

Portrait of a year

Autor(en): **[s.n.]**

Objektyp: **Article**

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

Band (Jahr): - **(1971)**

Heft 1629

PDF erstellt am: **15.08.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-690533>

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The Swiss Observer

FOUNDED IN 1919 BY PAUL F. BOEHRINGER

The Official Organ of the Swiss Colony in Great Britain

Vol. 57 No. 1629

FRIDAY, 10th DECEMBER, 1971

*The Dents du Midi seen from Gryon*

1972

PORTRAIT OF A YEAR

The key event of the year was the granting of federal right to Swiss women. This highlight came as the result of years of preparation and evolution. Even then, the male electorate did not show much enthusiasm and many citizens voted in the trail of the general movement. Fifty-seven per cent of Swiss men turned up at the polls on 7th February, only 66 of whom gave a positive vote. Four months later, women were given the opportunity to participate in a federal vote. They joined with their menfolk in disowning Parliament in its attempt at banning the constitutional tax limits but gave the Confederation the right to legislate against pollution.

Then on 30th October they took part in their first Federal Elections. It resulted in the entry of 10 women at the National Council and one at the States Council. These elections reflected the Swiss desire for continuity and showed at any event that Swiss women had in the main the same political inclinations as their men. Together they contributed to put into place an overall conservative government for a new legislature of four years.

Switzerland was faced with the relentless inflation affecting the remainder of the western world. 1971 has not been a boom year for Switzerland as a whole and the country felt the repercussions of an unsettled monetary climate and was compelled to upvalue the franc for the first time in the history of this currency on 9th May. The Government took measures to damp the economy and instituted building control. It also clamped down on bank operations in foreign deposits and made Swiss banks somewhat less attractive to foreigners. The continuing Swiss-American banking agreements made good progress and concrete steps were achieved towards finalising an agreement satisfying their mutual requirement and ending a contention that was older than the Inerhandel affair. The trade balance of Switzerland hardly improved as Swiss industry had to struggle against rising costs, revaluation and the American import surcharge. Many firms relying on American trade had to cut down their labour force but companies, particularly in the chemical and mechanical sector, reported continuing good business.

The effectives of foreign labour remained remarkably stable throughout the year, which had begun on deadlocked negotiations with the Italian authorities on the status of their nationals and a rather sour climate. The position improved during the year and the issue of "over-foreignisation" so actual during the previous year, marked by the near-miss of Mr. Schwarzenbach on 7th June, abated somewhat. The year nevertheless saw the creation of a new extreme-right party, the "National Action", and a considerable upsurge following the murder of an Italian in Zurich, Mr. Marutto.

On the social front, the situation was encouraging. There was a miraculous average of about 50 unemployed during the year against many thousands of vacancies. The trade unions tried to stir up their dormant and complacent membership into a new-style revival by launching an initiative promoting the right of workers in management. These proposals were rejected by a militant fringe of the working people and by employer associations.

The "three pillars" promoting the survival of old age through state pen-

The Swiss Observer

Published Twice Monthly at
63/67 TABERNACLE STREET
LONDON E.C.2
Tel.: 01-253 2321

Telegrams: Paperwyse Stock London
HON. PRESIDENT: Robert J. Keller
EDITOR: Pierre-Michel Béguin

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24 issues Frs. 25—or £2.50

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Editor's telephone: 01-602 1378

sion schemes, private pension schemes and personal savings were much talked about. The philosophy on the responsibilities for old age in a community was the object of much reflection while three initiatives on the matter lay pending and Parliament agreed on an 8th Revision of Old Age Pension which will substantially improve the material condition of the old.

The continuing rise of rents gave rise to a growing restlessness. Tenants in Geneva, Lausanne and Zurich demonstrated against the present state of housing contracts. The year was marked by growing pressures towards a state participation in the building of cheap housing of a social nature and towards a reinstalment of rent controls. tol.

The impetus of dissent has moved from the University to the schoolroom. There were serious troubles in schools at Zurich, Lausanne, Geneva, St. Gall, Fribourg and Biel. Lausanne was paralysed for an afternoon as youths fought a tear-gas battle with police. Youths fighting for headquarters in which they could be the sole masters frayed with the forces of law and order in Zurich and Geneva. Police also laid their hands on an arms cache in Geneva where an impressive arsenal of military rifles and confidential documentation had been assembled by anarchist youths.

The Separatist movement has been the stepping stone of dissent in the Jura, where the Separatist youth movement, the highly vocal "Beliers" have made themselves well noticed throughout the year. They daubed Bernese monuments with red paint and their leaders stood trial before the Federal Court in Lausanne following an incident at Parliament the previous year. On the Jura issue, despite the major-

ity of Jurassians abiding by the recommendations of the Four Wise Men regarding a free vote on autonomy within Berne, the Separatist continued to militate for total independence and remained adamantly attached to the anti-constitutional principle that Jurassians from all over Switzerland should vote on the autonomy issue.

More seriously, the people of the Jura will have to decide on the fate of approximately a square mile of beautiful Franches Montagnes countryside, now that the embittered controversy over their use for military purposes is over.

No significant new event has marked the life of the Army. The Frauenknecht trial had ended before the year began. The Oswald Report renewing etiquette and usages within the forces drafted last year was implemented with varying support from those in charge. The problems of a "total defence of the land", the involvement of women, the integration of civil and active defence were the themes of considerable discussion in the press and the higher instances of the Army. Among the various reports and books published, the Schmid Report set out to elaborate a global strategy for Switzerland. But the ruling philosophy continued to abide by a maintenance of armed neutrality, even though thinkers disagreed on how much Swiss defence should be tactical or strategic, mobile or entrenched.

The smallness of the country and its stringent neutrality compounded to make problems more difficult, none of which have been made easier by the new feelings of servicemen and a higher proportion of conscientious objectors than ever before. The idea of replacing military service by a world social or civil service has been debated in Parliament but nothing definite came out of it so far. Military experts were deciding for the third year running which aeroplane they should buy to replace the obsolete material now older than the pilots who man them.

The environment has naturally been very much in the forefront. The pollution of Swiss rivers and lakes continued despite increased public awareness. Lake Geneva and Lake Lugano are particularly affected by an excess of submarine growth exacerbated by household chemicals being flushed into them. Bathing is forbidden in Lake Lugano. The societies for the protection of nature were struggling against vast constructions intended to regularise the flow of the Rhine below the Bodensee. They feared that it would affect the ecology and climate of the region. The people of Kaiseraugst were using the veto to the building of a nuclear power station and thus frustrating the country's energetic planning.

On the cultural sphere, two marking events were the creation of an annual "Art Fair" in Basle and the decision to build a huge 1,000 billion

electron-volt accelerator at the Cern in Geneva.

The Bengal crisis had an impact on Switzerland's foreign political life. Berne offered to mediate between India and Pakistan for the transport of their respective diplomatic personnel. Efforts at giving refuge to limited numbers of refugee children were frustrated but the Swiss government and the Swiss people made unprecedented contributions towards reducing the hardship of the distressed population of East Pakistan. A bishop was accused of using funds intended for refugees for the funding of a Cistercian monastery and Mr. Kaiser, director of a charity, staged a hunger strike to urge the government to do more for East Pakistan refugees.

On the foreign front, Switzerland increased its activities. There were many visits in Switzerland by foreign heads of state. The Italian, German, French, Austrian foreign ministers all paid visits to Berne. Edward Heath was in Zurich for the 25th Anniversary of a famous Churchillian speech. Emperor Hirohito paid a pilgrimage to Switzerland—it was the most trouble-free visit of his European tour. Switzerland increased the pace of its foreign contacts, particularly in third world and communist countries. It gave recognition to North Vietnam.

Discussions continued at Brussels towards associate membership to the European Community. Their level was highly technical and centred on the trade of industrial goods, particularly watches and problems relating to the free movement of labour. These extended exploratory talks are now to give way to a round of hard bargaining and a high-powered Swiss delegation is due to leave for Brussels. But Mr. Gnaegi stressed that no concessions would be made to Swiss neutrality and independence.

The Swiss abroad and in Great Britain

Berne continued to devote a marked interest in the life of Swiss nationals abroad. An appeal for more funds to the Solidarity Fund of the Swiss Abroad was widely publicised in the Swiss press at home and abroad. The results of this campaign have not been up to expectation and reflect the changing face of Fifth Switzerland. The Swiss abroad met at their highly successful 49th Assembly at Brunnen and debated on the influence of the two worlds of every expatriate. Berne has stepped up plans for giving better information to the Swiss abroad.

In Great Britain, there were several important developments. The gleaming new Embassy was rebuilt on the site of the old Legation at Montagu Place and was ready for use in November. The project of a Swiss Forum was definitely interred but plans

to replace it by a building housing all the Swiss activities of London were being devised by the Federation of Swiss Societies in the United Kingdom. It was realised by those directly concerned that the new scheme had to overcome considerable problems. The "Swiss Observer", which had been facing serious financial difficulties at the end of 1970, received a welcome promise of support from a Swiss industrialist in London.

There were a series of marking cultural events, the most prominent of which were a Hodler-Böcklin exhibition at the Hayward Gallery on the South Bank and a remarkable concert at the Royal Festival Hall in which Heinrich Sutermeister's "Requiem" was performed by the Berne Choir. Heal's, one of London's largest shops for household wares, organised an important exhibition of Swiss goods. Among the many Swiss works edited this year in English, we should mention the publication of "Switzerland and Europe", by J. R. de Salis.

To a new Embassy must be added a new Ambassador. Dr. Albert Weitnauer succeeded Dr. and Mrs. Rene Keller after their untimely call back to Berne. Dr. Keller took up his new post as Head of the Division for International Organisations on 1st February and Dr. Weitnauer presented his letters of credence to the Queen on 26th February. The Institute of Swiss Trade Promotion had to close down after several years of effort to keep it going. This failure was partly brought about by the non-realisation of the Forum.

As reported in this issue, we also had to record the disappearance of the Société de Secours Mutuels, the oldest Swiss Society in the U.K., which voted itself out of existence on 1st December.

The Swiss community in Great Britain deplored the deaths of many compatriots and among the many who have gone we should name Mr. Edmond Paul Banderet, Mr. Charles Schorno and Mr. Fred Streit.

On a more rejoicing note, the Ger-

man-Swiss church and the Catholic Mission have solved their accommodation problems and are thriving in a spirit of fellowship and ecumenism. Father Bossard's Sunday evening youth

sessions at the John Southworth Centre continue to be a great success and are a vital part of the work of the Swiss Churches among the Swiss youth of London. (PMB)

SWISS EVENTS

FEDERAL

Mr. Rudolf Gnaegi against a presidential regime

Mr. Rudolf Gnaegi, President of the Confederation, announced that the Federal Council had approved the conclusions of a commission of experts charged with examining possible ways of reorganising the federal administration.

The Federal Government has been composed of seven members since the creation of modern Switzerland in 1848. To lift part of the growing burden resting upon them, many circles had advocated that the Executive should be enlarged by three or four new Federal Departments. Mr. Gnaegi rejected these proposals yet more categorically than the commission had done, considering that they would endanger the cohesion and smoothness of the collegial operation of the Federal Council. Mr. Gnaegi was equally opposed to the creation of a presidential regime, which he described as "a form of government entirely alien to our traditions".

The experts had also stressed in their report that a presidential system would go against the spirit of Swiss federalism.

Opening of a new legislature

Twelve women took their seats for the first time in Swiss history under the cupola of the Federal Palace on November 29th. The usually austere

National Council was in exuberant spirits to welcome these ladies with flowers and loud applause. The Doyen of the Assembly, Bernese Professor von Waldkirch, 81 years old, made the opening speech. He said that "the charm of these ladies will strengthen the ties between our Council and the Swiss people". As Professor von Waldkirch represents the right-wing, anti-foreign National Action party which had just made its entry at the Federal Palace, there were fears that this first sitting would be troubled by protests from members. However, Dr. Waldkirch's speech was tempered and harmless. Mr. William Vontobel from Zurich (Independent) and Mr. Ferruccio Bolla from Ticino were respectively appointed Presidents of the National Council and the States Council.

New Evangelical Group in Parliament

When a party has more than five elected at the National Council, it has the right to form a "group" entitled to hold seats at the various parliamentary commissions. The Evangelical Party with only three delegates, have thus formed a group with the Liberal Democrats, who have six members at the National Council. It will be called the "Liberal and Evangelical Group". The "and" stresses its confessional character. The object of the new alliance is to give both these minority parties a chance to be represented at the commissions.

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