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# Che Swiss Observer

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#### HOME NEWS

In the by-elections for two members of the Regierungsrat of the canton Berne the Liberal party retained their seats with the elections of Dr. Mouttet and Dr. Rudolph. Robert Grimm, one of the unsuccessful Socialist candidates, is instituting legal proceedings against the *Bund* for defamation of character, the paper having ascribed to him an activation in the second of the seco tive interest in a newly-formed company to establish a gaming centre in Greece.

A new income tax Bill slightly reducing the existing progressive rate has found favour with the electors of the canton Lucerne.

The ruins of the castle "Zwing-Uri," immortalised by Schiller's "Wilhelm Tell," have passed into Swiss ownership again, thanks to the munificence of Mr. A. Dufour, the President of the Swiss Automobile Club, who is also on the comittee of the recently-formed Swiss Association for the Preservation of Historic Castles and Ruins (Burgenverein). Zwing-Uri, about twenty years ago, was bequeathed to Wilhelm II. (the ex-German Emperor) who in his turn made it over to a German Art Society.

Another wild chamois has been captured alive in the Charmey valley and is to be sent to the London Zoological Gardens, where one secured last Christmas is already in residence.

Whilst ascending from Urnasch to Thierwies in company with two friends, in order to inspect his mountain hotel, the owner, Johann Dähler from Appenzell, slipped on the frozen ground on to a incline and was dashed against a rock, being killed instantaneously.

In descending on his skis from the Niederhorn to the Justus valley, Karl Böschenstein, a goldsmith from Berne, made a fatal fall; a search party subsequently recovering his body

### NOTES AND GLEANINGS.

# The Stockport Comedy.

The Stockport Comedy.

The Stockport Town Council have cancelled the contract for the generating plant placed with Messrs. Escher Wyss & Co., or as the Daily Mail (Feb. 16th) conveniently puts it "are reconsidering their proposal for awarding the order to a Swiss firm." This decision, which was carried by a small majority (30 against 28) at a stormy Council Meeting, was fostered by the misleading statement made in a pamphlet issued by the British Electrical and Allied Manufacturers' Association and reproduced in most of the large dailies. The distorted way in which the case has been presented by these very same papers to the public constitutes a slur on the traditional British fairness and sense of justice. We quote the Daily Mail:—

"We congratulate the authorities of Stock-

"We congratulate the authorities of Stockport upon their decision to reconsider their proposal for awarding to a Swiss firm the order for new electrical plant. The Swiss tender was £34,307, and the lowest British tender was at the outset £52,220, which figure has subsequently been reduced to £42,000.

been reduced to £42,000.

Though on paper the British tender may look higher than the foreign one, there are numerous points to be taken into consideration by a British municipality before it sacrifices the British worker to the alien. It is claimed for British electrical machinery—and we believe with entire truth—that its fuel costs are much lower than when foreign machinery is used. Thus the British Electrical Manufacturers' Association has issued figures showing that in the case of three British towns which installed foreign plants the loss in four years from excessive fuel costs was no less than £70,000. than £70,000.

than £70,000.

A second fact which must not be overlooked is that British wages are very much higher than any paid on the Continent of Europe, and British manufacturers are saddled with every sort of costly regulation, and with heavy and steadily mounting charges for social service, from which many of their foreign competitors are free."

Contracts are broken every day with more or less dire consequences, but we did not know that it was a matter for congratulations when such a tort is committed by a town council. As regards the merits of British electrical machinery we will leave this to the experts, who have voiced their opinion in English technical and other papers, vide for instance the Manchester Guardian Commercial (Feb. 16th), but when the Daily Mail unearths again the long-exploded fallacy of cheaper wages in Switzerland we can only conclude that this untruth is purposely reiterated in the hope that "something will stick." We agree with the concluding sentence as to the "Heavy and steadily mounting charges for social services," though these exist everywhere on the Continent, they are decidedly inequitably distributed in this country. The same refrain is chanted in an article dealing with this controversy in the Weekly Dispatch (Feb. 12th) when it says:—

..The other reason is that our industry is "...The other reason is that our industry is heavily burdened with rates and taxes from which our foreign competitors in many cases are almost completely free. That is our legacy from the war, the price we must pay for our effort to save civilisisation. We are adding to it needlessly and thoughtlessly when we buy foreign goods where we could buy British, and deliberately unravelling the web of our own prosperity."

We thought it had been agreed long ago that America had won the War and could therefore claim to have "saved civilisation"!

The only large daily which gives the matter a fair hearing is the *Manchester Guardian*. We reproduce a letter which appeared in its issue of Feb. 17th from a local resident which seems to reflect the opinion of the intelligent layman:—

"As a Stockport ratepayer I wish to record my protest against the mismanagement by the Stockport Borough Council of the matter of the Swiss tender for electrical plant recorded in your columns to-day. As you state in your leader, this affair is of more than local interest, as it raises questions of the purity of local government in general. This is a case where the considered judgment of an important borough, based upon the advice of technical advisers, has been reversed the advice of technical advisers, has been reversed as a result of public clamour or commercial wire-pulling, which, if it becomes common, would seriously depreciate the whole tone of public administration. No wonder that an eminent local administrator like Sir Thomas Rowbotham has resigned in disgust, though one hopes for the sake of the town he will reconsider his decision.

One argument in favour of the Council's volte-face seems to be that by spending £10,000 volte-face seems to be that by spending \$10,000 more on a British contract we provide employment for our own people. It is overlooked, of course, that if, on the other hand, we save \$10,000 on the rates, by obtaining the most economical plant, we have, as a result, \$10,000 more to spend productively. It is also urged that these contracts should be given to home firms irrespective of price. This argument, if carried the it leading conclusions would lead the Borough these contracts should be given to home firms ir-respective of price. This argument, if carried to its logical conclusions, would lead the Borough Council to place all such contracts with Stock-port firms, regardless of cost. If this is absurd it is equally absurd to think there is any special benefit to anybody in giving the contracts to any but the lowest tenderers, wherever they may be. The only ones to benefit in the long run by the present unbusinesslike procedure are the di-rectors and shareholders of certain companies who will obtain a monopoly price by the crushing out

rectors and shareholders of certain companies who will obtain a monopoly price by the crushing out of fair and legitimate competition.

Stockport ratepayers are entitled to ask what benefit British workmen on this electrical plant are likely to get out of the extra £10,000 that other working-class ratepayers in Stockport will have to pay for it. If, however, the British tender is eventually brought down to the Swiss figure was shall want to fatour whether this will be der is eventually brought down to the Swiss figure we shall want to know whether this will be done on an economic basis or at a loss in order to undercut the Swiss firm; and, if at a loss, what guarantee the ratepayers will have that they will not have to make up this loss in future contracts which they will be forced to place with British firms owing to these squeezing-out practices."

The following letter from an engineer challenging the "Beama" was published in the *Daily Distatch* (Feb. 17th) and will help our readers to form their own judgment:

"It is time that the British public knew how municipal organisations and general buyers of plant have been dictated to by the British Electrical and Allied Manufacturers' Association.

The tenders that would be received by the Stockport Corporation for this plant from British

firms would all be within five per cent. of each other, except one, which would have been a smaller percentage below the remainder. I am not speaking of something I have heard, but something I have good knowledge of, and I would like to ask this same Association if they mean to tell the British public that the works costs of all the manufacturers are within five per cent.

cent.

If so, can they please tell us how it is possible for one firm to reduce to the tune of £12,000—nearly 25 per cent.

The general public are not aware how prices are controlled by this Association. The Association have certainly done much to keep up the very high standard necessary in this type of plant, but it must be admitted by them that the Continental manufacturers also have a standard which is not by any means below our own. The difference between the lowest British tender and the Swiss not by any means below our own. The difference between the lowest British tender and the Swiss firm was £17,000. This represents about 36 per cent. below the British tender, and is a very large sum of money, particularly when it has to be paid by the ratepayers of Stockport. I challenge the British manufacturers to show me in your columns any just reason why the ratepayers of Stockport should subsidise British plant manufacturers.

There are many sides to this controversy, but if the whole truth is told I feel quite certain that a concerted movement will be made by buyers plant to break down this combine which controls prices so effectively, generally at the expense of ratepayers.

This letter is by an engineer, and I am quite willing and ready to enter into the matter whole-heartedly and submit this as a challenge to Mr. Dunlop, secretary of the Association."

(At a meeting of the Stockport Town Council held last Tuesday the original contract placed with Messrs. Escher Wyss & Co. was confirmed by a majority of one vote out of 65.)

# The Basle Mission.

Thanks to the untiring efforts of Viscount Templetown the claims of the Basle Mission Trading Company are not allowed to lapse; the following motion stood in his name and was dealt with in the House of Lords on February 22nd:—

"That a Select Committee be appointed to incurie into the matters so many care; in dispute

inquire into the matters so many years in dispute between His Majesty's Government and the Basle Trading Company.

Trading Company."

The Marquess of Salisbury, replying to a query by Lord Londonderry, said he must be extremely careful not to deal with the merits of the case, but in the public interest it was his duty to make an appeal to Lord Templetown and the House. He was aware Lord Templetown had great reason to complain of the delay in this matter, and he could not defend in all respects those who were responsible for it.

Would they be wise, he asked, to enter upon this discussion? The question was full of complications. He was unable, so far, to make a statement on the part of the Government, but so far as the Colonial Office was concerned, he was able to say that negotiations took place throughout last summer and autumn on the basis of:—

- (a) The restoration of the share capital of (a) The restitution of their properties.
  (b) The restitution of their properties.
  (c) Some additional compensation.

They had not been able to arrive at a settlement on (c), but were willing to continue negotiations.

So far as the Indian aspect of the question was concerned, the matter was complicated by the regard which must be paid to the authority of the Indian Legislature, but in respect of both, he would put it that those who were called upon to would put it mat those who were called upon to negotiate with a foreign company on behalf of the Government would find their difficulties seriously increased by the discussion of Lord Templetown's motion, and he suggested to him not to proceed with it then.

proceed with it then.

The Earl of Birkenhead, dealing with the Indian aspect of the question, said he was in correspondence with the Viceroy upon this matter.

He thought he would do more harm than good if he put the matter higher than this: he was sure the development of the situation in India and the conclusion ultimately reached must be very greatly effected by the agreement announced by the Leader of the House in relation to those claims which particularly affected the Colonial Office. A detailed debate that day would not be helpful.