

News at random

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NEWS AT RANDOM

Federal

In a general statement to the Swiss press on March 9th about the results of the Anglo-American negotiations with Minister Stucki, nothing was disclosed about the contents of the agreement arrived at; he, however, warned our people and stressed the likelihood that in the absence of such an agreement conditions in our country might have become catastrophic. He also repeated a former declaration of the Federal Council that war criminals would never find shelter in Switzerland. The information released to the press on this side is equally ambiguous. In a foreign survey published in the Trade supplement of "The Times" for April, the following information is given:

"Complete agreement has been reached in the Anglo-Swiss discussions at Berne. The subjects covered included Swiss trade with the belligerents, the carriage of goods on the Swiss railways, Swiss exports of electricity for help in French reconstruction, measures to prevent looted property from being concealed in Switzerland, the supply of food and raw materials to Switzerland from oversea, and railway transit traffic across France. An understanding was reached on the use of facilities for the transit of goods through Switzerland, and France is to place Toulon at the disposal of the Swiss. Later France will also allow the Swiss to use Sete, and meanwhile Switzerland will endeavour to import her accumulated supplies overland from Spain and Portugal by using her own rolling stock and motor vehicles and the steam locomotives (fewer than 100) remaining after the electrification of the Swiss railways.

Switzerland has forbidden the import or export of foreign bank notes or their exchange in Swiss territory. By this ruling the Germans will lose any chance of selling in Switzerland their stocks of Bank of France notes. Another decree maintains the freezing of French holdings in Switzerland and provides that these holdings will not be released without the previous consent of the French Government. Thus French holders of assets in Switzerland will be faced with the alternatives of declaring their holdings or leaving them frozen."

In order to correct misleading statements in the foreign press the Federal Council last month reiterated a declaration made as far back as July 6th, 1940 to the effect that all moneys deposited with Swiss Banks by people living in France will remain "frozen" and will be released only after consultation with the French government.

Propaganda literature containing deliberate lies and threats against our government and particularly against the army has been widely circulated during the last few weeks. A group of Swiss in Germany who have succumbed to Nazi principles are believed to be the authors; similarly minded people — remnants of former frontist organisations dissolved a few years ago by Federal decree — are stirring again strengthened by an increasing influx of agitators and other so-called refugees from the other side of the Rhine. Here is the version of the "Evening Standard" Berne correspondent and published in its issue of March 26th, 1945:

"Switzerland, land of asylum for about 150,000 Germans since before 1939, is angered over disclosures in an investigation against 'persons or person unknown' accused of attempting to sow sedition among the ranks of her army and doubts in the minds of her people.

An insidious propaganda pamphlet has been broadcast far and wide in the name of 'officers, N.C.O.s and men of the Swiss army.'

Informed Swiss circles, commenting on the pamphlet, describe it as the 'first blow of the forthcoming bitter nerve war' to swing the Swiss Government from its reported blunt refusal a fortnight ago of a German request for 200 'asylum safe conducts pending transfer to Argentine' to be accorded en bloc to a number of prominent Nazis.

Immediately following this point blank refusal

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On his recent appointment as Swiss Minister to Czechoslovakia and prior to his departure a

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will be given, THURSDAY, 3rd MAY, 1945, at 7 p.m. sharp at the DORCHESTER HOTEL, LONDON, W.1.

Members and their Swiss friends (Gentlemen only) wishing to take part should reserve their seats by writing to reach the Hon. Sec. P. A. MOEHR, IMPERIAL HOUSE, KINGSWAY, W.C.2, not later than Tuesday morning, 1st May. Dinner 10/6 excl. gratuities payable to waiter. Kindly abstain from telephoning.

THE COMMITTEE.

even to consider the question, steps were taken to increase frontier patrols to prevent eventual attempts of would-be refugees of doubtful political antecedents to get into the country."

The total expenditure incurred in 1944 for the defence of our country amounts to 1,532 million francs; the revenue from the various war impositions (luxury tax, war profit tax, etc.) reached 502 million francs only.

Cantonal

The Gemeinderat of Zurich spent the whole of their sitting on March 14th in debating the decision of the Regierungsrat which suppressed the contemplated "Furtwängler" concerts thus giving way to popular indignation. Democracy!

An unexpected telephone call enabled the Zurich police to apprehend a hotel thief who for the last seven years had outwitted the best brains of our detective force. A Lucerne jeweller rang up the Zurich police which had circulated the description of a bracelet missing from a fashionable hotel in the Grisons and which, he thought, he had just received by post for valuation and possible sale. The supposed owner was soon traced to a boarding house in Zurich and finding no escape admitted 45 other hotel thefts to the value of about 700,000 francs. A middle-aged woman — Viennese by birth — had by her dexterity and sang-froid duped all the eagle-eyed detectives of the fashionable hotels, she never stayed at any one of them but

helped herself freely to jewels, money and furs. She was obviously unbeatable at her *métier* which she carried on placidly for seven years but the realisation of the plunder beat her at last.

The canton Schaffhausen, that is to say its Rhine frontier is enjoying a good bit of publicity and is likely to play an important part in the closing phase of the war; it may even witness a modern pageant on the lines of the Bourbaki incident in the Franco-German war. In the meantime, fantastic reports appear in the English press. People fully clothed manage to swim across the Rhine though on the northern side a ceaseless patrol is kept up by armed guards with ferocious police dogs. The German village of Büsslingen between the lake and Schaffhausen which is an enclave encircled by Swiss roads, is stated to be crammed by war criminals who are getting familiar with the long jump. "Himmler goes to the Swiss Border" is a sensational head-line in the "Daily Express," April 3rd, and the following is a short extract which appeared in the "Daily Herald," April 3rd under the heading "So many Nazis feel they need a Swiss holiday":

"Where are the Goerings, Himmlers and Ribbentrops?"

Until a fortnight ago, Frau Emmy Goering and her chubby six-year old daughter Edda were tucked away at Schloss Elman, a fine ex-royal castle at Oberammergau, comfortably close to Lechfeld and Berchtesgaden, the Führer's personal escape airports.

Now, even the Bavarian mountains seem too hot for the cautious Goerings, for they have just moved to Goetschen, in Vorarlberg close to the Swiss border.

Frau Marga Himmler and her daughter Gudrun have just moved from their closely-guarded estate near Munich to Schloss Schrecken, at Bregenz, on the shore of Lake Constance, just opposite the Swiss border.

Two months ago Himmler sent a friend to buy a villa in Switzerland.

A sudden interest in Switzerland is also shown by the Ribbentrops.

Von R. has moved the whole of his Foreign Office into the largest hotel at Constance. He himself and his family live in the villa of the former Austrian arms king, Fritz Mandl, nearby.

A heavy 'tourist traffic,' unusual since 1939, has come to Davos, in the Engadine. Here several German-owned 'sanatoria' have been crowded beyond their capacity with sturdy, well-fed 'patients.'

Two of the 'nurses' who arrived there in recent days were Ursula von Ribbentrop and 18-year-old Renate Ley, daughters of von Ribbentrop and Dr. Ley."

The tobacco harvest in Mendrisiotto (Ticino) produced 22 tons and realised about 1½ million francs.

Army

For the first time, we believe, our two houses of parliament in joint session commuted a death sentence pronounced by a military court. The supreme penalty was received by a young Frenchman, A. G. Carnet, for the betrayal of military secrets. He had contrived to be employed for some considerable time by our own secret service



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while following a similar occupation in the pay of a belligerent power.

Regular crossings of British and American aircraft over the Ticino and further north are reported; raid alarms are being sounded but firing by our own defences seems to have ceased. On the 16th inst. an American machine made a forced landing in the canton Aargau; three of the crew baled out successfully whilst the body of a fourth one was later on discovered in a field.

During cavalry exercises near Aarau the recruit Hans Peyer from Gächlingen (Schaffhausen) lost his life in crossing the Aare.

New instructions based on experience gained by recent events have been issued to fight fires caused by incendiary bombs; considerable expense is occasioned to owners of large buildings.

On the recommendation of the military department a Federal gymnastics and sports college is to be established at Magglingen near Biel. The Federal Council had opened a contest to obtain suitable designs and the jury has acquired about a dozen projects, the first prize being awarded to Werner Schindler, architect in Biel.

Strict measures are taken by the army authorities to prevent the crossing of the frontiers by undesirable persons. Generally speaking ordinary Wehrmacht members on surrendering arms are admitted without searching investigations. According to the "Daily Express" whose foreign editor is in Switzerland on other business, a good many unwelcome refugees and others under various disguises are finding their way into our country. This is perhaps not surprising in view of the answer given in the House of Commons on April 18th by a Minister of State; he was asked how neutrals were to recognize war criminals appearing at their frontiers as long as no lists of names were supplied, the reply was "I expect that generally they will know a war criminal if they see one."

Traffic

The civil aviation plan already approved in principle by the Federal Council has not found the unanimous support of the National Council. A member representing the Ticino insisted that the Locarno aerodrome should enjoy continental traffic facilities so that the southern part of Switzerland should not be side-tracked by the European lines. Another councillor was interested to know why the existing military airfields could not be utilised for civil aviation. A St. Gall representative regretted that the interests of western Switzerland had been overlooked whilst a spokesman for Geneva demanded that the Calvin City should be armed with the same equipment for inter-continental traffic as Zurich. A suggestion that the Federal Assembly only should have the right of selecting or naming inter-continental air stations was not proceeded with. The whole discussion may of course be premature as we may have to fall into line with plans decided elsewhere.

A new temporary agreement has been concluded with the management of the French Railways. Altogether five goods trains — three from the Spanish frontier and two from Toulon — are to be run daily for our exclusive benefit. A passenger train-service has also been agreed upon which will become operative as

soon as the coaches damaged during the war have been repaired; it is confidently anticipated that by July 1st a direct train between Paris and Berne via Porrentruy and Delle will be a regular feature.

No improvement in the postal service is announced. We have now received newspapers and letters (uncensored) posted in Switzerland in June 1940 rubber-stamped "Delayed in France owing to German occupation."

Here is a cutting from the "Railway Gazette" April 13th, 1945, which throws some light on the strange legal problem with which the Gotthard Railway is confronted as a result of the wartime situation:

"The unusual circumstances in which the Gotthard Railway was built and has since been operated has taken a strange turn as a result of the wartime situation in Italy whereby, for many months past, there have been two *de facto* Governments in control in different parts of the country. The Royal Government in Rome, which has Allied support, naturally claims to be the *de jure* Government of the whole country, but Mussolini's Neo-Fascist Republican Government under German control is in fact the only one which has access to the southern end of the Gotthard Railway. A considerable part of the discussions between the British and American delegations on the one hand and the Swiss Government on the other, concluded in Berne on March 8, was devoted to the problem of transit traffic over the Gotthard line between Germany and Northern Italy.



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According to the spokesman of the Swiss Government, the Italian Government in Rome had informed the Swiss Government that it (the Rome Government) renounced officially all rights arising from the Gotthard Convention, and protested against that convention being kept in force in present circumstances. The international convention in question is that concluded on October 15, 1869, between Switzerland, Germany, and Italy, as the parties interested in the construction and operation of the Gotthard Railway. It provided for full freedom of transit over the Gotthard line in Switzerland of consignments from Germany to Italy or *vice versa*, and fixed the subsidies to be paid by the three countries towards the construction of the tunnel and its approach sections at Swiss francs 119,000,000, of which Germany contributed fr. 30,000,000.

The point of view maintained by the Rome Government is that the southern section of the Gotthard line does not now lead into 'Italy,' but into German-occupied Northern Italy. According to the Rome Government, coal and other commodities from Germany which cross Switzerland *via* the Gotthard line are benefiting Italy's adversary, as they are intended to support that adversary in its fight against Rome-controlled Italy. Commodities crossing from Northern Italy into Germany are regarded as being stolen from 'Italy.' That is why, says Rome, Switzerland (as a neutral country) should no longer tolerate this."

Economical

The collection of the Cockchafer (Maikäfer) has been made compulsory this season. The cantonal authorities are under an obligation to fix a minimum surrender quantity for each commune which is generally four litres per hectare of cultivated soil. The actual gathering or tree shaking will probably be undertaken by individual households, farmsteads or schools.

The following appeared in the "*Financial News*," April 3rd, 1945, and requires some conjuring with figures to make sense of it:

"It is learned in Zurich, that in Germany Swiss notes of twenty francs are fetching as much as 8,000 reichsmarks.

No business is carried out in Zurich in German notes as it is officially forbidden to trade in foreign notes, but quotations fixed by the Basle Exchange include 80 mark notes to £1 and 400 blocked marks to £1.

There is hardly any black market as there is no interest. The official Swiss exchange rate on Germany remains 172.50 Swiss francs nominal to 100 German reichsmarks."

Since then we have been creditably informed that in the free market at Zurich marks changed hands at the rate of 25 cts. for 100 Reichsmarks.

Humanitarian

A party of agricultural experts with the necessary equipment and supply of seeds has been sent to the region of Colmar (Alsace) in order to set the local farmers going again whose fields and farm implements have been totally destroyed. The expedition is financed by the "Don Suisse."

Here is a description of one of the many food convoys that travelled into the heart of Germany under the auspices of the International Red Cross Committee to bring the indispensable means of existence to Allied prisoners. It is taken from the "*Evening Standard*," March 27th, 1945:

"As the first streaks of dawn broke over Lake Constance, 21 ghostlike, white-painted lorries throttled up, and in convoy formation slowly made their way across the dividing line of the Constance-Kreuzlingen frontier, separating neutral Switzerland from war-swept Germany.

This convoy was starting on the long hazardous journey eastwards into the very heart of Germany—some almost into the front lines near Berlin, others into Czecho-Slovakia to far distant Allied prisoner of war camps near Prague, within the sound of the gunfire of the advancing Russian armies.

This convoy was the International Red Cross emergency service for British and American prisoners of war camps; a mercy convoy to save Allied prisoners of war from starving amid the destruction, panic, and disorganisation behind the German front lines to-day.

Food, medicines, clothes and cigarettes made up the cargo, third of its kind to leave Switzerland since rail communications inside Germany had broken down for everything else than important military traffic.

As each lorry took its position in the formation I saw the driver take a last peep back at Switzerland, which to them spelt freedom — internment, but safety and freedom nevertheless.

The drivers who were driving away those Canadian-built three-ton lorries were Canadian war prisoners, and had been sent to the frontier, on agreement between Germans and the International Red Cross, to take the lorries back to the various camps.

It would probably have been very simple for those men to have made a dash for liberty, only a matter of seven small yards from where they were standing beside the German police to where I was standing on free Swiss territory.

This idea probably passed through their minds as it passed through mine, yet not one made that small leap for freedom.

The reason was, not that they had been put on their honour, nor that they were afraid to take the

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risk, but simply because if one had attempted to escape, the whole convoy would have been stopped immediately, and probably hundreds of their comrades who were anxiously awaiting their return would starve.

Suppression of the convoy was the German ultimatum for their good behaviour.

Beside each driver was seated a German policeman or a member of the Volkssturm.

These lorries, which had all been painted white in Geneva to avoid Allied air attacks in Germany, were the gift of the Canadian Red Cross to the International Red Cross.

They will all remain at various prisoner-of-war camps near Marlenbad. Carlsbad and Lubeck, principally for inter-camp service and for evacuating prisoners-of-war from danger zones.

Eighty-five more lorries have just arrived in Geneva from Toulon for this new service, and all will be painted white with Red Cross on the sides and roof.

All will then take cargoes of foodstuffs from the huge stocks accumulating in Geneva."

* * *

A huge conglomeration of civilian refugees, both German and foreign, is said to have migrated to the northern shores of the Rhine in the hope of finally reaching our country, as it is generally believed that war criminals and political escapees alone will be refused admission. In the meantime we read with some amusement the notice which appeared in all the dailies, the "Times" excepted, of the Italian dictator's request to be admitted for treatment of a stomach complaint. The "Daily Telegraph," April 4th, started the cycle with the following from its Rome special correspondent:

"If Mussolini should seek refuge in Switzerland, asylum might be granted to him on the grounds of ill-health. This, I understand, is the substance of a communication just received here from the Swiss Government.

Italy had inquired what would be the attitude of Switzerland in the event of the ex-Duce trying to escape there.

The Swiss reply indicates that he would not be

received as a political refugee, but that an application for an entry visa would be considered from a humanitarian standpoint if Mussolini presented himself at the frontier as a sick man. Though still able to make public appearances, his health is known to be far from good.

The German debacle threatens to leave Switzerland as his only possible refuge when he is driven from Northern Italy. Several prominent Fascists who would face trial here if extradited have for some time been living in Switzerland.

Among them are Mussolini's daughter Edda, Count Volpi, multi-millionaire industrialists, and Dino Alfieri, ex-Propaganda Minister and ex-Ambassador to Berlin."

On the same day the "Daily Mirror" published an inferential denial from our Legation, as follows:

"The Swiss Legation in London revealed last night that six months ago Mussolini asked Switzerland to give refuge to his wife and children.

'It was a direct sounding through high diplomatic circles, and the answer was "no,"' an official told the 'Daily Mirror.'

'We are not likely to accept Mussolini himself,' he said, when told of a report—which he described as 'probably untrue'—that the Swiss Government had stated that if Mussolini should be an ailing man he might possibly be granted asylum on 'humanitarian grounds.'

Two or three days later the "Daily Express" had a heading, "Petain to Swiss: Let me in," which was echoed in some of the contemporaries without eliciting an official statement from Swiss sources. The Federal Council had already on November 11th last year made a positive statement that no political refugees would be granted asylum in our country. Personally, we believe that the whole episode was nothing but a "ballon d'essai," as there are plenty more important grandees who at present suffer from chronic headaches for which an undisturbed and secure stay in Switzerland might be the only cure.

—oo—

Dr. Arnold Lätt celebrated on March 28th his 60th anniversary. More than any other Swiss he created and maintained among our people at home an interest and understanding for the Swiss abroad, which only those of us can appreciate who lived in foreign countries before the termination of the last war. Dr. Lätt began his career in London, where apart from his manifold journalistic activities, he accepted the secretaryship of the newly-formed group of the New Helvetic Society; his engaging personality shared by his life-partner soon captivated the best in our Colony and their unstinted financial support enabled him to pursue the lofty patriotic ideals for which he was fighting. It may be stated safely that the always sympathetic appreciation in this country of Swiss culture and aspirations following the end of the last war are mainly due to his personal efforts. Dr. Lätt was the co-founder and first editor of the "Swiss Observer," which will ever remain indebted to him for his initiative; most of our readers are still preserving a vivid memory of his short stay in our Colony and will wish to join us in hearty congratulations and best wishes for the future. As a matter of interest we reprint the first editor's first article in the first number of the "Swiss Observer," which still retains its personal appeal:

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LE " SWISS OBSERVER " ET LA COLONIE.

Mesdames et Messieurs,

Je vous présente un nouveau compatriote qui vient faire ses premiers pas au milieu de vous. Le jeune " Swiss Observer " sollicite votre bienveillante attention. Il demande les droits d'un simple membre de la colonie. Il n'appartient à aucun groupement spécial, à aucune société, si ce n'est par la parenté spirituelle qu'il peut tenir de son père. Etant le Benjamin des institutions de la Colonie et prêt à être leur serviteur dévoué, sa conduite sera surtout dictée par des considérations de bienveillance et de curiosité.

Il espère être admis partout dans les familles et les clubs. Il ne manquera guère une conférence si vous voulez bien l'en avertir. Il suivra les délibérations des Conseils et des Comités dont il notera les décisions pour les porter à la connaissance des membres. Il secondera toute bonne initiative, d'où qu'elle vienne. D'autre part il ne se gênera pas de blâmer les importuns qui seront libres de lui en vouloir.

Quelquefois il viendra vous voir pendant l'heure du lunch ou au bureau pour s'entretenir avec vous de la marche de vos affaires. Il vous demandera votre opinion sur tout ce qui se passe d'important dans la Colonie et au pays. C'est ainsi qu'il partagera votre vie, vos espoirs et vos soucis.

En bon " Observer " de tout ce qui s'écrit sur la Suisse il aura toujours quelques citations intéressantes qu'il n'a qu'à tirer de son portefeuille, et si vous n'êtes pas trop pressé, il vous lira une page de l'histoire si curieuse et si peu connue de la Colonie même ou des rapports anglo-suisse. Et comme son amour est le même pour tous les fils du pays il aura pour chacun d'eux une parole encourageante dans son idiome à lui, — et pour le reste — nous comprenons tous l'anglais.

Le " Swiss Observer " servira de guide aux nouveaux arrivés; il leur indiquera l'hôtel qui les recevra, le tailleur qui leur prendra la mesure, le restaurant dont on ne se fatigue pas, l'horloger suisse, les sociétés qui l'admettront toutes avec empressement, la Légation, l'Eglise, la Banque où l'on compte sur lui.

Une fois par quinzaine le " Swiss Observer " ira voir tout son monde jusqu'au plus éloigné des isolés en province. Pour ceux-ci, il sera le messager fidèle de Londres, celui qui se soucie de leurs intérêts communs. Les devoirs de solidarité et la sympathie pour ceux qui partagent notre sort le feront souvent parler des autres colonies suisses à l'étranger. Son plus beau rôle sera celui d'officier de liaison avec la patrie. C'est de là qu'il tirera son inspiration. Il s'en tiendra à l'idéal helvétique sans préjugé de parti ni de langue, ni de race, ni de religion. En ceci il croit vous ressembler, à vous tous qui, vivant loin des factions, ne voyez que ce qui fait l'unité, la force et la grandeur du peuple suisse et de son histoire.

Bien que le " Swiss Observer " aime d'un égal amour tous les coins et les vallées que vous chérissez dans notre terre natale, nous n'aurons pas assez d'espace pour donner des nouvelles de chacun des cantons en particulier. Mais chaque numéro de l'" Observer " vous donnera quelques faits soigneusement choisis pour vous permettre de vous tenir au courant de ce qui se passe de vraiment important en Suisse et de ce qu'on en pense.

Combien de fois avez-vous regretté au cours des années de guerre l'absence d'un tel lien entre Suisses

en Grande Bretagne ! Il aurait souvent pu nous encourager, nous consoler et surtout nous aider à préciser notre attitude en face des difficultés résultant de notre position de neutres, de notre isolement du pays.

Enfin, bien que tard, le voici, votre journal suisse de Londres. Puisse-t-il trouver l'accueil et le succès que nous lui souhaitons en le lançant sur la glace.

N'allez pas en juger trop sévèrement avant d'avoir lu plusieurs numéros et d'avoir payé votre abonnement. Londres, le 16 Novembre 1920.

A. LATT.

POST WAR HOUSING — SWISS PARTICIPATION.

We would like to bring to the attention of our subscribers and all Swiss otherwise interested that Messrs. Heal & Son Ltd., Tottenham Court Road, London, W.1, are opening on Friday, the 11th of May, at 2.30 p.m., a Post-War Housing and Equipment Exhibition. Swiss activities and developments in this field will be shown on a small screen displaying drawings and photographs of prefabricated Swiss houses and timber buildings with interior furnishings and installations. The arrangements are being made through the Swiss Legation.

Visitors will have the satisfaction of seeing for themselves well thought out and practically conceived ideas of Swiss Designers of Swiss prefabricated houses, which will assure a front rank to the Swiss Building Industry.

It is understood that French and Swedish designs will likewise be shown.

The exhibition is to be opened at the above mentioned time by Professor Sir Charles Reilly, F.R.I.B.A., O.B.E., Hon. LL.D., and admission will be free.

GENEVE.

Il semble que la tourmente
Qui frappe encore le monde
Par surcroît de fureur
Tourne à la détente.

Malgré tant de souffrances,
De terreur et misères,
Une petite lumière
Donne un peu d'espérance.

Hélas, ce n'est plus à Genève
Que les peuples meurtris
Se rendent comme jadis
Pour résoudre leur problèmes.

Certes, ils y sont encore
Ces Palais des Nations,
En grand espoir bâtis
Mais vides aujourd'hui !

Belle Cité du Rhône,
Ce n'est pas de ta faute
Si la folie humaine
A renversé ton trône.

Et, si tout s'oublie, hélas,
Il te reste quand même
Une devise suprême :
" Inter arma caritas " !

C.J.B.