

News at random

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NEWS AT RANDOM

Federal

From the latest report of the Swiss National Bank it would appear that our claims under the different clearing agreements amount to about 1.3 milliard francs; most of it is unrecoverable the largest debtor being Germany with 938.7 million francs.

* * *

The Federal Council approved the trade agreement with Argentine which was concluded on January 20th in Buenos Aires by a Swiss trade delegation.

The agreement runs for five years and provides for Argentine deliveries of wheat, rye, corn, oats, edible oils, leather, meat, butter, lard, castor oil, while Switzerland will supply industrial machinery of all kinds, textile machines, looms, motors, steamboilers and electrical, telephone, telegraph and radio materials as well as chemical and pharmaceutical products.

* * *

A new Anglo-Swiss trade and monetary agreement is stated to have been the subject of negotiations which commenced at Berne on February 24th. Nothing official has so far appeared in the Swiss press but the following reprinted from the February issue of "The Banker" will be of interest: "The British Government has agreed to Swiss measures designed to keep tourist traffic and the expenditure of British tourists in Switzerland within reasonable limits. A special Swiss certificate is now required before funds are allocated by the authorization officer in cash; for the rest he receives vouchers in denominations of Frs. 10 each valid in Switzerland for any of the services normally required by a tourist."

* * *

The Allied War Criminals Court at Hamburg recently sentenced to death a Swiss girl who was charged with cruelty to inmates of a German concentration camp where she occupied a controlling position though a prisoner herself. Her name is Carmen Mory (described by sympathisers as the "Black Angel of Ravensbruck") who has an adventurous life behind

her. At her trial the evidence is said to have been conflicting and her lawyers and relatives have approached the Federal Council with the plea that a reprieve might be suggested by the Council. The Federal Council stated that the information at his disposal was not sufficient to form an independent judgment but has consented to convey the plea to the British authorities in the hope that the verdict might be reconsidered.

Cantonal

After a lengthy discussion the Zurich cantonal council decided by a large majority to exempt from income tax the recipients of special long-service gratifications; on the other hand members of the communist party are pressing, among other demands, for increased death duties on large estates. [A.T.S.]

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On account of the scarcity of current the municipal tramways of Zurich ceased running on Sundays between noon and 6 p.m. [A.T.S.]

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Another post office, this time the one at Zollikon, was partly looted in broad day-light on Saturday, February 15th, by a couple of amateurs who proceeded on military lines. Arriving in a taxi, which they stopped and kept waiting in a side street, they first partook of a fortifying café-kirsch at a close-by tavern and then entered leisurely the office — one through the front entrance and the other one at the rear service-door. At a given moment they drew revolvers shouting "hands up — right turn," cut the telephone line and emptied a drawer containing about 20,000 francs in notes. The small staff and the few callers were kept at bay frightened by the fire-arms while the two plunderers walked round the corner and unconcernedly ordered the taximan to drive away. However, the *modus operandi* was not sufficiently ingenious for the alert Zurich police who, on the following Monday morning, visited a certain business house and called out for an interview two of their clerks. They both confessed unhesitatingly and accompanied their guides like a pair of lambs. They are Hans Heer, age 28, and Arthur Hollinger, age 22, who occupied good positions in the firm and were liked and respected by both the principals and the staff. All the money was recovered and subsequent enquiries disclosed previous petty thefts in other quarters.

The veteran rifle champion, Ernst Stumpf, died in Zurich at the age of 82; he represented our country at many international matches and was an honorary member of the Swiss Rifle Association.

A once prominent figure, well remembered by the older generation of the London Colony, died in Zurich at the age of 80; it was Albert Hofammann who was the first manager of the employment department, founded in 1897, of the Schweiz. Kaufm. Verein. Firm and at times obstinate he toiled with energy and efficiency to develop this new activity and has been rewarded to dwell upon the growing success of his 36 years uninterrupted efforts. In his early life he spent some time abroad; apart from having been president of the Zurich section for eleven years he took an active interest in municipal affairs. [A.T.S.]

The municipal tramways closed the last financial year with a net surplus of 6,300,000 frs., which is about 1,200,000 less than in the previous year. Over 143,000,000 passengers were carried against 131,000,000 in 1945. [A.T.S.]

The accounts for 1946 of the commune of Schwyz actually closed with a surplus of 22,433 frs. [A.T.S.]

In the canton Zug planters of vegetables have been ordered by their association to cultivate about 30% less ground than last year as the cultivation is likely to become uneconomic on account of increasing foreign imports. [A.T.S.]

An all-round cost of living bonus of 25% has been granted in the Canton Zug to civil servants; retired members of the Regierungsrat become entitled to 20% extra if their pension does not exceed 5,000 frs. [A.T.S.]

Some time ago the Bernese sanctioned a credit of 7½ million francs for the acquisition and partial reconstruction of the "Bellevue" sanatorium in Montana. From a discussion in the Grosse Rat it now transpires that the final total cost will be very much higher. Further land with a large building is to be purchased but apart from this the 280 beds are now estimated to cost 30,000 francs each all told.

Prof. Dr. H. Bluntschli, Director of the Institute of Anatomy at the Bernese University, celebrated his 70th anniversary on February 10th, in the best of health.

In Berne the collection of waste paper seems to be a profitable enterprise. When at the central depot the lot brought in by the end of February was sorted 8,590 frs. in notes of various denominations came to light. The Cantonal police is offering to refund the money to those who can prove loss and ownership. [A.T.S.]

The population of the town of Fribourg has been increasing considerably during the last few years and to end of January last registered 27,504 residents, though only about two thirds originate from the canton.

In place of Maxime Quartenoud who has been elected to the Conseil d'Etats, Fribourg has nominated Charles Chassot to be the new National Councillor. [A.T.S.]

Lively debates in the Basle Grosse Rat are endeavouring to balance the 1947 budget at a figure that does not call attention to the reckless expenditure that the councillors have approved with equanimity and lack of forethought. At present the anticipated deficit exceeds 22 million francs and the government's expenses have reached 575 francs annually per head of population — a state of affairs not known before in Switzerland. A drastic change alone can save the situation and as there are no *assumed* exports to fall back upon the much boasted abundance of the "rich old" families is likely to be heavily tapped. [A.T.S.]

Suggestions and designs are being invited in connection with the rebuilding of the Centralbahnplatz in Basle and the Grosse Rat has set aside a sum of 51,000 francs for prizes. [A.T.S.]

The merry frolics at the Basle carnival (February 24th) were not restrained by the prevailing cold weather nor the many seasonal restrictions. Winston

Churchill having overlooked the town on his recent visit to our country his cigar surrounded by his effigy in the company of fascinating girls was carried through the streets.

* * *

From a Canadian paper we gather the news that the priceless paintings of the Basle art museum were safely hidden in cellars in Swiss mountain retreats during the war and that they are now all back in their original home.

* * *

At the closing discussion on the 1947 budget the Councillors of the Basle Grosse Rat sanctioned a deficit of 16,900,000 frs. by 75 against 13 noes, the latter being liberals and Landesring. [A.T.S.]

* * *

The damage by American bombers in the canton Schaffhausen is stated to have been 55 million francs; so far 17 million francs have been paid on account by the U.S.A. though the sufferers have been partly indemnified by the home authorities to the tune of 27.6 million francs.

* * *

An avalanche, not uncommon in this particular district, claimed no less than seven skiers above St. Antonio near Klosters on Sunday, February 9th. An advertised ski run had been cancelled owing to a change in the weather but eleven young and experienced members of the local club risked the ascent. Just before reaching the peak near the Sesa Plana range they were caught without warning and buried. One of them was able to extricate himself helping another one to come to light and they in turn saved the life of two other comrades. With the exception of the schoolmaster, Gansner, who was 27, the other six victims were all youngsters, some of them under 20. Their names are: the brothers Mathis and Johann Thöny, Peter Flütsch, Christian Ladner, Christian Thöny and Hans Disch.

* * *

A piquant episode is called to our memory by the death at Chur at the age of 51, of Moritz Conradi, who assassinated in May 1923 in his hotel the Soviet observer Worosky at the international peace conference at Lausanne. Conradi's family were rendered penniless during the Russian revolution which preyed on his mind; the assizes at Lausanne before whom he was

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charged with murder returned a verdict which in effect declared him *Not guilty*. [A.T.S.]

* * *

The small commune of Besenbüren in the Aargau experienced an unusual surprise, perhaps not altogether inappropriate to its name. The village elders had been called to a special meeting to discuss and approve the budget for the current year but as the momentous document could not be found and no copy had been filed the venerable legislators had to adjourn to a more enjoyable pursuit.

* * *

The ruins or what remains of the old castle Habsburg are to be renovated at a cost of nearly 200,000 francs if a proposal of the Aargau government is received favourably. Shortly before the war a decision to this effect had been taken but had to remain dormant. If this historic citadel is to be preserved repairs cannot be delayed any longer.

* * *

A fire which broke out on February 11th in the timber yard and joinery of Jäggi A.G., in Olten, caused considerable damage which is said to exceed 220,000 francs.

* * *

Dr. Heinrich Häberlin, a former Federal Councillor, died in Frauenfeld at the age of 79 after a long illness. A lawyer by vocation he was elected to the

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National Council in 1904 to which he belonged without a break until in February, 1920, he joined the Federal Council taking the place of Federal Councillor Calonder who then retired. He was twice President of the Confederation, in 1926 and 1931, and went into retirement in 1934.

The elections for the Grand Council in the Ticino (February 8th/9th) brought little change but there was a slight movement to the left. The liberal-democrats lost two seats and now hold 27, the conservatives retained their 24 mandates, the socialists are one to the good with nine seats, and a new-comer is the communist party with two members.

Giovan-Battista Camponovo, editor of the Ticinese daily "Popolo e libertà" died in Bellinzona at the age of 46; he was secretary of the conservative party of his canton. [A.T.S.]

The carnival celebrations in Bellinzona terminated with a free distribution to the population of 250 portions of "Busecca" (a meat dish peculiar to the Ticino).

The Grand Conseil in Vaud has increased the daily attendance dole of its members from 8 to 20 francs and will allow 30 cts. per km. for travelling expenses; the President of the Council is to receive an extra 500 francs for "frais de représentation." [A.T.S.]

In the Valais the few coal mining companies have dismissed about 700 miners as there is little sale for this inferior coal. [A.T.S.]

The Grand Conseil of Neuchâtel has voted a credit of 400,000 frs. in connection with next year's centenary festivities of the Neuchâtel republic. [A.T.S.]

Reports from Neuchâtel say that the Anglo-American "Gillette" concern has made arrangements with the municipal authorities to establish in the Monruz quarter a large factory which will be ready in 1948.

Traffic

The Basle harbour has handled in 1946 a total traffic of 1,067,800 tons (over 2.7 million in 1938); scarcely 34,000 tons went down the Rhine the imports being well over a million tons.

At the Extra-ordinary Meeting of Swissair held on February 12th, at Zurich, to confirm the new constitution, it was stated that the protracted negotiations with the Berne aviation company "Alpar" had now come to a satisfactory conclusion: Alpar is being merged with Swissair.

On May 2nd next Swissair will fly for the first time a passenger plane from Geneva to New York. It will also carry mails and the Swiss post-office is issuing a special stamp to commemorate the occasion.

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Owing to the shortage of electric current the heating of railway carriages has been withheld since February 16th on all short-distance trains between the hours of 10 a.m. and 4 p.m.

The many electric power generating stations are all suffering from the insufficiency of water carried by the rivers; the level of the Rhine at Basle, for instance, showed 70% only of the average established since regular records have been taken.

Economics

The Arctic conditions towards the end of January have not passed our country without leaving their impress. The cold was much more severe than over here but the government was ready to take the necessary measures to prevent interference with industrial production. Hot-water bottles were prohibited except on week-ends; tram cars had to run cold and on secondary lines steam or gas turbine locomotives were substituted for the electric ones. Some of the fast trains were shortened while those leading to winter sports resorts were cancelled altogether. Fortunately the railway service is not depending on coal but the preceding drought has reduced the water-level in the power stations to a point not experienced during the last 25 years.

After long and far-reaching investigations the Federal police has succeeded in uprooting the main source of the spurious Swiss bank notes. In the canton Vaud three vagrant tradesmen were noticed to handle 1,000 franc notes; they were detained and an inspector of the Geneva police subsequently discovered that one of them named Jacquenoud had already been through his hands. He was closely questioned and made a full confession exposing the whole of this underground activity. The Federal police took the matter up and contacted the Italian police and acting on the information secured hurried to Turin where they arrived at the domicile of the chief forger at the moment when he was packing another lot of notes into a case ready for despatch to a member of the gang. Further enquiries helped by the local police brought to light an elaborately equipped printing factory which during the war had turned out for the resistance movement forged identity papers and other documents. The chief, Vercelotti, an expert engraver, stated that it had taken him six months to prepare the plate for the Swiss notes which is considered perfect; a slight flaw in the paper led to the detection of the forgery. From the accounts kept by Vercelotti it appeared that 1,400 notes had been put into circulation all of which with the exception of 200 have since been traced.

The steadily mounting figure of street accidents finds some explanation in the enormous number of motor cars imported during the last year, i.e., about 11,400 (only about 340 in 1945); the value according

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to an English source is given as about 3½ million £ sterling — amazingly low. Of these 3,781 were British costing £1,165,000.

* * *

39,000 sewing machines were exported from our country in 1946 against 6,000 received from abroad. Of typewriters about 36,000 were exported against an import of 7,600.

* * *

An International Motor Show was opened at Geneva on the 13th inst. The world's leading manufacturers have taken stand space.

* * *

Swiss transport insurance companies have reduced their premiums for a number of important types of merchandise. Insurance premiums on export consignments of machines and apparatus of all kinds, as well as of parts, tools and instruments have been cut by an average of 30 per cent.

* * *

U.K. trade with Switzerland are dealt with in the following short article taken from the "Financial Times," February 7th:—

"Great Britain occupied sixth place in Switzerland's import trade during 1946, supplying goods worth Frs.196,600,000, compared with Frs.21,500,000 in 1945. The United States took the lead with a total of Frs.547,800,000 (Frs.138,800,000), followed by France, Belgium, Argentine and Italy.

Exports to Great Britain amounted to Frs. 58,100,000 (Frs.31,700,000), leaving the Swiss with a deficit of Frs.138,500,000 which was largely offset by trade with other sterling area countries.

Exports to the Union of South Africa rose to Frs.76,700,000 (Frs.12,700,000), against imports of Frs.12,600,000 (Frs.8,000,000). The respective figure for British India are Frs.44,700,000 (Frs.47,800,000) and Frs.19,900,000 (Frs.5,400,000).

Before the war Great Britain was Switzerland's second best customer. In 1946 she took thirteenth place, the United States leading with Frs.453,300,000 (Frs.385,300,000).

The watch industry tops the Swiss export trade with goods valued at Frs.605,200,000, the second place being taken by machinery, Frs.418,800,000."

* * *

A first consignment of 5,000 tons of Swiss Apples arrived in London at the end of last month; there were six different kinds which were retailed at 8d. per lb.

NEW APPOINTMENTS AT THE SWISS LEGATION.

We have much pleasure to announce the appointments of Lieutenant-Colonel, Jean G. Rieser, as Military and Air Attaché, who has taken over from Lieutenant-Colonel Schlegel, and Monsieur Paul Clottu, "Attaché Social," who will specially deal with labour and similar questions.

Lieutenant-Colonel Jean G. Rieser, born 1901 in Berne, citizen of Berne and Wuppenau, Thurgau, attended schools in Berne and St. Gall and studied languages in Rome, Cambridge, London, Paris and Berlin. He then studied at the Federal Technical School in Zurich, where he passed his examinations as an Architect. After several years in this branch, he was until the beginning of the war for five years General Secretary of the Swiss Aero Club. During the war: Commander of various units and joined the Federal Military Department in 1942. Towards the end of the war: Commander of the Group of Special Squadrons for Air Defence; succeeded on March 1st, 1947, Lieutenant-Colonel Schlegel as Military and Air Attaché of the Swiss Legation in London.

Lieutenant-Colonel Schlegel has returned to Switzerland where he will be attached to the staff of the Swiss Air Force.

* * *

The new "Attaché Social" to the Swiss Legation, M. Paul Clottu, of Neuchâtel, has recently joined his post. Born in 1897, he completed his studies at the universities of Neuchâtel, Berne and Geneva. In 1920 he became a member of the newly created International Labour Office in Geneva. After twenty years collaboration with this Office and a short time at the Central Agency for Prisoners of War of the International Red Cross Committee, M. Clottu entered the Swiss Civil Service as one of the heads of the division in charge of the Allowances scheme for soldiers and their families. In 1945, he became deputy chief of the division of the "Office fédéral de l'industrie, des arts et métiers et du travail" dealing with the protection of workers. M. Clottu has attended in recent years several international conferences as a member of Swiss delegations.

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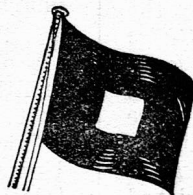
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