

News at random

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NEWS AT RANDOM

Federal

PERSUADING THE SWISS.

Thus the "*Christian Herald*," March 8th, 1945 has, probably unwittingly, headed a short leader dealing with the conference at Berne. It has taken just over three weeks to consummate this historic process and to exchange our lofty ideals of neutrality, cherished and expanded for over five years, against the cold facts of actualities and common sense.

The Anglo-American negotiations came to an end on Thursday March 8th, when an agreement was signed after three weeks deliberations. The Swiss delegation was in charge of Prof. W. Rappard. It is somewhat remarkable that no official statement was issued at Bernè from the Swiss side, but later in the day the French delegate, M. Chargueraud, who, at the last moment had joined the negotiators, extolled to press representatives the harmonious spirit and understanding that characterized at all times the proceedings. The superlative utterances — peculiar to the French language — were reminiscent of a discourse on a defunct member of the French Academy. The actual terms received scant recital and apart from gratifying all the Allied demands, hold out promises to Switzerland such as the import of food and raw materials from overseas and railway transit across France. While the concessions to the Allies enter into force immediately (especially the elimination of the use of the Gothard railway between Italy and Germany) the compensation held out to us is of a very problematical value best described as "Zukunftsmusik." The French authorities have so far been unable to re-establish their ravaged railway system to distribute food to famished districts that they cannot be expected to offer transit facilities to a neutral power. Some months ago arrangements had been made for the conveyance of the mails to Great Britain, but it is quite a common occurrence that newspapers are accepted and during the journey through France returned by some busy-body on the plea that there was no more space available. It looks as if the full text of this agreement, so vital for the Allies, is to remain a secret document. In the meantime the Swiss press is already expecting improvements in our inter-

national position economically as well as politically, ignoring the one and only purpose of this agreement. A "complete success" is the unanimous verdict of the English papers with which all our readers whose sons are still serving with the forces will hopefully agree. Here is a cabled report from "*The Times*" correspondent on March 8th which supplies some information:

"The documents endorsing decisions reached in the negotiations between the allies and Switzerland were signed this morning, bringing the long and technically difficult conversations to a fruitful end.

All the delegations referred to the mutual tolerance and sympathy with which the negotiations were conducted. The Swiss representatives said that their country's neutrality was fully understood by the allies, and had emerged inviolate from the negotiations. All that Switzerland wanted was coal, without which she could not live.

Complete agreement was reached on all the matters discussed. They included Swiss trade with the belligerents; the carriage of goods on the Swiss railways; Swiss exports of electricity, which will help in French reconstruction; measures to prevent looted property from being concealed in Switzerland; the supply of food and raw materials to Switzerland from overseas, and railway transit traffic across France. An amicable understanding was reached on the use of facilities for the transit of goods through Switzerland, and, as was expected, France is to place Toulon at the disposal of the Swiss.

The French delegates stated that the facilities available at Toulon are greater than was indicated by early pessimistic reports. Later France will also allow the Swiss to use Sete, and in the meantime Switzerland will endeavour to import her accumulated supplies overland from Spain and Portugal by

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Messieurs les Membres sont avisés que

L'ASSEMBLÉE GÉNÉRALE ANNUELLE

aura lieu Mardi, le 17 avril, 1945, au BROWN'S HOTEL, DOVER STREET, W.1, le dîner commencera à 6 heures précises.

ORDRE DU JOUR:

Procès-verbal.	Décharge au Comité.
Admissions et Démissions.	Elections du Comité pour 1945-1946.
Divers Rapports.	Divers.

Messieurs les Membres sont priés de s'inscrire par écrit pas plus tard que le 14 avril auprès de M.P.A. Moehr, Hon. Sec., Imperial House, Kingsway, W.C.. Prière de s'abstenir de téléphoner.

using her own rolling stock and motor-vehicles and the few steam locomotives, fewer than 100, remaining after the electrification of the Swiss railways. Although the allies will do their utmost to supply Switzerland with food and raw materials, they have warned her that she cannot expect to receive more than the war-scarred countries, which have a claim to priority. The Swiss people should, therefore, accept a further cut in their rations if necessary.

It is generally felt that the negotiations, which began on February 12th, have been a political success also, since the allied delegates were able to see for themselves how deeply rooted democracy is in the minds of the Swiss."

In the hotel in which the British and American delegations had their rooms reserved a German economic mission was staying at the same time. No incidents were reported and Dr. Currie left within a few minutes after he had signed the document. He took with him a letter from our President to the President of a great sister republic together with a specimen of the recently struck St. Jacob/a. Birse medal. We hope that President Roosevelt will not suffer the same shock as President von Steiger, for according to "Reuter" the Basler "National Zeitung" said on February 27th that "President Roosevelt, in a message to M. von Steiger, President of the Swiss Federal Council, referred to Hitler with 'an expression mild for American conditions, but which has shocked some ears accustomed to Swiss censorship.' The paper states that highly placed officials in the Swiss Government were even alarmed by Mr. Roosevelt's reference."

The members of the American delegation made use

of their first free Saturday they spent in Switzerland by making an excursion to the Jungfrau, when Dr. Currie casually sampled a piece of Bernese dry humour. During their stay on the Joch the party visited the ice-grotto. It suddenly occurred to the Doctor that he had read that glaciers had a habit of moving. He addressed himself, though not over-apprehensive, to a Swiss standing next to him with the enquiry whether it was not dangerous to loiter in the midst of a glacier when he was told that "this is a Swiss glacier and that in Switzerland everything moves slowly" . . . Before leaving the district, Dr. Currie expressed great admiration, adding that in spite of the sumptuous banquets he and his colleagues were being entertained to, he was fully cognisant of our deprivations and of the hard battles the Swiss housewife often had to fight.

Dr. Stucki, in welcoming the Anglo-American delegation, expressed the hope that they might be spared the interruption of sirens and bombers — a hope that was sadly shattered.

The following story was told by Mr. Dingle Foot after his return; it is taken from "The Evening News," March 10th:

"An American girl was selling flags at a Berne hotel in which both Allied economic conference representatives and German trade delegates were staying.

The British Minister's wife had organised a sale of badges bearing the Tricolour and the Stars and Stripes in aid of French children.

The American girl told Swiss sellers they did not know how to sell and that it was a question of 'not asking but going up and making people buy.'

She went up to two men in the hotel, who said 'No.' So then she placed herself at the front door between the two men as they were going out. Eventually one pulled out two Swiss francs. As she pinned a badge on him she saw a swastika on his lapel. The two men were German delegates."

* * *

The members of the German economic mission departed soon after the Anglo-Americans. The Swiss Radio on March 14th stated that as a result of military events and developments, it was unsafe to draw up an agreement relying on definite performances; ordinary commercial relations, however, continue.

* * *

Lieut. General Spaatz, Commander of the U.S. Strategic Air Forces in Europe, arrived at Geneva on March 7th and accompanied by the U.S.A. Minister had a two-hours interview with our over-lords at Berne. He was facing Prof. Petitpierre (Head of our Political Dep.), General Guisan and other high officials. Prof. Petitpierre informed the General that he was obliged to ask the Federal Council to make a serious and firm protest to the Government at Washington. Federal Council Kobelt pointed out that all possible measures had been taken a long time ago to warn foreign aircraft when approaching Swiss territory; the special marks were visible at an altitude of 6000 metres. Other speakers repeated that nothing had ever been neglected to maintain our neutrality though for four years the country had been encircled by one belligerent. Prof. Petitpierre could hardly believe under these conditions that the instructions given to American pilots were sufficiently clear and precise. General Spaatz while regretting sincerely these grave incidents expressed the

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desire to study with our authorities ways and means of preventing similar occurrences in the future. The offending pilots had been punished but he felt that more stringent preventive measures were called for. The Swiss audience, convinced that as far as General Spaatz was concerned, everything possible would be done, declared itself satisfied with his explanations.

It seems to us that no other result could be anticipated. Since the German government has chosen to take refuge between the Bavarian Alps and our northern frontiers in order to escape air attacks, the repercussions of the latter can hardly miss Swiss territory. We have not yet heard of a gadget that can pin-point targets infallibly; besides, it is by no means established that all the damage suffered so far is due solely to Anglo-American operations.

As from the first of this month the ban on the political activities of extremist parties has been lifted by the Federal Council; this does not only affect the communists but so-called Fascist fronts. A new decree is published providing for the punishment of subversive activities endangering the safety of the state or its system of government.

Prof. C. J. Burckhardt, the recently appointed president of the International Red Cross Committee, has been selected by the Federal Council to be our new minister in Paris, the French government having declined the "agrément" to the previously nominated Counsellor of Legation de Torrenté. Though extremely popular in Paris, Minister Stucki's return was of course precluded as he had been forced to follow the old French government to Vichy. Prof. Burckhardt, who, during the last few weeks has been travelling in Germany in connection with the release of French prisoners and other war workers, enjoys an international reputation as an outstanding and extremely versed diplomat. The now dormant League of Nations had appointed him High Commissioner of Danzig, a polemical assignation under singularly trying conditions. A historian and jurist he is equally prominent in the world of industry and finance (he is on the board of the Swiss Bank Corp.) and the Zurich labour daily "Volksrecht" describes Prof. Burckhardt as the representative of the 200 families that rule Switzerland.

The Federal Council has promoted Counc. of Legation Henri de Torrenté who did not find favour with the French government as our envoy, "Ministre Plénipotentiaire;" he is earmarked for the next foreign appointment.

Cantonal

Music for once could not melt the hearts of the music-loving citizens of Zurich for the name of Furtwaengler carried a prickly sting. The well-known conductor who is a Prussian State Councillor and as such a Nazi had an engagement to conduct two orchestral concerts in the Limmat-town. When the news of his engagement became known it raised such vehement protest in the press that the Municipal Council barred his appearance. Undaunted and determined to persist until his last nerve, he went to Winterthur there to fulfil an engagement. He was received by four thousand people demonstrating, but when the police turned the fire hose on the crowd, Furtwaengler was able to reach the hall. To

the accompaniment of whistles and catcalls the concert commenced but eventually finished without further disturbance. His insistence had won him the day.

The construction of the new power station at the Julier (Grisons) for which Zurich has voted a credit of 15 million francs is now postponed indefinitely as it has been discovered that there is not sufficient cement in the country for such a vast enterprise. Until coal can be freely imported the manufacture of cement is discontinued.

A rare example of the voters of a commune rejecting the annual budget submitted by their elders, is reported from Köniz (Berne). The place numbers about 14,000 inhabitants whose civic virtues are not imitative, for of those entitled to vote only 28 per cent turned up at the polls. The accounts anticipating an over-expenditure of Frs. 176,000 were referred back.

On account of gas rationing, public food kitchens have been installed at Baden and Lenzburg, where soup at 50 cts. per litre can be obtained.

The funeral at Fribourg of Mgr. Marius Besson, Bishop of Fribourg, Geneva and Lausanne, on February 28th, was attended by Federal Councillors Etter, Celio and Petitpierre, General Guisan, a large number of Federal and cantonal dignitaries apart from 700 priests. The Bishop who was born at Turin of Swiss parentage, died from a heart attack at the age of 69. He was a



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brilliant exponent in many fields of science in addition to theological theses and the author of several volumes on Swiss history and archaeology.

The Grosse Rat of Basle has sanctioned this year's budget showing an expenditure of 70 million francs and closing with a probable deficit of over 5½ million francs.

Great damage was caused at Basle on Sunday morning, March 4th by a bombardment variously attributed to American Liberators, that had mistaken their targets, to unidentified aircraft and to deliberate attack by one bomber out of a large formation. According to the Swiss radio 40 bombs were dropped on the "Wolf" goods station practically destroying the railway track and over 50 trucks. In the adjoining Gundeldingen area fires were caused and a number of people injured. Time-bombs subsequently discovered rendered railway traffic to the interior of Switzerland hazardous. A statement in the "Daily Telegraph," March 5th, 1945 that "the misfortune to Basle was caused by only one plane, which received a direct hit from Swiss flak. The machine exploded in the air and the crew must have perished. Its incendiary bombs and fragments of explosive bombs were distributed over a wide area" is contradicted by the Swiss report that altogether about 100 bombs were dropped. The damage is estimated to exceed eight million francs. Federal Councillor Celio later in the afternoon inspected the scene of action. For the evening an extraordinary session of the Regierungsrat was called to protest to the Federal Council and insist on full reparations.

A prize contest invited by the Schaffhausen Stadtrat for a suitable monument or tombstone to pay homage to the victims of the bombing on April 1st last has been unproductive, none of the plans or designs so far submitted being fancied by the jury. However, the town fathers insist on having a monument and the contest has been opened again.

The whole of our north-eastern frontier from the Ticino to the Lake of Constance has now become the scene of continuous air battles from which Swiss territory cannot escape being involved. But when such encounters take place in broad day-light on the wrong side of the Rhine and are followed by definite bombardments of Swiss villages one can hardly believe that these "accidents" are due to a loss of bearings or judgment. On Thursday, February 22nd, considerable activity between American and unidentified aircraft along the Rhine frontier was observed. Sirens were sounded when about 200 bombers with their escort were seen to cross our territory in the direction of Munich. Soon after midday bombs began to rain on the southern side of the Rhine, particularly on places in the canton Schaffhausen. Altogether 18 people were killed outright and a large number seriously wounded. The

worst visitation was experienced in Stein/am Rhein where a single bomber of unknown nationality flew low and released about a dozen heavy explosives. Eight people were killed and about 20 badly injured. The names of the killed are: Frau Fahrni and her daughter Lena; Frau Vetter-Leibacher and her daughter Elizabeth; Frau Störchlin, widow; Frau Frei and the two boys, Karli Fehr and Werner Vetterli. Ten private houses have been completely destroyed. At Rafz (Cant. Zurich), ten bombs were dropped, one of which made a direct hit on the house of the family Siegrist-Schweizer. They were enjoying their midday meal and were all killed: Father, mother, aunt and five children. Another stick of ten bombs from an American machine landed harmlessly in a field near Niederdorf (Basel-land). Neuhausen received 11 bombs, only one finding a residential quarter, without doing any harm; later on a man was found dead in the grounds of the Aluminium A.G., having succumbed to shock.

In the afternoon Dr. Currie accompanied by other members of the American mission rendered an official visit to Schaffhausen in order to place a wreath on the grave of the victims of the bombardment nearly twelve months ago. At a subsequent reception he assured the Stadtpräsident that he would personally prevail upon President Roosevelt to make further violations of our territory impossible.

The 80-year-old former Nat. Counc. Arnold Kneuwolf from Herisau collapsed from heart failure while addressing a public meeting in Stein/am Rhein.



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He had at various times been a pastor, newspaper editor and free-lance journalist; during the few years he belonged to the National Council he represented the Grütlianer party, now extinct.

* * *

The people of St. Gall confirmed their present Regierungsrat of seven members for another term of three years, no fresh candidates having been proposed.

* * *

The world-famous herbal doctor, pastor Johann Künzle, died in Zizers at the age of 87.

* * *

Former States Counc. Brenno Bertoni, a lawyer by profession, died in Lugano at the age of 85. He was a leader in the futile Ticinese putsch in 1890, belonged to the National Council from 1914 to 1920 and then for 16 years to the States Council.

* * *

In the elections in the canton Valais the conservatives retained their overwhelming majority holding 92 seats against 32 by the radicals and 7 by the socialists.

In the elections for the local council at Sierre the socialists secured for the first time two seats at the expense of the radicals and conservatives.

* * *

A deficit of 5½ million francs is anticipated by the budget for 1945 passed by the Geneva Grand Conseil. The cantonal indebtedness already exceeds 227 million francs which works out at Frs. 1,345 per inhabitant as compared with Frs. 314 in Zurich.

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Army

A clerk employed in the military department at Berne has been fined Frs. 200 in addition to 75 per cent of the cost of the proceedings for showing favour when placing printing orders for his department. Apart from assisting his friend in obtaining such orders he had accepted invitations for dinner, an occasional leg of mutton and a box of brissagos!

* * *

Several suggestions are made in army quarters to assist foreign bombers in identifying Swiss territory. One is the setting up of large beacons for the better marking of our frontiers. Another one is to cease A.A. firing as this obviously leads allied pilots to the belief that they are over enemy country; in its place signalling informing them of their error would be adopted.

* * *

On the occasion of President Roosevelt's 63rd anniversary the American internees at Adelboden have made a special collection in favour of the sufferers from infantile paralysis in the Zurich hospital.

Traffic

The Federal Council has sanctioned a scheme modernising the existing aerodromes at Berne, Geneva, Basle and Zurich and adapting them to the use of European airlines. In addition the Zurich airport will be specially extended to link up with inter-continental routes. The construction of a number of regional airports is also contemplated, such as: Lausanne-Ecublens, St. Gall-Altenrhein, Locarno-Magadino, Samaden, etc. A subsidy of 25 to 30% towards the cost of the construction or alteration of these airports is to be granted by the Confederation.

* * *

The Postal authorities announce that arrangements have now been completed with Belgium for the mailing of postcards and ordinary letters; the correspondence must be carried on in the French language.

Economical

The Federal Office for War Economy issued on February 14th a somewhat disheartening statement as to the immediate outlook of our food position. The following are the main points: it is now over twelve months since the last cereal consignment has arrived from overseas; we are now living on the reserves accumulated from the home production. The gravity of the position arises from the fact that the present rations of our population, including refugees and internees, demand 1,200 tons per day. Potatoes and other suitable ingredients will have to be added to the flour which has permitted of a reduction of 10% only in the bread ration for March. As in April no more potatoes will be available a further reduction in the bread ration will become imperative. On the other hand the ration for chocolates in tablets is increased by 50 points. There are still reserves in the country, but the position as regards

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fats, rice, tea and coffee is approaching a crisis. On March 14th the rations for April were published. No more potatoes can be added to bread the ration for which is again reduced; also reduced is the fat ration. Coupons for jam and marmalade are suppressed altogether and chocolates are also in short supply. There is no change in the meat ration.

The Federal decree restricting the consumption of gas has released protests in all parts of Switzerland.

The cultivation of land is to be hastened forward to the utmost. The Government has issued a decree making various categories of Swiss and foreign residents liable to join the "green" army; this is what "The Times" reports from its correspondent on February 28th:

"This is what is now called the 'green army,' whose help is urgently needed by farmers. Owing to the adverse autumn weather and the extremely cold winter, work on the land is abnormally delayed, and so far one-third of the cultivated area has not been sown. Agriculture is therefore needing some 200,000 hands, instead of 120,000 last year, so as to assure the country's life, the more as no production deficit can be offset by importations.

Rapid organization of the "green army" is regarded as a question of life and death among the Swiss people, and volunteers are flowing in without waiting for the enforcement of the decree."

The Swiss Industries Fair at Basle will be held from April 14th to 24th which suggests a good deal of courage and optimism on the part of the organisers. Obviously we can afford to ignore foreign buyers!

Humanitarian

A first convoy of 80 Swiss and their families who have lost their property in consequence of the bombing of Berlin and Baltic towns arrived after a protracted journey via Konstanz, in Kreuzlingen on February 10th. Pending their adoption by relatives or their places of origin, the refugees were lodged in local school buildings or with private families.

The second medical mission of the Swiss Red Cross left for Hangleur and St. Ghislain in Belgium on February 20th under the direction of Capt. Dr. Olivet; it comprises four doctors, six sisters and an orderly and will distribute 150 tons of milk products among destitute juveniles.

Prof. Max Huber will again, temporarily, occupy the presidential fauteuil of the International Red Cross Committee during the absence of Prof. C. J. Burckhardt, our new minister at Paris — which seems to imply that diplomatic appointments nowadays are not expected to be of long duration.

It is interesting to note from a statement in the House of Commons that, in order to remove sick or weak prisoners from German camps, the British Government has placed at the disposal of the International Red Cross Committee several hundred lorries with sufficient petrol, oil, tyres and spare parts.

The continuous air raids on our northern frontier is causing a steady influx of refugees, both military and civilian and of various nationalities; they are

seizing the chance of relaxed police vigilance and are crossing the Rhine at several convenient spots. The patrolling guards on the Swiss side have been doubled without effect; a cynic suggests that boards might be hung out along the Swiss banks notifying that there was standing room only.

At the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the creation of the Swiss Telegraph Agency at Berne, Federal Councillor Kobelt asserted that in a democratic state the people had the right to be consulted on all public questions, which could only be done by a regular daily news service.

Avalanches have caused considerable damage during the last few weeks. In the early afternoon of March 8th the neighbourhood of Andermatt was visited, the military barracks were cut in two, nine soldiers were killed, two are missing and two wounded. In the canton St. Gall two stables were carried away. As one avalanche was rolling towards a chalet the father with five children managed to escape but the mother was injured and the maid killed. In the canton Uri three road workers lost their lives in a snow drift.

The head master of Rossall School in an address at Fleetwood suggests eight years' free training for youth of the axis countries and recommends amongst other places Switzerland as an appropriate quarter; we suggest that he should go there for eight weeks schooling first.

Several English papers are already rejoicing over the early arrival of Swiss alarm clocks; in the opinion of our editor, however, they and the aeroplane are the most malicious and malevolent inventions of the present generation.

CORRESPONDENCE.

*Légation de Suisse en Grande-Bretagne,
18, Montagu Place,
Bryanston Square, W.1.
March 7th, 1945.*

To The Editor,
THE SWISS OBSERVER,

You will remember that in the September issue 1944 of the SWISS OBSERVER you published the following editorial note under an article on Swiss military tax:

"N.B.—The above complaint is nearly as old as Methuselah, but it may be stated that since the outbreak of the present war the home authorities have exempted any Swiss in this country serving in the English forces from payment of future military taxes, though such service without the explicit sanction of the Swiss Government is not permissible under our Constitution.—(Ed. — S.O.)"

I would just like to point out to you that this is somewhat misleading, since only Swiss with dual nationality are exempt from military obligations in Switzerland — and consequently from military tax — if they join up in this country. We should be very grateful if you could draw attention to this fact in one of your next issues to obviate the possibility of any misunderstanding.

Yours sincerely,
ERIC KESSLER.