

# News at random

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# The Swiss Observer

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This year as in previous years, I wish to convey my warmest greetings for Christmas and 1947 to all members of the Swiss colony in Great Britain.

Paul Ruegger.

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## NEWS AT RANDOM

### Federal

At the joint session of our parliament on the 12th inst. the present Vice-President, Federal Councillor Dr. Philipp Etter (Zug), was elected President of the Confederation for the year 1947. He had originally been elected to the Federal Council in 1934 as successor to Federal Councillor Musy and has already been twice our highest magistrate in 1939 and 1942. Following tradition, Dr. Enrico Celio was elected Vice-President; he was made a member of the Federal Council in February 1940 taking the place of Giuseppe Motta and was president of the Confederation in 1943.

On the opening of the winter session of our parliament Dr. Max Wey, succeeding Robert Grimm, was elected President of the National Council and Ständerat. Walter Ackermann, replacing Dr. J. Piller, President of the States Council.

It was stated officially at Berne, on December 1st, that all the formalities for the immediate release of the frozen dollar assets in the U.S.A., valued at four to five milliard francs) have been completed. It is, however, also stated that the Swiss Clearing Association will certify those assets eligible for the release.

In next year's Federal budget the subsidy to Swiss schools abroad will be increased to 170,000 francs which is 106,000 francs more than previously and a closer co-operation with schools at home will be aimed at.

Nothing positive has transpired in Switzerland about the financial talks recently conducted by a Swiss trade delegation in London and which at the time were stated to have concluded in a general agreement on current problems. The "Financial Times" of November 25th in referring to this matter reveals that these talks may be resumed in the near future — probably after Xmas.

In pursuance to a former decision to constitute social attachés at our Legations abroad, the Federal Council has now nominated M. Paul Clottu, born in 1897, to fill this office at the Swiss Legation in London. Before the war M. Clottu was a member of the International Labour Office at Geneva, then joined the International Red Cross and is now at one of the Federal departments at Berne; he is expected to arrive here at the beginning of the year.

In the National Council a member (Von Almen — Berne) invited the Federal Council to study the establishment of a "Swiss House" in London. It should be situated in the centre of the metropolis in conjunction with the home offices for furthering trade and traffic; the export trade and tourism should have an opportunity of concentrating propaganda on a wide scale. In the speaker's opinion the interested parties should be called upon to supply the necessary funds thus precluding government assistance. Federal Councillor Celio promised to give this suggestion his attention but pointed out the great difficulties in the way of realisation. In the meantime we reproduce a reference in the "Daily Telegraph" of December 5th, which we hope is at least an intelligent anticipation:

"London is likely in the near future to have a Swiss House. This will be run by the Swiss Government, who will offer receptions, exhibitions and trade shows to the British public.

The scheme has just been decided on — at least, as far as the Swiss are concerned — by the unanimous acceptance in the Swiss Parliament of a motion to this effect. It was put forward by M. Von Allmen, who is known to the great circle of British winter sportsmen as the proprietor of the Kleine Scheidegg Hotel, half-way up the Jungfrau peak.

Only obstacle in the way is the difficulty of buying a suitable property in London, preferably in Regent Street."

### Cantonal

In the absence of startling news from Zürich the following, an eulogy taken from the December issue of "Good Housekeeping" may delight a good many of our readers:

"You can keep Fifth Avenue. You can pocket the Rue de la Paix. The Bahnhofstrasse, for me, has always been the world's loveliest, most "atmospheric" shopping street. There it is, broad but not too broad, straight but not too straight, running from the busy neon-lit gaiety of the main station down to the blue lake of Zürich. In winter the snow is piled and banked under the plane-trees, a white margin edging the befurred, festive crowds. In summer the trees are grateful shade as you wait for your blue-and-white No. 10 tram. I prefer winter. And of all the winter-months, December, please!

The summer tourist throngs are gone. (And what a summer it has been!) The winter sports transients have not begun. (Only a month or two to the first real post-war season.) In December the Bahnhofstrasse is itself again.

The latest cars from America, the newest from England, whip their chains on the frosty tarmac. The handsome Swiss police wave huge gauntlets from their operatic white rostrums. There's that moment I love when the snow turns to drizzle and the women, instantly unzipping coloured raincoats from plastic wallets, stage a Cochran quick-change in waterproof nylon. Imagine it for yourself. And let me paint in the luscious brilliance of the shops in the background — the fruit and hothouse flowers, rainbow umbrellas, perfumes, jewellery, silk stockings galore, *confiserie*, *pâtisserie*. We are beginning to know what it is ourselves to see a little more in the shops, month by month. Can it be merely contrast that gives the Bahnhofstrasse its glittering, sumptuous air?"

\* \* \*

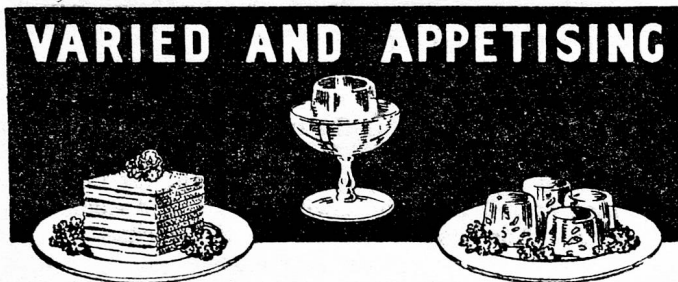
The President of the Board of Trade, Sir Stafford Cripps who is on a private visit, delivered a lecture on the 13th inst. on British Reconstruction at the recently formed Anglo-Swiss Association at Zurich.

\* \* \*

In the elections for the cantonal council of Zug the socialists increased this representation by five to fourteen at the expense of the conservatives (2) and liberals (3); in the new council of 78 the conservatives control exactly half the seats.

\* \* \*

The little summer resort Meiringen, at the foot of the Grimsel pass, was achieving world-fame when on November 23rd the exact location of the ill-fated American army transport plane became known. As the event developed the people were treated to a marvellous display of planes, jeeps, paratroopers, G.I.'s, reporters and cameramen that crowded the road to Interlaken — in fact, an invasion of an United States army on war footing which was wondered at in the best of good nature. But all the time a less glamorous manifestation was in course of preparation by our authorities. The government was hastily calling up and assembling the best of our local climbers and guides, for whom the Niederhasli is rightly renowned, in addition to army units; all the men were carefully selected on the strength of experience and physical fitness. Continuous radio communication was established by dropping from the air transmitting sets on the route of the planned ascent. The rescue party was placed under the com-



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mand of Lt. Wanner and a relief team was standing by in charge of Capt. Wyss. A troop of 70 climbers and guides left the same evening (Saturday) at 8 o'clock divided into groups. Crawling under dangerous conditions, roped together, often guided only by the compass and at times in heavy snow reaching to their thighs, they greeted the 12 survivors after ten hours hazardous and heroic efforts. The distance from Meiringen as the crow flies is 25.6 miles only and the altitude 10,500 feet. The actual descent was perhaps not so perilous: the 12 passengers were gradually taken to a spot on the Gauli glacier where previously firm ground had been stamped down on the snow by the climbers so as to enable a landing by two slow-flying Fieseler Stork or Pelikan ski-planes. Two by two the lucky voyagers were flown down to Unterbach (Meiringen); the two planes were piloted by Capt. V. Hug and Major P. Hitz who had to make several trips as their descent took about two hours each time. The whole operation was completed according to plan early on Sunday morning. — Of the many not over-generous appraisals in the foreign press we reprint the following from the "New York Herald Tribune":

"In the midst of the confusions of the present day, it is both a relief and a happy augury to observe how well the jarring elements of human society can collaborate when an issue is presented in such simple, if dramatic, terms as that of a plane lost in the heart of a continent. There was high courage involved in the rescue of the twelve Americans stranded beside their wrecked transport on the Gauli Glacier — high courage, intricate technical skills and a world of good will. The Swiss especially those who flew tiny planes to a difficult landing near the wreck, and those who toiled on foot up the mountain slopes, have won the gratitude and respect of the rescued party's countrymen.

It is not easy to appreciate the task involved in the rescue for those Americans whose vision of Europe is that of a continent tamed over many centuries to the uses — and abuses — of men. But human bonds lie lightly on the Alps. The great mountains press boldly and contemptuously through the fabric with which civilization has clothed the less rugged portions of Europe, islands of primeval rock

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and everlasting snow, which men may surmount, but not without skill and fortitude."

Professor Carl Rehfuss, the musical director of the Berne radio and formerly a renowned concert singer, died suddenly while returning from a studio rehearsal.

In the elections for the Grand Conseil in Fribourg the socialists scored a victory by securing for the first time 13 seats; though the conservatives were returned five mandates short, they still hold the majority in the council with 79 members out of a total of 127.

In a high treason trial before the divisional tribunal V at Basle, Joseph Böswald, a former commissioner of the criminal police, was sentenced to twenty years penal servitude; his three accomplices received eight and three years hard labour and two years imprisonment respectively. Their delinquencies date back to the years 1940 and 1942 when they were acting for the German intelligence service. All four have lodged an appeal.

The leader of the Zionist movement, 72 year old Professor Chaim Weizmann, who is also a noted chemist, was entertained by well-known Swiss savants at the hotel Trois Rois, at Basle, at which Professor W. Rappard (Geneva) and Professor L. Ruzicka (Zürich) eulogized the great services of their guest both

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in the field of Zionism and Science. At the official opening on December 9th, in the large hall of the Basle Fair, Dr. Karl Peter, the President of the Regierungsrat, welcomed the 370 delegates from 43 different countries saying that Basle was the cradle of political Zionism and paying tribute to the great pioneer Theodor Herzl at the first congress exactly fifty years ago. To commemorate this milestone in the movement the meeting decided to have a forest or grove planted on the heights near Jerusalem on the way to Bethlehem to be named, it is positively hoped, after the historic town on the Rhine. There is already a street in Tel Aviv similarly distinguished.

After seven years interruption the first farmers' wives — about twenty crossed the frontiers from the neighbouring Neudorf to offer their vegetables at the Basle market on the 11th inst. This was possible after protracted negotiations with the French occupying authorities along the Rhine.

The sustained agitation against the erection of a large power station in the "Hinterrhein," for which the cantons Grisons and Uri had already granted the concession, has gained its object. The property of three small communes would have been turned into enormous reservoirs, and although the inhabitants were offered liberal compensation in other parts of the canton they protested vehemently against this nationalisation or expropriation of land that had been occupied by their families for generations. The Federal Council to whom the appeal went in the last instance protected the claims of these small peasants, thereby sacrificing a project which would have enabled the supply of electric power at exceptionally low rates.

A building contractor and noted motor cycle racer, Rinaldo Notari, age 39, was killed by falling timber while supervising the demolition of an old building at Bellinzona.

The Federal statistics office has now published particulars about the canton Ticino collected at the time of the national census in 1941. The population is given as 161,882, nearly 10,000 more than in 1920, the fair sex predominating by about 14%. Against 149,764 catholics there are 9,053 protestants and 500 israelites. The mother tongue of the overwhelming majority is, of course, Italian, but 13,209 acknowledged the German language, 1,736 French and 199 Romansch.

A level-crossing at St. Blaise, near Neuchâtel, became the scene of a railway accident on November 26th, when the last four coaches of the night express from Berne to Neuchâtel left the track and partly telescoped. Three passengers lost their lives and a small number were badly injured. The names of the dead are: Veuve Christine Vioget from Neuchâtel; the retired railway employee, Robert Kaltenrieder, from Grandson; and Mme. A. Jobin, age 41, from Saignelégier. Detained in the Neuchâtel hospital are: Charles Nussbaumer from Neuchâtel; Arthur Jobin from Saignelégier; Mme R. Lanz from Serrières; J. L. Perrenoud from Colombier and Ed. Hofmann, an apprentice in Neuchâtel. The damage was considerable but in the course of the following morning the line was clear again. On the day of the accident a number of workmen were engaged near the spot in connecting the main track to an industrial side line.

The elusive house burglar, W. Rognon, who for weeks has been hunted by the Neuchâtel police by car and plane, has at last been arrested in La Côtes-aux-Fées.

The International Committee of the Red Cross regret to announce the death of Monsieur Charles Huber, head of the Delegation of the International Committee of the Red Cross at Vlotho, British Zone of Germany. He was killed in a car accident on November 19th.

His car, driven by a German chauffeur, crashed into a lorry. Mons. Huber was killed instantly, and a British lady doctor who was accompanying him, died shortly afterwards. The driver was seriously injured.

Monsieur Huber was well known to the Government Authorities in India, the United States of America, and more recently in the British Zone of Germany. After a successful career abroad as agent for an important Swiss firm, Monsieur Huber acted as Delegate for British India in Simla, from May 1941 until the end of 1944. In March 1945 he was appointed head of the Delegation in the U.S.A., and in June 1946, Chief Delegate at Vlotho. Here, he not only made a great number of visits to camps for prisoners of war and civilian internees, but also organized the transport of "surplus kit," comprising hundreds of tons of excess baggage belonging to prisoners of war who had been repatriated or transferred from the United States of Europe.

The death of Monsieur Charles Huber deprives the International Committee of the services of a Delegate who was most popular with all the Authorities with

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whom he had to deal. He rendered invaluable service to the Red Cross, whose cause he served to the utmost of his ability and with great success.

An initiative demand tentatively described as the "right to work" launched by the independent "Landesring" (Duttweiler) met with a decisive discouragement when the plebiscite on Sunday, December 8th, resulted in 524,336 noes against 124,000 ayes. Though the proposal had been prepared and dessionimated for a long time no more than 54% of the electorate went to the polls. Zürich was lukewarm with a three to five rejection but the inner cantons, particularly Unterwalden with ten to one against, were overwhelmingly deniable. The government did not look upon the innovation with favour and the socialists made a stand against it in view of another similar scheme cherished by them and likely to come before the people before long.

### Traffic

Offers are invited by the Federal War Transport Office for the whole of the steamers which were acquired by the Confederation during the war. They number four and were known under the following names: Eiger (8,137 tons), St. Gotthard (8,839 tons), Säntis (6,690 tons) and Chasseral (4,064 tons).

Owing to a heavy ground fog at Dübendorf the international air service (London, Paris, Brussels, Oslo, etc.) was deviated temporarily to the Basle — Mülhausen airfield on November 28th and 29th. Pilots expressed their astonishment at the rapid construction and intense development of this new airport.

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Without debate our Parliament has ratified the International Civil Aviation Agreement of December 7th, 1944.

Some speculation — probably inspired — is voiced in the English press as to the effect on tourist traffic of the conversations that have recently taken place between a Swiss delegation and representatives of the Treasury. So far the Swiss papers are reproducing comments from the British press but an official statement from Berne is expected shortly. There can be little doubt that British visitors will have to curtail their purchases whether they be personal apparel or gifts for friends over here; it is a kind of import not looked upon favourably in this country. We have all become used to a measure of regimentation in this country but when we go abroad we like to feel and enjoy a whiff of freedom and it remains to be seen how new restrictions will react on the flow of tourists. Here is a typical letter which appeared in the "Sunday Times," December 1st; the writer is, of course, looking at things from the wrong angle:

"The Englishman is harassed and worried enough by all sorts of restrictions, without the Swiss — so jealous of their own liberty — adding to it by telling him how he is to spend his money while on holiday in their country. Many of my friends have already expressed their determination not to go to Switzerland any more if any such regulation comes into force.

While I travelled all over Switzerland last summer I had the greatest difficulty in finding accommodation, both in well-known and in off-the-road places. This refutes the allegation that the Swiss hotel-keepers suffered from the way in which the English tourists spent their money."

The doubling of the Gotthard route has induced the "Railway Gazette," November 22nd, to publish the following retrospect of this great undertaking:

"With the completion of double track on the Rivera-Taverne section, the process of doubling the whole length of the Gotthard Railway is nearing completion. From Arth-Goldau, in the north, to the Italian frontier station of Chiasso, the only single-track sections now remaining are those between Brunnen and Sisikon, alongside the Lake of Lucerne; and between Melide and Maroggia, on the Lake of Lugano.

On the Brunnen-Sisikon section, work on the second track is already in progress. The plans for the Lake of Lugano are linked closely with a project for regulating the water level of the lake, which will necessitate new embankments for roads and railways.

As far back as 1869, when the original agreement for construction of the Gotthard Railway was entered into by Switzerland, Italy, and Germany, double-tracking of the line was envisaged, and the Gotthard Tunnel, as well as other important tunnels on the line, were constructed from the first to accommodate two tracks. In 1876 a financial crisis forced the Gotthard Railway Company to reduce its initial capital expenditure, and most other sections of the line were built for single-line operation only. However, almost immediately after the opening of the line in 1884, the development of traffic exceeded all expectations and called for the successive provision of double-tracking.

Because of the great engineering difficulties, and to the interruptions caused by the two world wars and the periods of economic crisis between them, the process has been spread over many decades. When, in 1909, the line was taken over by the Swiss Federal Railways, the whole of the principal mountain section, between Erstfeld and Bellinzona, was doubled. Further sections followed soon afterwards.

After the first world war, priority was given to electrification of the line, which necessitated the replacement of most of the iron bridges by stone

bridges. In the course of these works, the section between Giubiasco and Al Sasso also was doubled. In 1934, the fiftieth anniversary of the opening of the line was celebrated by the inauguration of the second Monte Ceneri Tunnel, more than a mile in length, which carried the second track through the mountain range south of Bellinzona.

The works completed on the Rivera-Taverne section concern a length of line immediately south of the Monte Ceneri tunnels. This section is about 5½ miles long and follows the course of the Vedegia Valley.

In its upper part, the Vedegia Valley is rather featureless. Here engineering works were confined mainly to the elimination of level crossings, and to the drainage of areas cut off by the railway embankment. In its lower part, however, between Mezzovico and Taverne, the valley becomes a ravine, so that the work called for rock blasting, earth movements, and engineering works of some magnitude."

Particulars of a new Swiss Tourist Agreement have now been officially released by the Treasury and published in the Swiss press. The following is taken from "The Times," December 11th:—

"From December 18th a special Swiss certificate will be required for the allocation of funds for tourists and for their conversion into Swiss francs. These certificates will be issued by the Swiss Tourist Traffic Federation, at an office to be opened on that date at 1, Great Cumberland Place, London, W.1, by reference to the total amount of Swiss francs allotted for this purpose.

When the new arrangements come into operation, application for these certificates should be made by prospective tourists either direct or through their travel agents. It should be noted that under the new arrangements, tourists will no longer be able to obtain in Switzerland the full counter-value of their credit documents in cash. They will receive vouchers enabling them to pay for their hotel and travelling expenses in Switzerland, and a reasonable amount in cash.

The normal procedure for obtaining the necessary visas remains unchanged, and the present arrangements with banks and tourist agencies in this country are not affected.

It is not intended to impose similar limitations on Swiss visitors arriving in this country."

Previous to the above date it has been widely stated that a daily influx of 3,000 English tourists has booked their reservations at winter sports centres, particularly in the Engadine.

### Economics

Figures given in the House of Commons by the President of the Board of Trade disclose an aggregate of 2½ million £ as the value of imports from Switzerland for the period of January to October 1946; the chief items are machinery 867 tons with £780,000 and watches and watch movements worth £596,000. As far as machinery is concerned a Manchester reader has sent us the following cutting from a local trade paper, the "Textile Mercury" of November 15th, which gives the total textile machinery exports for the first six months:

"Switzerland's exports of textile machinery have risen considerably this year — they reached a value of 45 million francs in the first six months of



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1946 compared with only 19,700,000 francs in the corresponding period of 1945 (6,133 tons against 3,179 tons). Although the Swiss textile industry, also, is enjoying strong demand from abroad, the large exports of textile machinery from Switzerland have given rise to discussions regarding the advisability of such machinery shipments. Switzerland, textile men argue, will soon be faced with strong competition from countries whom she is now supplying with machinery."

An agreement in principle has been reached with the Ministry of Labour for the exchange of hotel students or employees between our two countries; details are being worked out.

The International Fur and Leather Fair, postponed from last year, is to be held from April 10th to 17th in Basle.

Lower water levels at power plants have led to rationing of electricity for household and commercial use. In some districts heating of homes by electricity is forbidden and in others hot-water heaters can be switched on on Saturdays and Sundays only.

Believe it or not, chocolate from abroad is actually arriving in Switzerland. During the month of October we have imported 160 tons from the Argentine at a cost of about half a million francs. Holland has also sent us a quantity (exact figure not stated) at less than 40 cts. per 100 kilo(!). A spokesman of the chocolate industry has given out a warning that the shortage would continue for months to come as world production of cocoa is not expected to cover the demand for several years.

Recent statistics reveal that the largest farmsteads are in the canton Zug whose peasants on an average are assessed at 48,000 francs. In the canton Berne the average works out 36,000 francs. The poorest peasants — under 20,000 francs average assessment — are in the cantons Uri, Ticino and Valais.

—oOo—

This year's Pro Juventute stamps, which were issued on November 30th and are valid for postage until May 31st next, picture a famous Swiss artist and three home flowers. The five-plus-five rappen, green (engraved by the Government Printing Office, Berne) portrays Rodolphe Toepffer, artist of the nineteenth century. The rest of the set, helioengraved by Courvoisier, Chaux-de-Fonds, include the following: 10-plus-10r. olive, orange and grey, white narcissus 20-plus-10r. red, yellow and grey, mountain cactus, and 30-plus-10r. blue, lialac and grey, Alpine thistle.

COMMUNICATION FROM THE SWISS LEGATION.

The Swiss Legation have drawn our attention to the fact that according to the statement made by the President of the Board of Trade in the House of Commons on the 21st October, 1946, War Damage Claims under the Business and Private Chattels Schemes will not be considered after the end of this year, unless the claimant can show that he has been prevented by circumstances not under his control from lodging his claim.

Sir Stafford Cripps also announced that all amounts in respect of Private Chattels Claims, payment of which has been deferred, will be paid together with accrued interest at 2½%, less tax, as soon as possible in the next financial year. The British Government aim at making these payments in July 1947.

No date has yet been fixed for payments under the Business Scheme.



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