

# Home news

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# The Swiss Observer

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## HOME NEWS

Last Friday it was exactly 25 years since the Swiss Diet met for the first time in the present Palais Federal. A solemn procession accompanied by the sound of church bells and the firing of cannon preceded the opening of that memorable sitting. Six Federal Councillors have during this period occupied their seats without interruption; they are: Messrs. Jenny (Berne) since 1890, Gaudard (Vaud) 1894, Freiburghaus (Berne) 1896, de Meuron (Vaud) 1899, Eigenmann (Thurgau) and Choquard (Berne) 1900. This honour is shared in the Federal States Council by the following six members: Messrs. Isler (Aargau), Winiger (Lucerne), Geel (St. Gall), Ammann (Schaffhausen), Simon (Vaud), and Hildebrand (Zug).

The neutrality of Upper Savoy has now been definitely abrogated, the necessary resolution having been passed by the National Council on the recommendation of the Federal Council. The matter was already under discussion in November, 1919, but not being then of great urgency no decision was taken.

(The neutrality of Northern Savoy was created and recognised by the Congress of Vienna in 1814; it meant that in the event of war no other troops than those of Switzerland had the right to enter that region. As a compensation, Sardinia handed over to Geneva a number of Savoyard villages, together with Carouge, in order to round off the canton of Geneva, the territory of which had hitherto been comprised in several "enclaves" of Savoy. In 1860, when Savoy was ceded by Sardinia to France—an event that rendered the neutrality of northern Savoy illusory, and seriously imperilled the situation of Geneva—Switzerland was less fortunate in securing a rectification of the frontier on this side. Napoleon III had given the Swiss envoy a verbal assurance of his willingness to cede the neutralised region; but when the voting as to the annexation had been completed, he declared this to be impossible. A party in Switzerland, led by Federal Councillor Stämpfli, wished to make this a "casus belli," but the great majority of the Federal authorities would not hear of so grave a venture; and an appeal to the signatory powers of the Vienna Congress remained fruitless.—W. Oechsl.)

With a very small majority—10,976 against 10,818—the electors of the canton Solothurn refused to sanction a Bill which sought to revise the existing system of game-shooting by establishing the principle of leasing shoots over certain areas and abolishing the indiscriminate killing of the rapidly-decreasing wild animal stock, which is enhanced by the issue of personal unrestricted licences. A similar measure had been submitted to the people over 20 years ago, when it was rejected by a two to one majority, so that public opinion seems gradually to assimilate the more humane system of the "Revierjagd."

In connection with the withdrawal from circulation of foreign gold pieces, of which over 87 million have already been handed in to the Swiss National Bank, a Bernese farmer tendered 25,000 francs; on being questioned he stated that his wife had hidden this gold away in stockings during the war as a last reserve.

For the forthcoming ninth international congress on insurance matters which will be held in London from the 27th to the 30th of June next, the Federal Council has nominated as Swiss delegates M. Dumas, director of the Federal Insurance Office, and Dr. Werner Friedli, technical expert for social insurance.

A strange judgment has been returned by the Military Court of the Fifth Division in Lugano. A young Ticinese, illegitimately born, was registered in his native commune in the name of his mother, who subsequently married and moved into another district. The local clerk of the latter place entered the three under the name of the husband. In due course the young man underwent his military training but contracted an illness and was declared unfit for further service. Evidently bent on a military career the supposed "Staatskrüppel" obtained from his native commune new papers in his original name, presented himself again as a recruit and after the usual examination was passed for service. Later on he joined the Officers' Training Corps and was promoted to lieutenant. The Court has now sentenced him to five months' imprisonment and dismissal from the

army for "fraud and violation of his military duties."

In the National Council a Socialist member lodged a protest against our compatriots in Shanghai joining the volunteer corps formed amongst the Europeans for the protection of the settlement and thus actually resisting the armed forces of a country with which Switzerland entertained friendly relations. (Our compatriots in that place are being enrolled for service through the offices of the local "Swiss Rifle Club.")

The Socialist Party in the canton Neuchâtel are launching an initial demand to introduce Proportional Representation for members of the Conseil d'Etat.

Mr. Karl Diethelm has been appointed by the Federal Council Honorary Swiss Consul-General at Johannesburg in succession to Dr. Petavel, who retired from this position some time ago. Mr. Diethelm, who is the head of a Johannesburg business house bearing his name, was born in 1882 at Winterthur, though a citizen of the canton Thurgau.

According to statistics just published 2,889 persons have been naturalised in Switzerland during 1926, against 3,287 in 1925. The list is headed by Basel-Stadt with 187 (86), Zurich 168 (134), and Geneva 46 (97); in the Ticino the number has fallen from 62 to 27.

The castle ruin "Zwing-Uri," in Silenen-Amsteg, which is owned by the German "Künstlerverein" is to be acquired by the canton Uri.

A new steamer, "Le Rhône," capable of carrying 1,200 passengers, has been launched on Lake Lemano.

Through the breaking of a cable on the Seilbahn, which was in use in connection with the erection of the electrical installation near Avencion, between Bex and Gryon (Vaud), two workmen lost their lives, the trolley in which they were travelling running loose and dashing against the wall of the tunnel; two others were able to jump off before the impact, but suffered serious injuries.

M. Frederic Broillet, a well-known architect, who constructed a number of public buildings and churches in the canton Fribourg, has died in Lugano whilst on a short stay.

Owing to the driver's ignorance of a dangerous bend in the road a three-seater car carrying five passengers overturned near Weiningen (Zurich); two of the occupants escaped with slight injuries whilst a third, Florian Blanchet, aged 53, from Vevey, died on the way to the hospital.

## NOTES AND GLEANINGS.

### Basle—Sea Port.

Though the uninterrupted navigation on the Rhine from Basle downwards is still subject to the vagaries of the season, the possible regularisation of the river between that town and Strasbourg, and the proposed construction of the Grand Canal of Alsace open great prospects of a considerable marine trade. The following short notice is taken from *Syren and Shipping* (March 23rd):—

When the annual Swiss Industries Fair opens at Basle on April 2nd the Transport Section will have a new interest and significance, for at that town, 800 miles from the sea, Switzerland is forming the nucleus of a mercantile marine. With the completion during the past twelve months of a main section of the important new harbour works on the Rhine, Basle has become the terminus of Rhine navigation, and is now in direct communication with the North Sea. To extend what is expected to be the active overseas trade of the future, several Swiss navigation companies are now established there, and numerous firms who re-ship merchandise by way of the canal and river systems to Central Europe and the Near East have opened offices in the city. The most noticeable feature of Rhine shipping during the past 15 or 20 years has been the steady penetration of traffic farther and farther up stream. Not long ago the German town of Mannheim was the terminus of the river's trade shipping; to-day it is Basle, 150 miles nearer the source. The present annual turnover of goods at the Swiss port amounts to about 320,000 tons, but when the harbour works are fully completed it is anticipated that more than a million tons will be handled every year. Over a million

## ANNIVERSARIES OF SWISS EVENTS.

April 10th, 1503.—Peace of Arona between Switzerland and the French, when Louis XII handed over the town and county of Bellinzona together with Val Blenio to Uri, Schwyz and Nidwalden, and also confirmed the Confederates in their ancient exemption from Customs duties in Lombardy.

April 12th, 1798.—121 deputies from ten cantons assembled at Aarau for a constituent session under the chairmanship of Bodmer of Stäfa; the assembly then divided itself into the two chambers described by the new constitution, and formally proclaimed the new Republic, and elected the Directory.

April 15th, 1798.—Notwithstanding guarantees for the security of property and declarations as regards the political independence and integrity of Swiss territory, the Swiss towns of Bienne, Mühlhausen and Geneva were annexed by France. On this day, 1,600 French soldiers, cavalrymen with drawn sabres, infantry and artillery pressed through the gates of Geneva. A meeting of all the public officials, surrounded by French bayonets and cannon, was forced to agree to the annexation to France.

April 16th, 1857.—Opening of the railway-line Winterthur-Schaffhausen.

pounds sterling are invested in the construction of the three harbours at Basle, and a big increase in the foreign trade of Switzerland is confidently expected.

As to the canal scheme which is prompted by French economic and political considerations the Manchester Guardian has the following interesting exposé:—

A few days ago the Chamber adopted, almost without discussion, at a morning sitting attended by only a handful of deputies, a Bill of great economic and political importance, the consequences of which may seriously affect Franco-German relations. The Bill in question concedes to a Company called Des Forces Mortrices de Haut Rhin the right to begin the construction of the Grand Canal of Alsace, which, when completed, will leave the Rhine just below Basle and rejoin it just above Strasbourg. The Bill authorises the construction of the first section of the canal and a waterfall at Kembs for the production of electric power, and declares the enterprise to be "of public utility." The State will contribute the cost of making the dams, which will be 100,000,000 f. (about £16,000,000).

This scheme is an adaptation of a German scheme for using the water of the Rhine for producing power that was originated in 1902 by the engineers Köchlin and Potterat, in conjunction with the firm of Havenstadt and Contag, of Berlin, but was never carried out. The necessities of navigation have, however, obliged considerable modifications in the original scheme, such as larger locks, which are detrimental to the production of electric power, and will make its price higher than was anticipated. France is given the right to make a canal by Article 358 of the Treaty of Versailles, and its construction was sanctioned in April, 1925, by the Central Committee of the Rhine. The Committee has, however, also authorised Germany and Switzerland to regularise the Rhine between Basle and Strasbourg for the purposes of navigation.

These two decisions of the Committee are contradictory, and cannot both be realised, for it is estimated that the water withdrawn from the Rhine for the canal, which was fixed by the Committee of the Rhine at 815 cubic metres a second, will reduce the water in the bed of the river to 50 cubic metres during 130 days in the year, and to barely 215 cubic metres during the remainder of the year. Navigation between Basle and Strasbourg will, therefore, be diverted to the canal when the latter is completed.

Grave political considerations are thus involved. On the one hand there is a conflict of interests between France and Germany. It is true that Articles 358 and 359 of the Treaty of Versailles oblige France to compensate Germany by surrendering to her either half the power produced or half the profits realised, but conflict is caused by the contradictory character of the two schemes authorised by the Central Committee, it being the interest of Germany to