

Home news

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HOME NEWS

A new règlement consulaire, to be applied as from the 1st of January next, has been approved by the Federal Council. Generally speaking, the many prescriptions have been simplified and more clearly defined than in the old one dating from 1919, the experience gained in these five years having contributed to this end. Fees have been reduced—the immatriculation card will in future cost Frs. 3.— only—and passports can be renewed for a period of five years.

According to the index figures, calculated by the Swiss Co-operative Societies (Konsumvereine), the cost of living has, since the 1st of August this year, slightly increased, chiefly due to higher prices for sugar and meat. Another rise in the price of milk, butter and cheese has set in with the beginning of this month.

Tumultuous scenes characterized the meeting, last Monday, of the Zurich cantonal council, when the Socialist and Communist parties insisted that the Federal Council should be called upon to cancel the recent dispositions curtailing unemployment assistance.

Vevey is to be one of the first districts in which a Sunday postal delivery will be re-introduced; acceding to the demands of local bodies, the postal authorities will revert to the old conditions as from next Sunday.

Torrential rain, accompanied by violent thunderstorms, visited last week the cantons of Schwyz and Lucerne, as well as the lower portion of the Ticino.

Swiss artists, residing abroad, are invited to submit to the jury sketches or photographs of subjects, suitable for being reproduced for the special post-cards to be issued on the occasion of the 1st of August celebration in 1924; these cards are to represent or symbolise the relations and ties which unite the Swiss living abroad to our compatriots at home. Designs will have to be addressed, not later than December 1st, to Mr. Victor Schuster, 18, Bahnhofstrasse, Zurich. Prizes up to Frs. 300.— each are offered in addition to a similar amount to those whose ideas are ultimately reproduced.

The French Government has now replied to the Swiss note with reference to the Free Zones controversy. M. Poincaré entirely ignores the proposal of the Federal Council to have recourse to the services of an impartial tribunal, but reiterates his willingness to continue the negotiations; in the meantime the decree abolishing the zones on Nov. 10th is to remain in force. The Journal de Genève (Oct. 27th), under the heading "Un jeu de cache-cache," deals with the French note as follows:—

"Constatons tout d'abord une fois de plus que le ton de cette conversation est, de part et d'autre, très amical. C'est fort bien. Malgré la divergence fondamentale des manières de voir, il n'est pas nécessaire de recourir aux paroles blessantes ni aux accusations injustifiées. Nous souhaitons que cet échange d'explications conserve jusqu'au bout ce caractère.

"Mais nous souhaitons aussi — et nous sommes certains qu'il en sera ainsi — que le Conseil fédéral ne se laisse pas abuser par la forme courtoise de la note française. L'opinion suisse, elle, ne s'y est pas trompée. En réalité, c'est une fin de non-recevoir que M. Poincaré nous oppose. Sur ce point, comme sur d'autres points encore plus graves des négociations internationales, c'est le côté purement négatif de sa politique qui apparaît trop clairement.

"On a été très frappé et pas mal surpris en Suisse du fait que la note française ne mentionne même pas la proposition ferme d'arbitrage que le gouvernement suisse a formulée de la façon la plus nette. Qu'est-ce donc que cette réponse qui reste muette sur la demande principale du partenaire. Faut-il croire que cette proposition embarrasse tellement le quai d'Orsay qu'il ne veut dire ni oui ni non ?

"Un avocat, un parlementaire peut passer à côté d'un argument qui le gêne. Un homme d'Etat ne

le peut pas. La demande d'arbitrage est présentée par le Conseil fédéral suisse, appuyée par l'opinion publique unanime. La France lui doit une réponse. Elle ne peut pas se soustraire à l'obligation de dire oui ou non.

"Quant à la thèse française que les conversations continuent, elle est en contradiction avec la décision du gouvernement fédéral de ne pas négocier sous la pression du fait accompli. Nous nous trouvons actuellement en présence du décret et de la notification du 10 octobre annonçant le transfert du cordon douanier à la frontière pour le 10 novembre. La Suisse ne négociera pas, elle ne peut et ne doit pas négocier avant que ce décret ait été rapporté ou expressément suspendu. Il est insoutenable d'affirmer que ce décret ne préjuge pas du résultat de la négociation.

"Du reste, nous l'avons déjà dit, des pourparlers nouveaux n'auraient pas d'effet utile avant que l'on ait précisé le sens de l'art. 435. Il existe une opposition absolue d'interprétation entre la France et la Suisse sur la portée de cet article. Depuis le mois de mai 1919, on tourne autour de cette divergence sans obtenir aucun résultat positif. Il ne reste qu'une chose à faire avant de conclure une nouvelle convention de détail, c'est de faire trancher par une instance impartiale le sens exact de cet article, qui doit servir de base à tout nouvel accord. Nous regrettons seulement que le Conseil fédéral n'ait pas fait cette proposition dès le lendemain du vote populaire du 18 février. Cela aurait encore beaucoup mieux valu.

"Une demande d'interprétation authentique par une instance impartiale. Voilà la signification exacte de la proposition de la Suisse. Le Conseil fédéral ne peut pas faire autre chose que de la maintenir intégralement. Nous espérons fermement et nous sommes convaincus qu'il en agira ainsi dans sa réplique. Quant au gouvernement français, s'il désire vraiment un accord comme nous le croyons, il ferait bien mieux de prendre le chemin de l'arbitrage, qui mène droit au but par les moyens les plus simples et les plus amicaux, plutôt que de continuer à jouer à cache-cache avec l'article 435 et avec la proposition du Conseil fédéral."

Since the despatch of this note the French Customs officials at Annecy, Hauteville and Pringy have received instructions to quit their present offices between the 5th and 9th of November, and take up their new posts along the political frontier. Last Tuesday our Minister in Paris, M. Ducloux, handed to the Quai d'Orsay the official Swiss reply, the contents of which have not yet been published.

NOTES AND GLEANINGS.

By "KYBURG."

Franco-Swiss Frontier Dispute.


Having touched upon this matter in my last week's notes, I think it will be interesting for my readers to hear something more, and among all the various papers I have perused I find the following article in the Manchester Guardian (Oct. 18th) very much the best:—

The Swiss Federal Council published on Oct. 17th the full text of its Note, handed that morning by the Swiss Minister in Paris to the French Government, in answer to M. Poincaré's Note of Oct. 10th, announcing that on Nov. 10th French Customs officers will be posted at the political frontier between France and Switzerland, thereby abolishing the free zones of Upper Savoy. Although it was already known that the Swiss Government would protest against France's one-sided change of the situation instituted by the Vienna Treaty of 1815, and would propose submission of the dispute to the International Court of Justice, nevertheless the Swiss Note causes surprise by its extraordinarily firm tone, not usual in documents issued by the Governments of small States to Great Powers.

The Federal Council, by using this firm, though never discourteous, language to France, without doubt conforms to the almost unanimous feelings of the whole Swiss population, without distinction of language or politics. The Swiss Note first refutes in great detail the French accusation of slowness in the efforts to attain agreement after the rejection of the Convention of August, 1921, by Swiss referendum. The Swiss Note affirms that the Swiss Foreign Minister informed the French Government in September that a new Draft Convention would be submitted to France in the course of the month of October. Therefore, the Swiss Government is much surprised that "the French Government brusquely interrupted negotiations and without sufficient reason."

The Swiss Note then repeats the reasons why the Government is convinced that France has no right to post her Customs officers along the political frontier without Swiss consent. The Swiss Government is obliged to protest against the French decision of Oct. 10th, and to declare that "the decision, if executed, would violate the treaty rights of Switzerland and the principles which international law upholds as the basis for international relations."

The Swiss Government maintains the point of view that, owing to totally different Swiss and French interpretations of the real meaning of article 435 of the Treaty of Versailles, it is essential to ask impartial



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judges to decide whether article 435 has indeed annulled the Swiss treaty right of free zones, as France maintains. The Swiss Government proposes to submit this juridical question of the interpretation of the Versailles Treaty to the League International Court, but declares its willingness to accept other arbiters, if France prefers.

The Swiss Government calls M. Poincaré's attention to the fact that "France and Switzerland are both members, on an equal footing, of the League of Nations, one of the highest aims of which institution is to find friendly solutions of disputes between States."

In this connection it is not without interest to recall to mind that the second paragraph of article 13 of the Covenant expressly states that "disputes as to the interpretation of the treaty . . . are declared to be among those which are generally suitable for submission for arbitration," and that the first paragraph of the same article stipulates that the members of the League agree that, whenever any disputes shall arise between them which they recognise to be suitable for submission to arbitration and which cannot be satisfactorily settled by diplomacy, they will submit the whole subject matter to arbitration." Finally, perhaps the most striking point in the Swiss Note is the twice repeated declaration that the Swiss Government cannot enter into new direct negotiation about the zone Convention until France has declared that during the whole course of negotiations French Customs officers will remain where they are now. The Swiss Government refuses to undertake negotiations under pressure of an accomplished fact.

Personally I like the last sentence, as it seems to confirm my opinion that Switzerland is not going to be bullied, even if the other chap is more powerful! It is perhaps that, as a Swiss friend said to me the other day, France thinks we Swiss are much too lethargic to fight against a *jait accompli*, but I hardly think so. At all events, in case this should be so, the Weather Clerk for once seems to have taken an intelligent interest in our country's affair, for, according to the now defunct Pall Mall Gazette and Globe (Oct. 26th):—

Unusual heat prevails in Switzerland. At Geneva the thermometer registered 73.4 deg. at Zurich 66.2, at Basle 69.8, in the Alpine valleys 68, and on Pilatus and the Rigi from 48 to 55.4.

Such temperatures have not been registered in October since 1890.

And, as we all know, high temperatures are not conducive to taking things calmly. So M. Poincaré had better beware! By the way, according to the Manchester Guardian of Oct. 25th, the French Government has discovered something new again, as you will judge by the following:—

In rejecting the Swiss demand for reference of the "free zones" dispute to the League of Nations for arbitration, France is about to put forward a new doctrine, especially interesting to the United States, but no less important to other States that are members of the League. It will be remembered that a draft agreement between the French and Swiss Governments was, in accordance with the Swiss Constitution, submitted some months ago to national plebiscite and rejected by the Swiss people. The parallel with the American Senate's refusal to ratify the Versailles Treaty is complete.

M. Poincaré now argues that nations with such constitutional checks upon their diplomacy put other nations in a state of inferiority and cannot, therefore, be allowed to appeal to the League. A semi-official announcement in the press makes it clear. To quote from the "Temps" version, which is the longest and most explicit:

In fact, could not the Swiss people decide by a referendum to cease to belong to the League or to refuse to conform to its decision? Did it not, indeed, decide in February last that the Franco-Swiss Convention of August 7, 1921, ratified by the Federal Liaison