

Sundry news from Switzerland

Objektyp: **Group**

Zeitschrift: **Helvetia : magazine of the Swiss Society of New Zealand**

Band (Jahr): **11 (1945-1946)**

Heft 1

PDF erstellt am: **13.09.2024**

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SUNDRY NEWS FROM SWITZERLAND.

With deep regret the death of Mr. Walter Thurnheer, former Swiss Minister to London, has been announced. Mr. Thurnheer passed away at the age of 61 in Switzerland. He returned to the homeland in bad health in December 1943. In 1915 he entered the service of the Political Department as Assistant Secretary of the Foreign Affairs Division. He held posts in Berlin, Paris, Washington, Montreal, Tokio. In 1940, he succeeded Mr. Paravicini as the head of the Swiss Legation in London.

The Italian press points out in big headlines that Italo-Swiss commercial negotiations have ended in a general agreement, which will be signed shortly. It is expected that the agreement includes arrangements on Italian commercial debts to Switzerland, trade relations between the two countries and a convention placing the ports of Genoa and Savona at Switzerland's disposal for the needs of Swiss overseas traffic.

The Federal Military Department has created an employment office for the large number of personnel which it engaged during the war and which has now become superfluous. The office functions also for other services of the Federal Administration. So far some 700 jobs have been offered to this office, while the number of employees looking for another position is about 1400.

In its session of August 3rd, the Federal Council has taken important decisions with regard to the High Command in the Swiss Army. Division-Colonel Louis de Montmolin has been appointed Chief of the General Staff with the rank of an Army Corps Commander. Colonel Maurer has been made Chief of the Artillery with the rank of Division-Colonel, and Army Corps Commander Hans Frick will be Chief Instructor of the army.

Until June 1, 1945, Switzerland has offered refuge to some 275,000 people from all countries. About 183,000 of them have returned home while more than 92,000 (53,000 military internees and 39,000 civilian refugees) are still in our country. The repatriation of Italian internees via Chiasso was concluded on July 31.

Saturday afternoon the Band of the 13th Battalion of French Alpine Troops arrived in Geneva for a two days' visit. The band gave a concert at the Bastions Promenade after a march through the city's main streets. Sunday, the musicians laid a wreath on the monument erected to the Swiss soldiers who died during the mobilization of 1914-1918.

In order to encourage the creation of possibilities for work, the Federal Council has approved a decree according to which larger subsidies will be granted to the cantons undertaking the construction of buildings considered to be of Federal interest. Such subsidies can even be granted to cantons in which the number of unemployed workers is small but which are willing and able to employ people from other cantons.

The preliminary project for a new federal law on labor, commerce and trade has just been published by the Federal Department of Public Economy. This project has been worked out by a special consultative commission presided by Mr. Willi, head of the Federal Office for Industry, Trade and Labor. The text has been sent to the various cantonal governments as well as to the employers' and workers' organization which are expected to give their opinion on the new law before the end of October 1945. The project which is based on corresponding articles in the Federal Constitution provides for the protection of those workers who are not under the federal factory law.

It is well known that Japan's surrender, bringing the end of the war, is considered by Japanese military circles as a moral failure. In keeping with the traditions of his country, Lt. General Okamoto, Japanese military attache in Switzerland, committed suicide in Zurich, where he had been under medical treatment since the start of the year.

The uncertainty prevailing henceforth regarding the ownership of Japanese holdings in Switzerland led the Federal Council to issue a decree blocking the holdings of all persons residing in Japan or of Japanese citizens residing in Switzerland or in other lands. This measure is designed to protect Swiss interests. All payments to persons belonging to one or the other of the above categories must be made to the Swiss National Bank. It is understood that Japanese subjects residing in Switzerland can receive payments and have access to their holdings in the normal exercise of their professional activity and in order to satisfy their normal personal needs.

The Federal Council Department of Justice and Police has issued new instructions regarding the activity of foreign political organizations in Switzerland. These instructions based on the experiences with National Socialist activity during the war include the following points:

Foreign political organizations must notify the cantonal and federal authorities of their existence and submit their by-laws and the names of the members of their committees.

Political organizations of an exclusively party character are forbidden. Foreign political organizations and their members are held to abstain from all meddling in Swiss affairs. It is forbidden for them to bring pressure to bear upon anyone else. It is also forbidden for foreigners to organize parades, and to hold public assemblies of a political nature unless special authorization has been obtained. Even meetings in closed quarters can be forbidden or controlled by the cantons. The members of foreign political organizations are not authorized to wear uniforms, parts of uniforms or armbands indicating their political membership.

In postal relations with Great Britain, the Dominions and the British colonies, as well as with the United States of America and its possessions, the maximum weight for letters remains at 2 kgs. or a little over 4 pounds. Air connections with North America, Central America and South America make it possible to save much time.

The Basel-Mulhouse canal which forms part of the Rhine-Rhone canal was reopened on Friday, August 10. Thus, Switzerland is again linked to the French canal system, but for the time being it is still unknown to which extent transports between Switzerland and France can be resumed through this canal.

Our country is at present visited by a number of guests of honor. Twelve members of the United States Senate who are on a study trip in Europe arrived in Berne on August 13 by plane. While in the Federal Capital they will study a number of questions concerning transportation, education and work. On August 15, they will leave for Italy.

The "Swiss National Gift" announces that the Norwegian ship "Mode" with a cargo of foodstuffs is on the way to Norway. The food is for Norwegian school children in Oslo whose state of health and food supply has created great concern. The food has been taken from the Swiss reserves in Lisbon. Shipment of these goods to Switzerland is meeting with great difficulties.

The Mayor of the Italian town of Varese paid a visit to Chiasso where the Swiss authorities presented him with 60 hundred weights of salt. Salt is at the moment one of the scarcest goods in Italy.

Statistics of the Swiss wage compensation fund for mobilized soldiers reveal that reserves have been created during the past years. At the end of June the fund amounted to 464 million francs. More than 52 millions have been paid in compensation for lost wages during the second quarter of 1945.

Through its minister in Berne, the United States Government expressed to the Federal Political Department its thanks and its recognition for Switzerland's quick and efficient action with regard to the Japanese surrender. A similar message has been sent to the Swiss Legation in Washington.

On Thursday afternoon a truck train with 60 Swiss refugees from Hanover in Germany arrived at Kreuzlingen from Constance. The transport had been organized by the Swiss Consulate in Hanover several weeks ago.

The cantonal police of Vaud published a communique on a regrettable incident which was caused by Russian civil internees at Villars sur Ollon. In the evening of August 21st, three Russian civil internees who behaved scandalously in a public restaurant were arrested by the local police. Two hours later 20 other Russian civil internees forced their way into the police station and demanded the release of their comrades. After that they went over to the pub in question and threatened the innkeeper with bottles and stones. The man was badly beaten up but finally in self defence fired several shots against his aggressors. One Russian was killed and three were wounded. The cantonal policeman who tried to break up the fight received a blow with a bottle. The district attorney of Aigle also arrested the innkeeper. Immediately after the publication of this incident, the head of the Swiss delegation to the Swiss Russian negotiations and the entire Russian delegation inspected the Russian internee camp of Chesleres. The inhabitants of this camp should have been repatriated this morning and measures have already been taken to carry out their repatriation as soon as possible regardless of the incident which was the unfortunate consequence of too much alcohol.

The Swiss Prasens Film Company has found buyers for their films "Marie Louise" and "Last Chance" in England. The first mentioned of these films "Marie Louise" has for a hero a little French war victim who came to Switzerland as a refugee while the second deals with the adventure of a group of refugees and prisoners of war who escaped from Italy and who finally found refuge in our country. These two films will be shown in London for the first time at the end of August and on the first of September.

The Federal Chambers opened their ordinary autumn session on Monday, September 17, and continued their work on Tuesday. During these two days, the National Council has listened to more than five speakers on the postulate regarding the maintenance and development of the labor peace, i.e. the collaboration between employers and their workers, in other words between capital and labor. The speakers came from different political parties. A Trade Union Socialist, as well as a Catholic Conservative could be heard. All agreed on one point at least, that the future social legislation of the Confederation should try to bring about reconciliation and co-operation between the two elements of production. The proof of the value of this system has already been given by the experiments made in the metallurgic branches since 1937.

The Federal Council, in its meeting of September 14, took notice of the protocol which concluded the negotiations with the Russian mission to Switzerland. On September 11, a joint final report was signed. This means that the investigations carried out regarding the treatment of Soviet internees in Switzerland have brought objective results inasmuch as the Swiss delegates could sign the final statements. This was the aim of the Federal Council. The protocol will be published later when the Russian delegation has returned to Moscow.

The Federal government has granted the Swiss Hotel Trustees Society a credit of 2 million francs for the renovation of Swiss mineral spas.

Concerning the exportation of cattle raised in Switzerland, the Federal Council gave this answer in response to a question asked by National Councillor Barben of Spiez: 'Important deliveries of Swiss cattle were among the items provided for in the recent trade agreements concluded between Switzerland and France, Italy and Czechoslovakia. However, because of the lack of transportation, the purchases cannot be made right away.'

The Swiss harvest this year will be far below the average of the past few years. This is due to the freeze that hit Switzerland on the night of April 30 to May 1st. The secretariat of Swiss farmers has estimated the damage done as to the quantity and value of the fruits. For wine, the loss is estimated at 150,000 hectoliters for all Switzerland. This means a corresponding loss of about 18 million francs. Only the Cantons of St. Gall, Graubunden and Thurgau and the lake region of Zurich escaped the freeze. On account of hail storms, it is estimated that around 2 million hundred weights of apples have been lost and 120,000 hundred weights of prunes and cherries. This represents a loss of over 50 million francs. The freeze damaged the potato and beet crop as well as vegetables and cereals. The loss of these crops amounts to a total of 90 million francs to which must be added 10 million francs lost because of the summer drought.

Fortunately, this poor harvest comes at a time when our reprovisioning is slowly improving, though yet still insufficient. If it had come a year or two ago, the consequences would have been grave indeed.

Until the middle of September some 50,000 members of the American armies have passed their one week furlough in Switzerland. 20,000 of them entered our country at Chiasso on the Southern border and 30,000 at Basle coming from Germany and France.

The pocket money for American forces on furlough in Switzerland has been raised from 150 to 175 francs per week. This measure has been agreed upon by the Swiss authorities and the representatives of the American headquarters in the Mediterranean. The increase was considered necessary as the American Army tourists have so far had not sufficient money for their personal expenses such as the pressing of clothes, telephone calls, souvenirs, etc. and as imports into Switzerland will probably increase before long. The effects of the raise will be continuously controlled by both authorities. In case it should lead to disadvantageous results, the measure will again be abolished. On the other hand, if our import situation will improve and satisfactory results will be achieved, a further increase may be possible.

King Leopold of the Belgians will take up residence at the property called the "Le Reposoir" at Pregny near Geneva. He will stay for a few months there. The royal family and the King's suite will number about 20 persons in all.

In the National Council, Federal Councillor Stampfli, head of the Federal Department of Public Economy announced that the War Office for Power and Heat succeeded in buying 100,000 tons of liquid fuel. It may be counted upon that this fuel will arrive in Switzerland by April or May next year, and will bring about a considerable improvement in our fuel supply. However, Federal Councillor Stampfli warns not to give way to premature hope for a speedy resumption of unrestricted automobile traffic.

In the National Council, Federal Councillor Nobs, head of the Federal Department of Finance, made a statement on the economic situation of the federal personnel. The Federal Council is aware of the unsatisfactory situation, particularly of the lower wage categories, and has, therefore, granted them a 100% increased cost of living bonus for 1946. Despite the larger demand for labor during the war, these increased cost of living bonuses have only reluctantly followed the general increase of the living cost. Federal Councillor Nobs continued that for their spontaneous efforts, the federal personnel deserves the gratitude of the whole Swiss people. However, it should not be forgotten that the financial situation of the Confederation is at present much less favorable than many members of parliament believe. Nevertheless, this year, the federal government will pay 16 million francs of autumn bonuses and is planning further bonuses of a total of 21 million francs for 1946. A complete wage adaptation to the former standard, however, would be about 90 million francs.