

Comment

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COMMENT

ENVIRONMENTAL SELFISHNESS

Reserving a night flight to Zurich, I recently had the unpleasant surprise of learning that my plane would leave Heathrow Airport in the heart of the night and land at around 5 a.m. at Kloten. The new regulations banning all night flights on Swiss airports between 11 p.m. and 5 a.m. (6 a.m. for take-offs), which took effect on 1st November, 1972, had upset my plans, and doubtless those of many other passengers, compelling me to disburse the cost of a day flight. The extra expenditure had, all told, less disruptive consequences than the absence of a good night's sleep. Still, many passengers from Britain and other parts of Europe and the world are now made to pay for the comfort of the residents of Kloten and its neighbourhood, to whom the Federal Council decided to give firm environmental protection seven months ago. Similar restrictions apply to Geneva and Basle, with minor exceptions in both cases. Charter flights which are already banned from Kloten on mid-day peak hours, will not even be allowed to land before 6 a.m. They complain of discrimination.

These measures are designed to improve the environment of those residential areas surrounding the country's three major airports. However, they satisfy no one. They have meant a disadvantageous overhaul of flight schedules (with flights concentrated in the day, thereby shifting the noise by a few hours) and are deemed insufficient by local residents, who wanted a complete eight hour ban.

The ban is by no means the first of its kind. London's Heathrow forbids takeoffs at nights during the summer season, but allows landings, which are less noisy. Several German airports have strict similar regulations. But the Swiss case is probably the first involving a complete all-year ban on in and outgoing flights.

Naturally, man must have priority over machines and profits. Quality of life should come first. Yet there is some element of selfishness, both nationally and locally, inherent in the strict measures that have just been taken in Switzerland.

On the national level, it is obvious that if similar restrictions were applied in other parts of the world, intercontinental flights would soon take twice as long and cost considerably more. It would take 25 hours to go from London to Tokyo if Japan decided to follow the Swiss example. One can also imagine the disruption which will eventually be caused when a plane bound for Zurich from a foreign airport

is forced to delay its departure by eight hours because it has some delay preventing arrival at Zurich during the prescribed hours. In European airports, this could mean spending the night in the departure lounge for many of the passengers. The fact that the earth is round and turns around the sun means that intercontinental flights inevitably go from areas where it is daytime, to others where it is night.

The local residents concerned can also be criticised for not caring about the comfort of the international community, which is relying increasingly on air transport. A few thousand residents living at Kloten, Rumlang, and other dormitory towns have managed to institute a law that will affect hundreds of thousands of Swiss and foreign passengers. Should a similar attitude have held sway in the case of road transport, then we would have no motorways. A few fortunate Berkshire gentlemen farmers would have stopped completion of the M4 from London to Bristol. The common good will always disadvantage a minority.

While the inconvenience of living near an airport must be recognised, it is also true that aircraft are called to play a vital role in modern life thus one must come to terms with them. The solution to noise cannot lie in banning aircraft, and particularly charter flights, from airports at suitable and economic hours, but in banning urban development in airport neighbourhoods

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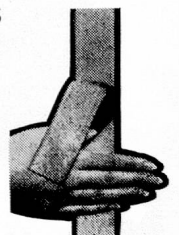
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and doing everything technically possible to abate the noise of jets. This is fortunately under way.

Nothing prevents people who are sensitive to noise from moving to another area, but this may perhaps be easier said than done. The next best solution should be to sound-proof houses. This is technically feasible, and should start with multiple-glazed win-

dows. The cost of such fittings should be paid by the State (this has recently been planned in the UK) with eventual contribution by aircraft companies, which could pass on part of the expense to passengers. This seems to be a better long-term alternative to closing Intercontinental airports at nights.

(PMB)

SWISS EVENTS

FEDERAL

Swiss mission in Brussels

As the Swiss prepare to vote on their association to the Common Market during a national referendum, their interest in Brussels are being defended by seven diplomats assigned to the *Mission Suisse auprès des Communautés Européennes*. This Mission, probably unique in the Swiss diplomatic service because of the highly specialised nature of its duties, and because it works not with one, but with several partners, is responsible for keeping Berne informed of Community developments. This involves 600 telex messages a year, and an astounding volume of diplomatic mail. The head of the Mission is Ambassador Paul Wurth, who has been in Brussels since the beginning of the Common Market negotiations. His chargé d'affaires is Minister Pierre Cuénod. At the head of the Chancery is a former Swiss diplomat in London: Mr. Pierre Bringolf. This team accompanied Mr. Paul Jolles, Switzerland's negotiator to the Common Market, during the lengthy negotiations which preceded the last July agreement. Much of the success of this agreement will depend to some extent on the kind of relations which this highly qualified team of diplomats will manage to maintain with the European authorities in Brussels.

Purchase of real estate by foreigners

New regulations for the purchase of property by foreigners living abroad are under study at the Department of Justice and Police. The orders implemented in the days of Mr. Ludwig Von Moos, and the 21st June Decree which has frozen since this summer all property transactions with foreigners, will give way to a generally more supple system but strengthened controls by Berne over individual cantons. The new regulations which Mr. Kurt Furgler, Head of the Department of Justice and Police, may decide to enforce are outlined in recently published proposals. Although purchase procedures will be simplified and made easier, foreigners will be expected to reside for over five years before buying primary residences. Cantons suffering from a "saturation" of foreigners or foreign owned property will be bound to put a stop on new demands. The Confederation will be entitled to cancel all authorisations delivered by Cantons which it considers unjustified, Solicitors and civil servants concerned with property transactions will be supervised more closely. Barriers for the investment of foreign funds in cheap and social housing will be lifted in those areas suffering from an acute shortage of housing.

1971 was a record year for property purchases from abroad. 4,849 applications were accepted and only four per cent of all applications had been

rejected. The previous year, 3,448 applications to buy land or buildings had been accepted.

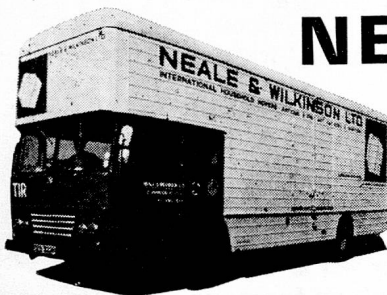
Tunisian minister in Berne

Mr. Mohamed Masmoudi, Tunisia's foreign minister, paid an official visit to Switzerland at the end of October. He was the first Arab foreign minister to come to Switzerland in an official capacity. Relations between Switzerland and Tunisia have been traditionally excellent. Mr. Masmoudi had talks with Mr. Pierre Graber and Mr. Kurt Furgler, whom he invited to come to Tunisia in the near future. These negotiations led to an agreement on an amendment of economic relations and a development of technical co-operation. The vice-director of the commercial division of the Department of Economy, Mr. Emilio Moser, will leave for Tunis next spring to work out the details of these new relations. The Canton of Vaud will undertake to set up topographical and civil engineering departments at the University of Tunis.

During a press conference, Mr. Masmoudi said that Switzerland should feel more concerned about the problems of the Mediterranean and the Middle East, quoting Churchill, he said "These areas were the underbelly of Europe." He said that Swiss meditation should go beyond the stages of good intentions, and be motivated by the desire of conciliating the positions of the parties concerned in the Middle East conflict.

Arms exports fall sharply

Swiss arms exports were sharply down on last year during the first nine months of this year. Preliminary figures show that exports to Latin America were a quarter of what they were during the same period a year before, and those to Africa almost a twentieth of their previous level. This seems to be a result of the federal order of 29th September, 1970 which tightened the screw on arms exports to politically troubled countries. Thus the authorised arms business with the third world has become almost insignificant.



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