

Swiss views on the news

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Objekttyp: **Article**

Zeitschrift: **The Swiss observer : the journal of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK**

Band (Jahr): - **(1950)**

Heft 1138

PDF erstellt am: **13.09.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-691672>

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SWISS VIEWS ON THE NEWS.

By Dr. HERMANN BÖSCHENSTEIN.

Swiss Transport Anxieties.

Viewed from the European standpoint, Switzerland possesses an abundance of means of transport. It is true that there are no "autostrade" in Switzerland, but, nevertheless there exists an extensive and generally well-kept network of roads. There is also a dense and excellently run railway system and her airlines are closely intercalated not only with international but also with inter-Continental air services. But, in spite of all these things, her transport difficulties are at present the subject of public discussions. Quite recently, the Swiss Trades Association, an influential leading economic organisation of self-employers belonging to the middle class, discussed the question of the co-ordination of transport at its Annual Meeting. Particular attention was paid to the so-called Road Transport Bill, which is being discussed by Parliament and which, it is feared, may lead to considerable difficulties in the future. It is anticipated that through its system of concessions and licences the road transport trade will obtain unfair advantages over the professional transport undertakings, and that, as a result of illegal competition on the part of the former, there will ensue a slump in prices, tariffs and driver's wages. This calamity is the result of the increasingly difficult financial situation to be found in the public transport undertakings. These are heavily burdened with their duties to the Public, the keeping up of schedules and the maintenance of lines which are not profitable, as well as the necessity for keeping public tariffs down at a low level. The duty of maintaining the material in good condition and the necessity of preserving a high level of security and of providing adequate remuneration for the transport personnel have brought the State and Private Railways to their present difficult financial position. The Federal Railways are no longer able to finance the construction of important transport buildings, with their own means; they are obliged to have recourse to the assistance of the Cantons and Communes, when the latter demand an extension of railway lines or wish for new railway Stations. The Railways demand that there should be equality in competitive conditions, but Public Opinion has not worried about this, up to the present and has thus favoured the development of mechanised road transport. It has thus come to pass that those goods providing profitable transport charges fall to the lot of road carriers, whilst goods in bulk which fall under cheaper transport rates are handed over to the railways. And, to add to this crisis in Swiss transport undertakings, the national airlines formed by a privately organised company, are now suffering severely from the effects of the devaluation in currency and from keen competition. And whereas the Federal Railways are of the greatest importance for the National Defence, and perhaps even still more for the economic and social policy of the country, contributing as they do by means of their cheap workers' season tickets to the de-centralisation of the big urban centres, Swissair represents a very considerable asset, in that its international significance as one of Switzerland's most outstanding undertakings, is of inestimable value from the general publicity

standpoint. Once the Commission of Experts has taken over the problem of the co-ordination of transport, Parliament will no longer be able to, shut its eyes to the necessity for the application of practical measures. And the Public must be properly informed with regard to the matter, more especially with regard to the significance of the Road Transport Bill. The old problem of freedom versus control has attained particular importance in this domain. An unrestricted freedom of action in respect of transport would finally lead us into very serious and costly economic difficulties. For, it is impossible for the State to leave the Railways without assistance. Moreover, the Railways themselves are making great efforts to adjust themselves to circumstances. They are giving careful study to the question of employing motor-lorries in order to ensure for the Rail, the traffic passing between the big urban centres. They are making propaganda in respect of both passenger and goods traffic and are continually introducing improvements in the service and timetable. And they are putting up a brisk fight against any decline in their share of the total goods traffic. The railways have, of course, high permanent costs; whether they carry much or little passenger and goods traffic, the railway apparatus must be maintained and served at the highest level on security grounds. They also have charges outside the normal railway operations, in particular for services rendered to the Post Office, and attempts are being made to obtain a lightening of this burden. Thus, although the Swiss transport apparatus is extraordinarily well equipped, efficient and even famous for its quality, financially it is not sufficiently well assured.

SWISS NATIONAL DAY CELEBRATION

Sunday, 30th July, 1950
2.30 to 5.00 p.m. (Doors open 2.00 p.m.)

AT THE

STOLL THEATRE
Kingsway, W.C.2

(Near Holborn Tube Station)

Patriotic Address by the

SWISS MINISTER, Monsieur HENRY de TORRENTÉ

ENTERTAINMENT ON TRADITIONAL LINES
INCLUDING YODELING

All Swiss and their families cordially invited.

Admission by ticket only,
obtainable in advance, free of charge

(see announcement on page 5527)

Ticket holders to be in their seat by 2.15 p.m.