

Zeitschrift: The Swiss observer : the journal of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK

Herausgeber: Federation of Swiss Societies in the United Kingdom

Band: - (1941)

Heft: 995

Rubrik: News at random

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The Swiss Observer

FOUNDED BY MR. P. F. BOEHRINGER.

The Official Organ of the Swiss Colony in Great Britain.

EDITED WITH THE CO-OPERATION OF MEMBERS OF THE LONDON COLONY.

Telephone: Clerkenwell 2321/2.

Published Monthly at 23, LEONARD STREET, E.C.2.

Telegrams: FREPRINCO, LONDON.

VOL—No. 995.

LONDON, DECEMBER 19th, 1941.

PRICE 6d.



NEWS AT RANDOM

On the first Monday in December the traditional winter session of the Federal Chambers took place, when the session started with the election of the respective presidents.

In the National Council the present Vice-President, the Socialist Rosselet, from Geneva, was elected, and in the States Council the catholic-conservative Hans Fricker, from the canton of Argovie. Rosselet is a Director of a Geneva printing firm and is a member of the National Council since 1922. Fricker is a member of the High Court in the canton of Argovie. He was for seven years a member of the National Council until 1933, when he was elected to the States Council.

Dr. Philipp Etter, former Vice-President, has been elected President of the Swiss Confederation, according to Swiss radio.

Dr. Etter is 50, and was educated at Zurich University.

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Federal Councillor Dr. Stampfli spoke on the 23rd November, 1941, on Switzerland's position in the third winter of war. He maintained that while the Swiss citizen was not expected to give up his personal rights and to submit to dictatorship, yet certain restrictions, particularly with regard to freedom of speech and the press, had become necessary in order not to upset relations with the belligerent parties. To-day Switzerland's trade position was more difficult than it had been in 1914-1918; the fall of France had exposed all Swiss frontiers to the German counter-blockade. Nevertheless, continued Dr. Stampfli, Switzerland was trying to maintain trade relations with the whole world and to be fair to both sides. Switzerland had made serious efforts to obtain certain relaxations of the counter-blockade in England's favour. If the agreement had caused disappointment in London, that was not Switzerland's fault, she had done everything in her power. The speaker concluded with an appeal to the Swiss to put all their energy into their work, to save and not to lose faith in the future.

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The fourth Federal loan to cover the cost of mobilisation and the future requirements of finance had an unexpected good result, although the interest conditions are extraordinarily low. For the 100 millions 2½% Treasury bonds asked for, 250 millions were offered and instead of the 250 millions ¾% stock required, 325 millions were subscribed. In view of this readiness to invest, the Federal Council has increased the Treasury bond issue to 270 millions and the stock to 320 millions.

Almost as a completion of the turnover tax which came into force a few weeks ago, now an increase of the war profits tax has just been announced. The tax free limit has been lowered and the tax increased. The tax which up to now was 30 and 40% on the increased profits has now been put up to 50 and 70%. This increase will come into force already in the present tax period.

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In the September session of the two Federal Chambers the initiative of the socialist Party to amend the popular vote and to increase the number of Members of the Federal Council from 7 to 9 was finally rejected. A majority counter proposal by the National Council, which only proposed the extension of members of the Federal Council, was rejected by the States Council and thereby will not come before the voters. The initiative will have to pass the ultimate test of the popular vote.

The date of the vote by the people and the cantons has not yet been fixed but as far as can be judged now, the last Sunday in January 1942 is the most likely date. So many circumstances, internal as well as external tend towards the rejection of the initiative that already now the acceptance thereof appears most unlikely.

The same fate most likely will befall an initiative by the "Independents" which is for the reform of the National Council. This proposal aims at reducing the number of National Councillors from 187 at present to 135, or one National for every 30,000 inhabitants of a canton against 25,000 at present and to limit the duration of the office to eight years. Through this proposed reduction the more densely populated cantons would lose some of their representatives in the National Council, and they therefore would not be inclined to vote for this proposal. There is neither a date fixed

CITY SWISS CLUB.

Messieurs les membres sont avisés que

L'ASSEMBLEE MENSUELLE

aura lieu Samedi, le 10 Janv. à 12.45 p.m. au Brown's Hotel, Dover Street, (near Green Park Tube Station).

ORDRE DU JOUR:

| | |
|----------------|-------------|
| Procès-verbal. | Démissions. |
| Admissions. | Divers. |

Déjeuner à 1.0 h. précises. Les participants sont priés de bien vouloir s'inscrire au plus tôt auprès de Mons. H. Bingguely, 167, Clapham Road, S.W.9. (Téléphone: Reliance 4150).

Le Comité.

for this initiative to come up for voting, but it appears that the Federal Council does not propose to couple it with the former initiative.

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After many years of deliberations which have been retarded by the war, the Federal Assembly has recently completed a law which will liquidate the indebtedness of farms which are vitally sound, but overburdened by debts. This is to be done with the assistance of the Confederation and especially drawn-up legislation. The share of the Confederation to which are to be added contributions by the cantons and certain debt remissions by the creditors, has been fixed at 100 millions Swiss francs. This amount will be paid into a debt remission fund in yearly instalments of 5 millions for 20 years and although the date for the coming into force of the law has not yet been fixed, the first instalment of the share of the Confederation is to be taken into the budget for 1942.

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The inhabitants of the Hinter Rheintal in the Grisons like those in the Urserental in the canton of Uri, are fighting against the project of a power works which would submerge completely the villages of Splügen Medels and Nufenen. At an extra-ordinary "Landsgemeinde" at which 79% of those entitled to vote took part, it was decided to oppose with all means possible the building of this work and they have called for the assistance of the cantonal Government. Even the promises of ample compensation and new settlements under the most advantageous conditions can persuade neither the people of the Grisons, nor of Uri to let their old homes be drowned in the reservoirs of the power works.

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The town fathers of St. Gall have refused by a six to five majority a scheme to convert the existing two autobus services into a trolleybus line. An initial expense of Frs.800,000 would have resulted in a considerable reduction of operating costs. The proposal was strongly supported by all the local parties.

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A further decrease in the population of St. Gall is recorded in the statistics just published to the end of 1940. The inhabitants now number 63,321 or more than 12,000 less than thirty years ago but while the percentage of foreigners in 1910 amounted to 33% it is now reduced to 12.1%, i.e., from 24,900 to 7,664. The Roman Church is finding increased favour its adherents numbering 29,432 against 30,810 protestants. Death has scored over the number of births by 21.

* * *

In the by-elections in the canton Vaud to replace the two disqualified members of the Nicole group in the National Council, Gabriel Despland, veterinary surgeon in Echallens, and Lucien Rubattel, agriculturist in Vilbroye emerged successfully from the polls.

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In Geneva the two new National Councillors elected are Paul Randon (radical) and Prof. William Rappard (Duttweiler group).

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The 3½% loan offered by the canton Geneva to convert a previous 4½% issue of 13 million francs has been over-subscribed only about 30% of the amounts applied for being allotted.

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The cultivated land in the canton Vaud has increased by about 15% during the last twelve months

and covers now 42,190 hectares; the production of vegetables shows an increase of 40%, potatoes 13.8 and cereals 12.5%.

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The municipal accounts for 1940 of Liestal (Basel-land) balance with a surplus of Frs.620, a deficit of Frs.80,000 having originally been budgeted for.

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An appeal is made by agricultural interests in the cantons of Zurich and Thurgau to intensify the hunting and shooting of deer as the increased stock is causing unwanted depredations.

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To be a burgher of Quinten (St. Gall) seems to be an expensive and exclusive luxury for the local council has recently granted naturalisation papers to six foreigners resident in the district since their early youth at a fee of Frs.6,000 each.

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The provision coupons for December contain for the first time four coupons which will entitle the holder to four meals in a Restaurant. Although the position of provisioning demands the greatest economy and plainness, many a person will be pleased to be able to have a good feed out during the festive season.

* * *

The brown seeds of the tobacco plant contain a useful table oil. In order to obtain as much as possible of this oil the Federal Military Provisioning Department has ordered the 4,000 tobacco growers to let the fourth part of their plants grow until the ripening of the seeds, and not to cut off the leaves as is generally the practice. It is calculated that in this way about 100,000 litre of this oil will be produced, the price per kg. of seeds is guaranteed at 1.50 frs. A particularly good result is obtained from a tobacco plantation which was started a few years ago on the right bank of the Rhone near Aigle on a previously sandy and swampy soil. Climatic and ground conditions are such that a specially excellent tobacco plant has been cultivated there which produces stems 3.5 m. high with large, fine leaves. This particular plant produces besides very fine tobacco also a large quantity of seeds. This year the plantation produced 35,000 kg. of tobacco leaves and 20,000 kg. of seeds, from which about 10,000 litre of oil was gained.

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The use of coal which in 1910 amounted to 2.83 millions grew in 1939, including the stocks, to 3.97 million tons. In 1939 the use for house coal amounted to 40.9% of the imported coal, the transport undertakings, railways and shipping 3.6%, the remainder was distributed over industrial and gas works.

Previous to the first World War the Federal Railways required 761,000 tons or 22.7% of the total imports; in 1939, however, thanks to the electrification of the main lines, only 92,000 tons were used or 2.7% of the imports.

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A new process by which copper and aluminium can be reliably soldered together has been discovered by the Maschinenfabrik Oerlikon. This new combination, which up to now was not possible, is of the utmost importance in the construction of electric machines, for which more and more light metal is used in place of the very expensive copper. The patented process consists in a simple spreading of a special alloy over the heated aluminium parts. This alloy immediately

forms a union with the aluminium surface and can be soldered in the usual way like copper or brass. Aluminium can be soldered to aluminium or copper without salt or acids as fluxing medium.

This new process will no doubt increase the utility sphere of aluminium.

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In order to preserve the stock of cattle as well as a measure of price regulation the Federal War Provisioning Department ordered a third meatless day since the beginning of December. Accordingly no meat from warm blooded animals is allowed to be sold or consumed on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. Wednesdays, however, "Blut and Leberwürste" are allowed to be eaten. Since the introduction of two meatless days in May last, the slaughtering in the larger slaughter houses has decreased by 20% compared with last year.

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According to a recent Federal edict wine growers have to collect and surrender the grape-stones from which by a special process the oil will be extracted. These stones are stated to contain about 10% of oil which after treatment can be used for industrial purposes. The machinery for treating the stones is supplied by a Swiss company and production is to be started in the vineyards of the canton Valais.

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In order to preserve existing stocks of nickel an alloy of 75% copper and 25% nickel will be used when further 20cts. pieces are cast; so far this coin is pure nickel.

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At the age of 93 years, old Company Sergeant-Major Jacob Durtschi died at Spieswiler in the Bernese Oberland. He was one of the few remaining veterans of the mobilisation of 1870.

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An amount of 1.11 million Swiss francs has been paid by the British Government as compensation for the damage done in districts round Geneva and Renens in the night of June 11th/12th, 1940, when the R.A.F. accidentally released some bombs. — In a similar occurrence when the neighbourhood of Zurich was concerned on December 22nd/23rd, 1940, the damage to life and property has been assessed and agreed at Frs.800,000.

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Early winter has visited Switzerland. On 23rd October a 50 year old shepherd was snow-bound for 30 days in his hut on the alp Bogarten in the canton of Appenzell. He had with him 7 goats, 1 he-goat and 2 pigs. Luckily he had enough fodder for his animals, but he himself had for several days nothing but goats milk.

Somewhat better placed was a Director of one of the Pilatus Hotels, who with his wife and two maid servants was cut off from the outside world for nearly a month. The railway had stopped running and avalanches broke the telephones lines, and with a temperature of 9 to 14 degrees of frost and tremendous blizzards blowing it was impossible to leave the house. After ten days of hard work by fifty men in a breakdown gang it was possible to free the imprisoned party.

October passed out with renewed snow falls, which reached far into the middle land. In many places the potato harvest has not been gathered. So for instance the mountain village of Hemberg in the Toggenburg

was totally snowed in and was cut off from the outside by over five feet of snow. Already avalanches are reported from all over the country as the snow is lying only very loosely.

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During the last two years, about 450 villages in the German speaking part of Switzerland have been visited in order to make records of dialect expressions and designations of things, which are to be collected in a language atlas. This scientific and ultimately important work is directed by two Zurich professors, Baumgartner and Hotzenköcherle, and is expected to be completed in about seven years.

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An error in signalling was the cause of a serious railway accident which took place in the morning of September 23rd, at Kiesen on the Thun-Berne line. Workmen were engaged on this sector in relaying part of the double track. While the passenger train from Berne was waiting for the all-clear the fast train from Thun sped along resulting in a head-on collision; the two locomotives were smashed and the two luggage vans and six coaches badly damaged. Amongst the ten killed — most of them are railway employees — are Sanitätsmajor Dr. Otto Haab-Escher (Zurich), Lieut. Dr. Jakob Schaffner (Berne) and Dr. K. Hammer (Basle; 27 others were more or less badly injured and taken to neighbouring hospitals; one of them will probably be remembered by business men in our Colony as she was one of the regular stewardesses on the Swiss Air line, Fräulein Erna Nikles from Interlaken.

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The railway across the Brünig pass from Interlaken via Meiringen to Luzern has been electrified. The work which took about two years is technically a great success, but the budgeted amount of 13 millions is not sufficient owing to the increased costs of the material required. The time of the journey from Meiringen to the pass-height is reduced by half and the 16 electric locomotives will replace 16 valley and 18 mountain engines.

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The first gas-turbine locomotive in the World has just finished its trial runs. It has been invented and built by Brown Boveri, in Baden. The technical-scientific reports now available prove that this is a most valuable invention. The locomotive consumed on the trial runs with an average load of 1,200-1,300 H.P., 500 kg. fuel oil. A medium steam locomotive with an equal capacity would use about 1,300 kg. of coal and 9,000 kg. of water.

The latest steam locomotives have an efficiency of 9-10%, whereas the gas turbine locomotive has 17%. The new locomotive which requires only cheap oil, but no coal or water, is particularly suitable for countries poor of water.

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In place of the law which was rejected by the people last year, to create a compulsory military preparatory course, the Federal Council after having discussed the scheme with the interested parties, has recently prepared a mandatory decree, to bring the scheme forward on a voluntary basis.

The new ordinance which is expected to come into force on 1st January, 1942, leaves the Confederation to decide on the scope and supervision of the scheme, but transfers to the cantons the execution of it. The sport and gymnastic preparatory courses, which require an

ability end-examination are to be held at schools and gymnastic societies. Physical training is to be supplemented by rifle shooting courses for youths of 17-19 years of age. Young men who cannot pass the rather high standard set for the gymnastic examination of recruits and which generally takes place at the age of 19 years, will have to undergo a compulsory sport-gymnastic preparatory course of 80 hours before entering the recruit school in order to enable them to keep up with their comrades.

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During a training excursion for alpine troops a climbing party negotiating the Rigidalstock (near Engelberg) made a fatal fall. The three men were roped together and just before reaching the summit the footing underneath the middle man gave way precipitating him and the other two into the abyss; all three are stated to have been experienced climbers and were under the direction of an expert. The names of the victims, all from an Aargau unit, are Franz Hunziker, aged 23 from Mooslerau; Hans Hilfiker-Suter, aged 28 from Safenwil and Max Müller, aged 22 from Muhen.

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Considerable damage was caused by a fire which broke out in the Grand Hotel Quellenhof, Bad Ragaz; the hotel which contains 250 beds has been closed since the beginning of this war.

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For unlawfully importing (smuggling) salt from a neighbouring canton into Obwalden two tradesmen in Sarnen were fined Frs.8,000.

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In the night of 5-th October Switzerland reverted to normal time, i.e., has put back the clock one hour. The regulation issued by the Military authorities states that the black-out has to start at 10 p.m. instead of 11 p.m. and the Broadcasting stations are also closing down at 10 p.m.

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The old tower of the castle of Kyburg at Burgdorf had the coat of arms of Berne, which was to be seen at its wall, renewed. It was done as a present from the town of Berne in commemoration of the 750th anniversary of its foundation. The coat of arms shows the largest 'Bäremutz' ever painted. The head measures 1.50 metre, the soles of his paws without the claws are 1 metre long and the extended leg reaches 2.50

metres and is 1 metre thick. The coat of arms including the crown of the state of Bern is 9.5 metres high and 7 metres wide. The painter is W. Soom from Heimiswil.

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The compatriots living on the other side of the Jura mountains have not been forgotten by the population of the Bernese Jura. A voluntary collection of potatoes was started which in a few days amounted to 5,000 kg., and which were forwarded to Swiss citizens living in the Montbeliard region. Already a new collection is to be instituted to assist in a similar manner our compatriots in the districts of Belfort and Delle.

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Every year in December the "Pro Juventute Association" is issuing charity stamps which have universal validity for several months in the following year. This year's series has two costume pictures by the painter C. Liner of Appenzell, representing a girl from Schaffhausen with the Munot as back ground and the other a girl from Obwalden with the Chapel of father Klaus von der Flue in the rear. The value of 5cts. and 30cts. show the true to life pictures of Johann Caspar Lavater, the great Zurich Educationist, and the creator of the Neuchâtel Watch Industry, Daniel Jeanrichard. Both pictures are the work of the painter K. Bickel on the Wallenstatter Berg.

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For the 20th time the youth movement in the romansch part of Switzerland instituted a fast-day on Sunday, November 2nd. On this day many families were satisfied with a very frugal meal, in order to give the money thus saved to the starving youth in Europe. The members of this movement have a communal meal consisting of a plate of soup and a piece of bread for which they pay two francs, all of which goes to those children in countries where through the ravages of war they do not even have sufficient bread and soup.

* * *

At the beginnig of October the last contingent of the small holiday guests who spent a few weeks in Switzerland have now returned to their homes. 200 Swiss children whose parents live in Belgium were the last ones to leave. The Swiss children living in Germany, about 400 returned at the end of September, as have also those living in France, followed by 34 from Holland and 9 from Czecho Slovakia. From Italy 120 small children were able to spend their holidays in Switzerland, but all these could not fill the vacant places put at the disposal of these little guests, so that a number of convalescent children from the French speaking part of Switzerland made use of the so kindly offered homes.

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The sale of the special stamps for the 1st August celebration this year and which were issued for the benefit of several charitable institutions, showed a very satisfactory result; 2,377,000 stamps at 10/20 cts., and 2,082,000 stamps at 20/30 cts. were sold.

* * *

In the interests of equal provisioning the Federal War Provisioning Department has just completed a stocktaking and rationing of eggs. The monthly ration for adults and children is three eggs. Owners of chickens are allowed to use for own consumption the annual produce of 1½ chicken per person permanently boarded with the family, the remaining eggs have to be handed over to the collecting stations.

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