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UNBOUNDED OPTIMISM ?

(Translation from an article which appeared in the "Neue Zürcher, Zeitung," 21/11/45.)

The policy of the Federal authorities, who had the onerous task during the second world war of saving our people from hunger, was up to the very last moment one of extreme prudence, and the officials responsible for it deserve the nation's thanks. This policy was adhered to even after the cessation of hostilities in Europe, although a considerable section of our population at that time existed on food rations which amounted to no more than a bare subsistence. It was only in October, when Switzerland had succeeded in securing increased shipping tonnage, and an improvement in overland transport became clearly noticeable, that the Swiss War Food Office decided on a relaxation of their stringent rationing measures.

There was considerable criticism in the country, imputing lack of optimism on the part of the authorities for not having introduced such relaxation before in respect of some of our extremely slender rations. It is surprising that here and there, abroad, on the other hand, an opinion to the contrary seems to be prevalent. At any rate, a recent article in "The Economist" attributed the increases which became effective from October 1st, of our bread ration by 25% and our fat and oil ration by 54% to 8.8 oz. per week, to the "unbounded optimism" in Switzerland in regard to the improvement in international economic conditions.

Had this observation, together with the further comments relating thereto, appeared in some other periodical, there would be little cause to discuss them. But, as already mentioned, they appeared in the foremost British Review on economics, in an article that not only dealt with the above matter, but also discussed expertly, and with the utmost objectivity, the post-war economic position of Switzerland. It would appear, moreover, that the article, which is of considerable importance in view of the present Anglo-Swiss economic negotiations, is not the work of a correspondent resident in Switzerland; it bears the hall mark of an editorial.

It cannot, therefore, be ruled out entirely that in responsible quarters connected with "The Economist" the position on this one point is not too well understood, and that therefore the level of Swiss food rations prior to October was not sufficiently taken into account. No surprise is likely to be felt in Great Britain (where throughout the war bread, flour and cereal products remained unrationed) at the increase of the bread ration by 25%, when it is realised that in previous months the ration was reduced to the totally insufficient level for any lengthy period of 200 gr. per day (7 ozs.) and therefore represented one of the lowest European bread rations. Equally the increase in the fat ration should lose its sensational character in British eyes when it is remembered that, during 1943 and 1944, this was almost exactly half the British ration.

These increases, which became operative in October, cannot under any circumstances be attributed to "unbounded optimism"; on the contrary they were a sheer necessity, in view of the approaching Winter, to the well-being of the Swiss population. That an improvement in this respect from the point of view of the national health standard was called for, is supported by the declaration of the Combined Food Board

of April 1945, according to which a nutritional standard of 2,000 calories per head per day is insufficient. Inclusive of 500 gr. potatoes (1.1 lbs), 200 gr. vegetables (7 ozs.) and 100 gr. fruit (3½ ozs.) per day, the normal Swiss consumer received, in the fourth quarter of 1944, 1,945 calories, and during the first quarter of 1945, 1,974 calories. In April 1945 the rations shrank to 1,830 calories, in May to 1,783, and between then and September rose to barely 1,900 calories. The minimum standard indicated by the Combined Food Board of 2,000 calories was only passed with the October increases. The October figure of 2,163, and the November figure of 2,206 calories may be considered sufficient, but can hardly be described as extravagant when, as far as we are aware, British rations even during the most difficult periods of shipping and supply shortages hardly ever sank below 2,500 calories.

CHRISTMAS PARTY OF SWISS CATHOLICS.

Sunday, December 30th, 1945.

Prior to the grand Xmas party at Westminster Cathedral Hall, on Sunday, December 30th, 1945, Swiss Catholics attended a Special Service at St. Peter's Church, Palace Street, W.1, at which the Rev. Major Dempsey, Chaplain to the Guards Barracks and Rector of St. Peter's Church, preached and the Chaplain, Father Lanfranchi, gave Solemn Benediction.

There must have been between 600-700 people and over 100 little children at the party and the Hall was crowded, but all had a welcome cup of tea, delicious cakes and biscuits provided free by courtesy of the Westend Fancy Bakery, Ltd., of Dawes Road, S.W.6.

Christmas Carols were sung by the mixed Catholic Choir, music was provided by Miss R. Pfaendler (cello) and Mr. Hernould (violin), with Mrs. Hernould at the piano, whilst Miss Margrit Willi sang arias from "La Tosca" and "Ich liebe dich" by Grieg, with Miss Pollak accompanying.

Miss Gandon, the eight-year-old daughter of Mr. A. Gandon, leader of the Swiss Accordion Group, first played on the piano, and to the delight of young and old also played on a beautiful little accordion lovely airs, alone and accompanied by her father.

The Swiss Minister, Monsieur Ruegger, who was present during the whole part, addressed the company, speaking especially to the little ones for whom the Christmas party was specially arranged.

For every one of the children there was a present, some even had a second one, and it was delightful to see, in spite of austerity and difficulties, such a plentiful and really good variety of toys for young and old; there were chocolates, apples and oranges, too, but alas! no bananas.

Father Lanfranchi worked like a Trojan the whole evening; it was he who had organised all and the thanks offered to him by the Minister were fully deserved.

Thanks, too are due to the many donors of gifts in kind and cash, and to the many workers behind the scenes, both for the social and the refreshment part.

The only disappointment of the evening was that His Grace the Archbishop of Westminster did not reach home in time to pay the promised visit. He would have been assured of a great welcome and hearty good wishes on his coming elevation as Cardinal.

J.J.B.