

# News at random

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# The Swiss Observer

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## NEWS AT RANDOM

### Federal

Contradictory reports as to the fate of letters handed to post offices here and in Switzerland have competed with each other and have left us in the dark. On August 20th it was stated officially in Switzerland that the air mail carried by Swissair on the Zurich-Stuttgart route was suspended. Letters and parcels already lying in Swiss post offices were being despatched by rail via St. Margarethen-Lindau-Munich whence after inspection by the censor the oversea part was expected to be flown to Lisbon. Later on the Swiss P.O. declined to accept any airmail for abroad and on the 31st similar action was taken by the Postmaster-General in this country. However, as for the first time since May, 1940, we have a common frontier with the Allies, it can be a matter of days only before a regular postal service, restricted, perhaps, will be resumed between our two countries.

The existing exchange agreement between Turkey and Switzerland has been extended to December 1st.

In the Foreign Affairs Committee of the National Council which met on September 13th, Federal Councillor Pilez-Golaz expounded the delicate position of the last phase of the war imposed on Switzerland. He was of opinion that post-war desiderata would necessitate the establishment of new diplomatic and commercial representations abroad apart from strengthening the existing ones. Considerable financial sacrifices for this expansion could not be avoided.

According to the Swiss Radio the Federal Council has bestowed upon their colleague, the President of the Confederation, the title of Dr.h.c.(!).

### Cantonal

A violent hail storm visited the region of Lucerne on August 24th when the tramway service had to be temporarily suspended and the cellars in the town were flooded.

A reported raid by local footpads on the office of the Andermatt branch of the Urner Kantonalbank and the removal of Frs. 30,000 was subsequently discovered after police enquiries to be a feint staged by the cashier to cover up defalcations of a like amount.

What is described as an old-age "assistance" scheme was approved by the electors of the canton Zurich with an overwhelming majority. It is a temporary measure pending the introduction of Federal old-age insurance which may take some years to become operative.

The intended re-organisation of the Beromünster station orchestra is meeting with considerable opposition in the musical profession.

Dr. Walter Weibel, one of the foreign editors of the Neue Zürcher Zeitung, has now definitely retired after 25 years of journalism. His sympathetic personality will be well remembered by the older members of the London Colony where, soon after the last war, he displayed an active interest.

Dr. Th. Hämmerli-Schindler, a widely consulted heart specialist, died in Zürich at the age of 61 after a prolonged illness.

A private mountaineering tour on the Mürtschenstock claimed three victims through the leading climber losing his foothold and dragging the other two after him. They are all from Winterthur, their names being Lt. Richard Hess, aged 22, and the brothers Albert and Walter Ganz, aged 22 and 19 respectively.

In the elections for the Landsrat of the canton Glarus, the four old parties practically retained their relative strength, though the socialists increased their number from 10 to 13 seats.

The municipal accounts of Berne for 1943 closed with a small surplus which surpassed the budgeted amount by about five million francs. The Stadtrat decided on the motion of a socialist member to reduce the rents of "council" houses to tenants with large families.

## CITY SWISS CLUB.

Messieurs les Membres sont avisés que

### L'ASSEMBLEE MENSUELLE

aura lieu Mardi, le 24 octobre, 1944 à 6h., dîner à 6h. 30 au DORCHESTER HOTEL, PARK LANE, W.1.

Cette assemblée sera en forme d'un "BIERABIG."

Les Membres sont priés de s'inscrire par écrit au plus tard le 20 octobre auprès de M. P. A. Moehr, Hon. Secr., Imperial House, Kingsway, London, W.C.2.

Prière de s'abstenir de téléphoner.

LE COMITÉ.

The Grosse Rat in Berne has voted credits totaling eight million francs for public works in order to relieve unemployment in the near future.

On the proposal of the committee responsible for this year's Battle of St. Jakob a/B celebration the Federal Council has added the little historic church bearing this name to the list of protected national monuments.

The crossing of our northern frontier by German military and party personnel is being sharply criticised by the press of the canton Schaffhausen. It is pointed out that the examination of every individual case is becoming impracticable and that a refusal of entry to all such people seems to be the only proper solution.

Near Urnäsch (Appenzell) a ski-lift is to be constructed between Sölzer and Osteregg; it will mount 270 persons per hour and measure 850 metres. It is supposed to be ready for the coming winter.

Contrary to a previous telegraphic report the recent fire at the Grand Hotel, at St. Moritz, was limited to the five upper stories, the eight lower floors being damaged by water only. The building was insured for 7.3 million francs and the contents for about a million; about 70 per cent. of the latter were saved. No decision has been taken yet as to the rebuilding of this luxury hotel; it contained 500 beds for visitors and 300 staff beds.

Nat. Coun. Sonderegger, a well-known leader and authority in national economy circles, died at Schuls-Tarasp.

An amount of 25 million francs has been voted by the canton Aargau to subsidise work for relieving unemployment likely during the next two or three years.

The members of the Regierungsrat in the canton Thurgau have been placed in an unenviable position by a demand of a large section of the newly elected Grosse Rat that their emoluments should either be reduced or brought into harmony with those of the other high officials in the canton, such as judges and other dignitaries. The old Grosse Rat in a spell of bountiful predisposition had increased the fixed allowance of every Regierungsrat from 12 to 14,000 francs, which meant an additional fiscal burden of Frs. 10,000. The Regierungsrat gave no indication of their willingness to forego the advantage gained by that spontaneous gesture and a proportionate extension of the increase to the other cantonal worthies would have upset the equilibrium of the budget for the present year. The council had to vote and by a small majority upheld the one-sided vote of confidence and encouragement of their predecessors.

The collection organised in the canton Vaud in favour of St. Gingolph, France, has so far surpassed Frs. 90,000.

In the canton Vaud a new bill levying a personal tax on income and capital was rejected by a small majority of the electors, only 15 per cent. of them troubling to register their opinion.

The civil servants of the canton Geneva will receive with their October wage bag a cost-of-living bonus of Frs. 200 (about 40 per cent.) or less according to salary with an addition of Frs. 20 for each child.

The Genevois have recently been treated to a unique sight. In spite of official warnings they made a habit, at great personal risk, of approaching and hanging round the frontier to watch the French flag go up over village after village, each flag as it climbed some steeply being greeted with a hearty if un-neutral cheer.

#### Army

The black-out was lifted throughout our country as from Tuesday, September 12th. The former view that our lighting system might constitute a guiding beacon to one or other of the belligerents has, of course, lost its justification.

Special levies have been called up during this month to strengthen certain frontier sectors. No large influx of foreign troops is reported but groups of German soldiers and customs officials from villages along the Jura region have been crossing almost daily.

Two American bombers violating our neutrality were forced down at Dübendorf on September 5th. An unconfirmed report says that when being spotted they fired on two of our fighters, one of our pilots being killed. Early in the morning of September 8th, the railway stations of Moutier and Delémont were shelled by aircraft, probably American, when a number of local people received more or less serious injuries.

During military exercises in the lower Valais a land-mine accidentally exploded, killing three soldiers; they are L. Moret from Bourg-St. Pierre, J. M. Rossier from St. Branchet and M. Maret from Martigny-Ville.

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Following a serious accident during manœuvres at Andermatt, one lieutenant and six N.C.O.'s were killed on the spot while another officer and six privates are receiving treatment at a military hospital.

### Traffic

The fight between Zürich and Basle for possession of the great airport that is to link up with the international routes is still in the balance. Recent reports state that the Government has decided on Kloten near Zürich, while a message from the same agency affirms that Basle has been finally chosen. The cost of constructing the new aerodrome will be about 70 million francs.

The traffic results of the SFR for the first five months of this year are published in the "Railway Gazette," September 1st, and are as follows: "The Swiss Federal Railways report a net profit of fr. 80,470,00 for the first five months of this year, against fr. 81,570,000 for the corresponding period of 1943. The decrease is due to a rise in expenses from fr. 114,660,000 in the first five months of 1943 to fr. 126,590,000 in the same period of 1944. The number of passengers carried was 80,940,000, an increase of 7,560,000 over the first five months of the preceding year; goods traffic decreased slightly, from 8,860,000 tonnes to 8,240,000 tonnes in 1944.

Referring to activities in May, the report states that the Federal Railways conveyed 16,800,00 passengers in that month of 1944, compared with 15,000,000 in May, 1943. Goods traffic increased from 1,740,000 tonnes in May, 1943, to 1,840,000 tonnes in May, 1944. Revenue from passenger transport in May, 1944, was fr. 19,370,000 (fr. 16,520,000), and from goods traffic, fr. 24,470,000 (fr. 21,680,000). The total revenue for the month in question amounted to fr. 46,000,000 (fr. 38,650,000), and expenses to fr. 26,230,000 (fr. 24,210,000)."

A convoy of forty heavy lorries is stated to have left Barcelona for Geneva on the 18th inst. with goods originally bought in America and held up on account of the uncertain conditions in the Mediterranean.

Preparations are said to be well advanced for opening an air service between Geneva and Paris, and another service to Lisbon by way of Lyons and Barcelona is under consideration.

The future of our Merchant Marine does not look very rosy if the following article from the July issue of "American Business Review" (New York) offers any indication: "Realism, now and post-war, is a theme that can be applied to the unique development of Swiss shipping. We hear a great deal now about this planning, but the Swiss are giving it significance. The desirability of maintaining a post-war fleet in Switzerland is currently being discussed in that country as shown in a recent statement by F. Frank, who is the director of Swiss shipping, that a Swiss sea-going fleet of private-owned vessels could be achieved.

Mr. Frank has estimated that the ships which Switzerland and Swiss shipping Companies now own—eight aggregating 55,915 tons deadweight—will be indispensable for at least a year after the war ends. But as Switzerland has been thrown entirely on her own during the war, it is difficult to predict the need for the marine when foreign competition is again brought into the picture. The vessels are old and slow, the

majority with a speed of eight to nine knots and with an average age of thirty-two years. The Swiss Federal Government now operates four of these ships. Upon their return to private ownership the question of bringing the fleet up to date is involved.

All owners wishing to continue would have to plan to rebuild. Renewal funds have been set aside for this purpose, but release of the funds is dependent upon the Government. Even with the renewal funds it has been pointed out that the cost of shipbuilding will be high. For instance at 500 francs per ton, a vessel of 10,000 tons deadweight will cost 5,000,000 francs. In 1938 the cost of new construction was 250-300 francs per ton.

Under favourable conditions, and on the assumption that the Government would release the renewal funds (set aside for extraordinary expenses), Swiss owners might be able in the next six or eight years to build up a fleet of six to eight ocean-going vessels of 7,000-10,000 tons deadweight, two or three smaller steamers and a considerable number of coastal vessels, making a fleet of some 80,000 or 90,000 tons.

An expert in this country on Swiss shipping and its problems concurs with this opinion—namely, Frederic Ehrsam, well-known shipbroker, chartering agent and specialist in ship management. Mr. Ehrsam is a realist, and, although a maritime man, has his feet on *terra firma*. He was one of the founders, some fifteen years ago of the Swiss merchant marine, and was previously associated with the Swiss Shipping Company. The headquarters was Basle, Switzerland, but these ships sailed under the Dutch flag.



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Railway traffic from Basle into Germany was suspended on Sunday, the 10th inst., as most of the trains arrived at the Swiss terminus badly damaged; one from Karlsruhe unloaded nine dead and many wounded passengers.

### Economical

All the English papers welcome the end of the four years' isolation which has been our lot. They are looking forward to early imports of the many lines that have always been in great demand in this country. The "Evening Standard", September 12th, is waiting for watches as the following cutting indicates: "More watches may soon be on sale.

The gradual clearance of the Franco-Swiss border is likely to lead, by the reopening of our trade routes with Switzerland, to an increase in the supply of watches reaching this country.

'The Board of Trade are doing all they can to help,' said an official of the National Jewellers' Association, 'but certain economic conditions have to be met'.

From time to time throughout the war we have received very small stocks of watches from America and from Switzerland, but they have been quite inadequate to meet the demand.

The majority of watches especially higher-grade models, have been earmarked for Service use, and only a fractional quota has been made available for sale to civilians'."

\* \* \*

Of the industries which have been developed in Switzerland in comparatively recent years, few have progressed so remarkably as the synthetic textile, says the "Statist," September 16th. This industry came into being shortly before the first Great War, and in 1911 its output totalled barely 150 tons. After difficult beginnings, the production increased rapidly, rising from 750 tons in 1923 to 4,640 tons in 1929 and 5,500 tons in 1938. The outbreak of the second world war gave the industry a new impetus and the output expanded further to 10,500 tons in 1941 and 18,000 tons in 1943. Whereas formerly two-thirds of the output of this Swiss industry was exported, to-day the vast bulk is absorbed by the home market, due partly to the paucity of imports of natural textile fibres. Switzerland now consumes four-fifths of her home production of rayon and her entire output of staple fibre which amounts to approximately 10,000 tons.

\* \* \*

At the end of August last our labour exchanges had 2,112 unemployed on their books (2,424 a month before). Generally speaking, the demand for labour is fairly brisk in all trades.

\* \* \*

At a conference of cantonal officials for wartime welfare held this month, the increasing privations of

our poor classes came under discussion; linen, bed-clothes and shoes are practically beyond their means.

\* \* \*

In 1934, 8185 factories were registered in Switzerland. This year, their number has risen to 9156, an increase of 971 units in ten years. The clothing and textile group registers the greatest number of units, namely 1336. Then follow the wood-working industry, with 1331 units, the machine, apparatus and precision instrument industries with 1158 units and, lastly, watchmaking, with 881. At the end of 1943, factory workers in Switzerland numbered 425,000.

\* \* \*

It is not generally known that, up to 1830-1835, Switzerland ranked as one of the most reputed horse-breeding countries in Europe. Since the late Middle-Ages, a heavy breed of horse had been reared on the grazing lands of the Central Plateau and the Jura region, and was much appreciated abroad, both as a dray and post-horse. The development of railways and the change in agriculture gradually caused horse-breeding to disappear in favour of cattle-breeding. By 1865, this activity had almost completely vanished all over Switzerland. In 1895, however, breeders again began to rear a certain race of dray-horse—the Jura or Franches-Montagnes breed—the fame of which soon spread even beyond the frontiers. By 1905 more than eleven societies had been formed in view of promoting horse-breeding in the country; in 1943, 78 societies of this kind were registered. Thanks to this branch of agricultural activity, the requirements of the home market can be met.

In this connection it is interesting to note that according to statistics just published in this country the veterinary services in Switzerland are far superior to the care and attention enjoyed by quadrupeds in any other civilised country. Before the war the provision of veterinary surgeons per one million larger domesticated animals (cattle) was in Great Britain 94.4; in France, 98.8; in Norway, 123; Netherlands, 140; in Denmark, 148; in Czechoslovakia, 149; in Germany, 149; in Belgium, 191, and in Switzerland, 247.8.

### Humanitarian

The changed conditions in the different theatres of war will mean freedom for thousands of refugees who have found a temporary haven in our country. Under the Hague Convention escaped prisoners of war who have had the good fortune of crossing into our country are practically free to go anywhere. There

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are probably some ten thousand of them that will leave our country as soon as practicable; the largest contingent among them are about 5,000 Britishers, the majority of whom escaped from prisoners' camps in Italy and France (Epinal).

A German request to afford transit facilities for the inmates of military hospitals on the exposed region of the French side of the lake of Geneva has been granted by our Government. An official statement issued in Berne, on August 21st, says that about 450 badly wounded from the region of Divonne (Gex) had been transferred to Swiss soil in order to receive treatment there. Another convoy of 220 hospital cases crossed our frontiers from Evians accompanied by 150 to 160 persons, the latter continuing their journey into the Reich. At the same time the Swiss Red Cross has been asked to launch an appeal throughout the country in order to collect clothing, books, etc., for these refugees.

Children of Swiss parents to the number of 133 living in the adjoining district of Haute Savoie (Annecy, Annemasse, Cluse, etc.) have been evacuated to Switzerland.

Nearly 30,000 French refugees who had found a sanctuary in our country are now being repatriated.

Thanks to the good offices of the American Red Cross, another steamer (Oriente?) has been placed at the disposal of the International Red Cross Committee. She will fly the Panama flag but at the request of the donors will be entered on the Swiss register under the name of "Henry Dunant".

The U.S. Legation having drawn the attention of the Federal Council to the extreme privations obtaining in the South of France, our authorities have spontaneously placed for relief in these particular regions 100,000 tons of cereals and other imported foodstuffs lying in store in Spain and Portugal and awaiting transport facilities.

Over a quarter of a million francs has been handed over to the Swiss Red Cross Society being the surplus shown in the final accounts of the National Postage Stamps Exhibition held in Geneva last autumn.

The momentous part which our former Minister in Paris played in the last phase of the liberation of France is recorded in a long dispatch to "The Times," September 14th, from which the following is an extract:

"The day we arrived Vichy was saying farewell to Dr. Stucki, the Swiss Minister, who was leaving in accordance with the Swiss tradition of not being accredited to provisional Governments. The warmth of his send-off was due to the courageous part he played throughout the latest period in opposing enemy excesses in which he seconded the counsels of moderation pressed on the Germans by the Nuncio in the name of humanity.

The story of the last days of the Vichy régime and of the interval before final liberation is the story of Dr. Stucki's interventions to avert bloodshed and needless cruelty. He acted as intermediary between Marshal Pétain and the F.F.I. in negotiations for the surrender of the Marshal to the F.F.I.; he induced the Germans retreating from the south towards Moulins to by-pass Vichy; he accompanied a

Canadian officer to Moulins in the hope that the Germans who would not surrender to the F.F.I. would be willing to surrender to him; and he was present with the Nuncio at the arrest of Marshal Pétain by the Germans.

For two-and-a-half years the *maquis* in this zone of France, which was perhaps the strongest and best organised anywhere in the country, was directed by Henry Ingrand, since August 26 the commissioner of the provisional government at Clermont-Ferrand for the region comprising the Allier, Puy de Dôme, Cantal and Haute Loire departments. After the southern landing the Marshal's doctor approached Dr. Stucki at the Marshal's own suggestion to find out on what terms the F.F.I. would accept his surrender. Ingrand told me that if the Germans had not acted on August 20 the surrender would have taken place the next day.

The day after Vichy was occupied by the F.F.I.—namely, August 25—it was learned that a German column was approaching from the south. Dr. Stucki drove out and interviewed the German commander. He pointed out that a passage through Vichy, besides endangering the lives of the diplomatic corps, would involve useless bloodshed, as the F.F.I. was bound to resist, and he suggested that the Germans should follow a road round the town. While they were discussing the matter someone in the column turned on the wireless and picked up a liberation Mass being sung at Vichy. The coincidence seems to have touched the German who consented to the column's being routed by way of Gannat.

When the column arrived at Moulins Dr. Stucki again visited the Germans massed there to the number of 2,000, being accompanied by the Canadian officer attached to the allied mission in Central France. The Canadian proposed that the Germans, being unwilling to surrender to the F.F.I., should surrender to him. The officer in command refused with extreme rudeness. According to one second-hand account, the German held his revolver pointed throughout the talk at Dr. Stucki, who certainly declared then and since that he had never been so received by a German officer. This attempt to avert bloodshed at Moulins failed.

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On August 18 the German General von Neubronn, on orders from Renthefink, ambassador extraordinary from Hitler, told the Marshal that he was to go to a town in eastern France with General Bridoux and Admiral Blehaut. The Marshal refused. The following morning Neubronn returned to him with an ultimatum expiring that evening and threatening a bombardment of Vichy if the Marshal persisted in his refusal. At the time of the expiry of the ultimatum the Marshal summoned the Nuncio and Dr. Stucki as witnesses to the violence being done and to renew his refusal. When Neubronn arrived he brought a message from Renthefink that Laval was already at Belfort with the Government.

In the meantime, however, Marshal Pétain received an autograph letter from Laval that he was a prisoner of the Germans. He showed it to the Nuncio and in their presence called Renthefink "a liar" and renewed his refusal to budge.

Renthefink, on this fresh refusal, told the Marshal that 100 hostages would forthwith be shot and Vichy bombarded. Thereupon the Marshal consented. The whole scene was witnessed by the Nuncio and Dr. Stucki. The Marshal left Vichy with his wife at 8 o'clock. Before leaving he wrote a farewell letter to the French people in which he expressed regret for the past four years and gave veiled encouragement to them to follow General de Gaulle."

\* \* \*

The well-known Swiss Alpinist, Alfred Zurcher, who some years ago, with Dr. Lauper, made the first ascent of the Eiger by the Mittelegeri ridge, made on August 24, his fifty-fourth birthday, his 250th ascent of a 4,000-metre (13,000 ft.) peak by traversing the north wall of the Moench. He has several times and by various routes ascended all the 4,000-metre peaks of the Alps.—("The Times," September 4, 1944).

\* \* \*

We are indebted to an enterprising reporter of the "Evening News" for having re-discovered an old and long-missed friend of ours; the following is taken from its issue of August 25th: "I have been talking to the Man Who Acts for Monte Carlo in London. I met him in his consulting room.

For the acting Consul-General for Monaco here is a distinguished physician—Dr. Kenneth Edward Eckenstein, of Devonshire Street. He is a baldish, good-humoured man of about sixty with twinkling eyes.

I asked him whether he had any comment to make on the fact that numbers of English people who used to live in Monte Carlo are now hoping to go back there.

Dr. Eckenstein told me that he gets very little news about the state of affairs in Monte Carlo. 'But I do know,' he says, 'that the Casino is still open for gambling.'

So far as he can judge from the meagre correspondence that he receives from Monte Carlo via Lisbon, things are fairly normal, except that the cost of living has gone up.

'A lot of English people left Monaco when the Germans occupied France, but I do not know what has happened to their property,' he said.

Then he said: 'If people in England have ideas of going to Monte Carlo directly the war is over they are very much mistaken. I think it will be some time before we can go back, partly because of the transport difficulties and partly for other reasons.'

Dr. Eckenstein distinguished himself in the last war—he served five years as a doctor in the French Army. He is an Officer of the Legion of Honour, Chevalier of the Order of the Crown of Belgium, and a holder of the Croix de Guerre. He is now physician to the French Hospital in London.

'I had a Swiss father, an English mother, I was born in Liverpool, and I married a Frenchwoman,' he told me.'

We will continue the genealogy by stating that the immediate ancestor of the doctor was a Bâlois, and at one time Swiss Consul in Liverpool. The last time we met Dr. Eckenstein was when he made out the passport for the last trip to Switzerland of a prominent member of our Colony, but most of his Swiss friends will remember him when he published his ill-fated diagnosis of a spring chicken that disported itself into the cuisine of a famous restaurant in Great Portland street. The former possessor of that "casualty" took strong objection to that now historic description—doctors being human are entitled to make mistakes—and it was thanks to the good offices of a third party that a "cause célèbre" did not develop. Since then the doctor had entirely cut himself off from his former Swiss friends and it was hinted that his mortification over that incident was such that he may have taken refuge in a lamasery in Tibet. Now as the secret is out his friends are hoping that he will return to his former Swiss haunts where his ready wit and dry humour used to relieve the stodginess of the customary meetings.



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