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The Swiss Observer

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NEWS AT RANDOM

Federal

By a decree dated November 30th the Federal Council has empowered the Federal clearing office in Zurich to insist on the opening of private safes and sealed deposits so as to assist in the search for hidden foreign assets. This decision abandons the time-honoured regulations constituting the "bank secrecy," a practice unknown and unvalued abroad, which has given rise to charges of shielding German interests and eluding the demands of the Allies; it is clear that an earlier and voluntary "renunciation" would have obviated unfair accusations and sharp criticism particularly in American quarters. At the same time the news is published that 400 Swiss firms (nearly half) have been removed from the Allied black list. Thus two of the three problems which Fed. Council. Petitpierre described as demanding an immediate solution (see our last issue) have entered their final phase.

Since then the English press has already given figures of the likely amount these assets will show, though no official statement has yet been published from Berne. A thousand million francs is generally expected; probably these assets will be graded, some of them are probably loot, whilst others may be the result of genuine banking transactions or deposits permissible at the time. The Federal Council stated some time ago that it would claim any liquid assets to compensate losses suffered by our own nationals; the aggregate of these claims is believed to be between three and four thousand million francs. It can hardly be expected under these circumstances that the decree of the Allied Control Commission which seems to requisition all German property outside the Reich can be taken literally.

* * *

A new "family protection article" is to be added to our Constitution, a definite mandate having been given to the Federal Council by our people and cantons on Sunday, October 25th. About 55% of the electorate went to the polls which recorded a three to one majority with only one state or canton — Appenzell A.Rh. — out of tune. The measure, which among other benefits lightens the burden of large families,

is a great social advance; the framing of its practical implications are now being worked out.

* * *

Official figures published at the end of last month disclose that the "Federal Clearing Office," which is supposed to have facilitated trading with the Axis powers during the war, shows a total debit balance of 1,257 millions francs; the recovery of this enormous amount is doubtful. Germany is indebted to us for 973 and Italy for 312 million francs. The largest creditors are Spain (19 million) and Hungary (18 million).

* * *

During the six war years, from September 1939 to June 1945, nearly 5,000 million francs have been raised by the Confederation. The 24 Federal loans produced 6,054 millions, of which 1,270 millions were used for paying off previous loans.

* * *

The decrees enacted in November, 1940, making the spreading of rumours or the diffusion of real or supposed military secrets a criminal offence have now been revoked.

* * *

In reply to a parliamentary interpellation the Federal Council states that permits to those seeking

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COMMANDER STEPHEN KING-HALL
nous parlera au sujet

"RUSSIA TO-DAY AND TO-MORROW."

Prière de s'inscrire par écrit auprès du Manager, Dorchester Hotel, Park Lane, London, W.1, pas plus tard que le 5 Janvier, 1946.

LE COMITÉ.

employment in England were granted in exceptional cases only; a temporary stay for educational or study purposes was not prohibited. There were at present negotiations in progress for the re-opening of the college in London of the Schweiz. Kaufmännischen Verein.

* * *

Another interpellation in the National Council dealt with the whereabouts of the notorious trio Oltramare, Bonny and Fonjallaz. Fed. President von-Steiger replied that they were under detention as investigations were still proceeding (since last April). Offences against our army penal code had been committed though heavy penalties were hardly justified. Geo. Oltramare was broadcasting in Paris under the German regime and an assumed name (Dieudonné) as well as editing a newspaper. Bonny followed similar occupations mostly at the bidding of Laval, and René Fonjallaz collaborated with Oltramare.

* * *

Following the established tradition the vice-president of the National Council was elected President (Speaker) of the Chamber. He is the well-known socialist Robert Grimm, who from 145 ballot papers received 122 votes; he will officiate during the 1945/46 period. He is 64 years old and was already vice-president of the National Council 20 years ago.

In the States Council (Ständerat) Dr. Josef Piller (Fribourg) advanced to the presidential fauteuil with 28 out of 43 possible votes, while the new vice-president secured no less than 40 votes; he is Counc. Ackermann from Appenzell A.Rh. The seeming unpopularity of Dr. Piller is due to certain insinuations in the local press accusing him of too-amiable relations with former German colleagues at the Fribourg university who have since been expelled.

* * *

The new Swiss Minister to Poland, Dr. Ganz, had to travel all the distance by road. He left Basle on the 12th inst. with his staff in two private cars and a goods' lorry; his first task on arrival at Warsaw will be the search for a convenient habitation, as the former legation building has been destroyed.

* * *

Federal Council. Karl Kobelt has been elected President of the Swiss Confederation for 1946. Federal Council. Philipp Etter was elected Vice-President.

Cantonal

The long drawn-out negotiations between the Confederation and the canton of Zurich about the future of the Dübendorf aviation field have at last been concluded to the satisfaction of both sides. The Confederation acquires the Dübendorf region, which will be turned into an army training ground for aviation; on the other hand the State will hand over to the canton Zurich the large area Kloten-Bülach, which so far has been used for artillery practise firing. An amount of ten million francs will be paid by Zurich as compensation for the larger tract of land. Kloten will thus become our largest civil aviation centre. Its construction is subject to the preparation and sanctioning of the plans as well as the granting of the necessary credits by the Zurich voters. No aerial traffic on the new field is likely to be witnessed before the end of next year.

* * *

A jeweller's shop was broken into and plundered at the end of last month during the night in the main street of Zurich (Bahnhofstrasse). In spite of thorough enquiries and investigations by the police no trace has been found so far of the thieves, who seemed to have packed up their loot in comfort as only the most expensive watches and jewellery were selected for appropriation.

According to later reports the Zurich police have offered a reward of 1,000 francs (the value of the stolen property exceeds Frs. 60,000) for information that may lead to the arrest of the malefactors.

* * *

A most trivial matter claimed the attention of the Zurich courts. As long ago as October, 1941, the

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Regierungsrat had allowed a certain H. W. Hirsch, now editor of the "Vorwärts," to change his name to Surava, the council not being aware that this was also the appellation of an obscure hamlet somewhere in the Grisons. On hearing of this "affiliation," only a few months ago, the elders of Surava lodged a plaint with the Zurich district court which latter directed the defendant to abide by his birthright. This was not the intention of Mr. Surava alias Hirsch, and he brought the dispute before the Zurich appeal court, whose considered judgment went against the elders of the obscure hamlet somewhere in the Grisons and thus re-established the new status of Mr. Hirsch. The Federal Court will probably have to put the two disputants into their proper places.

* * *

Pfarrer Karl Herbert Blum, who will begin his mission at the Schweizerkirche in London at the beginning of next year, has been acting similarly in Altikon (Zurich); he is the son of Pfarrer A. Blum-Ernst, of Zurich, an inspector of missionary settlements, who is about to leave on a visit to a Swiss religious establishment in Upper Egypt.

* * *

Former Prof. Dr. Leonard Ragaz died in Zurich after a short illness at the age of 78. He was born in Tamins (Grisons), began his career as a pastor and teacher at the cantonal school in Chur, returned to the church again first at Chur then at the "Münster" in Basle; at the age of 40 he accepted a call as professor of theology at the Zurich university which, after thirteen years' tutoring, he relinquished to take up

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public (mostly unpaid) lecturing on behalf of a religious-social movement of which he was the originator.

* * *

It is not often that a resolution carried by a cantonal council is subsequently declared illegal by the Federal Tribunal. Last year the electorate of Solothurn sanctioned a credit of five million francs for creating relief work should unemployment prevail. At a recent meeting of the council it was decided to allocate one million francs of this fund for agricultural adjustments and improvements. A councillor from Olten objected and forwarded his reservation to the Federal Tribunal with the result stated.

* * *

The budget for 1946 of Baselstadt again foresees a deficit, this time 5½ million francs on revenues of nearly 77 million.

* * *

An officer belonging to the corps guarding alpine fortifications, motorcycling from Thusis to Sufers, was attacked by about 20 smugglers armed with automatic pistols near Andeer. He was fortunate in escaping injury; the frontier guards, mobilised within a short time, were unable to make a single arrest.

* * *

An experimental flight with a glider resulted in a serious accident on Sunday afternoon, November 25th, near Spreitenbach (Aarau). The two planes were unable to gain sufficient height and crashed along the main road from Zurich to Baden. The pilot of the glider, the 21 year old student Zraggen from Zurich, was killed on the spot. The pilot of the motor plane and his passenger were badly hurt and had to be taken to hospital.

* * *

Smuggling along our southern frontier, particularly in the Ticinese region, is developing into a regular and well-organised traffic on a large scale and the re-inforced frontier guards, aided by specially trained dogs, seem to be a hopeless match against these resourceful merchants. From the Swiss side cigarettes and watches are the most traded articles, while on the Italian export catalogue figure rice, india rubber goods and medicaments, the latter said to be of American origin. Insulin is bought in northern Italy at 2 to 3 lire per unit and is sold in Switzerland at fantastic prices. The already heavy fines have been further increased and retail shops, carriers and private distributors have become liable in respect of any goods found in their possession unless proof of their legitimate acquisition can be produced.



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On hearing that three Italians had made considerable purchases at a shop in Cimalmotto frontier guards were stationed at likely crossings. One of the smugglers was duly captured and brought back to the police at Locarno; on being questioned he gave contradictory answers about the fate of his companions which led to the assumption that he had somehow disposed of them. In fact a further search brought to light the frozen body of one of them in an alpine gorge; the other one is still undiscovered.

The communal elections in the canton Vaud at the end of last month showed unmistakably, like in Geneva, the firm accent of the "party of labour." In Lausanne the newcomers secured 39 seats out of a hundred, the former liberal group being reduced to 29 mandates.

A Swiss national who is stated to rightly claim no less than three different nationalities has been denationalised by the Federal department of justice. He is O. R. Buxcel, aged 45, from Romainmôtier (Vaud) who was a member of the Swiss Colony in Chabag (Bessarabia) where he acted for a Nazi enquiry agency. Buxcel had legally acquired both Rumanian and German nationality.

Army

The mysterious disappearance of Lt. César, who some six months ago was reported to have been seen last in a rowing boat on the lake of Biel, has been thoroughly investigated by the military tribunal 2A. Drowning is stated to be the cause of death, though extensive exploration has failed to locate the body. It has been ascertained that he was unduly depressed by the death of his son Pierre in a flying accident and that he had mentioned to relatives that life had become unbearable.

Traffic

The harbour of Genoa has, during the month of November, been practically monopolised by Swiss traffic. Thirteen large freighters discharged at different times large quantities of cereals, cellulose, oats and barley, rice, cattle cake, aluminium, etc.

If unofficial announcements are to be believed the Calais-Basle direct express service will be restored early next year.

According to "Lloyd's List," December 10th, 1945, the first Swiss order for a new cargo ship has been placed in this country:

"An order for a cargo motorship of 9,300 tons deadweight for the Swiss merchant fleet has been placed by the Soc. Anon. Maritime et Commerciale, of Geneva, with Wm. Doxford and Sons,

Ltd., Sunderland. The vessel will be supplied by the builders with Doxford oil engines to give a service speed of 13 knots. Since the war of 1914-18 Swiss owners have been building up a small merchant fleet with second-hand tonnage, but this is believed to be the first order for a new ship."

An interesting airport project which still awaits final ratification is receiving full publicity in "Modern Transport," November 17th, 1945:

"Plans for the establishment of an airport in Alsace, which Switzerland could use as if it were situated on Swiss territory, have been approved by the Swiss Federal Council, and are now awaiting approval by the French Government. Construction of an airport at Basle-Mulhausen was proposed and planned by the Swiss municipality, but the fact that it would be located on French territory is expected to make a State treaty between the two countries essential. The Swiss request for the use of the proposed airport suggests that Swiss citizens need not obtain a passport to enter it and recommends the establishment of a Franco-Swiss Customs office on the site. The aerodrome would be built to provide facilities for transcontinental traffic, having three runways of lengths varying from 1,960 to 2,600 yd., and covering an area of 600 acres. The rest of the project has been estimated at 24,000,000 francs."

Economics

A far-reaching commercial and economic treaty has been concluded with France and enters into force at once. The salient features are the un-freezing of bank balances in both countries subject to documentation, the freeing from control of banking transactions and payments, the delivery by France of 55,000 tons of coal in each of the next six months, visits on business and health grounds (not tourists) from and to both countries with the necessary "pocket money" and a general exchange of manufactured goods from one against raw materials from the other side.

The total revenue from taxes collected by the Confederation, cantons and communes in 1900 amounted to about 144 million francs; in 1938 they had risen to 1,050 million and five years later, in 1943, totalled over 1,554 million francs.

At the close of a tour in South Wales, Sir Stafford Cripps visited the site where a large state-aided watch and clock factory is to be erected. According to the "South Wales Evening Post," November 26th, 1945,

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the President of the Board of Trade made the following enlightening statement:

"The watch and clock factories in Switzerland were established among the isolated villages in the mountains, and he felt there was something of that atmosphere around Ystradgynlais, in view of the lovely site selected almost at the foot of a mountain, and he congratulated Messrs. Smiths upon their imagination in challenging the Swiss watch and clock industry.

"He felt confident that with the technique and skill at the disposal of the company they could produce articles equal if not better than the people of Switzerland, where the children became clockmakers almost from birth."

In view of the formidable competition which seems to threaten one of our staple industries our readers will learn with gratification that Switzerland is reputed to supply about 75% of the watches that keep the world going.

Humanitarian

The Federal Council has decided on a fresh grant of five million francs to the International Red Cross Committee. Though hostilities have ceased, it is stated, there are still so many calls for relief and help which to meet the existing organisation of the I.R.C.C. is singularly qualified.

A train-load carrying 27 barracks to totally destroyed villages in the Dutch provinces of Brabant and Limbourg left Porrentruy early this month; in addition six special trucks contained winter clothing. The whole consignment is a gift from the "Don Suisse."

oo

A football match between Sweden and Switzerland played at Geneva at the end of last month ended in a three to one victory for the home team. Two of the three goals were scored by the captain and centre-forward, the former London Swiss Amada, whom we are all anxious to watch at the forthcoming match in London.

Zurich seems to be the repository of ideal husbands — this is the inference to be drawn from an advertisement which appeared early this month in the matrimonial calendar of our premier Swiss paper. "A young damsel from Ticino," so it says, "endowed with many shortcomings and few virtues wishes to contract a marriage with dashing young man able to counteract her deficiencies." We admire the self-abnegation, somewhat inconsistent, of the maid from the Bel Paese; we know a few unspliced Ticinesi in our colony, and in case one of them likes to try his luck, here is the reply chiffre: "W18897 N.Z.Z." (Do not forget to include a dashing photo.)

We hope that the following innocent notice which appeared in the Scotch edition of the "Daily Mail," November 16th, 1945, will escape the scrutinizing eyes of hot-brained Nazi fiends otherwise a German hidden treasure trove may be scented. Here it is:—

"Gold has been found at Lonay, near Morges, on Lake Geneva, close to the château occupied by Paderewski until shortly before his death.

"Digging drains at a depth of 4ft, a peasant discovered a streak of yellow metal which proved to be gold, known to exist in the neighbourhood for generations."

The first skating this year was reported on November 21st from the Tallières lake near La Brévine in the Neuchâtel Jura.

* * *

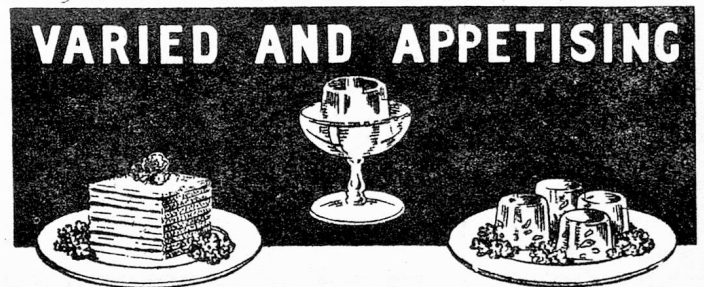
A plaint for slander and defamation of character lodged by the Genevèse Leon Nicole against the editor of the Lucerne paper "Das Vaterland" has been rejected by the local courts; in an article Nicole was described, among other "laudations," as waiting for the rôle of a red quisling should the occasion arise.

* * *

Having been elected to the Conseil d'Etat in Geneva, where he directs the departments of trade and industry, Charles Rosselet is resigning from the National Council; his place in the latter council will probably be taken by his socialist colleague André Oltramare.

* * *

The Genevèse estate agent Charles Fivaz who, since the beginning of July, has occupied a cell in the St. Antoine prison was recently transferred to a similar apartment in the cantonal hospital on account of illness. He managed to secure a file which enabled him to cut the iron bars of a window and take French leave. The examining magistrate subsequently received a letter from M. Fivaz apologising for his hasty departure, affirming again his innocence and declaring that his exit was solely intended for the purpose of looking for the real culprits, on the identification of whom he would return with the information and complete his hospital treatment.



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