerable number of tank vehicles to Germany, where they are now in use.

* * *

The Swiss Shipping Position is referred to in an article contributed to the "Shipping World," August 7th; it contains little that is not already known to our readers. Here it is:—

It was reported recently that negotiations were in progress between Great Britain and Switzerland regarding the ships chartered by Switzerland to carry her imports. It was stated that Italy had agreed to permit the through traffic.

At the outbreak of the war, the Swiss Government took the necessary steps to secure maritime shipping space in order to be able to maintain, independently of international shipping vicissitudes, the overseas trade vital to the country's economic life. Agreements were entered into with Greek tramp shipping interests and 16 vessels (totalling about 115,000 tons gross) were chartered for the duration by the Swiss War Transport Office. All 16 vessels are Greek-owned, 15 flying the Greek flag and one (the British-built *St. Cérque*, 4,200 tons, built in 1937) the flag of Panama. In accordance with the provisions laid down in the agreements, the ships also fly the Swiss flag, although this latter is not internationally recognised as a maritime flag; and on their sides the Swiss flag and the word "Switzerland" have been painted. The two biggest vessels are the *Helena Kulukundis* and *Master Elias Kulukundis*, each of 10,000 tons deadweight, and built in British yards in 1938.

The vessels were attached to definite ports where special facilities had been placed at the disposal of the Swiss Government to organise the country's transit traffic on a stable basis. These were the French ports of Marseilles, Bordeaux and La Rochelle and the Italian port of Genoa.

In connection with "Swiss maritime shipping" a Basle concern actually owns two seagoing motor vessels (*Albula* and *Bernina*) which in peacetime were employed on the combined Rhine-North Sea trade, plying between Basle and London or Baltic ports such as Stockholm or Helsinki. A scheme was afoot to increase the Swiss sea-going fleet in view of

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the steady increase of the Swiss Rhine traffic in recent years. Figures relating to the last three full years before the war show that Switzerland's Rhine-borne imports in 1936, 1937 and 1938 amounted to 30.2, 34.4 and 33.5 per cent. of the total. Similarly out of Switzerland's total exports, 21, 30.8 and 33½ per cent. respectively were carried on the Rhine. In both directions Rotterdam was the chief seaport for Switzerland. This trade is now suspended, and an alternative had been provided by the Greek-Swiss maritime shipping based on Mediterranean and Atlantic ports, which it was hoped would forestall also any shortage of shipping space which might hamper Switzerland's overseas trade.

* * *

Dealing with the same subject is a paragraph in this week's "*News Review*;" it is evidently based on an interview granted by our Commercial Attaché:—

Fate has never played a scurvier trick on a decent race of people than it is playing on the simple-living, hardworking, inoffensive Swiss.

Across the large walnut desk in his second floor office at the Legation in London, Switzerland's controller of Commercial Affairs explained his country's predicament last week.

Stout, pleasant, softly-spoken Alexandre Girardet told his story without heat or anger. "War makes things terrible for us," he said.

In halcyon days of peace, landlocked Switzerland feeds its 4,000,000 law-abiding citizens mainly on wheat and grain from Argentina, coffee from Brazil, cocoa from West Africa, sugar from the West Indies, tea, apples and edible fats from other parts of Britain's far-flung Empire.

Because so much of its own land is snow, ice and water it can feed its population on home-grown produce only for two or three months in the year. Its industries depend on imported raw materials carried across the seven seas in foreign ships, hence the hoary joke about the Swiss Navy. Switzerland has no mercantile marine, no coastline, no ports.

Boats carrying the country's purchases in foreign marts unloaded in peacetime at Rotterdam, Marseilles and Genoa.

From Rotterdam river barges took the goods along the Rhine to a specially-built harbour at Basle. Supplies unshipped at Marseilles and Genoa went by rail across countries now blockaded by Britain.

In the last war, Switzerland solved many of its acutest problems by arrangement with the belligerents. France put at its disposal the little port of Cette, on the Mediterranean near Marseilles, Germany allowed the Rhine route to be used, while certain imports were carried through neutral Holland.

To-day, the Rhine route is closed. Holland is under the Nazi jackboot. The Mediterranean ports are cut off by the British Fleet.

Lying idle at Madeira at a cost of £5,000 a day are 12 of the 15 Greek merchant ships, totalling 135,000 tons, which the Swiss Government hopefully

hired by agreement with Germany and Britain when war broke out.

The sole condition then laid down was that they would be used only for Switzerland's own requirements.

Yet to be negotiated with the belligerents are the terms on which this tiny neutral fleet will be allowed to operate, but last week the Swiss negotiated a new trade agreement with the Nazis aimed at stimulating exports to Germany and operative until June 30th, 1941.

* * *

Particulars of the new underground postal railway in Zurich which was built by the Oerlikon Company are given in "*Nature*," August 10th:—

An underground railway has recently been built in Zurich for the conveyance of letters and express packets between the branch post office at the main railway station and the Sihl post office, which are about three quarters of a mile apart. The railway is practically automatic. A driverless electric track is set in motion by pressing a push-button on the main control panel. At the railway station terminus the track runs on to a lift, which operates automatically, rising to the level of the post office above. The railway is operated by a three-phase 220-volt, 50-cycle supply. This obviates the need for converter sets or special gear on the motor track for reversing. To reverse, all that is necessary is to interchange the connexions of two phases of the supply.

The motor-truck has two axles, one of which is coupled through gears to a 3.5 h.p. three-phase induction motor, giving the truck a speed of 14.4 ft. per sec. The other axle is driven by a 1 h.p. motor for running at low speed (0.98 ft. per sec.). The latter motor is brought into operation at the stations by means of an electro-magnetic coupling controlled by a change-over switch, which is actuated by a roller contacting with a third rail in the station sections. The truck is fitted with a mechanical brake operated by spring force.

* * *

From the "*Evening Standard*," August 13th:—

The Swiss Government took steps to cut down the country's consumption of wheat, which must be imported, by ordering bakers to sell their bread only after it was 25 hours old.

Managers of 180 bakeries met after a few weeks of the new scheme and informed the Government that the consumption of bread was exactly the same as it had been when they were allowed to sell fresh bread.

It is now believed that the Government intend to make an order that bread must not be sold before it is 48 hours old.

This should not prove any hardship to those thoughtful people in our country who are in the habit of laying in a store of bread in order to fully utilize the advantage of a "baker's dozen."