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The Swiss Observer

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NEWS AT RANDOM

Federal

New dispositions regulating the import and export of gold as well as inland transactions were issued on Nov. 1st but it became known soon afterwards, though not officially, that certain licenced banks were empowered to dispose of 20 franc gold pieces without any formalities. The good patriot, however, has now to pay 31.80 francs (which includes the 4% turn-over tax) for a louis d'or or, as we call it now at home, a "Vreneli"; this is more than the price an English jeweller will give for a sovereign. It is no longer an offence to hoard gold coins. The store of gold reputed to be held by the Confederation and the National Bank is valued at about six milliard francs. A director of our National Bank stated not long ago that gold should remain in the possession of our note-issue banks and not be owned by private individuals. Contrary to expectations, there has not been a rush for the vrenelis.

The long pending negotiations for the release of the blocked Swiss assets in the U.S.A. seem to have reached finality although in principle the matter was settled months ago. In the absence of an official communiqué from Berne the Swiss press is dealing with the consequences from varied angles and it is generally hoped that large amounts of dollars will become available thereby helping the return to a free exchange.

Short and sweet have been the financial talks between the Swiss trade delegation and representatives of the British Treasury in London to judge from the brief communiqué published in both countries which says that general agreement has been reached on current problems. It is futile to speculate on its meaning as in practice these things manifest themselves differently from what we fondly anticipate. We reproduce in another column the comments of the two leading financial weeklies in this country in the hope that our readers can gain some useful information. It seems to us that our exports to this country will be considerably curtailed unless deliveries from the sterling area (raw materials) can be increased; it is also likely that if we are still allowed to take £75 with us on

a holiday to our country we will be told how and when to spend our money.

Of interest is what the "Daily Herald" prints on Nov. 20th. It says that it has "heard" that the Swiss government intends to introduce soon a new currency for tourists only, i. e. the £75 will have to be exchanged into this currency which is spendable only in Switzerland.

The hope, inspired by the surprising Soviet support and indulged in mainly by our trade unions and leftist papers, that Geneva may become the headquarters of the UNO has been put on the shelf for the next few years. Federal Councillor Max Petitpierre, our foreign minister, has always been lukewarm and sceptical, and other government circles have expressed the fear that with the return of big-power manoeuvring and diplomatic warfare we might one day find ourselves near the crater of a volcano.

The following is taken from the "Daily Telegraph" Nov. 15th:—

"The Swiss Government's friendliness towards

ROYAL VICTORIA HOTEL

ST. LEONARDS-ON-SEA

(Extract from the "Neue Zürcher Zeitung.")

"The Swiss Students staying in England celebrated their National Independence last August 1st.

After riding through the glorious green of Kent the party began in earnest at the best Hotel in the South of England, namely, the Royal Victoria Hotel, the Manager of which is a Swiss from Poschiavo. In this Anglo-Swiss establishment a warm welcome was extended to the visitors.

During the excellent dinner, music of Tchaikowsky and Mozart was played by the orchestra, which, after the dinner, with versatility switched to dance music and Swiss tunes and dances.

It is quite clear that the Swiss are welcome guests in the United Kingdom."

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Britain has led to an unusual triangular "lend lease" deal in Berne. It was announced that the Swiss Foreign Office have let to the British Legation the expensive German Embassy buildings, which came under Swiss trusteeship after the Nazi collapse.

In return the much smaller British Legation buildings are being let by our Foreign Office to the Swiss "German interests representation" office. Hitherto the latter have been in the German Embassy.

This transfer will greatly aid the vastly extended work of the British offices in Berne. The Minister himself is exchanging a modest house in Thunstrasse for the much more spacious, if also more pompous, private residence of the Nazi Ambassador."

Cantonal

According to recent statistics the population of the town of Lucerne now exceeds 60,000; at the last official census five years ago 54,716 inhabitants were counted.

An unusual strike is likely to break out in Glaris if the cantonal authorities refuse to capitulate. Coffins are supplied free of cost by the state under agreement with the carpenters; their union is now insisting on a maximum price of Frs.54 each. Though in other cantons the prices are lower — in Zurich 48 francs — it is argued that the Glarais are always entombed in the best of wood.

Amazement has been caused in Basle by a decision of the appeal court allowing the previous tenant of the Gotthard-Terminus hotel to again take over the management. The hotel had been closed by order of the Regierungsrat on account of persistent gambling in spite of numerous fines. The local police, however, has been instructed to keep an eye on the doings (!).

Another blow to suffragettes' hopes was administered in the canton Ticino when about 14,000 voters negatived the proposal, only 4,200 being in favour. No more than 45% of the electorate recorded their opinion.

A tailor in Basle has petitioned the Grosse Rat in an attempt to obtain payment for a pair of trousers which one of the councillors has omitted to liquidate in spite of court proceedings; the tailor is endeavouring to attach the daily attendance money paid to the councillor until the debt is paid off.

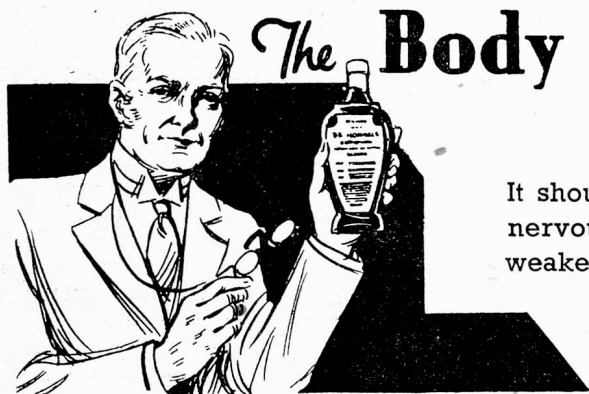
The voters in the canton Vaud disapproved the granting of a contribution of over five million francs to Lausanne for the purpose of developing the local air-field at Ecublens.

The town president of Lausanne has presented the parents of a baby girl, Renée Christinat, with a savings book of Frs.1,000 which amount was collected by the people of the town. It is to commemorate her birth which marks the 100,000th inhabitant; at the beginning of this century the population of Lausanne was less than 50,000.

The hamlet of Mayen near Vionnaz in the district of Monthey has been totally destroyed by a fire, the origin of which is so far a mystery though people attribute it to Föhn. A relief fund has been opened in the canton Valais to raise 600,000 francs, the estimated value of the damage. No lives have been lost but all the 73 inhabitants have been rendered homeless.

The efforts to identify and locate the wild beast in the upper Rhone valley have so far not produced any abatement, and the poor and hard-working farmers may scarcely find consolation in a chilly statement by an official spokesman to the effect that the cantonal government cannot offer any compensation for the damage suffered. Though in the aggregate the loss is small the destruction of sheep and goats is a severe blow to the individual crofters with the winter facing them.

The Neuchâtel police found it necessary to call in the help of an aeroplane in order to discover the whereabouts of a hardened burglar, named W. Rognon, who had been plundering huts and houses along the lake



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for some considerable time. After lengthy searches two boats hidden in the reeds were discovered; apart from a store of foodstuffs they were comfortably equipped with stolen ware but the rambling occupant has remained missing.

The communist "Voix Ouvrière" in Geneva is the only paper our country — and probably in the whole of Europe — that has published the pictures taken at the Nuremberg execution.

Army

The Federal Council has announced a number of promotions in our army command to take effect from the beginning of the new year. Amongst them are: Col. Johann Berli to be Chief of Staff of Infantry in place of Col. Probst, who has resigned for personal reasons, at the age of 59; Col. Montfort, at present Commandant of the second division, will take over the first division in place of Col. Petitpierre who is retiring at the end of this year; Col. Corbat will advance from the 6th division to the command of the second, and his old command will go to Col. Edgar Schumacher.

Traffic

Here is a short retrospect of the traffic returns of the S.F.R. for the first six months of this year, as published by the "Railway Gazette," Nov. 1st:

"The accounts of the Swiss Federal Railways for the first half of the current year show that working receipts increased by approximately 22 per cent. as compared with 1945, while working expenditure increased by only 7½ per cent. Goods traffic showed a remarkable expansion, receipts exceeding those of 1945 by no less than 44.4 per cent.

Passenger receipts, on the other hand, increased by only 3¼ per cent. approximately, the aggregate being lower than the goods receipts, although in the first six months of 1945 passenger receipts exceeded goods by about 18 per cent.

The volume of traffic in the first half of 1946, both passenger and goods, showed a notable increase compared with the corresponding period of 1945. The revival of goods traffic in the first half of the

current year compared with 1945, however, was not sufficient to attain the same level as in January to June, 1944. In that year the tonnage carried was influenced by the transit traffic through Switzerland between the main partners of the Axis group."

According to the latest information The Engadine Express will run daily again from the 9th December to the end of January; sleeping cars will be included three times a week from Victoria station right to St. Moritz.

A mixed commission meeting at Locarno has inspected the harbour installations at Basle — one of the preliminaries for the proposed construction of a ship-canal from Locarno to Venice.

Definite plans have been submitted to the Federal and Cantonal authorities for the intended erection of an aerodrome at Cret-Du-Loche, to the west of the present airfield at Eplatures.

Economics

The cost of living index figures compiled by the Federal statistical bureau in Berne, show an all round increase for the month of October, and with 154.2 (August 1939=100) are two per cent. higher than for the preceding month. The higher cost of dairy produce is mainly responsible.

An official warning has been issued against the consumption of imported duck eggs unless they are hard-boiled. It has been found that a recent consignment contained germs of enteritis. In future all such eggs will have to be clearly marked with the instruction that they must be well boiled before eating.

The Swiss radio announced an impending increase in the tax on cars and salt.

A noteworthy increase in the numbers of emigrants is recorded. In this year to the end of August last no less than 1,166 young compatriots have found positions in countries overseas; in the same period last year no more than 114 ventured the hazardous plunge. South America seems to offer the chief attraction.

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