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The Swiss Observer

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NEWS AT RANDOM

The Minister for War, Federal Councillor Dr. Kobelt outlined the principles of our national policy at the Conference of the Liberal Democratic Party. Dr. Kobelt called the national will for independence and neutrality the "unalterable axiom of the attitude of the Government and of the people." He emphasised that the clarity of the constitutional principles excluded any opportunist policy and constituted the basis for confidence between ourselves and all other countries, between the people and the Government. Referring to the necessity for national defence the War Minister declared that as long as the world was in arms, there could be no question of demobilisation. The Government were doing everything to preserve peace, but did not desire a peace at all costs, especially not at the cost of the honour and independence of the country. He rejected all half-measures in the realm of Swiss preparedness for war and declared that economy in the supply of war material should never be allowed to impede national defence. A stern and purposeful education of the soldier and training of the troops were the best means to preserve and strengthen the defensive spirit. Dr. Kobelt continued by declaring that wages and work were the pillars of the external and internal fronts; the internal front was no less important than the external one. As dangers on the external front closed the ranks of the internal front, so a weakening of the internal front was a threat to the external front.

The Head of the Federal Economic Department, Federal Councillor Stampfli, made a report to the National Council on Switzerland's economic position, on March 17th. He recalled the difficulties in the way of Swiss imports and spoke of how the coal transport during December, January and February had been completely disorganised owing to the intense cold and the consequent freezing of the rivers. This, he said, explained the severe cut in the coal ration. It was now intended to increase the home coal-output and coal deposits which were neglected before the war are at present producing 12,000 tons per month.

The textile position, Dr. Stampfli continued, was very precarious; owing to lack of imports, wool re-

serves have been reduced by half and cotton reserves by three-quarters. Leather imports were now only 10% of pre-war imports; reserves will cover shoe production for one year only. Imports of non-ferrous metals have stopped altogether. With regard to iron the situation was not quite so bad, although Germany had been unable to fulfill her commitments.

Speaking of the food position the Federal Councillor declared: sugar imports are as small as before, and it will be impossible to continue the present ration. Nor has Switzerland enough shipping space to import sufficient cereals and new discussions will take place with the belligerents regarding an increase in the tonnage promised for this commodity.

Fresh importance, said Dr. Stampfli, now attaches to home agriculture. Additional land is to be cultivated, bringing the total to 310,000 hectares, an increase of 65% over 1939. This increase was indeed, the Councillor concluded, Switzerland's only chance of becoming self-supporting.

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The Federal Council has fixed May 3rd for the plebiscite on the initiative "Pfaendler." This demand sponsored by the Landesring (Duttweiler) seeks to reduce the membership of the National Council to 139 by raising the representative basis from 22,000 to 30,000. It also disqualifies a National Councillor from accepting further election after 12 years continuous office and insists on candidates to disclose their business or financial interests.

* * *

Switzerland's foreign trade shows a decline on the pre-war situation; higher prices and freight and insurance costs are the explanation for the higher import figures. Exports are maintained on a high level but

CITY SWISS CLUB.

Messieurs les Membres sont avisés que

L'ASSEMBLEE GENERALE ANNUELLE.

aura lieu Samedi, 11 avril, 1942, à 2h.30, au Brown's Hotel, Dover Street, W.1. Elle sera précédée d'un lunch à 1 heure p.m. précises.

ORDRE DU JOUR:

Procès-verbal.	Election du Comité.
Admissions.	Election des Vérificateurs des Comptes.
Démissions.	Election des Fidei-commissaires du Club-House Fund.
Rapport du Comité.	Divers.
Rapport des Vérificateurs des Comptes.	

Prière de s'inscrire au plus tôt auprès du Secrétaire Mons. Henry Binguely, 167, Clapham Road, S.W.9. (Phone RELiance 4150).

Les membres sont instamment priés de réserver leur place par écrit et de s'abstenir de téléphoner.

undergo structural and directional modifications. It is of vital importance for Swiss commerce not to lose contact with foreign countries. This is why several Swiss firms again participated last year in international fairs. During 1941 Switzerland concluded a series of commercial agreements with European countries. The agreement with Russia was naturally cancelled with Russia's entry into the war. The renewal of the commercial agreement with Germany gave Switzerland important materials which enabled her to supply finished products to third countries. Economic negotiations with England are still going on. Economic and cash agreements have been concluded with Denmark, Slovakia, Croatia, Spain, Finland, Hungary, Bulgaria and Rumania. The economic relations between Switzerland and France remain settled according to the *modus vivendi* concluded in 1940. During 1941, France, in spite of difficulties, took the necessary measures to resume, after a brief interruption, payment of interest and redemption of the State Debt to the Swiss creditors. The clearing agreements of credits with Germany and Hungary, which had already lasted for ten years, have been renewed until 1942. Free international payments have been seriously hampered by the Decree of the President of the U.S.A. of 14th June, 1941, by which all European assets were practically blocked. The efforts undertaken to re-establish normal traffic of payments between Switzerland and U.S.A. at least for payments of a purely commercial character, have met with a certain success, but it has not been possible so far to obtain alleviation for financial operations.

The customs revenue for January and February 1942 was 21 million francs which is 4 million francs less than in the corresponding months of 1941.

The Swiss Minister in Rome, Dr. Paul Ruegger, has returned to Berne where he is entrusted with an important mission.

Summer-time will be re-introduced on May 4th.

On the 20th February, 1938, the people and cantons decided in a plebiscite to elevate the extremely ancient romansch language, still spoken in some of the mountain valleys of the Grisons, to be the fourth national language of Switzerland. Since then the "Lia Romantscha" which for many years past has worked for the extension of romansch has doubled its efforts to attain its goal. At the end of this year a small German-Romansch Dictionary will be published, and a large one is to make its appearance at the end of 1943. On this work a decade has been spent in research and preparation. Almost 3,000 Sursilvanic Grammars have already been sold. At the present moment and with the assistance of the Federal Exchequer the new Swiss penal code is being translated into the two romansch dialects. In order to obtain an assimilation of the various idioms of the Romansch an endeavour is being made to work out a short instruction to the inhabitants of the Rhine and Inn valleys, in which the particular peculiarities of the Sursilvanic and the Ladin are compared.

Although there are constantly a large number of troops with the colours, the General with the agreement of the Federal Council has arranged for a mobilisation practice, combined with regional alarm of

the local defence corps and air attack precautions detachment. The exercises are to be carried out in echelons and for each manœuvre only a small number of troops are called up and are again released after four or five days. These practices are solely done for the purpose of control and instruction. An announcement is made beforehand in order to prevent any scare-mongering.

Registrations for delivery of wheat produced in Switzerland have not come up to expectation and a circular letter has been sent from the War Food Office asking wheat producers to find out what their own consumption amounts to and to register their surplus immediately for delivery.

The Office for Industry and Labour announces that the scarcity of lead imports makes it necessary to impose further restrictions in the use of this commodity. As from the 19th February a new Order has been in force, prohibiting the use of lead or alloys of lead for building works, roofs, etc.

The Office for War Industry and Labour announced on February 27th, that in view of the difficulties encountered in importing fats for industrial use, it has been necessary to limit the soap allowance for the period January-March 1942 to very small quantities. Some additional coupons will be released for use up to the 5th of April in view of increased requirements for spring-cleaning.

A special permit issued by the Department of War Industry and Labour is now required to dispose of the hides of chamoix, deer, etc.

Meat rationing which has been introduced in Switzerland as from the 1st March includes all meat and meat-preserves, sausages, bacon and offal. Oxen, cows, calves, pigs, sheep, goats and horses are included in the scheme, but poultry, geese and ducks, rabbits, game and fish as well as fish-preserves can be obtained without coupons. Wednesday and Friday will be meatless days in spite of the rationing which is under a points system, the number of points required for each 100 gr. of meat depending on price and quality. All private slaughtering will in future be subject to an official permit.

On March 16th the Federal Council considered further measures for the improvement of the housing problem. Building operations are to be stimulated by subsidies to various cantons in their efforts to solve the problem; in larger boroughs this is being done with the aid of private building societies. A grant of a maximum of 5% of the total building cost will be made by the Council on condition that the cantons contribute at least double this amount.

The municipal Council of Berne has decided to re-name a street in the Kirchenfeld "Motta Strasse" where the late Federal Councillor Motta used to live.

The removal from Geneva of the League of Nations, the International Labour Office and other international institutions as well as the stoppage of international travelling has placed that town into a difficult position. At the moment there are about 6,000 empty flats, ten large Hotels are closed as well as a great number of shops. To offer some compensation

for this loss and at the same time to afford relief to the federal town of Berne, which has not sufficient accommodation for the constantly growing departments connected with the war, the Federal Council has moved some of the administrative departments to Geneva. The town of Calvin will receive the personnel, which deals with the census, national department for Salary and Earnings — Equalisation of Soldiers, the Post-cheque control and the Military Insurance — in all about 550 employees, who to a large extent are taking their families with them.

Some other departments of the war administration are moving to Montreux, Neuchâtel and St. Gall, where an increase of population is equally welcome.

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At the request of the Federal Police Department, the local gendarmes in Geneva have descended upon a number of houses suspected to be centres of communist propaganda. Several arrests have been effected and apart from a large quantity of incriminating leaflets 4,000 copies of "Le Travail" were discovered; they had just been printed on a secret press and were about to be distributed. (The publication of this paper had been officially suspended last year.)

* * *

A melioration project on a grand scale about which the people of the canton of Solothurn had to decide on the second Sunday of this month proposes to drain an area of land of about 7,000 ha. at a cost of over 21 millions frs. The reclaimed ground is to have a net of roads and is to be distributed afresh amongst the owners. The canton is to contribute 5 millions towards the costs, the remainder is to be covered by a graduated addition to the states tax during 1942/49. (The result of the vote is not yet known here.)

* * *

The town of Berne together with a few industrial undertakings is at present clearing a part of the "Anenwald" on the Aare between Kiesen and Uttigen in order to obtain 10 ha. of arable land. With the aid of heavy tractors and motor winches the trees are torn out of the ground. The cleared level ground will be planted with potatoes which will then in the autumn be distributed amongst the work people of the participating undertakings and necessitous people.

* * *

Exactly 2,000 years ago the name of Geneva was mentioned for the first time in history. It was Julius Cesar, who beat the emigrant Helvetians at Bibracte and forced them to return to their country. They had also to restore the destroyed bridge across the Rhône near Geneva. Now the town will fittingly commemorate this historical turning-point in the coming summer. On the 1st June a vast exhibition "Geneva in the course of centuries" will be opened and will last until the end of September. A big historical procession, a festival play and a further exhibition "Geneva at work" is to connect the past with the present.

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Coal to the value of six million francs (65,000 tons) has been produced in the six months to end of December 1941. First in the field are the 13 pits in the canton Valais where anthracite in steadily increasing quantities is being mined.

* * *

Under the new rationing scheme in force since the beginning of this month, Wednesdays and Fridays will be meatless days, the total monthly allowance being

about 4½ lbs. including bones and sausages; poultry is not listed.

* * *

Last years 1st of August collection shows net receipts of frs. 1,020,162, which is very gratifying, especially in times of continuing rise in prices and the demand made on the public by innumerable charitable institutions. The Federal Council has just decided that the amount to be collected on the 1st of August, 1942, is to be divided between the Swiss Samaritan Association and the "Nationalspende" for the soldiers and their families.

* * *

The action in aid of the starving population in Greece, which was planned by the International and Swiss Red Cross, has found active support throughout Switzerland. At the request of the Swiss Red Cross the Federal Council has allowed a considerable amount of milk products to be taken from the Federal stores to be exported in order to feed Greek children.

A Swedish ship is to take the consignments to Haifa, and the Red Cross has approached the belligerents for consent to a regular shipping service between Istanbul and the Piraeus. It is intended by the delegate of the Red Cross and of the Swiss Doctors Association to make Turkey the centre of collection and distribution of food.

* * *

The Swiss union which works for the assistance to children in the countries ravaged by the war has already provided a holiday of at least three months' stay in Switzerland to well over a thousand children from Western Europe. But never before have the many hundreds of families who provide a free stay to their little guests seen such heartbreaking misery, as was experienced when the contingent of children from Flanders arrived recently in Zurich. These children have been living all the time in the ruins of Dunkerque and the want which they experienced during that terrible time is plainly written in their little faces. Their eyes are blurred and dim through poverty and want, their little bodies are so thin that it is almost unbelievable and they are covered with only the absolutely barest necessity. The men and women from all classes of society who were at the station to receive their little guests were gripped by the deepest sympathy with so much suffering and will be doing their utmost for the charges entrusted to them.

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Federal Councillor Dr. Celio is President of a Committee which has just issued an appeal for donations for a Motta Monument in Berne and a "Foundation Guiseppe Motta." This institution it to be in accordance with the ideals which the great statesman has so valiantly and disinterestedly defended during his life time. The Committee appeals to all confederates and institutions in the country to contribute to this token of thanks and love to one of the most meritorious Swiss. The names of the donors will be entered in a book which is to be walled up in the monument.

* * *

An art patron has presented the Zurich Art Society with the handsome sum of 2 million francs in order to extend the Art Gallery, which has been planned a long time ago, but has been postponed continuously.

* * *

April 21st has been fixed as the official day of the Swiss Industries Fair in Basle. The Federal Council

has appointed Councillor Stampfli, Head of the Economic Department, as their representative.

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After three months of hard work at the Eastern front, principally in the section of Smolensk thirty Swiss doctors, thirty nurses and a group of attendants returned to Switzerland. The work for the benefit of German and Russian wounded was for doctors as well as nurses a very interesting but an exceptionally strenuous experience.

It happened often that owing to the enormous number of wounded, the work was continuous for nearly 24 hours. Luckily there were always sufficient medicaments, drugs and bandages at hand.

On the 8th of January another contingent of an equal number of Swiss doctors and nurses left to continue the humanitarian work at the Eastern front. They have already arrived at Warsaw, the field of their activities.

* * *

Nineteen people belonging to a national socialist organisation called "Eidgenössische Korrespondenz" were recently arrested in Lucerne. The organisation which was founded by a certain Franz Burri, distributed by post a Press and Information service leaflet under the title "Eidg. Korrespondenz." Legal proceedings have been authorised by the Federal Council against the founder and the main accomplices of this organisation, and civil and military power of jurisdiction was transferred to the courts of the Canton of Lucerne.

* * *

The board of Directors and the board of Management of the Swiss Federal Railways are at present engaged in working out a ten years plan for the completion of a double track program, the extension of the electrification of the system and the renewal of the rolling stock. The goal of the double track program is the uninterrupted completion of the lines Basle-Chiasso (Gotthard), Geneva-St. Margareten (Central longitudinal connection), Basle-Zurich-Chur; Vallorbe-Lausanne-Simplon.

In the field of electrification there is not much left to do, as already 14.2% of the whole S.F.R. net have been converted at a cost of 100 million francs. This electrified portion of the railways deals with about 94% of the traffic.

Extensive constructions to omit level crossings of rail and road are planned. These will afford a good opportunity for work as the principal road crossings are to be either lowered or raised.

760 million francs is the estimated total cost.

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An approximate estimate of the financial results of the Federal Railway system for the year 1941, gives receipts as 214 million and expenses 196 million francs.

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The Director of Military Railway Transport has decreed that from 9th March electric trains will no longer be heated between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. There will be a further suspension of a number of express and slow passenger trains as from the 16th March, thus bringing the total reduction to 30% since the beginning of the war; the cuts are being made in the interests of war production.

* * *

On the trial bench of the engineering Works Oerlikon, one of the five gigantic generators for the power works of Innertkirchen in the Oberhasli is being

tested. Three of these giants are to be ready by the end of the year and are to be built up in the works which are entirely blasted into solid rock. Later on two more of these colossuses are to follow. These turbines are the greatest current producers which will be erected in Switzerland for the next few years to come. Turbine and generator are mounted on a common vertical shaft and together are 13 metres high. The shaft is of forged steel, weighing 23,000 kgs., the generator 250 tons. The continuous output of each engine groupe is 52,250 kVA. (kilovolt ampere). When working at the end of this year there will be an average constant annual production of 350 million kWh. (kilowatt hours), and a supplementary summer energy of 70 million kWh.

* * *

About ten years ago a project to convert one of the parallel tunnels of the Simplon into a Motor road was under serious discussion but was dropped owing to railway technical and financial reasons. Now a new project has emerged, which proposes a motor road across the Col du Ferret. The road would start at Gourmajun in the Italian Aosta valley and lead to Orsière in the Valais, a distance of about 36 km.

To overcome the pass height there would be a tunnel of 6.3 km. The road could be kept open the whole year round and the distance from Basle to Turin would be reduced from 596 km. to 480 km.

* * *

By a decree just issued by the Federal Council the Swiss Power works are enabled to take all necessary steps to increase the water storage possibilities and thereby intensify the energy production. The river power works are to reduce the stream of water for fish-steps and other arrangements, the storage works are to heighten their dams in order to increase the water capacity. Natural lakes are to be dammed up higher or sunk deeper in order to prevent a hindering current deficiency.

* * *

Hasler A.G. Berne have some years ago produced a radio which is particularly suitable for the High Alps. It is a small apparatus producing ultra short waves, with which conversations can be held even where wire connections cannot be erected any longer, which is particularly useful for Alpine life saving, to get assistance in cases of accidents. The first of these installations was established between the Concordia-hut and the Jungfrau Joch in 1939. Since then these apparatus have stood the test well, particularly during the building of the Susten pass road. With the help of an ingenious adjustment the wireless conversation can be transferred to any ordinary telephone, so that it is possible to speak to all parts of the World from any selected point by making use of the public telephone net.

* * *

Although Switzerland possesses a number of flight pioneers as well as numerous motor and engineering works, until now all attempts to create an aviation industry had to capitulate before foreign competition. Even the works of a constructor who produced an excellent army aeroplane had to close down a few years ago. Now the necessity of the defence of the country and the difficulties of obtaining aeroplanes have led a few enterprising and leading industrial private firms to combine and to open works for the construction of aircraft in Central Switzerland. After several years of preparatory work the establishment was inaugurated.

ated in the presence of Federal Councillor Kobelt and General Guisan, to form a nucleus for future development. Already the construction of a special plane has been started, which possesses the start, climb and flight requirements suitable for Swiss conditions. These plans were evolved in the department for plane construction at the Federal Polytechnic Academy.

* * *

A new scheme for the construction of power stations based on a ten-year plan has received official backing and is to be submitted shortly to Parliament; it provides for an expenditure of 650 million francs.

* * *

During the last few days of January and the first days in February snow fell in the mountain regions to a depth which has seldom been seen. The new snow not laying very solidly on the old one, the surface of which was frozen, the rise in temperature caused these masses of snow to glide causing innumerable avalanches. On the whole of the North side of the Alps, from the lake of Geneva to the Säntis, avalanches are reported, which in many places have caused catastrophes. At Beckenried on the lake of Lucerne five children and two adults including the house and stables were buried, in Gurtellen a family of nine lost their lives likewise. Numerous roads and railway tracks were covered up by these avalanches and were made impassable sometimes for days. On the Gotthard line a part of a goods train was caught and dragged into the depth, which stopped the traffic for some time.

Should these masses of snow melt quickly either through the "Föhn" (south wind) or rain, then tremendous inundations will have to be expected. But on the other hand the melting of the snow will cause the long expected river-power-works to produce again full electrical energy and thus relieve the imposed restrictions on electricity.

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It was announced from Berne that the recent slight thaw had not alleviated the shortage of water-power and the use of electricity had to be further drastically curtailed. The use of electricity for heating water or for house-heating is prohibited, house-holds with children under one year excepted; and in the latter case only between 6 p.m. on Saturday to 9 p.m. on Sunday. The penalty for infringement of this regulation is the cutting off for two months of all electricity. Since then the Office for War Industry and Labour has been able to announce an improvement in the water situation, and accordingly an easing-up in the electricity rationing as from March 12th. For the present there will be no restrictions except when electricity is used for heating purposes.

* * *

Unsuccessful clearing operations with the object of freeing the ice in the local Sihl Kanal, at Amriswil, caused the bursting of the conduit. All the factories in the district draw their electric power from a central station which depends on the water power supplied by the Kanal. The damage is stated to be very heavy; in one factory the warehouse containing valuable raw materials and the workrooms have been partly submerged. A large number of looms have to be re-threaded.

* * *

By taking a recent emergency decree in its literal meaning a Swiss citizen has been fined Frs.50 for attending a social gathering held in one of the municipal-halls at Zurich. An obliging police superinten-

dant had given official permission to a foreign political group to hold a "closed" meeting the attendance of which was reserved to nationals of an adjoining state. The Swiss "intruder" was unknowingly admitted after having asked and paid for a ticket at the entrance. The offence was reported in due course and the learned judge declared that the Swiss by his presence "might have endangered the friendly relations with a foreign power."

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Severe sentences ranging from six years penal servitude downwards were inflicted by a military tribunal on six members of political cliques known as "Esap" and "N.B.S." and since officially dissolved; they were all charged with disclosing military dispositions.

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The comparative ease and freedom with which foreign political agents and spies move about in our country is shown by the many prosecutions in military courts against dubious army elements who have succumbed to tempting offers and disclosed army dispositions. The sentences are severe and widespread; one soldier who had resolutely resisted such solicitations was sentenced to four months imprisonment by the Territorial Tribunal 3A for having failed to denounce the particular agent to the authorities.

* * *

At the annual meeting of the Swiss Bank Corporation in Basle on February 27th, Mr. M. Golay and Dr. R. Speich, both general managers, were elected to the board, as was also Mr. R. Stadler, manager of Câbleries et Tréfileries de Cossonay. Dr. H. Schuler of Glaris was elected a new member of the Board of Control. After the meeting, the board confirmed Dr. Max Staehelin as chairman, elected Dr. J. Brodbeck as first vice-chairman, and Dr. R. Speich as second vice-chairman. Mr. M. Golay was elected president of the general managers comprising also Dr. R. Speich, Mr. C. Türlér and Mr. A. Nussbaumer.

* * *

In the near future the ninth son of a family from Benken, in the canton of Glaris, will enter the recruit school. Thereby all the sons have served their country in their turn. The family consists besides them of seven daughters, in all 18 members. (Some family!).

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In spite of all the difficulties, nearly 1,400 Swiss citizens have emigrated last year to Overseas countries, nearly 300 more than in 1940. However, the number of emigrants has dropped immensely as compared with former years.

* * *

The Conservenfabrik Lenzburg, so well known for their famous Confitures, have lost their founder in the person of Gustav Henckell, who died at the centre of his activities at the age of 83. He commenced preserving fruit in 1886 in a small house not far from Lenzburg; he gradually educated the local peasants to produce fruit of the finest quality. Success was slow and many were the disappointments and it required fifteen years of tenacious labour for the new industry to establish itself. To-day his name is a household word far beyond the Swiss frontiers.

* * *

Dr. Gustav Hürlimann died in Zurich in his 70th year after a long illness. A leading lawyer and legal adviser to many prominent concerns and institutions, he was on the board of directors of a large number of

successful undertakings such as Orell Füssli, A.G. Leu & Co., Impag, Werkzeug Maschinenfabrik Oerlikon, Neue Zürcher Zeitung, etc.

* * *

By the death at the age of 73 of former State Councillor Dr. Robert Schöpfer, Solothurn loses a popular and talented leader who had occupied with distinction and success at different times most of the offices in the cantonal administration.

* * *

Crows, blackbirds, sparrows and roaming cats were outlawed between February 14th and 28th throughout the canton Ticino, by order of the States Council who maintained that the protection of the agricultural cultivation made their reduction a necessity. Protests by friends of animals and like institutions were of no avail even the arguments that these birds fulfilled a vital task by their destruction of insects and ground grubs. — No reports of this campaign have so far been received but it can be safely assumed that the youngsters in the Ticino armed with an unrestricted licence and guns and all kinds of implements of war have carried off the first undisputed victory in modern history.

A SWISS MISSION IN LONDON.

A Delegation for the purpose of carrying out trade negotiations with His Majesty's Government has arrived from Switzerland and are staying at the Dorchester Hotel. The Delegation consists of Dr. Hans Sulzer, Minister Plenipotentiary, Professor William Rappard, Professor Paul Keller. M. Alexandre Girardet, Councillor in charge of Commercial Affairs, will also be a member of the Delegation which will be accompanied by M. Alfred Boller and M. François Lugeon.

The negotiations will be of the utmost importance and will have far reaching consequences in the economic field; it will be remembered that as from April 30th increased restrictions affecting the export of goods from Switzerland are coming into force.

OUR NEXT ISSUE.

Our next issue will appear on April the 24th.

In addition to the many letters of appreciation, which we continually receive, the Editor wishes to specially thank the following for the financial encouragement extended to our publication. F. Eggar, R. A. Merz, Miss A. Hohlfeld, F. Golay, P. A. Duvoisin, W. Graf, A. Steiner, J. Veglio, Miss A. L. Boerl, J. Eusebio, J. Lanz, E. Chatelain, L. J. Faivre, Miss R. Imhof, Nouvelle Société Helvétique, Swiss Y.M.C.A., J. Joerin, Jules Weil, and C. Campart.

L'AVENIR DES ASSURANCES SOCIALES EN SUISSE.

En 1925, dans un beau mouvement d'enthousiasme, le peuple suisse a inscrit dans sa constitution le principe d'une assurance-vieillesse et survivants et d'une assurance-invalidité. Pour améliorer nos conditions sociales, il apparaissait nécessaire d'accorder une sécurité supplémentaire aux vieilles gens, aux veuves et aux orphelins, ainsi qu'aux victimes des accidents du travail en particulier à tous ceux auxquels leur situation matérielle ou les circonstances n'ont pas permis de faire de substantielles économies.

Ainsi qu'il arrive souvent, ainsi qu'il arrive presque toujours, s'il s'est révélé très facile de se mettre d'accord sur un principe constitutionnel, il a été beaucoup plus malaisé de s'entendre sur ses modalités d'application. Les autorités fédérales n'ont pas perdu de temps. Sous l'influence de M. Schulthess qui y mit tout son cœur, elles élaborèrent un projet d'assurance-vieillesse et survivants qui devait permettre de verser de modestes rentes aux déshérités, étant entendu que les ressources nécessaires seraient fournies par des contributions de l'Etat, ainsi que par des primes payées par tous les habitants du pays.

Malheureusement, ce projet n'a pas trouvé grâce devant le souverain. En décembre 1931, le peuple l'a repoussé à une énorme majorité, bien qu'il eût été recommandé par les conseils législatifs presque unanimes et par tous les grands partis. Il ne s'agissait pas là du triomphe d'une tendance politique. Deux minorités s'étaient coalisées pour faire échouer cette œuvre. Les ouvriers estimaient que les rentes prévues étaient trop maigres et les primes exigées trop lourdes. Les fédéralistes et les antiétatistes auraient préféré un projet moins centralisateur confiant aux professions le soin d'organiser ces assurances sociales.

Plus de onze années se sont passées et aucune tentative pratique n'a été faite de réaliser cette grande idée. Pendant quelques années, la Confédération, obéissant à une règle formelle de la charte nationale, a accumulé dans un fonds des assurances sociales le produit des impôts sur l'alcool et le tabac. Mais bientôt, sous l'empire de la crise économique, alors que la Confédération avait d'autres soucis et qu'elle devait lutter contre le chômage et renforcer sa défense nationale, ces recettes ont été distraites de leur affectation légale, pour être mises au service de la couverture des besoins généraux de l'Etat.

Cependant, la Confédération ne s'est pas désintéressée du sort des malheureux. Ce qu'elle ne pouvait pas réaliser par l'assurance, elle a cherché à le faire provisoirement par l'assistance. Pour aider les vieux, les veuves, les orphelins, en particulier les chômeurs âgés qui ont perdu tout espoir de se voir réintégrés dans le processus économique, elle a dépensé des sommes toujours plus fortes. Celles-ci, de 8 millions en 1934, ont passé aujourd'hui à près de 25 millions. Ainsi, un devoir immédiat a été rempli. Mais cette politique présente un gros inconvénient et un gros danger. De plus en plus, nous avons tendance à tout attendre de l'Etat. Nous perdons de vue l'idée même de l'assurance qui exige, par le paiement de primes, un effort personnel et qui encourage une forme très précise de l'épargne. Il sera sans doute très difficile de remonter ce courant.

Il n'en reste pas moins que, depuis quelque temps, on répare toujours plus des assurances sociales. La

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