

# News at random

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# The Swiss Observer

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## NEWS AT RANDOM

### Federal

In November 1940 the Federal Council received a note or petition from about 200 prominent Swiss suggesting that the liberty of the press should be further curtailed, especially of those papers which were disinclined to comment favourably on German aspirations — and this in addition to the army censorship which was already operating. The Federal Council never officially acknowledged the receipt of this document but has published now, on January 22nd, 1946, the full text and the names and callings of the signatories. Of the latter most belong to the so-called intellectuals (lawyers, medical men, professors, engineers, etc.) and some high officers; they are recruited chiefly from the central part of Switzerland with Zurich as the focus. Subsequently a meeting, said to have been secret, took place at Zurich where a representative number of signatories, described in the Swiss press as adaptors (Anpasser), reviewed the situation under existing conditions. It was disclosed that the preliminary steps preceding the actual petition were not unknown to General Guisan and one or two Federal Councillors. Our country at that time seemed to have been in a great danger and those who recognised the serious state of affairs felt it as a patriotic duty to place their fears before our authorities in a confidential note. Fortunately, their apprehensions look to-day unreal but certain political parties have pounced upon them as being unworthy to hold any office of trust in our country. A sustained malicious campaign has developed in the press by partisans who have contributed as little to the outcome of the war as those who are now denounced as traitors, defaitists and what not.

Another official statement issued by the Federal Council on February 9th last says that at the time one of the chief movers (A. von Sprecher) was informed verbally that the demands contained in the petition were for several reasons impracticable — a reaction which finally disposed of the matter. It was further added that no disciplinary steps were contemplated against government officials who were involved in this movement.

A new article, to be added to the Federal Constitution, was submitted to the judgment of our electorate on Sunday, February 10th, and rejected by a two to one majority, i.e., 570,869 against 288,672; about 71% of the voters recorded their opinion. The article was intended to regulate all road traffic and invest the government with full powers to reduce or eliminate competition amongst the interested parties; it would have assisted the Federal Railways to present a well-balanced budget as the unwelcome rivalry of private haulage enterprises on certain routes would have gradually disappeared. The usual campaign preceded the votation and the two parties of the left strongly recommended acceptance to their adherents, their chief motive being the ingredient of nationalisation which the proposal carried. The result probably constitutes in a large measure a vote of censure on the government as the plebiscite coincides with the disclosure or exposure of many irregularities and obscure incidents during wartime and not unfolded to the general satisfaction. The only canton in favour was Grisons, which always showed a dislike for motor

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vehicles and suffers from an acute headache caused by unprofitable railway investment. Very large majorities against are registered by the inner cantons and Vaud, Valais, Neuchatel and Geneva; the latter, a well-organised labour cluster, shows that the followers do not necessarily endorse the advice of their leaders.

The long drawn-out negotiations for an Anglo-Swiss Trade Agreement have not yet terminated; pour-parlers are said to be continued now at Berne where a British delegation headed by a treasury official has arrived on the 8th inst.

The first social attaché to be appointed is a young lawyer from Geneva, Georges Chavez, who goes to our Legation at Paris; at present he is a secretary in the cantonal labour and health office.

In the absence of a lead from our government the question of our future relationship with U.N.O. has been studiously avoided in the Swiss press. An obviously inspired article on this subject has appeared in the English dailies and the following is reprinted from the "Evening Standard," February 11th:

"A means of admitting Switzerland to the United Nations without infringing on her traditional neutrality has been worked out by a committee of United Nations experts. It is likely to be carried through within a year.

Switzerland is to be offered the rôle of mediating and protecting power in all cases of international hostilities. This status will excuse the Swiss Government from contributing Swiss soldiers to the United Nations armed force, a condition of membership which hitherto made it impossible for the Swiss to consider joining.

In any armed conflict Switzerland will look after prisoners of war, displaced persons and enemy property within each country, and see the Geneva Convention terms, which still stand, are carried out by both sides.

Switzerland will partake in all non-political work of the United Nations. She will not be represented on the Security Council, but will share in the work of the Social, Economic and Anti-Narcotic Committees and continue to co-operate with the International Labour Office and the International Courts of Justice.

Switzerland's inclusion is due to the insistence of the French delegation that more European

countries should be member states. A means is now being worked out to overcome the condition that non-member countries must apply for membership; for fear of a rejection Switzerland is still unwilling to apply."

A commercial treaty with Spain was signed at the end of last month and regulates the interchange of goods to the value of about two million francs to the end of this year. Spain will export oranges, lemons, almonds, grapes, wines and liqueurs, while we will send newsprint, paper-making machinery, iron and steel and other machinery necessary to restore Spanish economy.

### Cantonal

An overwhelming majority of the voters in the canton Uri decided to retain the present method of hostel-keeping (Wirtschaften); it was officially proposed to amortise the cost of licences or patents and to introduce certain improvements.

An avalanche, the Dorfberglawine, came down in Davos on Sunday, the 10th inst. It demolished some stables and broke the ice on the lake. Two skiers were caught; one was able to extricate himself, the other — a local workman — remains missing.

The city police of Zurich has for many years been agitating for a better remuneration; it is asserted that the force is the worst-paid among the larger towns of our country. The fact that the guardians of the law, without any pressure from higher quarters, insisted on remaining strictly neutral and declined to be organised

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on trade union lines probably lost them the support of the strong labour movement. A proposal (Motion Stamm) to revise the existing scale of pay came before the electorate and was turned down by an overwhelming majority; the socialist party presented a united front against the bill.

\* \* \*  
Latest statistics give the population of Zurich on December 31st as 356,000, an increase of 5,700 during the twelve months. The average age of the ten oldest male inhabitants is 91 years and three months, which is easily beaten by 94 years four months claimed by the oldest members of the fair sex, all widows.

\* \* \*  
A liberal member of the Zurich cantonal council has submitted a plan which requires every youth at the age of 19 to join a course of lectures in political science, constitutional law and municipal administration.

\* \* \*  
The hotel industry in Zurich has enjoyed, comparatively speaking, a prosperous twelve months to the end of last year. Though the available beds (4,060) due to the shrinkage of frequencies were reduced by nearly 20% from the pre-war level 66.2% were occupied (39.1 in 1941). The increase was chiefly derived from inland visitors but the number of guests from abroad is also rising, they having contributed 17% to the total.

\* \* \*  
In Winterthur the municipal council lowered the tax assessment by 10%; the socialist members voted against the reduction.

\* \* \*  
The widow of General Ulrich Wille, who commanded our army in the 1914/18 campaign, died on

## CITY SWISS CLUB.

Messieurs les Membres sont avisés que la prochaine ASSEMBLÉE MENSUELLE aura lieu **Lundi le 11 mars, 1946, au Dorchester Hotel, Londres, W.1, à 6 heures, le dîner commencera à 6 h. 30.**

SIR ADAM MAITLAND, J.P.,

nous parlera au sujet:

**"BRITISH PARLIAMENT IN WAR TIME."**

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LE COMITÉ.

her estate near Horgen at the age of 95; she was a born countess von Bismarck.

\* \* \*  
Heavy damage was caused by a fire at Glattfelden when the homestead of the farmer Fritz Jaeggli, which sheltered three families, was totally destroyed. No lives were lost and all the cattle were driven into safety.

\* \* \*  
The Glarner Landrat is losing one of its members by the resignation of Caspar Jenny, whose name appears on the list of the "200." Another, Ständerat Dr. Mercier, is also retiring for the same reason.

\* \* \*  
In spite of the now generally known unlawfulness there are still communes that vote a bonus to their soldiers for the military service; the latest is Netstal (Glarus) whose decision was vetoed by a higher authority.

\* \* \*  
A proposal to construct special lanes or paths for cyclists in the canton Berne did not find favour with the electorate; only 51% troubled about this innovation and recorded a six to five rejection.

\* \* \*  
Dr. G. Wander, the only National Councillor who figures on the list of the "200," has resigned his mandate; he is also withdrawing from the Bernese farmers' party.

\* \* \*  
A robbery at a jewellery shop in broad daylight in the centre of Berne (Nydegger) was followed by the now rare sequence that the police actually caught the malefactor after an exciting chase. The proprietor suffered serious injury from a pistol shot and the invader had tried to do away with himself with the help of razor blades when he was cornered in his diggings.

\* \* \*  
One of the lecturers at the University of Fribourg, Prof. Reiners, a German by nationality and a nazi by conviction, was expelled by the Federal Council last July. Unwilling to stage a prompt exit he managed to prolong his stay by various devices, in the last instance by court proceedings. He sued the canton Fribourg for unlawful dismissal, claiming Frs. 50,000 as damages; his case has now finally been disposed of by the Federal Tribunal, which declared his complaint totally unfounded.

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The water supply of Fribourg has, during the last fifty years, been worked by a private company, the "Entreprises Eléctriques"; the town has now decided to take over the service for which a price of Frs. 2,800,000 has been agreed.

The legal questions pertaining to the fusion of Basle Stadt and Land which at the outbreak of the war were put *ad acta*, are now being studied by the Federal Council and a report is expected in the near future.

The 1946 budget of Basle is again based on a considerable deficit, this time 8.6 million francs.

The president of the Landrat of Baselland resigned his office in order to obviate futile debates about his action in November 1940, when he signed the note to the Federal Council without knowing its authors (!) nor realising its ultimate aims with which he never agreed; he is engineer Reinhard Straumann, in business at Waldenburg. Two others are likely to withdraw from public life: J. Kaderli, the director of the Kantonbank, and Dr. Karl Tanner, a former Federal alcohol inspector.

Eduard Egli-Deutsch, said to be the oldest accountant in St. Gall and an expert in company and taxation laws, died at the age of 72; he was the brother-in-law of our compatriot Willy Deutsch.

In the canton Grisons two popular leaders have retired from public life, their names appearing on the

list of the "200." One is Dr. med. Jürg Hasler-Brenner in Splügen, the president of the cantonal medical association, and the other Dr. jur. C. A. Vital in Schuls, where he was a member of several local councils.

The sporting activities at St. Moritz, after seven years of inactivity, are getting into their strides again. The Bobsleigh Club held its annual meeting in the presence of several prominent members from this country, though the former dominating British contingent is giving place to Belgian, Dutch and French visitors.

A revision of the cantonal constitution of the Aargau is proposed; it will give the women the full vote, so far they had a say only in ecclesiastic matters.

The cantonal recorder of Aargau, Dr. Hektor Ammann, another of the "200," has been asked by the Grosse Rat to relinquish his office.

The Ticinesi living abroad will lose their voting rights if a proposal to revise the cantonal constitution is sanctioned by the electorate at home.

The large furniture factory of Fratelli Boscacci in Magliaso (Ticino) was totally destroyed by fire; the damage is said to exceed 300,000 francs. No lives were lost.

Smuggling of gold and large quantities of raw materials and manufactured goods is still going on merrily on the whole of the Italian and French frontiers. The southern border of the Ticino seems to offer attractive facilities for this trade; English cloth mostly requisitioned in Holland by German troops and fine steel plates are favourite articles. Additional troops are continuously being called up to strengthen the frontier guards, and occasionally a good haul is effected. The adventurous and mostly successful operations remind one forcibly of the old song about the man flying in the trapeze with the greatest of ease.

The gambling haunt of Campione is still flourishing as the Italian Government has declined to yield to the Swiss request for its closure. The Swiss frontier has now been closed from 8 p.m. to 8 a.m. so that the gamblers are prevented from returning to Lugano before day-time; the accommodation in Campione is said to be extremely primitive.

A people's census was taken in the canton Vaud in 1941 and the figures have been published a few days ago. There were 343,398 inhabitants with a slight preponderance of females; 281,934 were protestants, 56,700 catholics, 1,660 israelites and the remainder "philosophers."

Apart from earth shocks heavy rain has caused widespread damage to roads in the canton Valais; Evolène is practically isolated.

Nat. Coun. Charles Rosselet, who last November was elected a member of the Conseil d'Etat in Geneva, is being replaced in the National Council by Prof. André Oltramare, who also belongs to the socialist party.

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The cantonal anti-communist laws in Geneva were repealed by popular vote; the majority was not large and only about half of the citizens appeared at the polls.

\* \* \*

The former police inspector of Geneva, Fernand Bachelard, whose resignation was officially suggested, has now been arrested; he is charged with counter-espionage and will be answerable to the army authorities.

### Army

Military tribunals are still busy dealing *in camera* with cases of espionage. In Geneva eight accused, half Swiss and half foreigners, had to answer charges of collecting and passing on to German agencies, information about our frontier fortifications and the position of tank traps. The sentences varied from penal servitude for life to six months' imprisonment. Two sergeants from Geneva, Fernand Gozzi and Constant Gallay, have to apply the next twenty years to hard labour.

\* \* \*

By order of the Federal Council the customary annual inspection of arms and equipment will not take place this year; a saving of about half a million francs will be effected.

### Traffic

Another Swiss steamer, the Zurich, has become a total wreck; she foundered near Algeciras in a heavy gale on her way to Lisbon. The whole of the crew were saved by a Spanish ship.

\* \* \*

The "Alpar," a small aviation company in Berne, is to be reconstructed. The control will pass to a Geneva concern which is supplying two modern planes. The transport of goods over long distances is its aim. Negotiations for its amalgamation with Swissair have so far been unsuccessful.

\* \* \*

Following an exchange of views with the French air minister in Paris it is now stated that the construction of the proposed international airport Basle-Mulhouse has become an accomplished fact. The last word remains, of course, with the Federal Council.

\* \* \*

The S.F.R. are experimenting with a new electric engine which is said to reach a speed of 125 km. per hour. A trial trip from Berne to Geneva (nearly 100 miles) took 98 minutes.

\* \* \*

On its way to India the first large inter-continental aeroplane landed on February 2nd on the airfield of Cointrin near Geneva; it carried 40 persons of whom 29 were passengers. The machine had left New York on January 31st and came via Paris where it had made a short stay.

\* \* \*

Here are the traffic figures of the Federal Railways for the first nine months of 1945; they are taken from the "Railway Gazette," January 25th:

"Approximate traffic figures for the first nine months of 1945, which have now been issued officially, show that working receipts for the period decreased by about 4.8 per cent. compared with those for the corresponding months of 1944. The comparative figures are shown below:

	January-September	
	1944	1945
	Francs	Francs
Passengers ... ..	165,486,128	187,905,206
Goods, luggage, livestock and postal ... ..	202,525,611	162,566,157
Miscellaneous ... ..	13,363,676	12,326,376
	<hr/>	<hr/>
	381,375,415	362,797,739

The increase of approximately 13½ per cent. in passenger receipts was partly offset by the substantial decrease in goods receipts, amounting to approximately 19¾ per cent. The decline in goods traffic receipts was less pronounced in the third quarter of 1945 than in the second quarter. This was, in the main, due to the revival of international traffic, although the total tonnage conveyed in the third quarter of 1945 was still below that obtained in the same quarters of 1944 and 1943. The increase in goods traffic with France (and in transit through France from overseas countries) was particularly noticeable, totalling 240,000 *tonnes* in the third quarter compared with 153,840 *tonnes* in the second and with only 36,716 *tonnes* in the first quarter of 1945 (these three figures referring only to traffic to destinations in Switzerland)."

### Economics

Practically all the men discharged from the army have found employment in trade and commerce. During 1945 the labour exchanges registered on an average about 6,500 totally unemployed against 53,000 in 1938.

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ASSOCIATED COMPANIES AT GENEVA, ZURICH, BASLE.

Fresh eggs in Switzerland have been nearly as scarce as in this country. In the last year the ration card entitled a holder to 28 whilst in the two previous years the quantity was fixed at 43 and 31 per annum respectively.

The increase in the price of paper — 3d. per lb. — already officially sanctioned has met with a protest from the newspaper publishers who feel strongly that with the all-round efforts to re-establish "normal" conditions the rise is not justified.

Light upon the precarious existence of the coal miners in the canton Valais is thrown by their march to Lausanne where they protested against the contemplated closing of the mines and demanded that our coal merchants should continue to market our expensive "black diamonds."

Coal imports showed a disastrous drop from 1 $\frac{1}{4}$  million tons in 1944 to 213,000 tons in 1945; normal imports in pre-war years varied between 3 and 3 $\frac{1}{2}$  million tons.

The rationing of benzín (petrol), Diesel and heating oils is to be discontinued as from the end of this month; prices remain the same as before.

A British automobile exhibition was opened at the beginning of this month at Zurich in the Congress Hall. New models of the Standard and Triumph light cars are being shown at prices which appear to us over here very attractive. So far there is hardly any competition to English cars. In the two years before the war over 18,000 cars were imported into our country; the British share reached barely 6%.

According to our daily press over half a million wristlet and pocket watches are waiting to be repaired. The essential spare parts from Switzerland cannot be imported on account of the currency restrictions enforced by the British treasury.

Apart from motor cars and fountain pens other more essential goods are beginning to reach Switzerland from this country, as the following cutting from "The Scotsman," February 1st, affirms:

"Edinburgh's first post-war trade to Switzerland started yesterday, when 20 crates of woollen cloth were sent off by George Harrison and Co., Chambers Street.

They went via Leith on the initial stage of their journey to Basle. The textiles, designed for women and men's suitings, have been piling up for four years. Next lots will go to Zurich, Geneva and Berne. Orders worth thousands of pounds are pouring in for woollens from most European countries, but shortage of labour is holding up export.

The firm's manager stated — 'Manufacturers are quoting nine to twelve months for delivery of goods.' All the crates were marked with the firm's thistle trade mark and the inscription, 'Scotland Delivers the Goods.'"

—oo—

No ostentation was the order that went before Field-Marshal Montgomery's visit to Switzerland. On February 3rd he arrived without much ado at the Badische Bahnhof at Basle in a special train of seven sleeping and saloon carriages; he was accompanied by two adjutants and 18 army policemen and batmen.

The train was wheeled across the Rhine to the S.F.R. track where an electric engine completed the journey to Saanenmöser. From that moment the Field-Marshal became the topic in the Swiss press; his simple and unassuming way in meeting old acquaintances won him the hearts of old and young. We find him pictured along with a local schoolboy also trying to learn skiing, shaking hands with his old friends at the Hotel Wildstrubel in Lenk, writing his autograph in exchange for a bar of rich milk chocolate from a smiling girl in a mountain tuckshop, etc. Before he leaves the great soldier is expected to accept an invitation to lunch with our president, Dr. K. Kobelt.

A special train is likely to bring a crowd of football enthusiasts from Switzerland to witness the match against England which is to take place in May next; we trust they will bring plenty of Swiss francs with them to relieve the annoying shortage in this country.

Hans Gerschwiler, the famous figure skater, whose home is at Richmond, has won the Swiss amateur figure skating championship. During the war Hans Gerschwiler became very well-known locally through his generous services on many occasions in ice shows held at the Richmond Sportsdrome for charities and National Savings weeks.

Like a good many of our pre-war hobbies the housing of canaries has gone out of fashion. However, at the recent National Cage-Bird Show at the Horticultural Hall two golden-red canaries were flown from Switzerland and the fancier, Mr. Sollberger-Wenger, won a first and second prize.

### SWISS RADIO.

We have heard from a number of readers, that the programme relayed to North America daily (except Saturday) from 20.20 — 20.50 Swiss time by the short wave sender Schwarzenburg (Welle 28.83 m./10.405 kc.) can be heard quite clearly in this country.

The programme consists of comments on daily events, news, lectures, sports news, etc., etc.

### MONTY IS IN SWITZERLAND. But can you find him in this Cartoon?



With the caption "Der Mont Gomery," this cartoon appears in the Swiss newspaper, "Die Weltwoche."