

Swiss Federal Day of prayer

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FRIDAY, 11th SEPTEMBER 1964

SWISS FEDERAL DAY OF PRAYER



THE CATHEDRAL
IN BERNE.

By courtesy Swiss
National Tourist Office.

On Sunday, 20th September, the whole of Switzerland and Swiss communities dispersed in all parts of the globe will celebrate the Federal Day of Thanksgiving, Atonement and Prayer.

At a time when the whole world thinks back on the outbreak of the two world wars of 1914 and 1939, we Swiss have a particular reason for gratitude that a kind fate kept battles and destruction out of our country. In all parts of Switzerland commemoration ceremonies are being organised, and rallies of active service veterans take place almost as often as ordinary society functions. At the Swiss National Exhibition in Lausanne, two special services were held during the "Army Days" in May. Many communes remembered mobilisation at the National Day Celebrations, others have fixed separate commemoration days. The SAV 1914-1918 (Swiss active service veterans) are having their reunion at the Kursaal in Berne on 11th October.

Papers have dedicated articles and supplements to the anniversaries. "Der Schweizer Soldat", the periodical for the Swiss soldier, issued a richly illustrated special edition, full of instructive contributions by military personalities and a preface by the Head of the Federal Military Department, Federal Councillor Chaudet.

The "Echo", journal for the Swiss abroad, in an article by This Adank, says that all these commemorative re-unions are well justified, for active service was for many Swiss the most decisive event in their lives. "It is not a glorification of those times which have brought us nothing but bad to the present day and whose consequences our and the next generation will yet have to bear. "But", the writer says, "the good thing which that time brought us was that it united our people. It succeeded to make us think and act in the first place as Swiss and not as Protestants or Catholics, employers and employees, as French or German-speaking Swiss, as members of this or that Party. Those bad days proved that the federal concept was as alive as it had been at the time of foundation of our Federal State."

This Adank then went on to recall 1944, the year of the invasion. In March that year, 70,000 refugees were in Switzerland, of whom about 40,000 were military persons. In 1943 the collection in aid of refugees brought in 1.5 million, the "Winterhilfe" collection 2.8 million francs. The Swiss were eager to donate. The country was being cultivated to the unbelievable total of 351,870 hectares (870 million acres) of open farm land actually under

cultivation. As more than half was used for cereals and feeding stuffs, meat consumption was further reduced. Only diplomats, doctors and the Army drove in cars. The shortage of rubber was almost worse, and on Sundays even bicycles had to be left at home.

But in spite of shortages, the sacrifices necessitated by the Army being kept at the frontiers and the uncertainty regarding Switzerland's position in the coming invasion, the country was united and determined to cope and it was proving its worth.

Looking back on this Day of Thanksgiving, we see much for which we have ample reason to thank the Almighty. However well the Swiss Army was prepared, and however ready the Swiss soldier was to defend his country, ultimately it was God's Grace which kept Switzerland out of the wars.

The Day of Prayer is called "Eidgenössischer Dank-, Buss- und Betttag". Thanksgiving and Prayer seem natural enough. But what of Atonement and Penitence? That is where it becomes more difficult individually and corporately. Yet, if this Sunday is to be more than just a day of outward conformity to traditional do's and don'ts, we must do more than just reflect. Much that is bad was done, and much was neglected which should have been seen to. We forget that to have been spared the horror of war gave us responsibilities, as individuals and as a nation. We take so much for granted and are not always willing really to come to grips with the problems which unprecedented affluence and a rapidly changing Europe have brought. The spirit of 1939 is lacking.

Professor Dr. H. von Greyerz, Bernese historian, said that there was a great difference between 1914 and 1939. The first war brought a basic violent commotion and a dissolution of a world of conventions. The second war, however, was for Switzerland far more of an endurance test. The "Landi", the Swiss National Exhibition in Zurich in 1939, symbolised the will and determination of the Swiss to survive united and free. It would have been unthinkable

then that the organisation of a National Exhibition should even be questioned or principles argued as was the case with the EXPO 1964. It would have been impossible in 1939 for the citizens of a Canton to refuse the credit for their Cantonal Day as the Aargau did this time, or that a group of people like the extremists of the separatist movement in the Bernese Jura should have threatened to blast the railway lines leading to Lausanne. Peter Dürrenmatt, Editor-in-Chief of the "Basler Nachrichten", mentioned this in an article in March. He said that for the young of today the active service of 1939 and 1945 is as much in the distant past as the economic crisis of the 'thirties. The same writer, in a leader on 1st August, deplors the *blasé* attitude which rejects the "Landi" spirit today. To be spiritually superior, he says, it seems to be necessary to make fun of the idealising strength of the political Swiss "Existenzgefühl" and to look upon it as one of the many forms of national lie and false pathos. "Today, if you want to be heard as an *avant-gardist* you have to 'de-mythologize' strongly or, as one of the sickeningly over-used fashionable terms has it 'to destroy the taboos'. Against this, you may then let the weekend horoscope of your favourite magazine help you to get on your feet again".

In spite of sceptical voices and deplorable discussions, the Swiss National Exhibition 1964 has been realised and is hailed more and more as a great success. It asks us to undergo a "Prise de Conscience". The Federal Day of Prayer this year, a few weeks before the ending of the EXPO, is an appropriate moment to halt and to reflect more than at other times and in other years. May we Swiss at home and abroad, be granted the readiness earnestly to search our consciences and to act upon the findings, individually and as a nation. Thanksgiving, Atonement and Prayer — then perhaps in another quarter of a century, we may look back on the "EXPO spirit 1964" as the beginning of a new era in Swiss national life.

Mariann.

IT HAPPENED IN THE CANTONS OF ZUG, GLARUS and SCHAFFHAUSEN

ZUG

The census of 1960 showed that in the smallest Canton in Switzerland, too, the population had increased in the ten preceding years from 17,461 to 52,489. Nine of the eleven communes in the Canton showed an increase, and Menzingen and Neuheim showed a decrease. In 1960, 83.1% of the population belonged to the Roman Catholic faith as against 84 ten years previously. One hundred years ago, the Canton had been almost entirely Catholic. Out of every thousand inhabitants, 891 were Swiss and 109 foreigners, over half of them Italians.

The total accounts for 1963 for the Canton of Zug show a deficit of 1.7 million francs. Like in other Cantons, the construction of roads falls heavily into account — and the present year will be no easier; in February, the government asked the cantonal Parliament for a credit of 9½ million francs. The accounts of the town of Zug also show an excess of expenditure of half a million francs, with an income 11.113 million francs.

In March a report on building was published, according to which the construction of houses and factories and above all of public buildings had gone up considerably. In 1961 it was for a total of 69 million francs, in 1962 for

84 and last year for 100.5 million francs. For the first time in 1963, not all the demands could be met. Among the buildings planned is a double kindergarten and school in the "Letzi" in Zug, a considerable extension of the Cantonal School, an eight-storey building on the Bahnhofplatz (the Bahnhofstrasse is to be widened, too). The kindergarten scheme was accepted by the electorate in spring, but the present plan for the Bahnhof/Poststrasse was rejected. In July, the electorate accepted the renovation scheme for the Burgbach gymnasium and the Fridbach scheme for 200 flats. Unteraegeri is to have a new old people's home.

Zug is to join the intercantonal concordant for a technical college in Lucerne. In June, the Cantonal Council decided on a revision of the regulations governing assistance to old age pensioners, invalids and dependents.

On 4th July, the population helped to clean up the Lake of Zug which, like many others in Switzerland, shows dangerous signs of pollution. Two hundred volunteers with some forty boats took part in the successful "spring cleaning". The problem of clean water is acute, and a central clearing plant is planned at Cham-Hagendorn, at the cost of about sixty million francs.