

Sundry news from Switzerland

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SERIOUS FOOD AND RAW MATERIAL SHORTAGE IN SWITZERLAND.

On March 27th, an important exposé was submitted by the head of the Department of Public Economy, Mr. Stampfli to the National Council. Mr. Stampfli portrayed in detail the situation of the country and gave information on the recent negotiations in Berne. The reason for our difficulties, he said, was that Switzerland is a highly industrialized country without raw materials of her own. She has to import both foodstuffs and raw materials needed by her industrial machines. And the fact is, he continued, that despite appearances Switzerland is today a land threatened by famine and massive unemployment. Our wheat supply, consisting of last year's crop added to our existing stocks, which have not been renewed since March, 1944, is not sufficient to carry us through until the new crop is harvested in 1945. This is why we have been forced to cut down the bread ration from 250 to 200 grams per person a day. A new reduction is unavoidable if we do not succeed in importing 6,000 carloads before the coming fall. Our reprovisioning in fats and oils is still more unfavorable. For other articles our reserves will be sufficient until fall. Only meat can be distributed on the same basis as heretofore. This situation, said Mr. Stampfli, makes an agricultural effort more urgent than ever, for unfavorable weather last fall made it possible to do only about one half the autumn work of sowing. Happily better weather has come this spring and earlier than usual, making it possible to make up the lost time to a certain extent. As for our reprovisioning in raw materials for our industry, the picture is darker still. For years now we have received no wool, no cotton and our supply in rubber and leather is no better. Coal is the greatest lack. On this point, Mr. Stampfli recalled that nothing is being imported and that the Allies could make us no promise of compensation. This naturally makes it necessary to place drastic restrictions on the use of gas for cooking. Our coal stocks will not last longer than the end of the present year if we do not succeed in getting some coal from outside. Mr. Stampfli then spoke further of the Berne negotiations and expressed the hope that the representatives of the great powers would do everything they could in order to enable us to ward off a catastrophe.

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SUNDRY NEWS FROM SWITZERLAND.

Sunday, March 4th, has been marked by a very serious violation of Swiss neutrality. In the morning foreign aircraft dropped bombs on Basel and Zurich.

In Basle, many explosive bombs were dropped of which 10 did not explode. Damage is especially serious in the area of the freight station of Wolf. Fifty to sixty railroad cars were destroyed, depots were razed to the ground, the electric wires were blasted away, tracks torn up and switches put out of commission. Repair work will last months and will be very difficult because of the present shortage of certain materials. Passenger traffic has to be detoured in several directions in order to avoid the danger caused by unexploded bombs. Mr. Celio, Federal Councillor, head of the Department of Railways and Mr. Paschoud, general manager of the Federal Railways have visited the area. Furthermore, 15 big fires were started by numerous incendiary bombs in the Gundeldingen and St. Alban quarters. Damage caused to private property will amount to at least 8 million francs. So far no deaths have been reported but one very severely injured person was pulled out of the rubble.

Clearing work in Basle revealed that 80 high explosive bombs were dropped by the Allied airmen during their attack last Sunday. More than 1000 incendiaries were dropped on the freight station and its immediate vicinity. More than 1000 square meters of glass will be required to replace the broken window panes.

In Zurich six planes dropped bombs on the region of Milchbuck and Schwamendingen. The bombs fell near the agricultural school of Strickhof, where a building was set on fire. Several houses were completely destroyed and some 20 were seriously damaged. Work to clean up the debris started immediately.

Five people were killed and fifteen seriously injured. They were from the region between Zurich and Oerlikon. House No. 29 In-der-Hub was completely destroyed by fire and three people lost their lives in it.

The Swiss-Turkish Agreement on trade exchanges and payments concluded on August 4, 1943, has been prolonged for another three months, i.e. until June 1, 1945.

Trade exchanges between the two countries will therefore continue to be carried out on the basis of private compensation or payment with free currencies according to the wish of the seller.

The Federal Council granted a credit of 17 million francs for the construction of wooden barracks for refugees. This measure is of a purely precautionary character.

In its meeting of March 2nd, the Federal Council asked the Federal Chambers to reject the appeal for pardon submitted by a French citizen who was condemned to death for espionage by a Swiss military court.

At a conference, the officers of the National Council and the States Council drew up the agenda for the session of the Federal Chambers, which will open on March 19th. On the National Council's agenda are among others the following questions: Federal subsidies for the construction of civil airports. Solothurn's initiative calling for a national work's plan, particularly for communications and city building, and a report from the Federal Council on the limitation of our imports.

Having decided to resume full diplomatic relations with the Czechoslovakian Republic, the Federal Council appointed on March 6th, Mr. Alexander Girardet, Counsellor of the Swiss Legation in London, Minister to the Czechoslovakian Government.

It is learned from Paris that France's Ambassador to Berne has just been appointed. He is Mr. Henri Hoppenot. The new Ambassador is not a stranger in Switzerland since it was in Berne that he started his diplomatic career as an Embassy attaché. Since then he has been successively counsellor at Rio de Janeiro, Teheran, Berlin and in Syria. Later on he was the delegate of the French Committee of Liberation in Washington with the rank of Minister. That was from 1943 to 1944. Switzerland is glad to learn of this appointment which will restore normal diplomatic relations with our neighbor to the West to which we are bound by so many cultural and historical ties formed through the past centuries.

Practically everywhere in Switzerland plans for community soup serving centres have been worked out. The idea of these plans is to meet the new restrictions placed on the consumption of gas, which is used by the majority of Swiss homes for cooking purposes. The new restrictions on gas have come because of the shortage of imported coal.

During the past few days the "Swiss Gift" has sent ten carloads of food to the French city of Lyon. The distribution of the food will be made under the supervision of a committee composed of delegates of the "Swiss Mutual Help for Workers," of the "Zurich-Lyon Committee" and of the Swiss Red Cross.

The "Swiss Gift to War Victims" has just organized a transport of food, mainly apples, for the needy population of Marseille. The Swiss Federal Railways have put 25 freight cars at the disposal of the "Swiss Gift." The distribution of the food will be carried out by the Swiss in France in collaboration with the Marseille authorities and the French Red Cross.

On February 28th, 220 Swiss citizens from Germany crossed our border near Kreuzlingen. Some of them have completely lost everything. The majority of these repatriated people have been living in Berlin and Eastern Germany.

On the same day, a convoy of 550 children from Southern France, especially from the region of Toulon, arrived in Switzerland. These little guests will be accommodated in the Cantons of the Ticino, Berne, Appenzell, Vaud, Zurich and Aargau.

The Berne Building Fair will organize in 1945 a special exposition called the "exported house." The idea is to show the plans Switzerland has to take part in the reconstruction of cities and villages destroyed on the Continent by the war and to show the kind of work that will be done. The Swiss Union of Trades and Arts is patronizing this undertaking. The display will also travel elsewhere.

Customs revenue of the Confederation in February 1945 only amounted to 2 million francs. This figure is the lowest ever reached and shows a decrease of 6.2 million francs in comparison with the same month last year. The reason for this decrease is the blockade of our imports.

On March 8th, an avalanche destroyed the left wing of the barracks of Andermatt. Eleven soldiers were killed.

Another avalanche blocked the St. Gotthard railroad line causing a temporary interruption of rail traffic.

Avalanches have also claimed victims in other regions of Switzerland.

At Unteriberg a number of avalanches have destroyed four alpine huts and have ravaged large wooden tracts.

During the last few days the International Committee of the Red Cross has succeeded in sending a train of 50 Railway cars to Germany. The train carries a cargo of 500 tons of foodstuffs and medical supplies destined for Allied prisoners in Germany. Furthermore, by way of trucks supplied by the Allied military authorities, another 120 tons of food and medical supplies were transported to Allied prisoners of war. These deliveries are destined for Allied prisoners who are at the moment being transferred from Eastern Germany to camps in the Western part of the Reich.

On March 13th, the French Council of Ministers ratified the financial agreement drawn up in Berne at the end of the economic negotiations with the Allied delegations. This agreement which deals mainly with payments is designed to facilitate the exchange of goods. The two countries have decided to open a purchasing credit of 250 million Swiss francs or the equivalent in French currency.

The economic negotiations which have been taking place in Berne for some time with a German delegation have come to a close without a renewal of the agreement governing trade exchange and payment between Switzerland and Germany. As a result of military events, the delivery of German goods, particularly of those of greatest interest to Switzerland especially of coal and industrial raw materials, has become so uncertain and unpredictable that it was found impossible to draw up a concrete and detailed new agreement. However, the trade relations have not been severed. They have been maintained on a de facto basis, ie. they will be carried on in a measure that circumstances do permit.

Beginning April 1st, the bread ration in Switzerland was brought down to 200 grams per day. This is the lowest bread ration fixed during the present war or even during the last world war. Due to the stop in imports the ration of fats and oils also had to be cut down and thus the April ration of 500 grams per head is the smallest ever. The April card like that for March with 850 meat points, will give two eggs more than in March. The chocolate ration again goes back to 50 grams and the points for jam have entirely disappeared.

The new restrictions regarding the consumption of Gruyère cheese went into force this past week. The stocks of Gruyère and Emmental cheese left over from last year and last winter's production do not make it possible to sell these two kinds of cheese in the same comparative quantities as heretofore. It is necessary to cut down the sale of Gruyère in order to avoid an early exhaustion of stocks on hand. Henceforth in Romande Switzerland, Gruyère will only be sold when a double amount of Emmental is taken at the same time. In the remainder of Switzerland, the proportion will be at least 4 parts of Emmental for one part of Gruyère.

The number of traffic accidents can be taken as an indication of the extent of road traffic. Thus in 1938, 21,500 accidents were reported. The latest statistical report reveals that accidents in 1943 numbered only 7,158.

The Swiss freighter S/S "Henri Dunant", arrived in an occupied port of Holland, on March 8th. The ship brought 3,100 tons of foodstuffs which will be distributed among the civilian population of Holland under the control of Swiss citizens residing in that country and with the collaboration of two delegates of the International Committee of the Red Cross in Geneva.