

News at random

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NEWS AT RANDOM

Statistics just published give the value of imports during last year as 1889.4 million francs (1606.9 million in 1938), and the exports 1297.6 million (1316.6 million in 1938). Most of the 282 million increase in imports has taken place during the last four months and this period is also responsible for a loss in exports of about 190 million francs as compared with September/December 1938.

* * *

Particulars are now published of the financial proposals which Federal Councillor Wetter will present at the coming session of Parliament. The extraordinary military expenses in connection with the present mobilisation will reach by the middle of this year the stupendous sum of 2½ milliard francs. It is proposed that this amount — and the further increase caused by a prolongation of hostilities — should be despatched by the present generation, i.e., within the next thirty years or so. As, however, the figure is too large for a reasonable plan of amortisation operated within that period, a tremendous effort will be set on foot to reduce it to limits which come within the scope of an annual defence tax, say about 1,800 million francs. This reduction will be secured by a war profits tax, the appropriation of 250 million francs from the exchange equalisation fund of the National Bank, and a defence contribution in the form of a property (Vermögenssteuer) tax of between 1½ and 3%.

* * *

In order to counteract speculation in farm and building lands a decree issued by the Federal Council makes it compulsory to obtain the consent of a local authority before a transfer or additional mortgage can be registered. No sale with an increment of more than 30% will be allowed, even if through intensive cultivation the value of the land may have increased beyond that figure.

* * *

The Organising Committee of the Swiss National Exhibition in Zurich has forwarded a cheque for Frs. 50,000 to the Swiss Minister in Helsinki to assist in Finnish relief work.

The collection in Switzerland on behalf of Finland has enabled the committee to forward a first contribution of half a million francs to the Finnish Red Cross.

* * *

The Federal Court has sustained the appeal of Federal Councillor Leon Nicole against the prohibition of making public speeches in the canton Vaud.

* * *

One out of four is riding a bicycle in Switzerland, the number of licences taken out in 1938 being 1,212,433. The poor man's car is most popular in the cantons of Berne, Zurich and Aargau, whilst in the Ticino its popularity is on the decline.

* * *

A former director of the well-known watch and munition factory, Tavano S.A. in Geneva, Auguste Varaud, has been arrested; he is charged with fraud and falsification of documents and is said to have sold to two competing firms certain patented secrets of manufacture.

* * *

Federal Councillor Giuseppe Motta died last Tuesday morning; he had been ailing for some considerable time. The loss of Our Grand Old Man, whose far-sighted and consistent policy had maintained the unique position of our country is extremely serious, especially in these critical times. The British Government have sent a message of sympathy to the Federal authorities at Berne. The following obituary is taken from "The Times" (24/1/40).

M. Giuseppe Motta, who was five times President of the Swiss Confederation and probably the most outstanding figure in Swiss political life, died in Berne on January 23rd, at the age of 68. He had been a member of the Swiss Federal Council for nearly thirty years, and was for the greater part of that period the most eloquent representative of Italian-speaking Switzerland. His work in connection with the League of Nations had given him an international reputation.

Giuseppe Motta was born in 1871 at Airolo, in the Canton Ticino, where his father was postmaster at the time of the horse-drawn post coaches. He was educated partly in Italy and partly in French-speaking and in German-speaking Switzerland; and this accounted for his remarkable ability to speak French and German as well as his native language. He established himself in his Canton and soon became one of the prominent lawyers of the Ticino. He sat for some time in the Council of State as a Conservative member.

In 1899 he was elected deputy on the National Council, and in 1911 Federal Councillor. He was

president of the Swiss Confederation in 1915, 1920, 1927, 1931, and 1937. During the last War he took over the direction of the Federal Finance Department, and it was largely due to his efforts that Switzerland came out of the War with a comparatively small debt and a strong financial position.

In 1920 M. Motta was appointed Foreign Minister and chief representative of Switzerland at the Assembly of the League of Nations. He was not only one of the outstanding figures at the Assembly, where he always knew how to speak the right words at the right time, but also one of the best debaters in the discussions of the Commissions in which he took part. His speeches were of a high literary standard, though generally unprepared. The speech he delivered as president of the Swiss Confederation at the opening of the first Assembly of the League will be particularly remembered. Though his feelings were in no way pro-German, he repeatedly spoke on behalf of the admission of Germany, his opinion being that the League should include all nations. In 1934 he made a bitter attack on Soviet Russia in opposing Russia's entry into the League.

M. Motta was married and had 10 children.

Nouvelle Société Helvétique.

LONDON GROUP.

Annual General Meeting.

Saturday, January 20th, 1940.

A nice and informal luncheon preceded the 23rd Annual General Meeting of the London Group of the Nouvelle Société Helvétique, which took place at the Foyer Suisse. Quite a fair number of Swiss with their ladies had gathered for this luncheon and were reinforced later, when the proceedings started.

Mr. A. Fred Suter was in the chair and conducted the business proceedings with his usual efficiency, mixed with good humour, up to the moment when the old Council resigned "en bloc," according to the Rules of the Society. Mr. Henry C. Balsler was then asked by Mr. Suter to act as President pro tem, a duty which he discharged with ease and the eloquence of a born barrister-at-law.

The elections resulted in 12 members of the previous Council being re-elected and in adding "fresh blood" to that body in the persons of Mr. Bernard W. Sigerist and Mr. E. J. Bachofen.

Mr. A. Fred Suter was re-elected President with acclamation and unanimity, an honour which he duly acknowledged, and Mr. C. Campart, in spite of his protestations, was re-elected Hon. Secretary of the Society. The two members of the last Council, who, more by mere chance than anything else, were not re-elected, took this result of the polling with good spirit. The accounts, duly checked up by the two auditors — who were in turn re-elected, also in spite of protestations — were passed and the Assembly then had the pleasure of admitting (by acclamation) three new lady members, viz.

Mrs. Clara Muller,

Mlle. Veinig (Marcello),

and Mrs. Gertrude Anna Keller, wife of our journalist member.

Mr. Suter, in reply to a friendly farewell letter of the retiring Swiss Minister, Monsieur Charles R. Paravicini, had drafted a letter of thanks to M. Paravicini, had drafted a letter of thanks to M. Society, and also of good wishes for the future. This letter was read out and afterwards signed by each member present. It is probably already on the way to Berne, where M. and Madame Paravicini are now living.

The business proceedings thus over, after one or two more small items were dealt with, the Nouvelle Société offered a cup of tea and some pastries to everybody present. This was highly appreciated and put all and sundry into the right frame for "things to come."

What followed then was a lecture on

Recent Experiences with the Swiss Army.

delivered by Captain Bernard W. Sigerist. When Switzerland mobilised in September last, Mr. Sigerist was among those who left England to join up. Being an officer, — he was First Lieutenant when he left England and was promoted to the rank of Captain during his ten weeks stay in Switzerland — he was put in charge of one of the trains which took, altogether, roughly 400 Swiss to their homeland. After a few days he was already high up in the mountains, "somewhere in Switzerland," under very different conditions from those he was accustomed to in his luxury flat in Hampstead — to use his own expression. There followed for him a course of most intense and concentrated training, during which he became acquainted with the latest weapons now in use in Switzerland: the light and heavy machine gun, the infantry gun, the mine-thrower. Mr. Sigerist gave his audience, which had grown to over 50 persons, a lot of interesting information about the range, the firing speed and other details of these weapons, which it may be wise not to reproduce here.

This lecture, which gave the impression of having been most thoroughly prepared, lasted well over an hour, and was enriched by photographs and an occasional drawing on the blackboard. It was so instructive and so well delivered that even ladies told me afterwards that they were completely under the lecturer's spell during the whole talk. There was indeed not one dull moment in it and the Nouvelle Société Helvétique has indeed, as Mr. Suter rightly said afterwards, every reason for being thankful to Captain Sigerist. It was, from A to Z, first-hand information, and comforting information too.

Thus it was nearly 6 o'clock when the meeting broke up and members and friends bade each other "Au revoir," to go out into the dark, home to their frozen water pipes ...

G. J. KELLER.

PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS

It is once again my privilege to present you with an account of the London Group's activity during the past year.

If, as I have said, 1938 was a year of continuous crises, 1939 produced a succession of war-like acts on the Continent which could not fail in the end to provoke the mobilisation and military participation of the two great Democracies in the West. This tragic event actually came about at the beginning of September,