

# Reorganisation and financial reconstruction of the Swiss railways

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Objektyp: **Article**

Zeitschrift: **The Swiss observer : the journal of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK**

Band (Jahr): - **(1934)**

Heft 688

PDF erstellt am: **12.07.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-695213>

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## LE VOTE DU BUDGET A GENEVE.

En trois séances, le Grand Conseil a discuté et voté le budget de 1935, ainsi que divers projets élaborés par le Conseil d'Etat pour rétablir la situation financière du canton de Genève. Le terrain avait été au préalable déblayé par la commission du budget dont les propositions, ayant pour la plupart été adoptées à l'unanimité par les commissaires, ont été ratifiées sans modification notable par le Grand Conseil. C'est dire que la discussion a été menée tambour battant et qu'elle n'a point été spécialement vive. Le temps pressait, en effet, car la trésorerie de l'Etat est à sec, ou à peu près, et pour retourner à Berne avec quelque chance de succès, il importait de pouvoir présenter au Conseil fédéral, et par son truchement, au consortium des banques, un budget équilibré de manière rationnelle.

C'est maintenant chose faite, et l'on peut espérer que les banques, tenant compte du sérieux effort de redressement financier fourni par le Grand Conseil, consentiront à avancer au canton de Genève — nous disons à dessein "au canton" — et non à la majorité du Conseil d'Etat — les fonds nécessaires pour payer au moins les fonctionnaires, lesquels sont les victimes innocentes de la carence du gouvernement.

Après, on verra venir. Car le vote du budget par le Grand Conseil, acte nécessaire que les députés de la majorité bourgeoise ne pouvaient se dispenser d'accomplir sans encourir une lourde responsabilité, a pu, momentanément, éclaircir l'atmosphère politique, mais il ne l'a point, pour autant, débarrassée des miasmes qui l'empoisonnent depuis trop longtemps. Nous entendons dire par là qu'il reste, après comme avant le vote du budget, à résoudre une question qui domine, et de haut, toutes les autres : celle de la confiance dans le gouvernement.

Or, cette confiance, condition *sine qua non* d'un redressement durable de la situation économique et politique de Genève, celle-ci commandant d'ailleurs celle-là, n'a pas été rétablie par les votes qui sont intervenus au Grand Conseil. Il n'est que de lire le compte rendu des séances pour s'en convaincre; et d'ailleurs le débat qui s'est engagé cet après-midi même à l'Hôtel de ville et qui se terminera sans doute par l'adoption de l'arrêté législatif déposé par M. Adrien Lachenal et invitant M. Nicole et son équipe à donner leur démission, en apportera la preuve irréfutable.

Dès lors, et, comme on dit au Palais, attendu que le vote par la majorité du Grand Conseil de l'arrêté en question ne sera pas pris en considération par les intéressés qui s'en soucient comme un poisson d'une pomme, il apparaît évident que le char de l'Etat continuera à rouler cahin-caha au risque de s'embarquer de nouveau, et de façon définitive.

En d'autres termes, le Conseil d'Etat risque fort d'être contraint, l'an prochain, de pratiquer une politique "à la petite semaine," si j'ose m'exprimer ainsi, jusqu'au jour, inscrit au Grand livre de l'Histoire, où il sera dans l'obligation de s'incliner devant la volonté de la majorité populaire. Peut-être se rendra-t-il compte ce jour-là, mais trop tard, que la suprême habileté eût consisté, pour lui, à se démettre au lendemain du scrutin du 18 novembre.

Mais ça, c'est une autre histoire!

Edgar Junod.

## REORGANISATION AND FINANCIAL RECONSTRUCTION OF THE SWISS RAILWAYS.

In a message of the Federal Council submitting to the Federal Assembly a draft Bill of the project for the reorganisation and financial reconstruction of the Federal Railways, are to be found the following references to the actual railway debt and the reduction in administrative expenditure. While advocating the introduction of certain temporary measures for the carrying out of the proposed reforms, the message stresses the urgency of a thorough reorganisation, the necessity for which becomes more apparent each day as the working deficit of the Federal Railways continues to rise. The railway debt grows heavier every year by some 85 million frs. and will exceed 3 milliard one hundred million francs by the end of 1934. Receipts are now falling steadily, whilst working expenditure — in spite of the cuts in salaries resultant from the measures taken in October, 1933 — shows no corresponding decline.

The message further states that the main causes of this unfavourable financial situation of the Federal Railways are to be found in such external factors as economic world depression, trade restrictions and foreign exchange difficulties, with the attendant diminution in general traffic, to which must be added difficulties of an internal character, such as the heavy indebtedness of the railways and the radical changes that

## OLD FOLKS CHRISTMAS LUNCHEON

at the

## FOYER SUISSE.

15 Upper Bedford Place, Russell Square, W.C.1.

Christmas time has often been described as being a festive season, specially dedicated to the children; and perhaps it is so. Does not this time though awaken in us older ones a host of happy remembrances? of times when we were gathered round the Xmas tree, with all our dear ones; many an eye which shone so gaily on that day has been closed, and many a hand which grasped us so warmly has grown cold, but the memory remains. —

But that Xmas time is not solely a privileged time for the younger generation, was proved at a function held on the 17th inst., at the Foyer Suisse at Upper Bedford Place, W.C.1, when the Committee of Management of this institution invited about 50 of our old compatriots to a Luncheon. This laudable custom has, I am told been kept up for several years; to this party every member of the Colony is invited, provided he has attained the 65th birthday, rich or poor are equally welcome.

The idea of gathering our old ones together, at least once a year, is a splendid one. How often, I have heard complaints from the older members of the Colony, particularly from those who have the misfortune to be laid up, and are therefore not able to attend the various functions which take place in the Colony, that nobody seems to care anymore about them, they feel lonely and forgotten, and many a tired heart has longed for the end to come.

Unfortunately there is some truth in their complaints, and the proverb "Out of sight, out of mind" applies to a number of those, who have in their younger days, rendered services to our community.

It is an unpleasant sign of the times, that sports, cinemas and a multitude of other events, occupy the minds of the present day generation, and in the hurly-burly our old ones are forgotten.

For this reason the Committee of Management of the Foyer Suisse deserves the thanks of all those, who, in spite of many other engagements, still remember our "Old Folks," who have upheld the old Swiss traditions years before they made their appearance.

Previous to the Luncheon a small reception was held in one of the Drawing rooms of the Foyer; it was indeed a happy and very homely gathering. Many an experience was related, and many a face brightened on seeing an old friend; rheumatism and other ailments which are the unpleasant companions of old age were forgotten for a time, they exchanged treasured memories of olden times, when they were still in their country, the land which so many have not seen for years and years, but in their hearts there lingers still that love, which no one ever will rob them of. —

The Luncheon started about 2 o'clock, the Dining Hall was prettily decorated, and the fare was excellent; indeed a great share of the success of this function can be claimed by the Management of the Foyer Suisse, I desist from mentioning names, because I feel that everyone connected with this Luncheon have done their very best to make our aged ones comfortable and happy.

M. Paravicini, the Swiss Minister, who graciously accepted an invitation to preside on this occasion was warmly greeted on his arrival.

have taken place in recent years within the transport industry as a direct consequence of the steady development of road traffic.

There can, of course, be no question of any increase in railway rates, which are already far too high and exercise an adverse influence on the economic life of the country, and it is suggested that efforts be made to reduce them. Moreover, it is urged that the railways should do all in their power to adapt themselves to present economic conditions and strive to cut down expenditure as far as possible. Energetic steps have, it is true, already been taken by the Board of Administration in this direction, but, although the results achieved up to the present are satisfactory, this does not suffice. From 1931 to 1933 it has proved possible to reduce working expenditure from 283,300,000 to 259,900,000 frs. Expenditure for construction and renewal work has been brought down from 94,608,000 frs. in 1931 to 41,875,000 frs. in 1933. It is estimated that 1934 figure will not exceed 40,500,000 frs., whilst that for 1935 is budgeted at 35,600,000 frs.

This gathering has, of course, none of the *allures* of a Banquet, and therefore no official toasts were given.

Pasteur Hoffmann-de Visme, on behalf of the Committee of Management of the Foyer Suisse, extended to all the guests a hearty welcome. He said how happy they were to see so many of their old friends turning up and he wished everyone a few enjoyable hours.

Monsieur Paravicini then addressed the gathering shortly, expressing his delight at being able to be present, he said: "It is a pleasure to be with you to-day, which I would not miss for anything in the world." He informed the company that the silver medal presented on this occasion by the House Committee, to the oldest member present, would go to Mr. Conrad Bührer, who was born in 1852 at Schaffhausen. (I might mention that two guests were present, who were older than the recipient of the medal, namely, Mlle. Bourquin, who will be 91 years next January, and M. Chiodo who was born in 1850, but these two have already received the medal on a previous occasion.) The medal depicts on one side an eagle perched on a rock, and bears the following biblical quotation: "They shall mount up on wings like eagles," and on the other side the name and birth date of the recipient.

"M. C. Bührer," the Minister said, "is a distinguished sculptor, who studied in Switzerland, France and Italy, apart from his many works of Art, he has another distinction, namely the one of being the brother-in-law of that famous artist Sir A. Gilbey, the creator of the much discussed Eros Statue in Piccadilly Circus." M. Paravicini concluded his address in asking for three cheers in honour of M. C. Bührer, which received a hearty response by everyone. M. Bührer then thanked the Committee for the great honour which was bestowed on him, saying: "I shall wear this much treasured medal in my waistcoat pocket as long as I live."

M. A. Dupraz, President of the "Fonds de Secours" and M. Ritter, the secretary of this institution expressed the thanks of the guests for this "beau geste" of the Foyer Suisse, and a short speech by the representative of the Press concluded the speech making.

On looking around at the tables, I thought to myself that here was a gathering of some 50 venerable Ladies and Gentlemen, most of them at the eventide of their life, who have all, no doubt, experienced life in its fullness and gladness, as well as in its harshness and disappointments. Many of them could relate tales of bitter experiences, of incessant hard and untiring work, of hardship, but also of success and happiness; some have made careers, some have climbed to the top of the ladder, some have not reached those exalted heights, but have rested half way, but all of them, I am sure, have struggled to overcome the many adversities of which life is so full, and to all of them I hope a kind providence will sweeten their remaining days amongst us. —

There remains nothing else for me, in concluding my report, than to thank once again the Committee of Management of the Foyer Suisse, for their splendid initiative to arrange such a gathering to honour those of our compatriots who have grown old, but who have remained young in their attachment to our country.

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The message points out that before proceeding to draw up a scheme for the reorganisation of the railways it was necessary to put a stop to the chaotic conditions prevailing in the entire transport industry, due principally to unrestrained competition on the part of motor carriers, which were slowly but surely leading both rail and road interests to ruin. The Bill recently passed by the Federal Assembly regarding the co-ordination of rail and road traffic should, it is hoped, prove instrumental in solving these difficult problems to the satisfaction of both parties concerned.

The scheme under consideration is both important and comprehensive, involving, not a simple administrative change, but a drastic reorganisation of the very constitution of the railways, both jurisdictional and financial, especially as regards the commercial and technical adaptation of the Federal transport undertaking to the new conditions.

R.G.