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The Swiss Observer

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NEWS AT RANDOM

Customs duties for last month amount to 22.4 million francs, an increase of 2.7 million as compared with February last year; the total increase for the first two months of the current year is 5.4 million francs.

States Councillor Ernest Béguin (Neuchâtel) has been appointed president of the board of the Swiss Federal Railways in place of National Councillor Dr. H. Walther, who retires.

Colonel Walter Kissling, permanent secretary of the military department, retires at the end of this month; he is 65, and has been in the service of the Confederation for over thirty years.

The discussion of the budget in the Geneva Grand Conseil has been enlivened by an animated exchange of epithets between the old friends of the extreme left Nicole, Dicker and Rosselet. The latter accused Nicole of his open championship of Russian aggression. The budget proposals were carried with the concurrence of the socialists. Nicole insisted on the disclosure by local banks of deposits and private financial transactions so as to enable a check of the income tax assessments.

In order to reduce the consumption of alcoholic drinks, the canton of Glarus proposes to introduce certificates of competency to future applicants of "patents." It is stated that the proportion of licensed innkeepers to adult citizens is one in 25.

The weekly meat consumption throughout Switzerland is slightly over 1½ lbs. per head, or to be exact 43.3 kg. in the full year; 91% is home produced.

After six months forced interruption Swissair is resuming some of the old services though international traffic north of the Alps remains in abeyance. Three airports are in operation for civil flying: Altenrhein, Geneva-Cointrin and Lugano. Arrangements for new lines are in course of completion such as the one from Locarno to Barcelona, which will cover the distance in about $3\frac{1}{2}$ hours against 30 hours by train. The line

Locarno-Rome (600 km.) was opened last Monday and carried a large consignment of mail to which the main contributors were presumably stamp collectors.

Passports and certificates of origin are not necessarily proof of nationality. A young vaudoise has been in possession of these documents for over 12 years; they have been taken away from her as it has been discovered that she was French. Her father acquired Swiss nationality in 1917 when she was six years old. According to an old treaty dating as far back as 1879 it is necessary for children to re-affirm their new nationality when they reach the age of 22. The young lady had forgotten to do so in the belief that her status was safely established by her papers which were obviously issued by the cantonal authorities under a misapprehension.

Labour camps are to be established with the help of the Confederation for the many refugees who have found a temporary sanctuary in our country ; they will be employed in the correction and upkeep of roads in the interior for which local labour is not available.

The proceeds of this year's First of August Celebrations will go to the Red Cross and a fund for relieving soldiers' families. A series of four surcharged stamps are issued illustrating some of our historic monuments. The 5cts. stamp shows the Winkelried monument in Stans commemorating our second war of independence in 1386 at Sempach. The 10cts. stamp reminds us of the glorious battle of Giornico in 1478. Benedikt Fontana is the subject of the 20cts.; he was the leader of a small troop of Grisonniers in the battle of the Münstertal in 1499. The guarding of the Jura frontier in 1870/71 and 1914/18 are called to our mind by "Les Rangiers" on the 30cts. stamp (surtax 10cts.).

As a precautionary measure, some famous art collections have been moved to the interior of the country.

An exhibition of the Holbeins from the Basle museum, and of the priceless collection of all schools belonging to Dr. Reinhart, of Winterthur, has been opened at Berne.

The treasures of the local museum and the private collection of Dr. Hahnenloser, well known for its examples of French nineteenth century paintings, have also been removed from Winterthur to Lucerne.

We do not know whether the following tit-bit from the "*Evening Standard*" (12.3.40) reflects the true position at the Special Division of the Swiss Legation :—

"The German Embassy in Carlton House Terrace has a new master. Count Moretti works there now, with a staff of seventeen.

But he works only in the basement, which opens on the gardens facing the Mall. The remainder of the Embassy has been emptied of its furniture and pictures.

Count Moretti is a former Swiss diplomat and as a neutral he represents German interests in England now. His work is concerned principally with the repatriation of interned civilians, and the welfare of prisoners.

He is responsible, too, for passing formal communications between the enemy Governments. A representative of the American Embassy in Berlin acts for this country.

The Count is descended from an Italian family which settled in Switzerland centuries ago. Both he and his wife combine fluent French, English, and German, with an extensive knowledge of the histories and literatures of the three countries. They live near the Embassy, at 19, Carlton House Terrace."

TO OUR NEW MINISTER, (Monsieur Walter Thurnheer).

We bid you welcome, Sir, with heart and hand
Within the CITY SWISS CLUB'S loyal fold,
Its chair of honour now is yours, to hold
During your mission in this friendly land.

Last week has proved, and you will understand,
The Colony's one desire, to uphold
Ties of affection for the man, whose mould
So truly represents just where we stand.

The months, the years, that lie ahead of you
— A testing time for diplomatic skill —
Are sure to call on all you have to give;

But work and duty are for what we live
And, if it helps you — as we trust it will —
Know: we are at your side, faithful and true.

GALLUS.

THE HELVETIA CLUB

1, GERRARD PLACE, LONDON, W.1. GERrard 4674.

(Owned by Swiss for the Benefit of Swiss)

Announce

THE OLD FRIENDS DINNER & DANCE

will be held in the club-house on

THURSDAY, 28th MARCH, 1940.

Reception 8.30 p.m. — Dancing until 2.0 a.m.

Admission by ticket only, price 5s. 6d. each.

Please book early — numbers limited.

LE ROLE DES PARTIS POLITIQUES EN SUISSE.

Le rôle des partis politiques est devenu toujours plus important, dans notre vie civique.

En soi, les partis sont de simples associations de citoyens professant les mêmes opinions sur les affaires de l'Etat. Comme tels, ils n'ont pas un pouvoir légal, et leurs décisions ne lient que ceux qui veulent bien les accepter. Pratiquement, et selon une évolution du reste normale, bien qu'elle produise parfois des effets déconcertants, les partis sont devenus de véritables institutions, officiellement reconnues. La représentation proportionnelle y a contribué dans une large mesure. Elle accorde en somme aux dirigeants des partis, non seulement le privilège de désigner les candidats qui figureront sur la liste — ce qui ne saurait guère être évité — mais encore elle leur permet de remanier les résultats du scrutin, en provoquant des désistements, ou même, lorsqu'il n'y a plus de suppléants, de repourvoir un siège, sans consulter les électeurs; ce qui nous a toujours paru excessif et peu démocratique.

Aux Chambres fédérales, les groupes exercent une influence considérable sur le cours des travaux, la formation du bureau et des commissions. La conférence des présidents est devenue un des principaux rouages du Conseil national. Il y a là, sans doute, un utile élément de simplification: lorsque les délégués autorisés des divers groupes se sont mis d'accord sur certains points, par exemple sur la méthode à suivre dans un débat, sur la date à laquelle il convient de traiter tel objet, on gagne du temps, on risque moins de discuter à perte de vue sur des questions de simple procédure.

La faculté qu'a le président de clore le débat lorsqu'un orateur de chaque groupe s'est exprimé, est également une coutume salubre.

Les avantages sont compensés, en quelque mesure, par des inconvénients. L'existence des groupes fait parfois oublier un peu celle des personnalités. Le facteur arithmétique prend le pas sur la valeur individuelle. Tel député n'aura aucune chance de siéger jamais dans telle commission peu nombreuse, simplement parce qu'il appartient à un petit groupe. Il n'est pas facile d'y remédier. Et nous savons, par l'enquête que fit naguère M. Henry Vallotton, dans plusieurs pays étrangers que certains Parlements vont beaucoup plus loin que le nôtre, dans cette voie: les groupes y sont véritablement les arbitres du jeu.

En Suisse, comme aucun parti ne peut à lui tout seul mener la barque, et que dans les groupes mêmes, il se produit des divergences de vues, selon les régions ethniques ou sous l'influence d'autres particularités, la position prise dans ces conventicules ne préjuge pas nécessairement le résultat final. Il arrive que, malgré l'accord apparent des "fractions" qui forment la majorité gouvernementale, l'assemblée se prononce dans un autre sens. Il peut se produire aussi que l'une des "fractions" doive modifier l'attitude qu'elle avait d'abord adoptée, si elle ne veut pas rompre le front commun. On peut faire à ce propos, durant une session, maintes remarques intéressantes.

Peu à peu, les grands partis politiques, et les groupes que constituent leurs députés à Berne, se montrent enclins à considérer certains problèmes nationaux comme étant de leur ressort exclusif. Ce ne sera pas le cas pour une loi sujette au referendum, par exemple; là, on daigne encore admettre que tout