

News at random

Objektyp: **Group**

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

Band (Jahr): - **(1945)**

Heft 1040

PDF erstellt am: **17.09.2024**

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The Swiss Observer

FOUNDED BY P. F. BOEHRINGER.

The Official Organ of the Swiss Colony in Great Britain.

EDITED WITH THE CO-OPERATION OF MEMBERS OF THE LONDON COLONY.

Telephone: CLERKENWELL 2321/2.

Published Monthly at 23, LEONARD STREET, E.C.2.

Telegrams: FREPRINCO, LONDON.

VOL. 27 — No. 1040.

LONDON, SEPTEMBER 28th, 1945.

PRICE 6d.

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AND COLONIES	{ 12 issues post free	6/6
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NEWS AT RANDOM

Federal

Postal telegraph and telephone services with Switzerland are beginning to enjoy normal treatment. Ordinary letters are in transit from three to five days, some of them still being censored; newspapers are somewhat irregular in delivery. Air mail is now accepted on this side as well. In the telephone service discrimination against Switzerland is shown by restricting the conversation to the English or French language; it is of course of no importance and we have been reliably informed that calls in Italian have been received from the other side.

* * *

The Federal Council has appointed Dr. Felix Weber to be Federal vice-chancellor; he is 42, was born in Bucarest and since 1937 has been the town clerk of Glaris.

* * *

The Federal Council will ask the coming session of our parliament for powers to issue fresh loans during the present legislature (1943-47); the amount is not stated but some of it will be applied towards the conversion of existing loans or the payment of old issues that are falling due. The indebtedness of the Confederation on July 31st 1945 amounted to 7061.7 million francs against 2173.5 million on the same date in 1939. In addition there is a floating liability (rescriptions) due to our banks of nearly a thousand million francs.

* * *

An expansion of our diplomatic service is under consideration. It is intended to establish legations in South American republics and British Dominions.

* * *

The investigations at Berne regarding the alleged ill-treatment of Russian internees were concluded on September 11th with the signature of the record of the proceedings and the statement that particulars would be published at a later date. We are reprinting a report from the Berne correspondent of "The Times," which appeared in the issue of September 13th:

"After negotiations lasting nearly two months, Major-General Vikorev, of the Russian Army, and Colonel Fluckiger, of the Swiss Army, have signed a protocol on the results of the inquiry into the treatment of Russians interned in Switzerland.

(Continued overleaf.)



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SUNDAY TIMES.

Easily the best of the new films is MARIE LOUISE. It tells, with tact, sympathy and humour, how French children from bombed cities regained health in Switzerland.

DAILY TELEGRAPH.

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The British, American, and French military attachés assisted at the inquiry, which is understood to have been concluded satisfactorily for both parties. The text will not be published until after the return of the Russian commissioners to Moscow. The first part of the inquiry concerned the repatriation of interned Russians, and presented only technical problems, all of which were disposed of rapidly. The last interned Russian left Switzerland on September 8.

The second part of the inquiry dealt with charges that the interned Russians were ill-treated, over-worked, underfed, and coerced, and necessitated minute investigations into the relations between the Russians and the Swiss camp authorities. During the investigations an incident occurred at Villars-sur-Ollon, in which a Russian civilian was killed and another wounded. This threatened to cause a breakdown, but the difficulties were overcome, both sides showing good will and a desire to smooth matters out.

Political relations between Switzerland and Russia were outside the commission's terms of reference and were not discussed, but the Swiss Government is understood to have expressed a wish that further steps should be taken towards a restoration of diplomatic and commercial relations between the two countries."

After reading the above, a reference in the "Daily Herald" on the same date strikes one as overbearing. The heading asserts "Swiss admit they were wrong" but the closing sentence of the article is perhaps more cautious when it says that "the Swiss authorities were compelled to admit that unfortunate things had happened."

* * *

Negotiations are said to be in progress between an American delegation and our Federal authorities for the employment of five to ten thousand Swiss functionaries (interpreters, technicians, teachers, lecturers, etc.) in the American zone of occupation. Applicants would be engaged for one or more years and receive a monthly salary of Frs. 1,000 to Frs. 1,800. After 15 years service they would become entitled to a pension and could acquire, free of cost, American citizenship after five years. No official statement has so far been issued but the above appeared in some of the dailies in Switzerland and as it was not denied the subject was ravenously worked upon. The next piece of news was

to the effect that our officials at Berne were confounded by the generosity of the proposal fearing that our teachers and civil servants would rush off to Germany or demand correspondingly higher salaries at home; it had therefore been suggested and agreed that the remuneration — when the proposal was announced officially — would be from 500 to 1,000 francs a month. Advertisements are expected to appear in the Swiss papers. In the meantime a Swiss monthly has revealed to its readers that the American authorities have already received 50,000 applications. All these are of course delightful rumours and may, let us hope, be intelligent anticipations.

* * *

It is now stated officially that King Leopold III of the Belgians has been granted permission by the Federal Council to take up his residence temporarily in our country on the usual conditions of abstaining from political activities. A large historical estate on the lake of Geneva — "Reposoir" in Pregny — is now being prepared for the reception of the royal family and a suite of about 20 persons.

Cantonal

In a paper entitled "Freies Deutschland" appearing in Zurich a somewhat illuminating statement discloses that when it was feared that the German Legation and Consulates were likely to be closed and sealed officially, the personnel did not miss the opportunity of providing for their immediate future from the large funds standing to the credit of the Third Reich. Thus the minister

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at Berne, Dr. Koecher whose whereabouts are still covered with a veil, helped himself to Frs. 55,000, his monthly allowance having been Frs. 11,000. The Consul General at Zurich with a personal monthly wage bag of Frs. 6,000 made sure of Frs. 24,000 and so on.

* * *

Both in Berne and Biel demonstrations took place as a protest against the continued residence of the German nationals who were awaiting the result of their appeal against the decree of expulsion. In Biel windows were freely stoned and the "Hotel de Poste" received a destructive visit from an unfriendly crowd. Six persons were arrested; later on four were released in order to obviate a serious encounter with the numerically weak police. The next day, the responsible local magistrate was deprived of his judicial functions by the higher cantonal court for having, by a display of negligent weakness, interfered with the course of justice.

* * *

A credit of six million francs is claimed by the Regierungsrat of Berne for the 1926-28 buildings scheme.

* * *

An astounding revelation was made in the Bernese Grosse Rat by the cantonal chief of police. In the spring 1940 ten German saboteurs armed with bombs managed to cross our frontier. Their instructions were to sabotage several aviation fields at a time to coincide with the invasion of Holland and Belgium so as to create consternation and panic. One of them, bearing the fitful name "Teufel" was arrested on the aerodrome at Biel when he was getting his fireworks

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ORDRE DU JOUR:

Procès-verbal.	Démissions.
Admissions.	Divers.

Prière de s'inscrire auprès du Manager, Brown's Hotel, Dover Street, Lonon, W.1, pas plus tard que le 1er octobre 1945.

LE COMITE.

ready, eight were seized within four days before any harm was done and the last one was able to use his return ticket.

* * *

Several fruit and vegetable retail shops in Basle have been temporarily closed for selling above the permitted maximum prices; an official enquiry has been ordered with a view to police proceedings.

* * *

A singular operation was recently performed in the Zurich Zoo. A newly born Yak-calf was found to be afflicted with a rupture. The veterinary surgeon decided upon an operation which was successfully performed the calf being afterwards returned to its mother.

* * *

A whole family of Beringen (Schaffhausen), the father Emil Strasser and three children became the victims of eating poisonous fungus; the mother recovered in hospital. They were in the habit of gathering edible boletus common in that particular district and before partaking of the prepared dish had added the generally reliable silver spoon — a precaution that for once proved unavailing. The cantonal food inspector subsequently declared the mistaken mushroom to be "agaric."

* * *

The scarcity of heating materials is not altogether unpleasing to the children in St. Gall: during the winter months primary schools will open four days only, from Tuesday to Friday, and secondary schools (from the fourth form) five days.

* * *

The chief commissioner for the assessment of taxes in the canton Berne, Rudolf Kellerhals, has received a call from the Turkish Ministry of Finance to act as its expert. The cantonal authorities have granted him the necessary leave; Mr. Kellerhals expects to stay at Ankara for at least three months.

* * *

The well-known shrine of Madonna del Sasso near Locarno was visited on Sunday, September 9th, by over 10,000 pilgrims.

* * *

Indignation has been caused among the hoteliers of Lugano at the news that the casino at Campione has opened its doors again. Politically Italian, Campione is practically surrounded by Swiss soil and before the war offered facilities for gambling which are not available in the canton Ticino; it was also a haven or refuge for dubious characters of all nationalities.

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La Chaux-de Fonds is credited with 50% of the watch export of the whole of Switzerland. Of the 63 watch factories in our country eleven are found in this town which manufactures 22½% of our annual output.

Platinum to the value of ten million francs is stated to have been stolen at Geneva from the St. Gabin factory by five burglars who overpowered and shackled the guards.

Army

Two military planes crashed on August 27th, near Tiefenkastel causing the death of Lt. Paul Otz, age 31 from Vechingen and Lt. Hans Buchter, age 30 from Thayngen.

Strange sentences were passed by the military court 3a on two offenders who had already been heavily dealt with during their absence. The first one was condemned to four years imprisonment for having gone abroad without obtaining a military permit, the court now meted out ten months. In the second case the sentence was reduced from 18 to 6 months, the recruit — a Swiss from abroad — having omitted to join up in 1939.

According to a Reuter report the Swiss army lost 4,027 men or about one per cent of its mobilised strength during the war. 2,660 died from illnesses, 1,005 through accidents and 362 committed suicide.

The many foreign residents in our country belonging to different nationalities have formed a patronage committee to open a General Guisan fund. It is intended to appeal for subscriptions as a token of thanks for the six years of undisturbed residence enjoyed by the many foreign colonies. The General is stated to have intimated his agreement.

Apart from smashed bombers and the damage done by such machines through carelessness there are no war relics in Switzerland but the French general de Lattre de Tassigny has been mindful of redressing this deficiency. A seasonable "cadeau" in the form of an outrun military convoy crossed our frontier at the "Lysbüchel" (Basle) on the 13th inst. on its way to Thun where the local army command quietly and without pageantry took into safe custody among other horrors two German 45 ton tanks (type Ferdinand and Jagdpanter). Though these tanks were officially consigned to the Swiss Confederation there is no report of the usual oratorical contest.

Traffic

A good picture of the rapid and satisfactory development of railway traffic with our neighbours is given by the "Railway Gazette" of September 7th, in a short article reprinted as follows:

"Despite a shortage of rolling stock, Swiss goods traffic with France the only country with which Switzerland has been able to resume regular railway services since VE-Day, is expanding. Contrasting with the intermittent railway connections with France early in the year (which enabled Switzerland to import through France daily averages of 100 tonnes in February, and 1,000 tonnes in May) it had risen to 1,750 tonnes a day in July. Regular goods services are now being operated between Switzerland and the French ports of Bayonne, Port-Vendres, Saint-Louis-du-Rhône and Port-de-Bouc.

Negotiations are in progress with Italy to obtain the use of Genoa and Savona, ports which are much nearer to Switzerland than the above French ports. The use of Genoa and Savona, however, will not dispense with the use of the French ports.

Negotiations are also in progress with a view to resuming railway traffic with Czechoslovakia, Austria and Germany. The extent to which Swiss goods traffic with other countries has declined, may be gauged by the fact that, whereas in the years 1935-1938, Switzerland imported a daily average of 28,000 tonnes, this average did not exceed 1,500 tonnes in the first quarter of 1945. Exports averaged some 2,000 tonnes a day before the war, against a daily average of only 370 tonnes in the first three months of 1945. Transit traffic is practically non-existent at present; before the war it reached an average ranging from 12,000 to 20,000 tonnes a day.

Pending the conclusion of a Trade Pact an understanding has been arrived at with the American occupation command for the regular transit of two to three goods trains between Czechoslovakia and Switzerland.

The first of a series of American consignments of 9,000 tons including 2,000 tons of grain has arrived at Antwerp; the cargo will be picked up by rail, 50% of



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the trucks being supplied by the Swiss Federal Railways.

After months of clearing and repairing, the sector Basle-Mülhausen of the Rhine-Rhône Canal was officially opened by one of the canal ships, "Ideal," leaving the Basle harbour and carrying delegates from both ends. Apart from releasing a dozen French canal ships which had taken refuge in the Basle harbour, the regained waterway will, for a considerable time, possess no commercial significance until the Strassburg extension has been re-instated.

The first five of the 20 locomotives sold by the Swiss Federal Railways to Holland have now been delivered; they travelled via France.

Economics

A general slackening of rationing is expected in the near future and it is anticipated that by Xmas textile articles will be obtainable without coupons. Cotton has been imported freely. The release of coffee, tea and cocoa is also under consideration.

Thanks to the cession of 400,000 tons shipping space to the end of this year, which will free large quantities of cereals stored on Swiss account in several ports, the bread ration will be increased from 1st of October.

Statistics recently published show that during 1944 our country has been entirely self-supporting as regards potatoes, meat, milk and butter. Concerning bread, 20% of the total quantity required for the ration emanated from abroad, though the cultivation of cereals in Switzerland during the years of the war has been more than doubled. Sugar was the only vital food article that depended on foreign imports to an abnormal amount, i.e. nearly 75%, in spite of the fact that home production is nearly four times as high than at the beginning of the war.

The Swiss harvest this year will be below the average. Spring frost and hailstorms have caused considerable damage to fruit trees, such as apples, prunes and cherries. This year's vintage is expected to be poor.

A six months' trade pact, according to an Exchange message, has just been signed between Switzerland and Czecho-Slovakia, in which Switzerland will receive iron and steel products, coke, porcelain, glass, hops and sugar. They will export breeding cattle, machinery, tools, chemical pharmaceutical products, textiles and watches as well as a limited quantity of cheese and milk in exchange for sugar.

The tentatively discussed amalgamation of the Eidgen. Bank with the Schweiz. Bankgesellschaft has been passed by the respective shareholders' meetings according to plan. The Eidgen. Bank retains its separate existence for the present in order to liquidate its German assets or claims some of which are of very old standing; it also keeps a million francs working capital. Six members of the board will join the one of Schweiz. Bankgesellschaft. Of the staff of 800 about 75% will be taken over; the remaining 200 are to receive increased pensions and compensation that will help them to find a livelihood elsewhere.

It is always instructive and sometimes a revelation to follow and compare the treatment of simple news items in the different countries. Our readers will remember references in the English press during the war to a product called D.D.T. and unanimously hailed as an unsurpassed invention (or other superlative terms) of English scientists; no names of these scientists have, until a couple of weeks ago, been allowed to appear in the English press. The fact is that the exclusive claim for the invention of D.D.T. belongs to Swiss chemists working in the well-known Basle laboratory of Messrs. Geigy who are and have always been Swiss. At the invitation of the American government, Dr. P. Längner, a director of the Basle firm, and another Swiss chemist or scientist (to use the vague and more pretentious English term) are staying in New York since the end of August. At a press conference they stated that the complete disappearance of Typhus and malaria throughout the world may be looked forward to in the near future; during the war D.D.T. products had successfully carried on the fight against mosquitos and other disease carrying insects. The whole of the New York press published extensive reports and paid the highest tribute to Switzerland for being identified with the invention of D.D.T. In the English press D.D.T. had received scant publicity, the Evening Standard being the only daily that could spare space for it occasionally; two articles on August 31st and September 7th deal with a derivation, the insecticide, but leave the readers in the dark about the real position; the first one maintains that the Ministry of Supply has refused commercial manufacture while the second one



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flatly contradicts this embargo and insists that exports must receive first consideration. The patent rights are of course the property of the Basle firm. The Daily Mirror on September 12th informs English housewives that within about three weeks a D.D.T. preparation will be on sale for killing flies and other domestic pests (!). The only elucidative description we have come across was published in "Reynolds News," September 16th, and we beg to reprint it herewith:

"A few weeks ago, as part of a domestic blitz on a minor plague of flies, I tried out in my kitchen a sample of a new chemical preparation.

At first the flies seemed to take no notice. There was a sarcastic gleam in my wife's eye. But next morning there were no flies in the room, nor has there been a single one since.

They were victims of D.D.T., the new wonder chemical which, developed on a big scale in this war, has already saved thousands of lives and prevented a large amount of disease among troops. Small quantities of D.D.T. are now to be released to makers of insecticides in this country.

Every gardener is familiar with the use of various chemical insecticides as weapons in his campaign against garden pests and parasites. So far all have suffered from the disadvantage that they were not universally applicable to insect pests and the effects of one application did not last very long, so that frequent applications are necessary.

D.D.T. has the supreme merit of persistence, so that with infrequent applications it remains as a lethal trap for any of a great number of familiar household and garden pests.

The letters stand for Dichlore Diphenyl Trichloroethane. Like many another vital discovery of scientists, its development is a story of lucky accidents and years of persistent, unrewarded effort.

D.D.T. was first made by a young German chemist in 1874. Until 1936 it was part of the small change of general scientific knowledge. In that year, in a way remarkably like that in which Fleming discovered Penicillin, a young Swiss scientist hit on its deadly action on plant pests.

Dr. Muller was carrying out routine testing of a number of insecticides being prepared in the laboratories of the Geigy Company at Basle, Switzerland. He sprinkled a little D.D.T. powder on to a potato plant infested with Colorado beetle and the larvæ fell off, stunned.

The observant scientist immediately dug up the plant with the earth around it on which the insects had collapsed and left them in his laboratory overnight. Next morning they were all dead.

He argued that the larvæ had not had time to eat much of the drug. They must have been poisoned merely by touching it. A new kind of insect poison had been discovered — a contact poison.

From then on it was a story of hard slogging work by three scientists, Dr. Muller and Drs. Längler

and Martin, backed up by the belief of the Geigy Co. in their technicians.

The three doctors were convinced that D.D.T. "did something" to the living organism, and years were devoted to finding out what the "something" was.

After the Colorado beetle, it was found that D.D.T. killed body lice.

First mass trial against that was made in 1943, in Naples, with spectacular results. For the first time in history the usual winter typhus epidemic failed to appear in Naples.

The drug killed the lice which carry the typhus germ. As there is no really satisfactory cure for typhus, here is an excellent example of prevention being better than cure.

Since then, it has been found that the new wonder chemical is effective against the mosquito, thus bringing under control malaria (which affects 800 million people, or over one-third of the population of the world); the tsetse fly, which carries the germ of sleeping sickness, and causes great mortality among cattle in the tropics, as well as the body louse and the Colorado beetle.

Mr. George Campbell, M.Sc., of the Geigy Company, Manchester, gives a warning against over optimism. D.D.T. is not a universal cure-all against all pests.

It is not, for example, of any use against green fly or red spider, although the latter can be dealt with by a spray of D.D.T. in mineral oil, as can the codling moth, which infects apples.

Caterpillars are killed by the chemical, but discretion must be used to avoid damage to bees. The spray should be applied to the plants during the early morning and evening hours when the bees are not about. It is only the spray that kills the bees; the dry deposit left does no harm.

Flies and bluebottles will not live on dung heaps which have been treated with D.D.T., and cows in sheds which have been washed with a D.D.T. white-wash give more milk, due to the absence of flies. The wash, as for distemper in the house, only needs renewing once a year.

Vast expansion of plant took place at the Geigy works to meet the demands of the Services during the war, and it is hoped that before long D.D.T. will be available in larger quantities for civilians. A process has been worked out which should bring

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Research work is continuing, and it is confidently hoped that many insect pests which, at present, do not respond to D.D.T. will be brought under control by new methods of application.

Effect of the drug on the mosquito is that it seems to paralyse the jaw so that the insect cannot bite. A number of volunteers spent 24 hours in a tent treated with the drug and filled with mosquitoes.

Although they were naked, not one received a bite.

So there is obvious hope for those who are always being bitten by midges and mosquitoes."

Humanitarian

At the expense of the Don Suisse and in charge of the Swiss Red Cross just on 200 tuberculous patients, mostly deportees and prisoners of war from France and Holland, are receiving medical treatment in Davos.

* * *

For the account of Don Suisse a hundred railway trucks containing roofing slates to help in the restoration of damaged houses have been despatched to the department Doubs.

* * *

American soldiers will be allowed to attend lectures at all the Swiss universities; about 2,500 such students are expected. They are not allowed to purchase watches or barter uniforms or parts of their equipment.

* * *

By the middle of this month about 50,000 American soldiers were spending their leave in Switzerland; their original pocket money of Frs. 150 has now been increased to Frs. 175 per month. The effect on our hotel industry seems to be in the nature of a temporary boom if the following report from Berne which appeared in the "Daily Mail" September 8th is to be believed:

"For the first time since 1938 Swiss hotels in all the big centres such as Bâle, Zurich, Berne, Lausanne, and Geneva are packed to capacity.

A leading hotel-keeper today said he was unable to explain this phenomenon, especially as entry into Switzerland is still difficult.

At Berne and Geneva people are sleeping in hotel bathrooms, while hundreds seek accommodation in private houses or small *pensions* outside the town. Eight thousand American soldiers daily on leave make big demands on the accommodation.

The rush seems to be due mainly to the passage of people caught by the war in Europe who are now "sorting themselves out" and of a small army of business travellers feverishly seeking whatever markets may be open in Europe.

Among these the British are noticeable by their absence.

A prominent Swiss industrialist told me that they are being overrun by American salesmen, who are offering all kinds of seductive credit terms. He said it was generally regretted that the British appear to be entirely ignoring the Swiss market, which is only too anxious to trade with Britain again.

Swiss also regret that British soldiers on leave are not allowed to join their American colleagues, who are making such a strong impression on their trips through Switzerland.

All the Swiss see of the British soldiers who have helped to liberate Europe is a fleeting glimpse of cheering Tommies as their trains speed through the Simplon route homeward bound twice daily.

The Swiss are clamouring for the British again."

* * *

The insistent demands by local residents for the expulsion of Countess Ciano have now been acceded to by her delivery to the U.S. military police; her two children are allowed to remain in Switzerland.

* * *

The despicable castigation of depriving a political culprit of his nationality, first initiated by the Nazis, is still being perpetrated in our own country. A citizen from the canton Uri, Alois Wipfli, who was sentenced to several years hard labour for espionage and who managed to find a sanctuary somewhere in Germany since 1942, has now been expatriated by the Federal Council. The same punishment was conferred upon a youth from Zurich, K. J. Reinegger, aged 24, who also scented that his country had no more use for him; his particular transgression is not given. All this makes one doubt whether the austere magistrates at Berne have ever heard of the story of the prodigal son.

—oo—

The "Auslandschweizertag" (the 23rd) was held at Baden at the beginning of this month. For the first time since its creation Swiss from abroad turned up in large numbers, that is to say our colonies in Germany and Italy were, for obvious reasons, commendably well represented. As was to be expected under the present conditions the debates were restricted to the rights and re-establishment of compatriots who, through no fault of their own, had lost the whole of their life work with poor prospects of making good. Government spokesmen endeavoured to explain the delicate position which rendered any official steps abortive. It is to be hoped, however, that some of our unfortunate compatriots may have derived consolation from the many lofty speeches that were delivered. The main orator, Dr. Zbinden, called for fortitude and a steady heart and for the preservation of right(!); in the basic renewal of the European conscience the Swiss abroad had an obligation to participate by displaying an unfettered belief in right and God.

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