

# News at random

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# The Swiss Observer

FOUNDED BY P. F. BOEHRINGER.

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## NEWS AT RANDOM

### Federal

The following is the distribution of ministries for 1945 among the seven members of the Federal Council :

Justice and Police :	Ed. von Steiger, <i>President of the Confederation</i> (Dep. M. Celio).
Home Affairs :	Phil. Etter (Dep. Ernst Nobs).
Army :	M. Kobelt (Dep. von Steiger).
Finance and Customs :	Ernst Nobs (Dep. W. Stampfli).
Political Dep. :	Prof. Max Petitpierre (Dep. Phil. Etter).
Post and Railways :	M. Celio (Dep. M. Petitpierre).

With just over 83.1 million francs the customs receipts for 1944 show a decline of 50 million francs as compared with the figures for 1943.

According to the Berne Radio a Danish-Swiss trade agreement has been concluded; no information is given as to the manner and ways in which trade is to be developed between the two countries.

A campaign to secure the co-operation of neutrals with a view to blocking the communication and escape routes from Germany and thus counteract financial ramifications beyond its frontiers has received wide publicity on both sides of the Atlantic. Of the four neutrals, Switzerland is to be the first one where it is hoped some friendly pressure is likely to show results. The references in the Anglo-American press are without exception well-disposed and seem to give a hint of a "give and take" atmosphere, however, the fact that our two Legations are not dealing with this matter reveals uneasiness at Berne. The following extracts from two leading publications in this country reflect the prevailing opinion; the first is from "The Times," February 12th, 1945 :

"It was certainly from no sympathy for the German cause that Switzerland found herself drawn

economically into subjection to Hitler's empire. Nothing can be more remote from Nazi ideologies than the political outlook of a people which, mature in the practice of self-government, has solved the problem of enabling three races speaking four languages to dwell together in harmony. Through the years of German dominion, however, Switzerland was a geographical enclave, entirely surrounded by territory controlled by the Axis. The principal Swiss needs were and are coal and iron ore. Even her supplies of food have not been secure, as was shown when this, one of the richest agricultural countries on the Continent, was compelled to institute meatless days. For the imports that Switzerland required the Germans could and did exact their own price. They chose to be paid largely in precision instruments, in the production of which Swiss craftsmen have long excelled, for use in the construction of aircraft and other engines of war. There is further a considerable traffic from Germany to Italy over the Swiss railways in coal and other supplies which, without being contraband in international law, have sustained the war factories behind the north Italian front.

The exchange of goods between Germany and Switzerland has already declined. After the loss of the Silesian coal fields it may soon be expected that the enemy must soon drastically curtail his consignments across the Alps; and it may be presumed that Swiss sentiment, which within the bounds of a scrupulous neutrality is known to be sympathetic to the allied cause, would welcome an arrangement to bring this commerce to an end. It serves now only to delay the final collapse of a visibly defeated Germany, and to prolong the world-wide suffering to which the Swiss have shown themselves so sensitive, and which through the instrument of the Inter-

## CITY SWISS CLUB.

Messieurs les Membres sont avisés que

### L'ASSEMBLEE MENSUELLE

aura lieu mardi le 13 mars 1945 à 5.30, dîner à 6 h. précise au DORCHESTER HOTEL, PARK LANE, W.1.

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

Monsieur A. Renou nous parlera des impressions de la Suisse lors de son dernier séjour.

Les Membres sont priés de s'inscrire par écrit pas plus tard que le 10 mars auprès de M. P. A. Moehr, Hon. Secr., Imperial House, Kingsway, W.C.2. Prière de s'abstenir de téléphoner.

LE COMITÉ.

national Red Cross Committee — a body composed, in spite of its name, exclusively of Swiss citizens — they have laboured so abundantly and so fruitfully to alleviate. Since the arrival of American and French forces on their frontier, Switzerland has been largely relieved of the fear of reprisals, should her aid to German war economy be withdrawn; and the opportunity of obtaining elsewhere the necessary imports that she has hitherto received from hostile sources will be gradually opened as conditions of supply and transport, at present so acutely difficult throughout liberated Europe, are improved. If the allied Powers feel entitled at this stage of the war to ask for a curtailment of Swiss commercial relations with the enemy, the Swiss people for their part will hardly find the request either unexpected or unreasonable."

and this is one from the "*Economist*" Jan. 13th 1945.

"In the last few days the Swiss have protested strongly against a tightening of the Allied blockade. The Americans demand the cessation of Swiss exports to Germany and of all transit traffic between Germany and Italy. Unless these conditions are fulfilled, Switzerland is to be denied facilities for transit traffic in Allied controlled territory. The Swiss declare that their trade with Germany has, since October last, been confined to cash transactions and that their exports to Germany have been strictly balanced with their imports from Germany. Even so, it is very probable that some of the precision instruments which Germany imports from Switzerland are vital to the German war effort; and the Allies are certainly within their rights when they attempt to stop this last gap in the blockade. Nor can the Swiss expect priority on French transport which does not begin to meet the demands either of the Allied armies or of the French civil authorities.

Yet the Swiss ought not to be made to feel that the Allies' demands are unreasonable or that their geographical position is being used to put pressure on them which the Allies have not used in the case of other neutrals. It is a fact that the cutting off of German coal and iron supplies would inflict a heavy strain on the economy of Switzerland. If the stoppage of Swiss exports to Germany is, nevertheless, important enough to justify the new hardships it will entail, the Swiss ought to be given some compensation in the shape of better facilities for trade with Allied and neutral countries. The record of Switzerland has been better than that of other neutrals; and it would be unjust and absurd to penalise Switzerland at a time when the Spanish economic system, for instance, has been considerably relieved."

Matters moved very quickly and towards the end of last month it was announced that Dr. Laughlin Currie, a personal confidant of President Roosevelt, and Mr. Dingle Foot, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Economic Warfare, were on the way to Berne with their respective staff of experts. It will be remembered that Mr. Dingle Foot has taken the opportunity of issuing a serious warning to Switzerland when her attitude to Germany was debated in the House of Commons some time ago. On February 7th, the Federal Council designated the members of the Swiss delegation, most of whom have already been abroad on trade missions which gave them little chance of scoring a success. They are: Prof. Paul Keller, the Federal

Council's expert for trade treaties; Dr. Hohl, Foreign Office; Prof. William Rappard; M. Victor Gautier, Governor of the Swiss National Bank; Dr. Borel, Vice-President of the Swiss Farmers' League; Dr. Max Weber, Director of the Swiss Co-operative Stores; Dr. Frey, Secretary of the Swiss Trade and Industrial Association. The absence of one particular leader prominent in previous negotiations will be noted.

The conference opened on Monday the 12th inst., but on the day before M. Stucki, one of the heads of our Political Department, stated to Press representatives that the Swiss Government had received no details of what the Allies wished to discuss. "*The Times*," February 12th, published the following cable from its Berne correspondent:

"The conference, it was explained, is necessary because total war inevitably changed the belligerents' attitude to trade between neutrals and the enemy. Food and raw materials were now of the highest military significance, and deliveries to the enemy could not be ignored even if they were merely goods in transit through the neutral country.

The joint discussions with the Swiss, whose chief delegate is Professor Rappard, of Geneva, will cover commercial, financial, and economic relations between Switzerland and Germany and supplies to France. But besides making requests the Allies will seek solutions of Switzerland's war-time embarrassments, and particularly those arising from her need of food, fodder, industrial materials, and transport. Another class of problems concerns looted property concealed by the enemy outside Germany, and the location of enemy assets."

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It is dangerous to predict what will be the outcome of these "pourparliers" which are not likely to be protracted. We can hardly believe that our high magistrates will tenaciously cling to principles of a neutrality that only witnesses the degeneracy and destruction of a one-time great and now misguided nation and prolongs untold distress and agony.

An extremely instructive article (too long for reproducing here) explaining the Swiss side of the argument appears in the "Daily Telegraph," February 15th, from the pen of its correspondent Noel Parker. Incidentally the article reminds us of the origin of our neutrality, which in reality is not an act decided by our own government but a policy imposed upon Switzerland in 1815 by the congress of Vienna. The five signatory powers (Gt. Britain, France, Austria, Prussia and Russia) "Officially recognised that the neutrality and inviolability of Switzerland and its independence of all foreign influence is in the true interests of the policy of Europe as a whole." The great English authority, Prof. Webster, described this settlement as "establishing a new principle in the public law of Europe which may be considered as one of the most important results of the period, for the great powers had definitely recognised that their own and Europe's interests were best served by the exclusion of a small state from participation in future conflicts." In the words of the man in the street the greed and self-interest of those powers made sure that no other member of the quintuplet should ever enjoy the possession or support of Switzerland. Luck has been

on our side; there are other small states that have not been so favoured. It has also served the ends of the contracting powers; Kaiser Wilhelm is credited with the statement that Swiss neutrality was the substitute for two German army corps.

### Cantonal

A credit of 15 million francs has been sanctioned by the citizens of the town of Zurich for the construction of a new power station.

\* \* \*

The trustees in charge of the liquidation of the Bank in Zofingen, which failed some time ago, announce that the shareholders will have to go empty-handed; the ordinary creditors will receive about 74 per cent, and the other claims will be met in full.

\* \* \*

Reports from the Ticino say that during the heavy snowstorms of the past few days a group of escaped prisoners of war were marooned on the mountains near Brissago, on the Lake Maggiore. Swiss patrols discovered 13 men still alive, most of them American and British, and brought them back to the nearest town. One Russian was rescued with his hands and feet frost-bitten. Three others had died from exposure.

\* \* \*

As coal deliveries from Germany have practically ceased, the fuel position in Basle has become so critical that the local authorities have decided to cut down all superfluous trees in roads and squares of the town so as to use the timber for heating.

### Army

A short aerial combat over Chiasso on January 11th, caused the death of the Swiss locomotive driver Lindola Bezzola, age 53, from Comolagna; his stoker, Mäschli from Bellinzona was badly wounded. About ten American fighters were chasing and machine gunning a train that had left Como and was approaching Chiasso. On the following Sunday evening several unidentified planes crossed the cantonal frontier and dropped a bomb near the village of Muggio damaging the electrical conduit.

A U.S. bomber was shot down near Bellinzona on Wednesday afternoon February 7th; of the crew of five four baled out safely.

### Traffic

Dr. h.c. A. Schrafl, president of the S.F.R. board from 1926 to 1938 died in Berne from apoplexy at the age of 72. He was born in Lugano and studied for the career of an engineer. At the age of 29 he was appointed second engineer of the Gotthard railway and gradually advanced to the post of general manager of the Swiss Federal Railways in 1922.

\* \* \*

The referendum submitted to our people at the end of last month as regards the official reorganisation scheme of the railways, was sanctioned by 386,646 votes to 204,333. Under the reorganisation, the Confederation will take over 900,000,000 francs debt of the Federal Railways and will also provide 400,000,000 francs as working capital—a total cost of 1,300,000,000 francs (about £65,000,000). The greater part of the debt was due to the railway electrification carried out

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mainly to relieve unemployment during the last war and in the early 'twenties at the enhanced prices ruling at the time.

### Economical

The accounts of the Swiss Bank Corporation to the end of 1944 show net profits of Frs. 10,510,000, including the carry-forward from the previous year, against Frs. 10,241,000 for 1943. The total assets at the end of 1944 amounted to Frs. 1,540,016,000, compared with Frs. 1,473,255,000. A dividend of 4 per cent. is to be proposed, as for the previous year, and the carry-forward will be Frs. 4,110,000, against Frs. 3,841,000.

\* \* \*

The "Commercial Motor," January 19th, has discovered a new agricultural Tractor with novel features and reports as follows:

"From the little town of Vevey, comes an oil-engined agricultural tractor, built by the Ateliers de Constructions Mécaniques de Vevey S.A., and possessing some interesting features. It combines simple mowing and heavy ploughing with transport work on the highway. The gearing affords five well-graded speeds, permitting field work at under 2 m.p.h., and a road speed of 12 m.p.h. The steering and layout are arranged so that it can turn about one of its rear wheels, enabling the smallest areas to be cultivated. To permit this, there are, apart from the ordinary foot and hand brakes, two others which allow either of the back wheels to be held. This scheme also permits a wheel to be locked if it tends to spin on soft ground. A patented device provides rapid connection between tractor and implements."

### Humanitarian

An interesting scheme to benefit juvenile war victims is given by "The Times" correspondent and is published in its issue of January 13th:

"Herr W. R. Corti has formed an organisation in Zurich for the purpose of creating "children's villages" in which foreign children who are victims of the war may be cared for — especially orphans, cripples, and those whose health has been undermined. Plans are already under way for the building of such villages at Aegeri, on Lake Zug, Beatenberg, on Lake Thun, and Agra, in the canton of Ticino. The children would be under specialist medical care, and in addition to receiving a general education they would be taught some art or craft which would fit them to earn their living when they returned to their own country.

Each village would be self-sufficient and the children would share in its administration. Children of various nationalities would be grouped in separate villages or houses in which they would be educated in their own language and according to the programmes of education existing in their homelands. They would remain in Switzerland until they were cured or fit to work.

It is intended that the scheme should be partly financed by private subscription but also that it should benefit from the 100,000,000 francs recently voted by Parliament for aid in European recon-

struction, and from a further 100,000,000 francs which the Swiss people are being asked to subscribe for the same purpose. It is hoped that other countries will create similar institutions for orphans and disabled children."

\* \* \*

During the second part of last month two large transfers between Constance and Marseilles of prisoners of war, both wounded and civilian, were effected under the supervision of the Swiss Red Cross, which had undertaken to provide comfort while passing through the country. The "Berner Tagwacht" of February 1st, has published a short description of one of these promising trips which proves conclusively that the Red Cross when fighting Red Tape has not the slightest chance. The following translation is published from "The Tribune" with due acknowledgment:

"A contingent of about eight hundred people arrived last Thursday in Kreuzlingen and was to have been sent on without delay. However, an unexpected delay occurred, and temporary shelter had to be found. This contingent consisted of two categories of people.

"Most of the travellers were American Jews, who had been well looked after in Germany owing to American intervention. They were properly fed and clothed.

"The second category of people came from the notorious camp at Dergensbelsen near Hanover. These people arrived here in the most pitiful condition, emaciated, old and some of them critically ill. Shortly after their arrival in Switzerland four of them died. Some had to be taken to the St. Gall Cantonal Hospital, because they were found to be unfit for travelling. The remaining refugees dragged themselves along the short road to the St. Gall railway station on Tuesday morning. They walked very slowly down the few steps to the platform, like very old, worn-out people.

"It was a very sad procession, and included women and children, some of whom were carried on stretchers to the railway carriage. The American authorities had not given permission for these people to rest on their way, or for those who were exhausted to be left behind. Not even the Jewish rabbi was allowed to look after them. A mother living in Zürich whose child was among the refugees, was not allowed to visit her child. A husband, whose wife died here, was not allowed to attend the funeral.

"The exchange of these Jews for Nazis from America had been organised as an exchange for an exactly equal number from each side. Therefore it was essential that all these refugees should pass non-stop through Switzerland into France on Tuesday, in bitter wintry weather."

### OUR NEXT ISSUE.

We hope to go to press again on the 30th March, 1945 and we take this opportunity of thanking the following subscribers who added welcome amounts to their ordinary subscription rates:— Miss M. Meyer, Miss L. Sigrist, R. Schmid, Miss R. Staub, P. Bonnet, H. Wälti, Miss C. Rougemont, E. Strauli, A. Steiner, H. Knapf, P. Meister, F. H. Meyer, P. Isacco, A. Peter, R. A. Merz, A. Wiedmer, E. Lucca, A. Gallusser.