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# The Swiss Observer

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## NEWS AT RANDOM

The provisional traffic figures for 1939 of our railway system exhibit a very gratifying result. The total receipts of over 358 million francs show an increase of over 35 million as compared with 1938 whilst working expenses are actually  $3\frac{1}{2}$  million less. The net result is a surplus of  $3\frac{1}{2}$  million francs against a budgeted deficit of 37.7 million. This is the first time for nine years that the accounts close with a balance on the right side; the accumulated deficits for the years 1931 to 1939 and not dealt with amount to 268 million francs.

It is now officially announced that Federal President Pilet-Golaz will be in charge of the political department (Foreign Affairs) and that Federal Councillor Celio will take over from him the post and railway department.

In a government message issued to the press it is stated that at the beginning of the last war (1914) the indebtedness of the Confederation amounted to 150 million francs; to-day the figure has reached two milliard francs. Not included in the latter amount are a further two-and-a-half milliard francs for extraordinary mobilisation expenses and the accumulated deficits of the civil servants' pension fund and the Federal Railways.

The vacancy in the States Council of the canton Ticino created by the election of Federal Councillor Celio has been filled by Dr. Peppo Lepori, a Bellinzona lawyer, who will be in charge of the department for justice and police. He has also been elected vice-president of the States Council of which Isidore Autognini is the president.

Thanks to methodic and extensive cultivation about 80% of the vegetables consumed in Switzerland are home produce.

In order to save coal St. Gall school children are to have a holiday on Saturdays; as a further measure of economy school books and maps are to be surrendered at the end of the course and will be re-issued, if still in serviceable condition, to the new classes.

Lucerne intends to extend and unify the existing educational system. So far the compulsory school attendance covered seven years with some of the communes reducing it to 6½ years. The new plan foresees an eight year period and a compulsory course for domestic duties.

An independent examination of the accounts of the commune of Rothrist (Aargau) has brought to light fraudulent entries extending over ten years and amounting to about Frs.100,000; the treasurer has been under arrest for the last two months.

A notable achievement in municipal finance is reported from Aarau where the accounts for 1939 close with a small surplus of about Frs.17,000.

Efforts are being made in the Fricktal (Aargau) to place the production of iron ore on a commercial basis. The construction of a furnace is being considered at an initial cost of Frs.20,000 and the cantonal treasury has been approached for a subsidy. The small quantities so far brought to the surface have found a ready market in Germany.

The bountiful despatch of 2-kilo postal parcels containing foodstuffs (coffee excepted) to friends residing in Germany has been disallowed as from the first of this month; in future a special licence will have to be obtained from the government office dealing with imports and exports and will presumably be granted in cases of Swiss living in Germany. It is stated that the thousands of parcels despatched every week were depleting our own food reserves.

In these times of dictatorial powers it is refreshing to read that the townfathers of Winterthur were consulted as to the hour they deem opportune for re-joining their spouses. The elected councillors hesitated to settle this perennial question, so the enigma was placed before the citizens who decided by 9,180 votes against 3,015 to have the restaurants and "Weinstuben" closed at 11 in the evening (Polizeistunde).

The heirs of Dr. Robert von Planta of Chur have presented to the cantonal library his valuable collection of 1,400 volumes dealing with indogermanic literature.

The well-known Zurich lawyer Dr. Robert Tobler has been arrested by the cantonal police; no definite charge has so far been formulated but it has been discovered that certain confidential information known to him in his professional capacity has been acted upon abroad in "record time;" some intermediaries in Schaffhausen have also been detained, amongst whom