

Cost of living in Switzerland

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In the course of the debate in the National Council, a number of representatives pointed out the unusual character of the decree, how much it was contrary to our deep sentiments on law and rights, but there must be some defense against such dangerous activities. The withdrawal of citizenship is one of the few effective arms that can be resorted to. This was the opinion of the National Council after hearing the explanation of the head of the Department of Justice and Police, and this opinion was approved with a very large majority.

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COST OF LIVING IN SWITZERLAND.

Price levels have been stable for some weeks. So far, the approach of every winter has made the increased cost of living a serious problem, and the authorities have done everything possible to stabilise prices. During the past year the cost of living index, now 48 points above that of August 1939, has risen only six points. On 1st September, the State-controlled milk price was raised by one centime per litre, the price of bread was lowered. The increase in wages has only slowly followed the increased cost of living; in all branches the wage-earner has to bear some half of the higher expense himself. The lowest wage-earners have been given the highest increase. State employees are granted a special bonus every autumn - a step imitated by most private businesses to cover the cost of winter fuel, potatoes, winter clothing and shoes. This autumn new shoe and textile cards have been issued after a marked drop in sales because of high prices. Since the outbreak of war, the price of beef has more than doubled, that of pork has trebled. Eggs cost three times as much as in 1939. Coal and wood prices have doubled. The tariff for public works, gas, electricity and railways, had remained practically stable. The worst strain on small incomes is the cost of clothes and shoes. A qualified mason earns about two francs per hour. In 1939 he earned only Frs. 1.70 and in 1914 Frs. 0.67. Between 1914 and 1939 mason's wages thus increased by 152 per cent. In the same period the cost of living only rose by 45 per cent., so that the masons' surplus buying power was large. Since the war, the cost of living has risen another 84 per cent., and wages only 20 per cent., which shows that if the war goes on long enough the whole improvement achieved in the workers' situation during the past 25 years might disappear. That is why stabilisation of prices, strict rationing and strong measures against the black market are so essential to the internal social peace of the country.

Rents, except in the new buildings, have remained as before. Taxes have enormously increased on a progressive scale which bears only lightly on the small pocket. The lowest wage classes especially in the towns, can buy potatoes, coal, clothes, shoes, etc. at prices kept artificially low by the Government. This is not charity, but an emergency Government measure to prevent hundreds of thousands of people having to fall back on public or private charity. Naturally, it is the farmers who profit most from the increased cost of food, and it needs a strong hand in the Government to prevent agricultural prices from rising still higher. On the whole, the price and wage discussion has become much milder this autumn than during the past two years, when the price curve was climbing steadily up.

The stability of the cost of living seems well maintained. The Index of Retail prices, calculated by the Swiss Co-operative Society, registers no noteworthy changes for the period 1st June - 1st September. On the whole prices are below those of the corresponding period of the first World war.

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