

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

Herausgeber: Federation of Swiss Societies in the United Kingdom

Band: - (1937)

Heft: 801

Rubrik: Swiss Mercantile Society LTD

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The Swiss Observer

FOUNDED BY MR. P. F. BOEHRINGER.

The Official Organ of the Swiss Colony in Great Britain.

EDITED WITH THE CO-OPERATION OF MEMBERS OF THE LONDON COLONY.

Telephone: CLERKENWELL 9595.

Published every Friday at 23, LEONARD STREET, LONDON, E.C.2.

Telegrams: FREPRINCO, LONDON.

VOL. 15—No. 801

LONDON, 20 MARCH, 1937.

PRICE 3d.

PREPAID SUBSCRIPTION RATES

UNITED KINGDOM AND COLONIES	3 Months (13 issues, post free) -	3/6
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SWITZERLAND	3 Months (13 issues, post free) - Frs.	7.50
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Basle V 5718).



HOME NEWS

(Compiled by courtesy of the following contemporaries: *National Zeitung*, *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, *St. Galler Tagblatt*, *Vaterland* and *Tribune de Genève*).

FEDERAL.

LESS UNEMPLOYED IN SWITZERLAND.

According to figures just published, there were at the end of February, 105,736 unemployed registered, or 10,059 less than last year at the same period.

EUROPEAN GRAND PRIX.

This year the European Grand Prix races will be organised by the Union Motocycliste Suisse on July 3rd and 4th. The races will be held over the 4½-mile circuit round the Brengarten Forest, on the outskirts of Berne.

On July 3rd, in the afternoon, the 350 c.c. race will be held, and during the course of the following day the 250 c.c. and 175 c.c. will be run off together, followed by sidecar races for 600 c.c. and 1,000 c.c. machines, and finally the 500 c.c. solo event. Entries close on June 12th, and should be sent to Mr. W. Bretscher, Chutzenstrasse 27, Berne, Switzerland.

JOURNALISTS AT GENEVA.

A full review of Mr. a Prato's case and of the rights of journalists accredited to the League of Nations took place in the Swiss National Council.

The Socialist deputy from Geneva had again raised the question of the expulsion of the anti-Fascist editor of the "Journal des Nations." M. Motta (President) stated once more that Mr. a Prato had abused the privileges extended to him, but that his expulsion had not been, as the Socialist member alleged, the result of Italian pressure. The Swiss authorities would never interfere with any foreign journalists in the exercise of their duties as long as they did not during their stay in Switzerland systematically or unjustly criticise Swiss institutions under the pretext of being accredited to the League of Nations.

The International Association of Journalists had presented the League Council with a petition, M. Motta said, and the Council had considered this in private session. Should the Council ask the Swiss Government for its views, it would be glad to inform the Council. Experience had shown, M. Motta said, that journalists had nothing to fear from the Swiss Government.

ARGENTINE FRUIT FOR SWITZERLAND.

The Argentine Ministry of Agriculture announces that after laborious negotiations in which the Foreign Ministry collaborated, the Government of Switzerland has been induced to fix the quota of Argentine pears and apples which may be imported into the country during the current year. The quantity established by the Swiss Government is 24,000 cases of pears and apples (together), the same as last year. The pears are allowed to enter Switzerland from February 1st to March 31st, and the apples from March 1st to May 31st.

ENLARGEMENT OF THE PORT OF BASLE.

The constant increase of traffic in the port of Basle has made its enlargement necessary. It has consequently been decided to undertake the construction of new installations at Klein-Hünningen and in the Southern part of the town of Basle-Birsfelden. The following will show the extent to which the port of Basle is overcrowded as compared with German ports: the port of Duisburg has unloading wharves 44 km. in length, and an annual traffic of 14,628,900 tons which is equivalent to 332 tons of goods per metre of wharf; the traffic of the port of Basle amounts to 2,217,000 tons of goods for 2.15 km. of wharf only, this being equivalent to 1,031 tons of unloaded goods per metre of wharf. The traffic of goods in the

port of Basle shows a great increase since 1928. As this expansion is likely to continue in the future and since there has been a lack in storage space for coal and cereals for the last few years, the competent authorities have decided to enlarge the port on the right bank of the Rhine by building a second basin at Klein-Hünningen. This basin will be 590 m. in length. The rail network of the port is also to be considerably extended. The cost of the new installation is estimated at 3.5 million francs.

In addition to the enlargement of the port of Klein-Hünningen, the construction of a new port at Basle-Birsfelden is also planned, which is to comprise a large surface for storage and industries. The cost of the installations at Birsfelden is estimated at about 5 million francs. After completion of the work planned at Klein-Hünningen and Birsfelden, Basle's and Switzerland's port installations will be such as to comply with all requirements.

SWISS SOCIALISM.

A special Conference of the Swiss Socialist Party, held recently, considered its attitude towards the Communists, a Popular Front and national defence.

By 370 votes to 72 the following guiding principles were adopted: firstly, an unreserved recognition of democracy while rejecting any connection or co-operation with any anti-democratic organisation or movement (the Communist movement is held to belong to this category); secondly, a positive attitude towards military, economic and intellectual national defence; thirdly, respect for religious convictions, and finally, the obligation to pursue a common programme for economic reconstruction and the solution of social problems in a spirit of social justice and reciprocal solidarity.

The conference declared further that a permanent and satisfactory solution of economic problems was only possible on a Socialist basis.

The former Socialist Mayor of Geneva Nicole, protested against the ban on co-operation with the Communists; and the declaration in favour of national defence was rejected by Graber, leader of the Socialist left wing, who contended that force was the negation of right and that it was impossible to support militarism without falling into nationalism.

LOCAL.

ZURICH.

M. Rosenbaum, a well-known advocate in Zurich, has been arrested, so far, no reason has been given for his arrest.

BERNE.

M. Fritz Spichiger, Manager of the "Bigla" in Biglen and a former National-Councillor (1918-1921) has died at the age of 62.

* * *

Dr. Hans Mühlestein, the Bernese writer, has celebrated his 50th birthday anniversary.

SOLOTHURN.

The cantonal judge, M. Hans Stampfli, President of the criminal tribunal of the canton of Solothurn, has resigned from his post after having been for over 50 years in the service of the canton.

* * *

An anonymous donor has sent an amount of 51,000 frs. to the "Bürgerspital" in Solothurn.

GRISONS.

At Samaden, died after a long illness at the age of 81, M. Gian Töndury-Zehnder, for many years President of the Board of the "Rätischen Bahn." In former years he was several times President of the District Oberengadin, he was also a member of the Grand Council of the canton Grisons.

VAUD.

Sterilization has been made legal in the canton of Vaud.

VALAIS.

Dr. Raymond Lorétan has withdrawn his candidature for a seat in the second ballot for the cantonal government. The fight remains now between M. Anthamatten, Conservative and M. Dellberg, Socialist.

GENEVA.

The death has occurred at Geneva of Dr. A. Pictet, who was for nearly 40 years Professor of Chemistry at the University of Geneva. He retired in 1932, and reached the age of 80.

SWISS MERCANTILE SOCIETY LTD.

The Monthly Meeting of the Society was held at Swiss House on Wednesday, March 10th. The Society was fortunate in having Lord Passfield to lecture to the Meeting on "WHAT ABOUT U.S.S.R.?" The lecture room was filled to capacity when the Chairman, Mr. A. Steinmann, in introducing Lord Passfield, who is better known as Mr. Sidney Webb, referred to the lecturer's outstanding work in local and national government. He particularly mentioned his acclaimed book on Soviet Russia, a masterpiece and standard work on the Soviet Union.

Lord Passfield, a septuagenarian, received a very hearty ovation when he rose to address the assembly. He expressed his pleasure at having been invited to lecture to the Swiss Mercantile Society because his connection with Switzerland had been an old one. He had been at school at the age of twelve to thirteen at Neuveville. He had not often been to Switzerland since as his time during the last fifty years was fully occupied in going from one English town and one constituency to another, and in writing books. He said he was particularly pleased to have come to speak to the Society about the Soviet Union, and had no intention of going too deeply into the political question. The Soviet and Switzerland had not been on the best of terms, they had had considerable differences, reciprocal differences, and he felt sure that if only for that reason the audience would do well to know more about the Soviet Union.

He said at once that he and his wife who visited Russia together were under the disadvantage of not knowing a word of Russian. Some people, he said, might call it presumptuous to describe Soviet Russia and to express an opinion about it without knowing the language. However, he maintained that his experience was that people who had been to another country numerous times and knew its language well, invariably knew very little about the administration, etc. A great number of English people who went to Switzerland had no idea how Switzerland was governed, the same as what the ordinary citizen knew about the London County Council was dismal enough.

No country other than the U.S.S.R. published so much about itself as the U.S.S.R. The Soviet not only published in its own language but also in English, French and German. If one knew any of these languages one could learn a great deal. Russia broadcasts in 14 languages as well as in Esperanto. These broadcasts were entirely devoted to discussing themselves, the success of that factory and the failure of another, a magnificent advertisement. He could only say that if one had a powerful wireless set one should not miss the opportunity of listening to Moscow.

Why should one trouble about the U.S.S.R.? They were not going to invade Switzerland. But one had to remember that it represented one sixth of the entire land surface of the world with a population of 175 million. What was very important was that although Russia had always been as big as that, it had never hitherto had a government which organised it from end to end right into the desert and the Arctic Circle. What was more was the fact that Russia was not troubled with the anomaly so common to all Western Europe and all the Dominions, that the next generation was falling off. The U.S.S.R. had the largest birth rate. The annual increase of population was 3½ million a year, as much as the whole of Europe put together. One might expect, of course, a very unhealthy population. Under the Czar the death rate had been a very large one. It was still large but had been reduced by at least one third in the last twenty years since the Revolution. The infant death rate which was the best test had been halved. They had got rid practically altogether of cholera and typhus and had greatly reduced enteric fever. There was still a lot of malaria but generally speaking great strides had been made for health and greater strides still, in education. Before the war the vast masses outside the cities had been illiterate and with something like 150 separate races, some of whom were cannibals in an actual savage state, many had not even an alphabet. But now they all were got to school and in all 25 million children were attending school, even those that had had no alphabet. In about 40 cases an alphabet was actually found, a Latin alphabet and not a Slavonic alphabet.

Books in those languages were written and the children were got to school to learn reading and writing.

All schools of seven years' duration had to teach one foreign language apart from Russian, and the vernacular throughout the U.S.S.R. At the end of 1937 children in all schools would have to attend for seven years and would be taught either English or German. In all England, the lecturer said, there was not one village school where a foreign language was taught. The learning of a foreign language, was not in the lecturer's opinion, the whole of education! But it had great advantages in learning one's own history for when he went abroad himself he discovered battles in which the English had been defeated and of which he had never known!

One could imagine what a population of 175 million of a thoroughly organised country with an up-to-date standard of higher education meant in its impact upon Western Europe. One could not shut them out, one could not escape the influence of their ideas and their industries.

A very astonishing fact of the greatest importance was that a country with 175 million people had had no unemployment for five or six years. Everybody received a holiday. Furthermore there was a frightful scarcity of skilled labour. The unemployment which perplexed the statesmen of Europe was unknown. The great thing that had happened was the agricultural mechanisation. It was the romantic story of the Russian peasant. Formerly he had had no plough, no reaping machinery, he reaped with the sickle and thrashed with the flail.

The Russian had had no agricultural knowledge. Every second or third year was a bad one, a real famine. All was miserable, there was not enough food produced to feed cities; and the higher command, the chief executive committee, the Cabinet as one should say in this country, determined on mechanisation, to teach them how to use the oil driven tractor instead of the iron plough, how to use a combine harvester, so that wheat was cut and stacked and thrashed in one operation. Of course, with all the mechanisation one would expect a great surplus of labour but as a matter of fact there was positively a demand for more labour. They had gone in for it more intensively, vastly increased the output, but it was not so much an increase in wheat. They now grew cotton, they clothed all their people with cotton garments made from Russian cotton. They no longer imported any cotton from America. One half to three quarters of the tea required they produced themselves. They produced almost everything except coffee. He was not sure whether they were able to grow bananas but they grew oranges. They could not grow rubber and said that that would not do, they would have to have rubber. So they sent botanists into the forests of Siberia who found not genuine rubber, but two or three plants something like rubber trees. They were therefore cultivating those plants, substituting rubber with something else.

They were making synthetic rubber, from which they made great tyres for lorries and the tyres stood all tests. It would not be a commercial proposition as compared with imported rubber. They did not mind, as rubber or a substitute was necessary. Perhaps they would soon be prepared to do without any imported rubber. Their lecturer explained that great transformation how they had managed to do away with unemployment, at least since 1931. Since that time the system had worked sufficiently satisfactorily. It was done by the rule of average Marxism by the system of cutting out, or extirpating profit-making. The practice of making profit as an incentive had become a criminal offence. One literally could not do it with impunity. The lecturer then amused the audience with a story of a Scotchman who went out to Russia and when visiting a school asked the children if he bought a dozen oranges for a shilling and sold them at 1½d. each what he would get. "Six months in prison," was the answer.

Dealing where one bought stock at one price and sold it one by one at profit was a crime called speculation. It was a crime to hire labour in order to gain, an exploitation. It did not matter what wages one offered to pay. The private owner, joint stock owner, they all had been liquidated. Everything was held by the government. One could not invest any money. One could save it and one could give it away but one could not put it into business. One could not start a business or a factory on one's own. One could, however, lend money to the government at interest. Consequently one might have all the joy of accumulating money but the government did not allow one to leave it to collateral enterprise.

A curious thing was that the people with the largest incomes were the authors, specially the dramatic authors. They were paid royalty for every performance. The theatres were full every night. The lecturer said that he thought they did not quite foresee that 175 million people had started reading. They read frantically. Every person was reading; men were going to work

reading in trains, peasants as well as factory workers. On account of that fabulous reading, editions of books were stupendous. Gorki, the favourite author, was top with 19½ million copies since the revolution, or more than one million a year copies had gone like wild-fire. Pushkin, another chief author, was next with 10 million copies. The reading in short was terrific and consequently authors made very big incomes. But not very much could be done with money except eat and drink. They could not buy pictures because dwelling space was scarce. One could have a motor car and a chauffeur, one could have several servants, members of trade unions, and had to treat them very respectfully. Did the audience realize, the lecturer said, that the whole of the operation of individualism and the joint stock capitalist had been done away with? The whole of business was done by the government or through industrial co-operative societies. Every kind of commodity from clothes, wood, to silver, etc., was provided by the government. On the other hand, the agricultural work, the co-operative farming, etc., needed very elaborate arrangements. It was certainly not Stalin who saw to all that in the Kremlin, it was not he who ran all the shops in the country and still less in the city. It needed a governmental organisation, an extremely complicated one. One great note of multififormity ran through the whole of the U.S.S.R., twenty different organisations for doing similar things. How did they manage to know how much to produce?

It was done by planned economy. A very large government department, several thousand strong, hundreds of statisticians, extremely competent people in every branch. Every year every enterprise in the U.S.S.R. had to make a return stating what it had been doing, what it expected to do, what labour, what materials it wanted, how much power, fuel, etc., were required. All had then to be worked out in an elaborate way, how many people of a given age were wanted, the plans of occupation and production of what they needed had to be settled by that very complicated arrangement. How were they to make things balance? This department had to send provisional plans to every enterprise which laid it before its workmen, not only the directors. Then the balance was worked out what each enterprise, agricultural and industrial had to do. It did not compel anybody to work, there was no compulsory labour! All they cared about was a sufficient number of places in which all people could get employment. They said that so long as they could keep that system in operation unemployment was thoroughly solved.

The lecturer then dealt with the question of currency. He said that it was often mentioned that in his great book of 1,200 pages he had not dealt with currency. He said that one was often told that unemployment came from stumps, bankers' ramps, over issue and under issue of currency. Inflation did not exist in Russia. No Soviet currency could cross the frontier. There was no rate of exchange quoted and prices were fixed. According to the Gosplan everything was fixed, prices, commodities, wages, etc., so as to cover all expenses. There was no such thing as a surplus. No amount of currency flooding in the U.S.S.R. had any effect on prices or on production. They had no problems of currency to solve. The collective farms were very successful, they had much more to divide, with a higher standard of living and greater amenities. The retail trade had increased by leaps and bounds and ¾ of the population were on the land. All this happened by planning and not leaving things to chance. In Russia there was no enemy party. Everybody had the same right to the whole of production and therefore everyone was eager for more production, work as hard as they could. They knew that it did not only depend on their individual effort but on the whole of the enterprise in which they were engaged and on all others and business dividends depended upon the whole of the U.S.S.R.

The lecturer concluded by saying that the U.S.S.R. was the most fascinating country in the whole world and it was most interesting to watch this great change which had come about in Russia during the 19 years since the Revolution. Many things had to be regretted and deplored but the fact remained that the country was going on increasing at a tremendous rate and they could not build fast enough to cope with the rapid increase of the cities.

A most interesting discussion ensued on such widely controversial subjects as the Gosplan, Russian imports and exports, the recent Russian trials and questions on moral as well as ethical issues were raised. Mr. J. J. Boos, Vice-President of the Society, very ably put the Swiss point of view for severing diplomatic relations with Soviet Russia, and in conclusion moved a hearty vote of thanks to the lecturer for his most interesting address. This was vociferously received by the audience, and thus closed a most interesting and instructive evening.

W.B.

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