ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, https://www.e-periodica.ch

Every Spring, as soon as the grass begins to grow again on the heights, the cowherds of Gruyere, Valais and Appenzell, take their flocks up to the mountain pastures to the sound of tinkling bells - for goats and cattle all wear a bell, so that, should they stray from the watchful eye of their guardians when in the pastures, they may be found again. This annual migration from village to alpine grazing lands is quite a solemn event in the life of the peasants, and a most beautiful melody is sung at this time, called the "Ranz des Vaches", which has become the traditional song of the Swiss mountaineers.

In the Upper Valais, which is a Catholic canton, on Corpus Christi day the mountain folk make wonderfully colorful processions through their villages and put on their treasured national costumes, jealously kept and handed down from generation to generation.

A great deal could be said about these old popular customs of Switzerland, so numerous, so diverse and sometimes so moving. Mention can only be made here of the better known among them. And yet in every canton, in every valley and region the most characteristic and charming customs are kept up, although their origin may be lost in time.

There is, however, one national tradition which must be mentioned here: every year, on the night of August 1st, the National Day of Switzerland, from one end of the country to the other, in the valleys and on the mountain peaks where the Alpine horn resounds so harmoniously, bonfires are lit around which gather the dwellers of towns and villages. The parson or a local magistrate reads in solemn tones the Federal Pact of August 1st, 1291, by which the founders of the Swiss Confederation swore to unite their strength in order to defend their liberty. Thus, after 650 years, to the town-dweller of Geneva, who speaks French and is Protestant in belief, is brought the realization of the fundamental ideal which unites him to his Catholic and Romanche-speaking brother of the Grisons. That is the link which welds together this multiple diversity of language, race, culture and religion and out of these creates the harmonious whole of the Swiss Confederation.

. . . .

THE SWISS MERCANTILE FLEET.

(Problems during and after the War).

The present Swiss Mercantile Fleet is comprised of the following ships:

1.	"Calanda"	7470 tons.
2.	"Maloja"	2650 "
3.	"St.Gotthard"	8340 tons.
4.	"Generoso"	2260 tons.
5.	"St.Cergue"	7600 tons.
6.	"Chasseral"	4200 tons.
7.	"Säntis"	6690 tons.
8.	"Eiger"	8137 tons.
9.	"Albula"	2030 tons.
10.	"Lugano"	9300 tons.

There is also, in addition to these, the Red Cross Ship "Caritas" 4650 tons which sails under the Swiss flag. The total tonnage of the Swiss Mercantile Fleet, excluding the "Caritas", is at present 58,677 tons.

In addition to these ships owned by the Swiss Government or by Swiss shipping firms, the Swiss Government has also chartered a number of vessels from foreign shipping concerns.

The big demand for scarce shipping space. The formation of a Mercantile Fleet was forced on Switzerland by the events of the present war in 1940. Neutral Switzerland, with the consent of the belligerents, must endeavour to maintain a minimum of her overseas trade. We must obtain raw materials and grain in order to keep our factories going and to feed ourselves, and in turn we must export the finished products which will enable us to pay for these imports. The direct participation of the Swiss Government in founding this Mercantile Fleet proves how

important it is for the national economy of our country. As already mentioned above, some of these vessels are the property of the Swiss Government, whereas others are the property of semi-official Swiss shipping firms.

What is the price paid for a merchantman today? Before we answer this question, let us state the following facts. Trading vessels are in great demand as the war at sea is taking an enormous toll of them. We know of the efforts of the Allied Nations to build more ships than the U-Boats of the Axis are able to sink. The merchant fleets of neutral countries have also suffered heavy losses. It is therefore easy to understand that the prices for merchant ships have risen enormously - if they are for sale at all.

These Expensive Ships. Between the two world-wars, the price paid for a new merchantman was about Frs. 200 per ton, a new ship of 5000 tons would therefore have cost about 1,000,000 Swiss Francs. In 1920, when the demand for shipping space was greater than ever before, Frs. 650 were paid per ton, in 1921 Frs.289 and in 1925 Frs. 199.85. Today it is absolutely impossible for Switzerland to buy a new merchant ship. The countries at war and the occupied countries cannot accept Swiss orders for ship-building. It is, therefore, only possible to interest the neutral countries, Sweden, Portugal and Spain, in the building of ships for the Swiss Merchant Navy. We shall refer to this possibility later.

How about acquiring old ships? The tremendous demand for shipping tonnage, and the fact that there are practically no ships for sale, has caused prices to rise enormously, as the buyers for the Swiss Merchant Navy know only too well, because the ten ships sailing under the Swiss flag are mostly old vessels. For an old ship which had seen 45 years service, a price of Fr.1200 per ton was paid, whereas in normal times the price of this "tub" if sold for scrap iron would not have reached Fr. 6.- per ton. Considering these facts, it is a wise policy to write off the cost of these ships as quickly as possible, which entails high freight rates to enable the owners to make corresponding profits out of which they can pay for the amortisation.

A proposal. The shipping firm "Maritime Suisse" which is connected with G.Duttweiler of the "Migros" has made a suggestion regarding the building of new ships for the Swiss Merchant Fleet in spite of high costs. This firm is of the opinion that, at the present time, Spain is the only country in a position to execute Swiss orders. In a booklet entitled "Switzerland must have a permanent Mercantile Fleet" issued by the "Maritime Suisse" they make the following statement: "A prominent Spanish Bank with important interests in shipping and shipbuilding concerns is, on principle, willing to accept orders from Switzerland for the building of merchant-ships and tankers, under the following conditions: -

1. Switzerland has to deliver the engines for the ships ordered, and, in addition, the same number of ships' engines for Spanish ships. (It is well known that Swiss firms like Sulzer Bros.,Brown Boveri and Co.,Escher, Wyss and Co.,etc. specialise in manufacturing engines for ocean-going vessels.)

2. The material for building the hull is provided by Spain.

3. The necessary instruments, as well as the interior fittings, can be delivered by Switzerland.

4. Payment of the balance, i.e. what has not already been compensated through the delivery of the ships' engines and instruments, will be made via the clearing system.

5. Delivery time will be 18 months to 2 years.

6. Prices will be about 900 - 1000 Frs. per ton for a vessel of 5-6000 tons, or 800-900 frs. for a ship of 10,000 tons."

The proposal of the "Maritime Suisse" is made under the pre-supposition that
the Swiss Mercantile Fleet will continue to exist after this war is over.
Experience after the last world-war gives rise to the opinion that the shortage
of shipping tonnage immediately after the present conflict will be even more
acute than it is now.   The proposition also contains details regarding the
financing of such a scheme with the help of the Swiss Government, and it is
maintained that such a procedure would enable the cost to be reduced to 700 frs.
per ton.

This raises the whole question of whether the present Swiss Mercantile Fleet
should be regarded as a purely temporary arrangement, or whether, after the war,
Switzerland should join the sea-faring nations regardless of the fact that we
have no outlet to the sea.   The "Maritime Suisse" inclines to the latter view
but points out that it will be necessary to build special types of ships for
the transport of grain and fuel only.

. . . .

SWISS-GERMAN TRADE TALKS FAIL.

According to the "Associated Press" the negotiations which have been going on
for several months between Switzerland and Germany, for the drawing up of a
new Trade Agreement, have come to an end without any result.

. . . . . .

SUNDRY NEWS FROM SWITZERLAND.

In the course of lectures on political science delivered in Solothurn, the
President of the Federal Council, spoke on the cultural policy of the Federal
Council. He pointed out that the basis of Swiss culture was the free Swiss.
Great importance therefore attached to the Council's policy of respecting the
rights, the honour and freedom of the individual. The second pillar of Swiss
culture was the Swiss family. Equal importance devolved upon local government.
In no other country was the autonomy of the community developed to such an
extent as in Switzerland. The main task of the Council was not to unify the
spiritual life of the country but to defend and foster its cultural riches.
Wherever necessary cultural activities led by private initiative or local
authorities should be aided by the Federal Council.   The quadrilingual
Confederation had never yet experienced a divergency over the language question;
this was a proof of the unifying quality of the Swiss spirit. The President
referred to the peaceful co-operation between Church and State and the cultural
importance of the Church. "Peace between Church and State and between the
various creeds must under all circumstances be maintained."

. . . .

When the whole story about the "unchaining" of war prisoners will be told we
shall realise that the Swiss diplomatic representatives in the two capitals
concerned have scored a notable victory.

. . . .

The Council of the Association of the Swiss towns (Schweizerischer Staedte-
verband) dealt with prices and wages at its meeting on 24th November. Professor
Boehler of the Swiss Technical Academy in Zurich attended the session. The
Council strongly advocated relative stabilisation of prices, maximum co-ordination
of the actual income between industry and agriculture, in particular a regulation
of the problem of peasants with small holdings, and further development of social
welfare and especially of public health services. The following information was
given on this year's vegetable crop. According to preliminary estimates, this
year's potato harvest amounts to 125,000 wagons of ten tons each, as against
81,000 wagons in 1938.   This rich harvest has to be stored in various parts of
the country, so as to permit a speedy distribution whenever the need should
arise. The production of vegetables before the war amounted to about 23,000
wagons, while approximately 6,000 wagons of vegetables were imported. This year's
vegetable harvest is estimated at about 50,000 to 60,000 wagons. The area under
vegetable cultivation has been nearly doubled since 1940.

. . . .