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The Swiss Observer

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NEWS AT RANDOM

Federal

The financial agreement concluded in Washington was ratified on June 26th after two days' deliberations in the National Council. The discussion marked the extreme bitterness of some of the speakers and manifested the utter impotence of small independent states to rely on the canons of international law, on the postulates of the "Atlantic Charter" or any of the high-flown principles of universal justice. President Grimm, in introducing the agreement, pointed out that we had now finished polemic considerations of the past and were facing the hard facts of what had really taken place. The agreement had been thoroughly discussed by the two sides which in vital respects were of course not of the same rank — in fact he might be tempted to say that might stood against right and right against might. A coalition of great powers whose war sacrifices, share in the world's markets and extent of land and populations many times surpassed Swiss interests and expanse was confronting a small state that had the rare fortune of having escaped the horrors of war and, though its humanitarian services had been appreciated, was now meeting envy, disfavour, unjust criticism and misunderstanding. President Grimm paid tribute to the great services of the Swiss delegation who, while trying their utmost to uphold right, would not suffer the negotiations to fail. The agreement could not be modified or amended; yes or no was the only resolution before the chamber and an analysis of the terms the only object of the debate. The succeeding *post mortem* clearly revealed the frame of mind of the many orators. Nat. Council. Anderegg (St. Gall) thought international law was undergoing a radical change due to power politics between East and West. Nat. Council. Speiser (Aargau) welcomed the cancellation of the Black List and the release of Swiss assets which alone moved him to vote in favour. Nat. Council. Boerlin (Baselland) did not consider the agreement perfect but of two evils it was preferable to choose the lesser one. Nat. Council. Zigerli (Zurich) deplored that by halving German assets in Switzerland with the Allies we had committed a judicial blunder; in 20 or 30 years' time Germany may render us an account.

Nat. Council. Duttweiler (Zurich) looked upon the agreement as a compromise that would help us to regain the confidence of the U.S.A. and assist us to reconstruction of a democratic Germany. Nat. Council. Dr. Rohr (Aargau) believes that nobody could consider the agreement to be the result of judicious contemplations; the refusal of the Allies of our request for an impartial tribunal seemed to make this failure clear. Fed. Council. Nobs pointed out that the transfer and acceptance of German gold belonged to those measures that were forced upon us for economic reasons; Swiss francs were in greater demand than gold. If the Washington agreement did not find approval Switzerland would be deemed by the outside world as declining to participate in the reconstruction of Europe. Fed. Council. Petitpierre brought the debate to a close by affirming that if the Potsdam understanding held good the possibility of Russia making similar demands on Switzerland did not arise. — The result of the voting showed 142 for ratification and 29 against with five abstentions.

The short discussion in the States Council

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(Ständerat) advanced nothing new unless it be a remark by the Zurich Councillor Wahlen that the unfreezing of the Swiss assets and the withdrawal of the black list had at present no more the importance that was previously attached to them. The voting was not so positive, there being 24 for and 11 against with one abstention.

The following is a short extract from a long dissertation that appeared in "The Statist," June 29th, which throws some light upon immediate developments:

"Not only will Swiss dollar balances in U.S.A., totalling about \$1,500,000,000, be unfrozen and the names of nearly 800 Swiss business firms removed from the Allied black-lists, but the liquidation of the assets in Switzerland of German nationals living in Germany will release altogether about S.Fr. 500,000,000 idle capital for use in coping with the problems of rehabilitation in Europe, reinforced by a further S.Fr. 250,000,000 contributed voluntarily by Switzerland for the same purpose, as a set-off against the gold, accepted in good faith from Germany, but subsequently shown to have been looted from Belgium. Over and above that, the cordial relations between Switzerland and the Allies, so long chilled by controversy, will be restored, once noxious differences of opinion about the legal status of German property in Switzerland have been forgotten. But although the ultimate consequences of the Swiss-Allied agreement will be beneficial to all, far-reaching dislocations — some of them permanent — will be inevitable.

One immediate effect will be to set vast amounts of gold and shares in movement, causing a trend in general price levels towards real values as one direct outcome of the firm endeavours to repatriate unfrozen capital from U.S.A. to Switzerland. Of the total



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amount of about S.Fr. 6,000,000,000 hitherto frozen in U.S.A. under Swiss names, a part, on closer scrutiny, will turn out to belong to enemy nationals. Of what is found to be really Swiss, S.Fr. 3-3,500,000,000 belongs to the National Bank of Switzerland and to the Swiss Government. This part for the time being will remain in U.S.A. Part of the rest, invested in American securities, will stay where it is, because the owners have no reason for desiring repatriation. Some now in dollars will be invested in U.S.A. But even after that, so competent judges estimate, quite S.Fr. 500,000,000 will seek repatriation at the earliest possible moment."

* * *

In a message to our parliament the Federal Council aims at securing the sole and exclusive right to further, initiate and finance research and development in the sphere of atomic energy.

Cantonal

Signor Arturo Toscanini, who for political reasons cancelled his visits to Paris and London, gave two concerts in Lucerne on July 5th and 7th; he arrived with an orchestra of 110 musicians. The interest created was tremendous and special trains to Zurich, Basle and Berne were run by the SFR after the end of the concerts.

* * *

The seventh Jodler festival was honoured at Lucerne on Sunday, the 14th inst., when over a hundred groups gave recitals; the culmination was a united choral listened to by Fed. Counc. Kobelt among other distinguished guests.

* * *

Winterthur has voted a credit of 531,000 francs for the purchase of three additional trolley busses, to which system the whole of the municipal traffic is to be converted.

* * *

Three years' imprisonment was bestowed on a Zurich business man for having defrauded local banks to the tune of over 350,000 francs; he succeeded in having six bills discounted, all of them with forged acceptances.

* * *

The important bedding and upholstery factory and warehouse of the firm A. Zangger at Rüti was completely destroyed by a fire that broke out on July 5th in the middle of the day.

* * *

A sea lion that escaped from the Zurich Zoo during night time enjoyed a short spell of liberty only. It managed to leave stealthily its assigned lodgings, crawling through the turnstile of the main entrance, and was first encountered on the road by a passing motorist who promptly informed the keeper. After some time it was discovered that the fugitive had consorted with the inmates of a neighbouring cowshed.

In Zug two proposals calling for a change in the cantonal constitution induced no more than 15% of the electorate to record their vote. Both bills were sanctioned with two to one majorities: one reduced taxes for small property owners and the other disenfranchised those receiving public assistance.

The visit of the "Dudelsack" musicians proved to be a great event at Berne — to judge from the following report in "The Times," July 19th:

"The 52nd (Lowland) Division's band of more than 150 pipers and drums marched through the principal streets of Berne this morning to the federal palace, where they were welcomed by Federal Councillor Kobelt, head of the Swiss Military Department, and the principal Swiss military officers. Federal Councillors Staempfli and von Steiger were also present. The band gave a short performance before a large and delighted crowd before continuing their march through the thronged streets to the Rathaus, where they were welcomed by the city council. The full pipe band was taking part in a costume searchlight tattoo at Neufeld stadium with Swiss military bands."

The Scottish bagpipe band on a goodwill tour to several Swiss towns roused nowhere greater admiration and enthusiasm than at Basle where the unfamiliar technique might have confused the local drum and fife bands at carnival time.

Following the lead of their town cousins the electors of Baselland rejected a proposal to grant votes to women: 3,853 only were in favour whilst the noes numbered 10,396. In all districts and communes there were large majorities against, two of the latter not recording a single endorsement. With the exception of the catholics and farmers, all the political parties recommended acceptance.

Burglars broke into the district post office St. Clara at Basle during the night and disappeared with 5,000 francs in cash and a stock of stamps without being seen or subsequently traced.

The suburb of Buchthalen is to be incorporated

with the municipality of Schaffhausen, the people of the latter having now approved the amalgamation with an overwhelming majority.

The large furniture factory Klingler in Wil (St. Gall) was reduced to ashes, including the whole of the contents, by a fire that broke out early on Thursday morning, June 20th, from unknown causes; the damage is said to exceed a million francs.

Chur is to have a new theatre at a cost of 1½ million francs for which an annual subsidy of 30,000 francs has also been voted by a four to three majority of the citizens.

A jovial expectation of the taxpayers of Baden was shamelessly frustrated when the cantonal authorities of Aargau vetoed a decision of the communal council to refund to them last year's fiscal surplus of Frs. 84,196 (not £115,200 as the "Evening Standard" boldly reported); the amount will have to be retained and used towards the reduction of loans.

Four baskets of fresh cherries gathered early on Friday morning, June 28th, were delivered by Swissair early in the afternoon on the same day; they were gifts by the people of Fricktal addressed to H.M. the King, Mr. Winston Churchill, Field-Marshal Montgomery and the publisher of "The Times."

The 650th anniversary was celebrated on Sunday, June 30th, by the small town of Mellingen (Aargau). The place received its charter in 1296 from Count Albrecht of Habsburg and Kiburg, who two years later was crowned German emperor and later on assassinated at Windisch.

The furniture factory of Robert and René Oppliger in Morges was destroyed completely by a fire that broke out on Friday night, July 12th.

An exceptionally rich apricot harvest is being gathered in the canton Valais and is expected to exceed five million kilo.

Another two earth tremors caused some consternation in the Rhone valley. They occurred soon after five

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on Tuesday morning, the 16th inst., and caused slight damage to houses at Sitten and Siders. The shocks also disturbed the slumberers at Biel.

* * *

Geneva is making comprehensive preparations to welcome the former New York Lord Mayor La Guardia, who will preside at an important meeting of UNRRA which will open at the beginning of next month in the League of Nations' palace. Whether this is the forerunner of UNO or one of its organisations settling on the shores of the Lac Lemman again remains for the present a pious hope. One of the deciding conditions will probably be our membership of UNO — a matter which will claim the serious consideration of our parliament after the summer holidays.

* * *

A strong demonstration, said to have been organised by liberal party members, took place at Geneva on July 3rd. After passionate speeches, resolutions were passed protesting against the step-motherly interest exhibited by the Federal authorities, the blindness to Genevese aspirations and the niggardly financial help given in developing Cointrin airfield while other less important aviation projects, including Kloten, had found unhesitating encouragement.

* * *

The Federal penal court at Geneva sentenced seventeen local butchers and slaughterers to fines and imprisonment for illegal slaughter and disposal of the meat in the black market. The chief accused, Camille Descombes, has to pay Frs. 15,000 and spend three months in prison.

* * *

A party of four climbers roped together, all students from the technical college at Geneva, plunged into a crevasse of the Allalinhorn. The 21-year-old Paul Perrenoud was killed instantly while the other three, thanks to the heavy snow fall, escaped unhurt.

Army

The official record of the 1939/1945 mobilisation, compiled by General Guisan and his personal staff, has now

been published in three heavy volumes of altogether 1,200 pages.

For what in other countries is usually described as treason Emil Reiffer, born in 1900 at Winterthur, was sentenced to four years' hard labour by a military tribunal. He was actually charged with ignoring, as a gunner, to join his unit, with villainously criticising the neutrality of our country and denouncing the independence of the Confederation. Reiffer, together with his associates Burri and Leonhard, had been engaged years before the war in a criminal propaganda campaign against Switzerland, taking his orders from several nazi centres.

Traffic

The development of the tourist traffic formed the subject of an illuminating debate in the National Council. It was authoritatively stated that propaganda was now redundant, the demand by visitors from abroad being still unsatisfied on account of transport limitations and foreign exchange restrictions. The further extension of our air service and the organisation of a transatlantic passenger fleet (floating hotels) was suggested. The minister concerned, Fed. Counc. Celio, said that the realisation of such captivating ideas could not be contemplated at present. It was also made known that our own compatriots constituted now by far the greatest proportion of visitors in our hotels, there being 14 Swiss to three foreigners; before the war the ratio was eight to six.

* * *

The pedestrian and vehicular traffic along our southern frontier is increasing enormously. The customs' officials are controlling about 28,000 people in

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A non-stop daily air service between Basle (Blotzheim) and Amsterdam was inaugurated by the K.L.M. Dutch company on July 1st. A feature is the reduction of the customs' formalities to a minimum; passports and luggage are examined while travelling on the official coach which links the city to the airport.

Light has been shed on the rumoured construction of a tunnel through the Mont Blanc by a statement of Fed. Councilor Celio. In the first instance Switzerland is not interested financially. The plan will connect Chamonix with the Aosta valley and the 12½ km. tunnel will shorten the railway distance between Lyon and Milan by 260 km.; about a quarter of a million passengers annually can be carried. Italian interests are stated to have already subscribed 800 million lire and a Swiss group has promised three million francs. The necessary concessions have been obtained.

* * *

Statistics for 1945 just published by the SFR name Zurich (30.7 million francs ticket sales), Basle (16.9 million) and Berne (14.9 million) as the busiest three railway stations; in the goods traffic Geneva-Cornavin (19.5 million francs) is an easy first with Zurich (17.2 million) and Basle (15.1 million) as second and third.

* * *

The annual report for 1945 of Swissair discloses a moderate profit allowing of a 4% dividend on the capital although the demand for the company's services has constituted a record. Six two-motor Douglas aircraft and three smaller machines were in operation;

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since the beginning of this year the fleet has been increased to ten machines capable of carrying 200 passengers.

* * *

A twice weekly service between Croydon and Berne is now operated by the Swiss Alpar Company, the return fare being £26. There is also an occasional taxi service from this country to Zurich used by holiday makers who have not been successful to secure a seat on the regular services.

Economics

With a 21 million francs customs revenue for June the total for the first six months of this year has reached 125.9 million against 25.2 million for the same period last year.

* * *

Representatives of the British Rayon Federation have recently been investigating textile machinery developments in our country. We read the following in the "Daily Dispatch," July 12th, which does not call for any comment:

"The delegation is unanimous that Switzerland is producing the most efficient machinery for rayon fabrics, and expresses the view that these machines or similar types are indispensable to the satisfactory development of rayon weaving in this country."

Presumably the next we shall hear about this is that a delegation will negotiate for the purchase of some of this machinery the same as is being done for the watchmaking trade of this country.

* * *

Statements have appeared in the English press that the Swiss franc has been revalued showing now a further 10% depreciation of the English pound. So far this may be a more or less intelligent anticipation but references in the Swiss press have repeatedly voiced the desirability of harmonising the official (artificial!) dollar exchange with the rate generally ruling in the free market (nearly 25% lower) which, on account of the heavy imports from the U.S.A., would help to reduce the cost of living. As far as the £ is concerned, notes in the free market, with an official exchange of 17.35, are now openly quoted at about 10.40 compared

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with unofficial dealings earlier in the year at five to six francs. On the eighteenth of this month Swiss radio broadcast that the Federal Council had decided that there was no need for any currency changes.

Humanitarian

During a debate in the National Council it was stated officially that the "Don Suisse" had so far collected 146 million francs of which over 107 million had been used, directly or indirectly, for relieving distress abroad; 3.2 million were distributed in administrative expenses including the cost of delegations abroad. The appeal is to be continued.

* * *

The annual report for 1945 of the N.H.G. just published reveals that Swiss residing abroad number over 300,000, of whom about 80,000 belong to clubs or societies in the respective Colonies. Most of those who have been repatriated during and immediately after the war hope to resume their former vocations. There is very little news of compatriots living behind the "iron curtain" or in the Pacific Islands.

—oo—

A notable climbing achievement goes to the credit of two alpinists, Alfred Sutter and Berchtold Hediger, of Münchwilen and Reinach (Aargau), who ascended the northern wall of the Matterhorn on July 12th; the two guides accompanying them were Alex. Taugwalder (no relation of the one battling in the Whymper tragedy 81 years ago) and Alex. Graven. This is the fourth time that this hazardous route has been overpowered; the feat was the climax of 12 hours' strenuous effort under extremely dangerous conditions.

* * *

Somewhat unheard for English conceptions is the report that at the recent tennis tournament in Montreux motor spirit (Benzin) was poured on the courts and set on fire so as to harden the ground which was soaked by a heavy shower of rain.

* * *

Changing one's name is under existing conditions quite a common performance. A Stockholm agency advertises in the Swiss press its large reservoir of original and now defunct family names, either dignified or elegant, and promises prompt conferment of a protected nomenclature.

* * *

A comprehensive exhibition of Swiss architecture will be on show at the Royal Institute from September 19th to October 26th. The "Builder," July 12th, publishes the following advance announcement:

"The possibilities for building a better world which architecture has to offer will be fully demonstrated in sections covering every phase of modern life. Building for work, building for recreation, housing, town and country planning, schools and

hospitals are among the subjects covered. Particularly interesting features will be the preservation of old and historic buildings and the countryside, and the replanning of winter sports resorts, for which an extensive programme has already been started.

Switzerland has many of the same housing and planning problems as England, but as the country was industrialised much later it has avoided anything like the ugly nineteenth-century manufacturing towns of England. Housing is regarded as the most pressing social question to-day, and how the Swiss have dealt with shortage of building space, the decentralisation of factories, and better homes and better living for the workers should be of great general interest here.

How Switzerland makes the most of her wild and lovely landscape will be shown in a series of photographs of buildings against the background of mountains and lakes. The Alps have had their effect on architecture as on every other phase of Swiss life, and building is conditioned by the contours and climate of the country. The development of a national architecture through the centuries will be a feature of the exhibition. In it will be shown the evolution of the chalet, with its thick roof built to stand its winter blanket of snow, and how each valley, isolated by the mountains, was obliged to build entirely with local stone and local timber until the railways opened up the country, with characteristic and beautiful results."



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