

# Rationing in Switzerland

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within 2 or 3 hours on foot or on bicycle or with the horses and communal vehicles. For one should not forget that a small country possessing such modern means of communication and excellent railway and road systems can carry its soldiers very speedily to the place of mobilisation and take its troops just as quickly to the border, because after all the frontiers are nowhere very distant.

Another special feature which favours a speedy mobilisation is the dense network of telephones, telegraphs and wireless-stations. In Switzerland with a population of only  $4\frac{1}{2}$  millions, there exist round about half a million telephone and radio subscribers. This means in practice that in almost every home there is means for the speediest receipt of news from a distance. As a matter of fact, the telegram ordering mobilisation, couched in the four languages of Switzerland, takes only half an hour to reach the most remote villages in the high ranges. And there the President of the Communal Council sets about using the means at his disposal to inform the militia-men that their country is calling them. Last September the oldest and most venerable means were used to call the sons of Switzerland to arms: beacons on the peaks and wild pealing of church bells in the valleys - and 10 minutes before the first declaration of war the Swiss army stood ready to march, while the frontier guards already had manned the gates giving entry to their land.

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#### RATIONING IN SWITZERLAND.

During the war of 1914-1918 neutrals were frequently accused of enriching themselves at the expense of the belligerent nations. Whereas a few individuals in industry and commerce made rapid fortunes, soon enough decimated by special taxes, fixed on a sliding scale, the Swiss Confederation had to pay the cost of the mobilisation of the army and meet other heavy expenses. Its national debt increased considerably. For the middle classes of Switzerland and for the Swiss public economy the Great War was an extremely heavy burden.

The Swiss nation cannot exist without importing a great part of its food stuffs and of the raw materials needed by its industry. Even though power is furnished largely by electricity, Switzerland has to import all the coal needed for heating and for the making of gas. The extremely diversified soil of Switzerland is poor in ores. It produces salt, but none of the metals that are used by the very important machine-making industry. Modern Switzerland needs importations as a living being needs air to live. This small country is situated very far from the sea.

During the 1914/1918 war Switzerland experienced very great difficulties in obtaining supplies. From 1917 onwards, the situation became very critical. The railways were then still not electrified. The train services were gradually reduced to a minimum; expresses and all Sunday travelling were suppressed; pine wood had to be used for engine firing. The population of Switzerland suffered still more from a rationing of food which, even though introduced late, was none the less severe. Mouthfuls of bread and cups of milk had to be counted and we had to do without fat. Ration cards, increasing in numbers every month, granted increasingly reduced rations. The health of many children and adults suffered from these privations. Many belligerent nations, sorely tried in other respects, were not aware of this fact.

Like all the states of Europe, Switzerland, having learnt the lesson of experience, was better prepared in 1939 than it was 25 years ago to meet the difficulties involved in a new war between its neighbours. But geography cannot be altered. And, if it is

possible to grow in the somewhat poor soil of the Swiss plateau a little more cereals and potatoes than in normal times (which proportionately reduces the production of dairy products), coal, petroleum and metals cannot be taken from the ground - for they are not there to be had.

Most of our benzine, for example, comes to us up the Rhine, the only navigable artery that links Switzerland with the Sea. Hostilities on the Franco-German front put a stop to navigation on the Rhine overnight. Italy has kindly placed her railways at the disposal of Switzerland. But our country does not possess the necessary trucks for the long distance transport (Genoa, Trieste ...) of fuel and other raw materials that the barges used to land in the port of Basle. There are technical difficulties that the Swiss authorities are striving to solve, but they involve time and money that is almost beyond the means of a small country.

Therefore, from the 18th September, 1939, Switzerland rationed petrol. The running of private cars has been considerably restricted. The rationing of fuel for heating was introduced almost immediately. The sale of lubricating oils, of petroleum, of the by-products of benzine for use in manufacturing and industry, is also restricted. Finally food rationing cards made their appearance on the 1st November. As far back as the Spring the Swiss people had received the wise and urgent advice to build up stocks of sugar, flour and macaroni etc. in every household. Poor families alone were exempt from these costly precautionary measures. They received special cards for daily supplies during the first two months of the war. The rations granted by the cards distributed for November, are, indeed, generous enough.. The federal administration of war-time economy, that had taken prudent measures in advance, is optimistic about the future. For the present, the Swiss are not obliged to "tighten their belts." They can buy only one kind of bread now - brown bread - but it is of good quality and there is an unlimited quantity of it. Fresh butter and dripping are also sold without ration cards. The foodstuffs rationed today are - sugar, rice (250 grammes per person per month), rye and barley produces - farinacious products - wheat flour and wheat and maize meals, leguminous products (peas, lentils etc.).

These quantities will be increased for the month of December; but this temporary relaxation does not mean that Swiss supplies of food are definitely assured. A long war, with unpredictable complications, might in the end make the re: victualling of our country precarious. The Confederation can carry out this task only if its bordering states and those possessing the mastery of the seas continue to give passage to food stuffs and the raw materials indispensable to its existence.

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#### 650 YEARS -- EIDGENOOSCHAFT.

It is indeed a great achievement to be a Confederacy of 650 years and to have for so long a period preserved freedom and independence.

To celebrate this anniversary on 1st August 1941, the cantonal authorities of Schwyz have the arrangements in hand for a worthy celebration to be held in Schwyz. On the 31st July, a Bundesfeier play will be staged. On 1st August Divine Service in the Field will be held for Catholics as well as Protestants. The celebration proper will be held in the afternoon on the Ruetli.

With just pride we look back to the historic events of our country, and we are proud to represent the oldest democracy in the world.