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HOME NEWS

A national vote will be taken on Sunday, Feb. 17th, on the proposed revision of the Swiss factory law, which will permit and legalise, under certain conditions, an extension of the working hours from 48 to 54 hours per week. In another column we publish the appeal and conclusions submitted by the Swiss propaganda committee in favour of this revision.

St. Gall has the distinction of being the most expensive town in Switzerland, according to statistics compiled by the Swiss Co-operative Society (Schweiz. Konsumverein).

Thun has increased its population by 10% during the last year, the number being now 16,710; more houses have been built than in the best pre-war years.

It is reported that the present British Minister in Berne, Sir Milne Cheetham, will be transferred to Athens.

The vaudois Socialist party has decided to expel one of their leaders, Dr. Jeanneret-Marinkin, as the latter's Bolshevik tendencies were considered incompatible with further membership.

The prizes in connection with the Eidg. Schützenfest (Tir fédéral) in Aarau have been ordered from the following firms: Ulysse Nardin, Le Locle and Geneva (gold watches), Fabrique Omega, Bienne (bracelet watches), Zenith Watch Co., Le Locle (silver watches), and Huguénin Frères & Co. (Medals).

Whole editions of valuable historical works were destroyed by a fire, which broke out on Friday evening (Feb. 1st) in the book store of Helbling & Lichtenhahn in Basle.

It is stated that a Berlin Treasury official has arrived at St. Moritz for the purpose of acquainting himself personally with the reported prodigality of the German tourists, who may probably in consequence be "strafed" by the imposition of a special tax. The Grisons hotel managers are strongly protesting against this espionage, which is having a deleterious effect on their hotel bills.

An act of vengeance on the part of his brother Fritz is said to be the cause of the fire which destroyed the farm buildings, belonging to Hans Schneeberger at Grub, near Balsenwil (Aargau).

Dr. Louis Guillaume, the former Director of the Federal Statistical Bureau, died in Epanier, near Neuchâtel, at the age of 91; in his younger days he successfully interested himself in the improvement of the hygienic conditions of schools and prisons.

Dr. John L. Gignoux, the son of the President of the Geneva Conseil d'Etat, died from the after-effects of influenza last Saturday, in the train near Zurich, during his journey from Warsaw to Geneva. He was only in the fortieth year of his age. The deceased was in charge of the Polish Legation since the departure of Col. Pfyffer, and will be remembered by a large circle of London friends as one of the chargés d'affaires at our Legation during part of the period when M. Carlin was Minister.

Prof. Lucien Gautier, a member of the International Red Cross Committee, died on Friday (Feb. 1st) in Geneva at the age of 74. He lectured for 21 years at the University of Lausanne and was the author of many well-known books on theological subjects.

LA REVISION DE LA LOI SUR LES FABRIQUES.

(Appel publié par le "Comité suisse d'action en faveur de la revision.")

La fortune nationale s'était considérablement accrue depuis le milieu du XIX siècle jusqu'en 1914 parce que l'activité économique avait pu prendre

un libre essor et grâce au goût inné du travail manifesté par le peuple suisse.

Cette augmentation de la fortune nationale a permis de rendre la cité habitable pour tous, tandis que le labeur intense de tous avait mis la Suisse en mesure de conquérir une situation exceptionnelle et enviée sur le marché mondial, bien qu'elle n'eût ni accès à la mer, ni matières premières.

A cette période relativement favorable a succédé, malheureusement, une autre période de lourdes pertes et de cruels déficits. Il en est résulté que la Confédération, les cantons et les communes ont aujourd'hui une dette totale de 7½ milliards de francs, dont les intérêts doivent être payés et qui doit être amortie. Ces obligations comportent une élévation considérable des charges de chacun, charges qui ne seraient tolérables que si notre puissance économique et financière augmentait. Et tout cela ne facilite guère le développement et l'extension de nos œuvres sociales, assurances, etc.

Or, il faut constater que la façon dont a été réglementée, chez nous, la durée du travail dans l'industrie nous a partiellement désarmés au moment précis où la concurrence étrangère devenait plus redoutable; notre loi sur la durée du travail a imposé une nouvelle et une lourde charge à la production.

Notre industrie, gênée par une loi trop rigide, a dû renoncer à exécuter des commandes livrables à court terme ou s'en est vu refuser d'autres à cause de ses prix trop élevés; cela a aggravé la crise de chômage et fait monter encore le coût de la vie.

Les améliorations techniques apportées à notre outillage industriel et à nos méthodes de travail n'ont pas suffi à compenser la diminution de l'effort fourni par l'homme. D'autre part, partout où il a été possible de prolonger la durée du travail, même dans les faibles limites permises par la loi actuelle, les renvois d'ouvriers ont cessé et l'on a pu engager du personnel nouveau. Mais notre industrie ne peut espérer reconquérir ses débouchés que si elle réussit à produire à meilleur compte en prolongeant quelque peu, lorsque cela sera nécessaire, la durée du travail pour diminuer ses frais généraux.

Personne ne peut plus mettre en doute que l'affaiblissement de notre industrie ait eu des répercussions fâcheuses pour toute la population et chaque citoyen a un intérêt évident à ce que l'industrie retrouve son ancienne prospérité.

Chaque citoyen peut y contribuer en acceptant l'article 41 nouveau de la loi sur les fabriques, qui ne sera applicable qu'en temps de crise grave et permettra de porter à 54 heures la durée de la semaine de travail pendant une période limitée à trois ans.

Qu'a-t-on fait à l'étranger, tout spécialement dans les pays où l'industrie est une redoutable concurrente de la nôtre?

Ou bien l'on s'y est soigneusement abstenu (Etats-Unis, Angleterre) de légiférer dans le domaine de la durée du travail et de restreindre ainsi la faculté pour l'industrie de s'adapter aux circonstances.

Ou bien, lorsqu'on y a légiféré, on a eu la prudence de laisser à l'industrie la faculté de prolonger, au delà de 48 heures par semaine, la durée du travail. C'est notamment le cas en France.

Dans les pays où l'on s'était, comme en Suisse, donné trop hâtivement une loi rigide, on l'a déjà corrigée comme c'est le cas en Hollande et en Suède, ou l'on est en train de le faire, comme en Belgique.

Quant à l'Allemagne, on y a simplement renoncé aux règles embarrassantes.

Il faut rappeler d'ailleurs que dans tous ces pays on a refusé de s'engager à observer les préceptes absolus de la convention de Washington.

L'article 41 nouveau de la loi sur les fabriques est, en réalité, uniquement destiné à aider à la Suisse à sortir de la crise actuelle. On ne peut pas contester sa modération.

L'article 41 nouveau ne porte pas atteinte au principe des 48 heures, qui reste fixé dans l'article 40 de la même loi. L'article 40 reste intact. L'article 41 ne fait que donner à notre industrie dans certaines conditions limitativement fixées, un peu plus de cette liberté dont elle a absolument besoin pour lutter, pour vivre et, si possible, pour prospérer de nouveau.

Aucun citoyen sensé et réfléchi ne voudra prendre la responsabilité d'affaiblir par un vote négatif l'espoir d'une amélioration de notre situation économique.

Volume III of "The Swiss Observer," containing Nos. 71-134 (October 14th, 1922, to December 29th, 1923), bound in dark cloth with gilt-lettered back, is now ready and can be obtained for the price of 17/6.

NOTES AND GLEANINGS.

By "KYBURG."

R.I.P.

There is a grief which is too deep for words, at least during the first period, when the senses are numbed by the stunning blow which has befallen them, and when the heart becomes cold with the hopelessness of the immediate outlook. Such a feeling has been produced on "Kyburg" by the sudden loss of our beloved Mr. Georges Dimier. This feeling was intensified, almost immediately afterwards, by the news of the death of ex-President Wilson. Between the two many comparisons might be drawn, but one Christian ideal animated them both, and, what is infinitely more, radiated from both, namely, that intense Love of their fellow-men.

Effect of Ruhr Action.

The Times (Jan. 28th) states:—

The results of the traffic on the Rhine to Basle during 1923 have just been made known. They are rather poor. The situation in the Ruhr and the prolonged periods of low water have so hindered traffic that not a single lighter has come up as far as Basle since August 19.

There has been a 75 per cent. decline in traffic compared with 1922. The tugs having handled only 40,000 tons. More than half of this—namely, 26,000 tons—was inward traffic and consisted chiefly of wheat (40 per cent.) and coal (20 per cent.); the principal items in the remainder being copra, petrol, wood, oats, oil, wool, and sugar. Of the exports about one-half consisted of condensed milk, one-third of cement, then carbide and asphalt. The greater portion of this traffic was with Britain.

Fortunately there are signs of a revival this year. Improved arrangements are being made at Basle, while at Strassbourg a company, known as the Société Franco-Suisse de Navigation, has just been formed for the purpose of developing rapid services between Antwerp, Strassbourg, and Switzerland, either by the Rhine when the water is favourable, or by the Alsace-Lorraine railways. Further, the Netherland-Scheerwaard Vereniging of Rotterdam, which has an available tonnage of about 420,000 tons, has recently opened a general agency at Basle in the form of a limited company.

British trade is likely to benefit by the reduction which it is proposed to make in Swiss postal rates. It is said that the Government intends, during 1924, to lower the international rate on letters from 40 to 30 centimes, and on post-cards from 25 to 20 centimes.

Swiss Economic Situation.

We all know that our country is still suffering a great deal from the after-effects of the Great War, or rather from the ill-effects of the "little" peace. The following note, which appeared in *The Times* (Jan. 28th) and in other English papers as well, will, I think, interest a number of my readers:—

According to advices from Berne, the number of completely unemployed in Switzerland at the end of 1923 totalled roughly 26,800, while those partially employed reach 12,800, or a total of 40,000 in round figures.

The number of the completely unemployed thus attained 27 per cent. of the figure for February, 1922, at a time when unemployment had reached its highest point. The highest figure as regards the partially unemployed was registered at the end of April, 1921, and the number of unemployed in this category attained, at the end of last year, 13 per cent. of that figure. At the end of 1922 the total of unemployed was about 74,000, which shows a reduction of 34,000 during 1923.

Nevertheless, there are still about 40,000 unemployed in Switzerland—a serious matter for a small country—and which shows that even now there are many industries confronted with difficulties of all kinds. Those difficulties will, it is believed, be overcome by furnishing the industries affected with the means for diminishing the cost of production.

The textile industry, for instance, as well as the metal and machine industries, still show a large number of unemployed, and these are the export industries which should have their place in the world markets. They will not, however, it is feared, again find an outlet unless they can reduce the cost of production.

The possibilities of work in the building trade have declined almost everywhere, and this set-back will probably continue during the present month, inasmuch as work has had to be suspended in different places owing to the very low temperature and the heavy snowfalls. As a set-off against this, the unemployment in the hotel industry shows a notable decrease, thanks, in great measure, to the large influx of visitors in the Alpine resorts. The watch industry also shows a marked decrease in unemployment. Unemployment has also decreased in the food industries and clothing industry. There is, however, an increase of unemployment in non-professional labour, while the liberal and intellectual professions still furnish a large contingent of unemployed, and it will not be easy to find posts for the 800 of that category corresponding to their aptitudes.

Bad News for Swiss Smokers.

The Times (Jan. 29th):—

In consequence of the increase of Customs duties on tobacco, the price of cigarettes will be raised in Switzerland by rates varying from 20 to 50 per cent. according to the quality. It is reported that the rise in price will cause many cigarette manufacturers to close their works.

I suppose our people at home will have to resort again to the kind of cigar which we used to call