

News at random

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NEWS AT RANDOM

Federal

Most of the time in the National Council has been taken up by interpellations, debates and government replies and explanations referring to — at times fascinating — topics which during the war years were masked as “official secrets” and are now beginning to see the light of day. The main bone of contention is supplied by discussions or “orientations” conducted between 1939 and 1943 with Dr. Hügel and others from a Stuttgart office that was supposed to watch the interests of our country. It is now admitted that these talks took place with the knowledge of the army and Federal authorities; no unpatriotic motives are suggested and at that time the political horizon was crowded, which would explain a desire for a clear vision. — Another sustained query related to the conditions in some of the internment camps and a third to the extravagant cost of army barracks and the supply of military stores in general, matters which arouse criticism after every war in every country and at all times.

The few days before Xmas in the National Council were devoted to a lively discussion on the army estimates. “The Times” correspondent sent the following frank resumé on December 20th:

“The army estimates, totalling 810,000,000 frs., have been strongly criticized in the Swiss Parliament, and the Federal Government has been compelled to appoint a mixed Parliamentary and expert commission to study the future of military expenditure in the light of the technical changes resulting from the experiences of the war.

The estimates contained a provision of 20,000,000 frs. for research, including the possibilities of defence against atomic weapons, which are being investigated by Professor Scherrer and the Federal Technical High School at Zürich. The greater part of the budget expenditure has already been incurred in rearming the field artillery with the new 105 mm. howitzer, completing the motorization of the army, and other military works. The debate turned on whether it was any longer possible for small states to defend themselves against great ones, and what

prospect of relief from danger was afforded by Uno. Overwhelming opinion favoured the continuation of national preparedness for war.

In the course of the debate it was revealed that Switzerland's total war expenditure had been 7,354,000,000 frs.”

* * *

Incessant curiosity is displayed by members of the National Council who are not satisfied with a vague statement made on September 5th by Fed. Council von-Steiger about the financial backing of the party of labour (Nicole). Information is insisted upon about the source of capital behind the establishment of the “Vorwärts” printing work (270,000 francs), the acquisition of a rotary machine (90,000 francs), the financing of a large estate company in Zurich and the payment of the large staff of journalists and clerical assistants. A few days afterwards, Fed. Council von-Steiger gave a spiritless reply. For the present, no positive grounds existed for believing that the funds came from abroad. The permit for publishing the “Vorwärts” and the “Voix ouvrière” was based on

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the condition that particulars about the financing were supplied; the particulars so far supplied showed that both publications were carried on at a considerable loss.

* * *

"Much ado about nothing" is the best description of a reference in the "Daily Telegraph" (December 21st, 1945) headed "Swiss Plot Reported — Coup Planned." A question was asked in the National Council on December 20th about certain rumours that had circulated for some time. Fed. Counc. von Steiger replied that he had heard of sports clubs in some of the big towns whose members were trained in sabotage work. The judicial authorities had made enquiries and continued to follow the matter closely; there was no evidence at all that the party of labour was organising assault detachments and barricade fighting.

* * *

A spokesman of the Federal Council declared in the National Council that "social" attachés will be appointed to our legations in Paris, London and Washington. Their duty is to study social developments, entry prospects and employment conditions in the respective countries. Appointments will be made in consultation with the quarters concerned.

* * *

After lengthy negotiations with a Russian military delegation whose presence has been kept secret an agreement has been reached as to the exchange of each other's nationals. We are surrendering a small number of Russian refugees who have been interned or imprisoned for local offences — and for various reasons declined to return. Russia will release the consular agents who since the occupation of the eastern part of Germany have remained in their hands; amongst them are also the legation secretary H. Feller and the chancellor Max Meyer from the former Swiss Legation at Budapest.

* * *

The New Year's reception at the Palais Federal was, for the first time since six years, of a cordial and cheerful character. Until now, the diplomats of the former belligerent powers had to play hide and seek in order to avoid despicable looks. Subsequently President Dr. Kobelt delivered the traditional greetings speech to our people; he was not very optimistic and

asserted that in spite of treaties, undisputed right and military equipments wars could only be prevented by peaceful co-operation of and mutual confidence amongst the nations. He sent a special greeting to the Swiss abroad who, apart from the sufferings and sacrifices imposed upon them by the war, were enduring constant anxiety about the fate of their homeland.

* * *

Minister Henri Martin is retiring from his post at Lisbon; it is stated that he has reached the age limit. M. Martin is still remembered in London as our first commercial attaché and was the most popular member of the Legation personnel. His place in Portugal is being taken by Minister Maximilian Jäger, who held a similar appointment at Budapest.

* * *

Dr. Ganz, our new Minister to Poland, arrived in Warsaw after a seven days' cumbersome journey by car.

* * *

Federal Judge Paul Kasser died in Lausanne on December 18th at the age of 69. Born at Niederbipp (Berne), he occupied judiciary appointments in Wangen, Aarwangen and Berne until in 1934 he was elected a member of the Federal Tribunal.

* * *

Notary Hans Schaffner, who, during the war, distinguished himself as a member of the special department of War Economy, has been attached as an expert to the commercial division of our Ministry of National Economy; he will probably take a leading part in any negotiations preceding future commercial treaties.

Cantonal

An initiative signed by 1,041 voters (500 signatures being sufficient) has been deposited with the Obwalden chancery demanding a partial revision of the cantonal constitution and the introduction of the secret vote. Should the petition succeed the disappearance of the picturesque Landsgemeinde will be the outstanding consequence.

* * *

A crushing penalty of three months imprisonment and a fine of 10,000 francs was inflicted on a Lucerne butcher (Erni of Nebikon) for offences committed more than three years ago. In 1942/43 he had slaughtered secretly cattle which enabled him to sell about 16 tons of meat to the black market; the officiating inspector, a veterinary surgeon, was fined 100 francs for negligent control.

* * *

Particulars of the construction of the new inter-continental airfield at Kloten have now been published by the Regierungsrat of Zurich. The cost is about 60 million francs, towards which the voters, probably in April next, will have to sanction a credit of 35 million. The Confederation is expected to grant a subsidy of 13.6 million, the canton Zurich will contribute 37.6 million and the town 7¼ million; Winterthur will participate with 900,000 francs. As the respective treasuries dispose of sufficient liquid assets no public loan is anticipated. It will be quite three years before the entire airfield is ready but it is hoped that by the end of this year a small section will become available to act as relief to the Dübendorf aerodrome, if necessary, for large planes.

* * *

In the Zurich market there was such an abundance of Xmas trees that a large number were ultimately cut up and used as firewood.

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The Basle carnival (Fastnacht) will be observed in the traditional pre-war fashion from March 11th to 13th; this decision was taken by the Regierungsrat in spite of representations by religious circles.

The police inspector of Basle, Major Bloch, who has been in the service for 35 years without reproach, has resigned following rumours alleging German sympathies.

This year's Basle Fair will be held between May 4th and 14th.

Two bills, one introducing professional instruction in agriculture and the other empowering the Grosse Rat to fix teachers' emoluments, have been sanctioned by the electorate of the canton Aargau with a two to one majority.

The small commune of Auenstein in the Aargau had decided to pay to their warriors a bonus of 20 cts. for each day of service. On reference to the cantonal authorities this free gift was promptly vetoed as the tax payers could not be expected to bear an additional expense of 12,000 francs.

A forest fire in the mountains along the Valle Morobbia mobilised the fire brigades from Pianezzo, Giubasco and Bellinzona and was mastered with great difficulty.

The cost of restoring and maintaining order in Locarno at the beginning of May last (the cessation

of hostilities) amounted to 186,000 francs, which amount has now been paid to the Ticinese treasury by the Confederation as not sufficient troops were available in the locality to undertake this task.

The first steamboat, restoring on Sunday, December 20th, the regular service since five years on the lake of Lugano to the Italian villages of the Val Solda, was hailed with great jubilation along the shores of the lake.

In spite of representations to the Italian Government the gambling houses in Campione have not been disturbed and are doing a gainful and growing trade, much to the disgust of Swiss circles, who insist that under the circumstances visits from the Ticinese side should be discountenanced. The local officials seem to take up a passive attitude as the hoteliers of Lugano have not raised any objection. It is also asserted that a syndicate in Geneva is interested in the casino.

The new town president of Lausanne is Nat. Counc. Pierre Graber, a socialist; the other four members of the municipal council consist of two liberals, one socialist and one "party of labour."

The oldest vaudoise, Mme J. Campiche-Junod from St. Croix, died at Nyon at the age of over a hundred years.

A few citizens of Geneva have come to the conclusion that the best way to show their gratitude and admiration to the allied leaders is to offer specially made and engraved watches. Mr. Churchill's watch bears a design representing St. George slaying the dragon, and the hour hand is a trident. The Statue of Liberty decorates President Truman's watch, the hour hand of which is an olive branch. Stalingrad — with a worker standing in front of the blazing factories — adorns the watch of Marshal Stalin and the Soviet star marks the hours. Jeanne d'Arc planting the Lorraine flag on the French coast is depicted on the watch destined for General de Gaulle and the hour hand is a Lorraine Cross. A small clock with the Statue of Liberty and an American ship sailing towards Europe will be presented to the family of the late President Roosevelt.

An international competition for musical performers will be held at Geneva from September 23rd to October 5th. There are classes for solo singing (men and women), piano, violin, cello, string quartet, flute and oboe. Entries and inquiries should be sent to the Secretariat at the Geneva Conservatoire.

Mme Maria Nicole, who on December 5th celebrated her hundredth anniversary when the Conseil d'Etat presented her with the traditional fauteuil, died at the beginning of this month, she was the widow of a professor at the University of Geneva.

Army

Considerable wrangling may be expected over an expected surplus of about half a milliard francs in the special fund, originated in 1940 by the Federal Council, to compensate in some measure our soldiers in the field for the loss of earnings and other sinister consequences due to mobilisation. No official statement has been published yet, but it is said that the government intends to use this huge surplus for financing



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social schemes entirely outside the purpose for which the money was collected during the war years. Many are still in military hospitals, others can no longer follow their pre-war occupation and find it difficult to begin life again in new callings without financial resources.

After many months of preliminary investigations the Federal Council has at last decided to institute proceedings against G. Oltramare, Paul Bonny and René Fonjallaz; their unsavoury activities in Germany during 1940/45 are likely to prove interesting reading.

It is reported that Franz Burri, who during the first years of the war has been in the limelight for his treacherous propaganda on behalf of the Nazis, has been arrested near Gmunden in Bavaria; he is said to have worked of late under an assumed name in a Vienna beerhall and was denounced by a girl friend with whom he had a quarrel. Burri has been before our military tribunals several times *in contumaciam* and sentenced to terms of penal servitude; he continued his nefarious propaganda chiefly by news circulars sent to Swiss colonies abroad boasting that the swastika flag would in due course be hoisted on the dome of the Palais Fédéral in Berne. It is hinted that the Federal Council will insist on his extradition, although he has been deprived of Swiss nationality. It is, of course, doubtful whether this course will be necessary after the occupation authorities have dealt with his other crimes.

Traffic

In the presence of Italian and Swiss dignitaries a notable ceremony took place at the end of last month at Brigue when Italian partisans were presented by the S.F.R. with specially engraved souvenir watches. A German sabotage unit, who intended blowing up a three-mile stretch of the southern end of the tunnel, had brought to Varzo a train loaded with 60 tons of explosives. During the night of April 22nd, 150 Italian partisans came down from the mountains, overpowered the German guards, and took away the 2,000 boxes of explosives, which they blew up in a deserted part of the valley. Thus the daring feat of these partisans has permitted the resumption of the Orient Express service through the tunnel.

The Swiss Navigation Co. in Basle announces that their steamer "Generoso" struck a mine on September 19th at Marseille; her value has been written off as she cannot be repaired.

If reports in some of the English papers are to be believed several English shipyards are expecting orders for Swiss merchant ships. The firm referred to in the following extract from the "Evening Standard," December 14th, 1945, are Messrs. Wm. Doxford and Sons Ltd., of Sunderland, one of whose directors was a well-known Swiss who died a couple of years ago.

"Switzerland, the country without a port — Marseilles was used by her ships during the war — is to build up a new merchant navy. And the construction of this navy, experts believe, is to be entrusted to British shipbuilders.

A Sunderland shipyard has received an order for a 10,000-ton motorship with a speed of 13 knots for the Maritime and Commercial Company of Geneva. It is thought that this is the first merchant

vessel to be specially built for Switzerland. Other orders may follow.

Throughout the war Switzerland has been gathering together a merchant fleet. But at present it consists only of second-hand ships bought from other countries. A fleet of 16, totalling about 115,000 tons, was chartered from Greek owners in 1940.

Before the war Switzerland was planning to increase her ocean-going merchant navy to cater for increasing Rhine traffic, but the plan was shelved.

Now it is likely to be revived in view of the importance of Europe's inland waterways system."

Swissair also seems to be in the market for new aircraft, the new machine being required for both short and long distance journeys; spares and replacements for existing machines are said to be practically unobtainable.

Negotiations for another air-service have been successfully completed by Swissair. It is from Zurich to Prague and already commenced on the 8th inst. For the present it is a weekly service, on Tuesdays, the plane leaving at nine in the morning and is back by three in the afternoon.

The railway bridge over the Ticino at Sesto Calende which had to be destroyed during the war is now completely restored; the Orient-Simplon express is passing over it again since the 8th January.

A coach service between Italy and Switzerland is brought to our notice by an ex-officer in the "Commercial Motor," January 4th, as follows:



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It is thought that this would be a good opening for British chassis. The British investment would be confined to the cost of the chassis, including freight and spare parts. Earnings from this would be paid in balances held in Swiss francs, and the investment would be guaranteed by debentures on the vehicles or some similar form of security.

Any concern interested should write to 'Autobus,' care of the Editor."

Economics

Cost of living statistics published in the Swiss press give the following picture based on a 100% in the first six months of 1939 :

| | Wholesale prices | | | |
|--------------------|------------------|-------|---------------|-------|
| | January 1945 | | November 1945 | |
| Switzerland | 209 | (153) | 206 | (151) |
| England | 172 | (131) | 174 | (132) |
| Sweden | 179 | (149) | 175 | (149) |
| Argentine | 210 | (122) | 211 | (135) |

The figures in brackets indicate the cost of living index.

* * *
The American technical expert, Mr. Leslie R. Groves, under whose direction the atomic bomb was produced, stated last month in a Senate committee that apart from the U.S.A. there were two countries only capable of creating similar bombs within five to seven years, namely Great Britain and Switzerland. Any other country without the assistance of either of these three would require from 15 to 20 years.

* * *
The export of high class watches to the U.S.A. is being curtailed at the request of the American government; it is stated that U.S.A. manufacturers have complained about the keen and sustained competition of Swiss watches.

Under a commercial treaty just concluded with Turkey we are to receive during the present year 300,000 tons of Turkish coal.

* * *
In response to a recent appeal by the Schweiz. Kaufmännischen Verein for young clerks willing to accept appointments abroad no less than 2,000 applications have been received. Special courses will be held at Basle, Berne, Zurich and Lausanne for these candidates to become acquainted with the conditions ruling in oversea countries. The lecturers will be compatriots who have had a long experience in the respective colonies.

* * *
An Anglo-Swiss trade and payment (clearing) agreement is likely to be concluded in the near future though nothing official has been disclosed by the commercial division in Berne. The Swiss delegate, Prof. Paul Keller, has been coming and going — so far three times — and the main difficulty seems to be in the sphere of foreign exchange as Switzerland has remained practically on the gold standard. Here are some obviously inspired references from the English press. The first is from the Glasgow "Evening Citizen," December 22nd :

"A man with a loan in view, Professor Paul Keller, has just arrived in this country from Berne. He wants to lend us 100,000,000 Swiss francs (about £5,000,000) to help re-establish commercial relations with Great Britain. He is chief foreign negotiator for the Swiss Federal Council.

The Professor first came here soon after the war ended to make his offer. But Treasury officials would not consider the plan. He went back to Switzerland

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but as soon as the American loan was signed in Washington, Professor Keller returned.

Financial relations with Switzerland are one of the Treasury's biggest headaches. One of the main items on our debit side is for the care of British prisoners of war in Europe and the Far East, and the expensive parcels and transport services involved. Large sums advanced to the Japanese on our behalf by the International Red Cross were lost, but must be repaid to the Swiss."

And here is one from the "Evening Standard," January 10th:

"Scarcest currency in the world to-day is Swiss francs. Official rate is 17.35 to the pound, but small black market deals are taking place in Paris at between nine and ten to the pound, while deals have been recorded as high as six to the pound.

No change in this situation can be expected until the Anglo-Swiss credit and payments agreement is concluded. Negotiations, which have been going on for some time, are complicated by British and U.S.A. reservations about German escape money held in Switzerland, but it is hoped that a settlement will be reached within a month or two. Until then would-be holiday makers will not be able to get their £100 of Swiss francs and Swiss importers will not be able to buy the goods they want from this country."

* * *

Unconfirmed reports assert that about 5,000 Swiss have been engaged to assist in the civil administration of the U.S. occupied zone of Germany. They are said to be volunteers but their terms of engagement have been arranged between the two governments.

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LE COMITÉ.

Humanitarian

Swiss relief work in Germany is meeting considerable difficulties and is for the present restricted to providing meals for children in the southern part. The former financial contributions by the belligerent powers have, of course, ceased. Here is a report from the "Times" correspondent, December 27th, which summarises the war activities:

"The Swiss Federal Government has decided to advance up to 5,000,000 francs to the International Red Cross Committee in Geneva to enable the Committee to continue its work.

Since the end of the war the International Red Cross Committee has been called upon to undertake new tasks, mainly because there are no longer any 'protecting' Powers now that the war is over. After having disbanded a great part of the staff — which exceeded 3,000 persons — it has been obliged recently to enlist new helpers. To-day the Committee employs 152 delegates overseas, and 2,692 other workers, 1,750 of whom receive salaries.

The extent of the work achieved by the international committee may be judged from the fact that, up to December 31st, 1944, its total cost in the war years amounted to about 62,000,000 Swiss francs (over £3,580,000). Expenditure rose from 2,600,000 frs. in 1939-40 to 29,800,00 frs. in 1944. It was met by the ordinary contributions of the national Red Cross societies to the international committee, and by public subscriptions and gifts, which reached a total of 67,900,000 frs. at the end of 1944. Expenses in 1945, mainly for helping prisoners and refugees, are expected to amount to between 4,000,000 frs. and 5,000,000 frs.

Of the 67,900,000 frs. representing special efforts, 5,417,255 frs. was contributed by Great Britain and the Empire, which contributed another 40,000,000 frs. to the international committee for use on behalf of British and Empire nationals. The share of Switzerland in the ordinary expenses of the International Red Cross Committee was 18,000,000 frs., about 57 per cent., of which nearly 10,000,000 frs. was in gifts from the people."

* * *

The municipal council of Lausanne has sent six roomy motor-buses and four trams to Budapest to collect a number of Swiss families who have been informed of this travelling facility by wireless. On its

outward journey via Munich and Vienna the convoy picked up Hungarians, former inmates of the concentration camps at Dachau and Belsen.

The Swiss Alpine Club has taken over from the army the avalanche dog service.

Members of the American Occupation Army, to the number of 1,815, are continuing their academic studies in our country where during the coming two months they are attending the lectures at the universities of Geneva, Neuchâtel, Berne, Basle and Lausanne.

On the list of French New Year honours appear a good many Swiss of note whom General de Gaulle has appointed chevaliers or officers of the "Legion d'Honneur." They are: Rodolfo Olgiati, director of the Don Suisse; Prof. Decker of the medical faculty in Lausanne; Dr. Fischer of the Centre Sanitaire Suisse; Dr. O. Forel from Prangins; Dr. R. Patry from Geneva; Dr. H. Oltramare of the Swiss Children Aid; Dr. H. Remund, chief surgeon of the Swiss Red Cross; J. P. Pradervand, chief delegate of the International Red Cross in France; Prof. Charles Dubois, lecturer on dermatology at the university of Geneva.

The first named, Rodolfo Olgiati, is stated to have declined the honour; he believes that its acceptance by a private individual is inconsistent with the nature of the Don Suisse, which is an expression of the sympathy and solidarity of the entire Swiss nation.

This refusal has given rise in some of the Swiss papers to a debate on the desirability or authority of Swiss accepting this order. If it were not for the different categories in the Legion of Honour such nominations would practically be equivalent with the honorary degrees bestowed by all universities on prominent men of their own or foreign countries. Article 12 of the Federal Constitution, which was strengthened in 1931, prohibits members of the army, whether officer or private, Federal or cantonal officials or functionaries to accept any orders, pensions or presents from a foreign government. No such beneficiary can be a member of either of the two houses of Parliament. The last official list of the Legion of Honour contains about 200,000 names and among the 300 Swiss are catalogued Gustave Ador, Karl Spitteler and Ferdinand Hodler.

The power of the short wave transmitter Schwarzenburg is being increased from 25 to 100 kw., which no doubt will eliminate most of the complaints about the inaudible or faulty reception abroad.

A new skilift, said to be the longest in Switzerland, has been opened on December 21st at Arosa; its length is 2,640 meters and its elevation 680 meters, and it can transport about 500 sportsmen in the hour.

The opening of the mile-long bobsled run at St. Moritz has been widely reported in the English press, which also points out the currency restrictions; for ordinary mortals a holiday in Switzerland remains a dream but all the same a few have managed to accomplish the "impossible." The "Evening News," January 2nd, has interviewed an old friend of ours who tells the world that there is plenty of whisky at St. Moritz and incidentally gives us a foretaste of the cost of the railway ticket; here it is:

"Mr. H. O. Ernst, the assistant manager of the Swiss Federal Railway in London, has himself just come back from St. Moritz. He has been telling me what it is like.

Twenty-one hotels are now open there, he said, including the Palace. You can get a bedroom plus three meals a day for something like 30s. at most of them. There is plenty to eat and drink; in particular there is plenty of whisky.

Winter sports are in progress. The Cresta Run, which has not been in use since early in the war, is soon to be re-opened.

As for getting there: well, a first class return from London to St. Moritz costs £26 18s. 6d. (£21 2s. 6d. second class)."

The Swiss Chess Champion Christoffel (Basle) had a hard fight against the world's masters at Hastings and remained amongst the also-ran. The old notion that chess is a game for youngsters is somewhat nullified, the proved masters still holding their own; a youngster of fourteen, a champion in his own country, found himself in the wilderness.

The appointment of Mr. Fulke Radice, principal at the Post Office Headquarters, as vice-president of the Universal Postal Union reminds us that this international organisation has functioned so well and to all the nations' satisfaction at Berne that never a voice has been raised to move the bureau to another country. Under the present constitution appointments are made by the Federal Council and the director has always been Swiss.

To Dr. H. W. Egli belongs the honour and privilege of being the first Swiss, for a good many years, of having contacted closely a Russian Ambassador. Mr. Andrei Gromyko, U.S.S.R. Ambassador at Washington and head of the Russian delegation of one of the commissions to the United Nations Assembly, has attended last month's meeting of the Foreign Press Association as the guest of honour of Dr. Egli, its president. We guess Federal Councillor Petitpierre will envy him his good fortune!

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