

Switzerland in 1943

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SWITZERLAND IN 1943

Last September, we gave an account of the various activities of the Swiss Colony in London during the first nine months of 1943. We now proceed to relate the main events recorded in the Swiss Observer between January and May 1943.

The President of the Confederation for 1943 was Dr. Enrico Celio, Head of the Department of Transport. He had been elected by the Federal Assembly on 17th December, 1942. Dr. Walter Stampfli, Head of the Department of Economy, was elected Vice-President. The income of Federal councillors was increased in January from 32,000 to 40,000 francs per annum with an extra 3,000 francs for the President. This scale was to remain in force for the next five years. The allowance given daily for attending National councillors was fixed at 35 francs.

A luxury tax was introduced by Parliament on a wide range of goods considered as non-essential. Trade negotiations with Germany for the renewal of an agreement which had expired on 31st December had come to a standstill. There were no signs of a solution on 17th January when the talks were suspended.

It was reported that British aircraft had violated Swiss air space on 11th and 12th December. Incendiary bombs had been dropped on Sins (Aargau) and between Brig and Raron (Valais). A few barns and a wood had been set alight. A railway box was damaged. People in Lausanne could see with their binoculars the Germans on the other side of the lake erecting installations for three large flying boats hitherto based at Marseilles.

The Swiss Army was busy tracking down spies and deserters. Hardly an issue



The Army that helped to keep Switzerland out of the war

of the *Swiss Observer* came out during the war without news of this kind. In January, readers were told that the Eighth Military Tribunal sentenced a businessman from Kreuzlingen and an electrical engineer from Gelfingen to life imprisonment for espionage. A Jehovah Witness, refusing to serve and encouraging others to do likewise, was sentenced to two years imprisonment. Two lieutenants and an army chauffeur, whose appeal had been rejected by Parliament a day earlier, were executed on 21st January. Rationing was eased slightly. Milk and coffee rations were increased and the War Industry and Labour Bureau announced new soap ration cards containing special coupons for shaving soap and shampoo.

The Editor reported on the 20th Assembly of the Swiss Abroad which had been held the previous September in Neuchatel. The magazine *Echo* had recently arrived in London with its report on the event. Despite the war, many Swiss had come to Neuchatel. Among the speakers were Dr. Philip Etter, President of the Confederation for 1972, national councillors Theodor Gut and H. Büchi. Other speakers from the Army and from the Swiss communities in Hamburg, Hanover and Sao Paulo addressed the gathering.

In February, the National Council decided against the introduction of death duties. Another bill aiming at limiting dividends to six per cent was also turned down. "Lloyd's List" announced on the 16th of that month that Swiss ships were going to be charged the same rate as Spanish and Portuguese ships for insurance cover. The two countries paid 5-6 per cent against a flat rate of 10 per cent for the cargo of other countries. The journal added that the Swiss flag was flown on ten ships totalling 58,600 tons. The Swiss were reported to be increasing their fleet to 150,000 tons to ensure that the country would have a merchant fleet of its own after the war.

A Swiss train driver was jailed in Germany for ten days after having thrown a "Stumpe" to a Russian prisoner of war. He was driving the Zurich-Schaffhausen train through Singen, which is in German territory, when a generous impulse made him throw a cigar to a prisoner working on the line. He was promptly arrested and it required painstaking diplomatic representations to have him set free.

Leon Nicole, a leading Communist figure from Geneva, was sentenced by the Federal Court to three months suspended imprisonment for having infringed a Federal Council decree banning Communist activities. Six other persons accused on similar charges were given equally light sentences with the exception of a Karl Hofmaier, who was sentenced to six months jail. Nicole was greeted at Geneva station by a crowd of enthusiastic supporters who carried him shoulder-high. The Federal Council asked and obtained a prolongation of the Decree making collective labour agreements compulsory.



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Switzerland had been compelled by the war to dig for coal. 220,000 tons had been produced in 1942. The war didn't prevent a one per cent rise in foreign trade. Switzerland imported two billion francs worth of goods and exported 1.5 billion in 1942, it was reported. Unemployment had fallen from 52,590 to 8,814 from December 1938 to December 1942.

8,000 refugees were reported to have entered Switzerland since the summer of '42. 200 Swiss Jews arrived from Paris on a special train.

The Swiss House in Milan housing the Swiss Club, the Swiss School and the Swiss Mercantile Society was destroyed by an allied raid. A 7,000-book library was also destroyed.

The architect Remo Rossi, of Locarno, was the winner of a contest for a design in memory of the late Federal Councillor Guiseppe Motta, who had led Swiss diplomacy at the beginning of the war. 65 designs had been examined.

The Swiss demand for chocolate registered a sharp increase and it was planned to ration this consumer

commodity. The federal authorities considered producing potato bread and tested this food with volunteer students in Basle. The experiment proved the excellent nutritive value of potato bread.

Making use of its war-time emergency powers, the Federal Council signed a Decree allowing it to 'de-nationalise' those Swiss abroad conducting anti-Swiss activities or showing sympathy for the Axis powers. The Decree was expected to be applied to a few isolated and known cases. The 1942 Report of the Government stated that 16 Swiss lost their lives in air raids during the year. Four had been killed in Germany, three in Italy, four in France and five in North Africa. A further four were killed at sea. The Report added that Swiss legations were looking after the interest of 26 countries. This had meant employing an extra 110 persons in Berne and 800 across the world. For this service, Switzerland had received 56.5 million francs from the countries concerned.

Bonmont compelled the inhabitants of Pellens to emigrate and the village was destroyed.

During the Reformation, the Government of Berne took possession of Bonmont and its properties which were assigned to various purposes. In 1711, those properties were set up in bailiwicks with the adjunction of several neighbouring villages.

The Abbey possessed a fairly large and beautiful church which still exists today. This building is of an austere architecture and of harmonious proportions.

Its great square tower is remarkable and particularly its beautiful porch, which is ornamented with capitals rich in floral decoration.

Pierre Savoie

LETTER FROM SWITZERLAND

Autumn has come overnight this year. As if somebody had pulled a lever, the temperature has dropped, early morning mist is appearing, the leaves on the trees are turning red and brown and begin to fall, and the alpine pass roads have had their first heavy snow fall.

A very busy time has begun for the kingmakers all over the country. No fewer than three Federal Councillors have announced their decision to retire from office at the end of this year. They are Professor Hans Peter Tschudi (Interior), Mr. Roger Bonvin (PTT, Transport and Power) and Mr. Nello Celio (Finances and Customs Revenue).

Their successors will be elected on 5th December in the course of a meeting of the United Federal Assembly. This means that the two chambers of the Federal Parliament meet together as one under the chairmanship of the President of the National Council, Franzoni, to elect, by secret ballot, three new

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Swiss Abbeys

BONMONT ABBEY

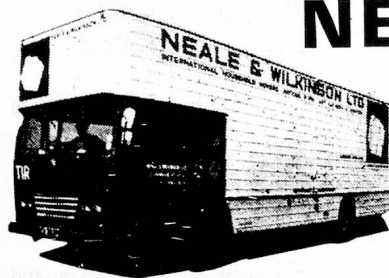
The ancient Cistercian abbey of Bonmont (Canton Vaud), at Cheserex near Nyon, was found in 1123.

The territory on which the abbey was erected was called Pellens and extended to the foot of the Jura.

The ancient village of Pellens, which has disappeared today, was situated near the actual village of La Rippe. Pellens belonged in the 12th Century to Bonmont Abbey. At the end of the same century, the abbot of

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