

Letter from Switzerland

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Minister treks 500 miles across Canton Vaud to raise money for Church centre

A 60-year-old minister from Canton Vaud has launched a 500-mile march across the Canton to raise funds and sympathy for Crét-Bérard, the meeting place of the Protestant Churches of Vaud. Pastor Charles Nicole-Debarge, resident Minister at Crét-Bérard, set out on his long march as this church institution, which has played a steadily growing role, celebrated its twentieth anniversary. Crét-Bérard needs at least 500,000 francs for a new wing. Situated in the countryside above Lausanne, this centre is well known to many former Swiss of London as the ex-parishioners of the Swiss Church meet there every year. Pastor Nicole-Debarge is carrying out his venture with a 300 lb. wagon mounted on bicycle wheels which contains all he needs to sleep and to wash. During his long trek, he meets plenty of good will and helping hands to push his wagon when climbs get a little steep.

Swiss Embassy to be built in Peking

The Federal Council has asked Parliament to approve an expenditure of 8.9 million francs for the erection of Switzerland's new embassy in Peking. A long lease has already been acquired on a three acre plot of land in Peking's new diplomatic district, east of the capital. Work on the future Embassy should begin in 1973 and be undertaken by the Chinese. The Embassy in Peking will probably be smaller than the Embassy in London, which was budgeted at 11 million francs four years ago.

Electronic eye at Geneva traffic lights

Geneva Police has installed cameras at certain important crossings which will detect motorists driving through red traffic lights. This device, which is already in use in Zurich, takes two pictures at a second's interval of offending motorists. It is actuated only once the lights have turned to red. The device is aptly concealed and during the first four days of service had traced 190 offenders who were each fined 50 francs. This will help to pay for the apparatus, which costs 40,000 francs. The system not only gives an assessment of the offending vehicle's speed, but also of the exact lapse of time since the "reddening" of the lights. This new electronic spy should cause a minor revolution among Geneva motorists. One doubts that they have welcomed it.

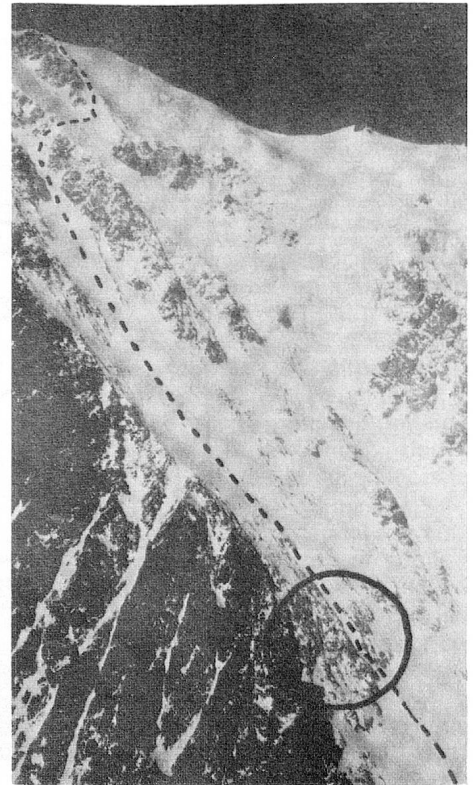
Great leap forward

A Swiss stuntman claimed a new world record for long jumping into water in a car. Driving ace Jim Stark drove at more than 62.5 mph to a ramp set up on the shore of a basin near Sion and then covered 47 yards in the air before landing in the water. The organisers said the previous world record was 39 yards.

Ski-stuntsman registers new performance

Sylvain Saudan, the Swiss suicide-skier, has achieved another incredible feat: he ski-ied down the Mont Blanc by the west face and weaved his way through rocks, crevasses and snow pits along precipitous slopes with 55 per cent gradients. Any faltering or concentration and slip would have meant probable death. But Saudan, having lost 900 ft. in altitude by using a path which would have awed inexperienced rockclimbers, vowed that he would improve on this exploit and ski next winter down the Aconcagua, 7,000 metres, the highest peak of the Andes.

Saudan, who is already 37 but contends that he is stronger than at 20 and ready to continue until he is 48, has already ski-ied down Europe's most famous mountains, such as the Eiger, Aiguille Verts, Monte Rosa and Grandes Jorasses. Last year, he ski-ied down Mount McKinley, 6,200 metres, North America's mightiest mountain. Saudan will not quit his career as ski-stuntsman until he has matched his skills with the Himalaya.



LETTER FROM SWITZERLAND

THE SWISS POST OFFICE: LESS THAN STERLING SERVICE

The following facts are a sad illustration of the deterioration in public services in Switzerland. At the end of May Federal President Roger Bonvin issued a public statement in his capacity of Chief ("Minister") of the PTT. In it he declared that he had given *instructions* to the administration and management of the PTT, according to which the proposed reduction from two letter deliveries per day and one on Saturday to one a day and none on Saturday *was not to take effect*.

Shortly afterwards the General Manager of the P.T.T. issued a communiqué according to which the instructions of the P.T.T. Chief were to be followed *as far as possible*.

A day later the District Postmaster of Zürich also issued a statement, in which he simply declared his regret at being unable to maintain the postal services which had so far existed and that consequently certain sub-districts in the Zürich-agglomeration, for example Seebach, would from now on only get letter deliveries once a day, with none on Saturday.

The District-Postmaster of Küsnacht did not even bother to issue a statement. And when I asked our postman — a very nice and friendly man — what was to happen in Küsnacht, he told me that there had been a lively exchange of letters and telephone calls between Berne and the local Küsnacht Post Office, but that letter deliveries would definitely be reduced from two to one a day, with

none on Saturday as they did not have enough men.

Hitherto the first mail arrived round about 10 a.m. and the second one around 4 p.m. Now the one delivery we get arrives round about lunch time, between 12 noon and 1 p.m. and if anybody wants his letter-mail on a Saturday, he has to go to the Post Office between 10 and 11 a.m. to get it. Political Newspapers, however, are still supposed to be delivered the same day, even if this necessitates the postman calling twice a day. This decision followed violent representations made by the Swiss Newspaper Publishers Association to the Federal Authorities, representations made in the name of the right to information of the public and the freedom of the press. How this will work, remains to be seen.

The fact remains, and it is a fact which gives cause for anxiety, that the Political Chief of the P.T.T.-Department, Federal Councillor and at present President of the Confederation and thus the highest magistrate in the land, has issued firm *instructions* about a federal matter, which are not followed on the cantonal and local level. And this, without any doubt, is serious.

Switzerland is, so one is told, at present short of 400 postmen. Recruitment into their ranks is going badly, because in this country of high and sometimes very high salaries in industry, the pay the postmen get, especially in the lower grades, is frankly bad. But the postal authorities keep stressing that their remuneration cannot be substantially increased without a further substantial



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increase in the postal charges — which have anyway gone up considerably since last January.

The reaction of the public to these facts varies. Some people write furious letters to newspapers, complaining bitterly — but some are quite philosophical about it. I have heard one gentleman say that he is quite glad not to be bothered by mail twice a day and certainly happy that his Saturday will hitherto be undisturbed by the arrival of bills or

income tax demands. As far as I am concerned, what disturbs me most is the fact that the Highest Magistrate in Berne can talk and issue instructions — and remains powerless to see to it that they are followed. One lady I saw recently has called this “revolution against Berne”. Even if one does not wish to use such strong words, it remains nevertheless a very disturbing development.

Gottfried Keller

TECHNICAL ITEMS

SWISS PLANT FOR A TRAIN OF THE FUTURE

The magnetic air-cushion train, a new high speed means of transport, will help to solve traffic problems in the years to come. This train of the future will run at cruising speeds of 200 and 300 m. p. h. and be able to reach top speeds of 350 m. p. h.; consequently over short distances it will be faster even than travelling by air. Japan is at present working on plans for a magnetic air-cushion train; the Swiss firm Sulzer Bros. (Winterthur, Zürich) is taking part in the development of this project with the supply of a low temperature refrigerating plant. The technical side of planning this new train should be completed by the end of 1975, and it is expected to be ready to go into operation during the year 1980.

MINI CLOTHES HORSE

A Swiss inventor from St. Gall recently invented and put on the market a mini clothes horse of entirely new design offering a neat solution to the problem of hanging up clothes at night. This useful device, which successfully replaces a chair or a traditional clothes horse, offers the advantage of taking up very little room and of being easily suspended almost anywhere, on a wall, the side of a cupboard, a door, etc. It is made of plastic and measures approximately 10 by 15 cm (4 by 6 in.); it is easily fixed by pressing the small adhesive tapes attached to the back onto any smooth clean surface. Trousers can be hung from the press so as to keep their creases, while the shirt and underwear are hung on the curved upper part. A small hook is provided for the coat hanger holding the jacket. This ingenious device won a gold medal at the Inventors Exhibition in Brussels.

TRAVELLING STACKING CRANES AND ELECTRIC HOISTS

The transport and mechanical handling of panels and laminated goods have raised many new problems, which have been rationally solved by the travelling stacking cranes produced and built by an engineering works at Nebikon (Lucerne, Switzerland). Among the many travelling cranes produced by this firm (travelling column-type stacking cranes, travelling gantry cranes, etc.) mention can be made of the travelling cranes with grabs for maximum use of the area available for stacking panels. It is sufficient to allow passage 40 cm wide between the stacks for the crane to operate under the best conditions. Technically, the lifting force, hoisting range and height are unlimited. Controlled from the ground, by means of a pear switch, or from a cabin fixed to the crane-grab, it can be operated by one man. The use of special brakes makes it possible to increase working speeds as well as efficiency. The same factory has also just placed on the market a new electric hoise, a twin version of which is capable of lifting 64 tons.

FIRST FULLY AUTOMATIC ALARM WRIST-WATCH

One year after launching the “Memotron” alarm wrist-watch with a self-winding movement, a Chaux-de-Fonds watch factory (Neuchâtel, Switzerland) presented at the Besle Fair 1973 the first fully automatic battery-powered alarm wrist-watch; this is the only watch in the world whose movement and alarm mechanism never need winding. Like the self-winding model, this new “Memotron” powered by a type 651 battery is equipped with a powerful acoustic generator. The electronic sound is transmitted by the watch glass acting as an acoustic membrane. The alarm operates automatically for 5 minutes. The battery has a life of one year under normal conditions of use. The new “Memotron” type 651 also possesses a unique alarm system making it possible to set the alarm according to a 24-hour cycle. The high frequency battery-powered movement fitted with a shockproof mechanism also indicates the date and seconds.



Quins born in Liestal

A woman gave birth to Switzerland's first quintuplets in Liestal, near Basle. The five survived, and it is believed that this has happened only four or five times in the world. The children required special treatment and were put in oxygen tents. Their mother, aged 32, had been unable to bear children until 1965 for health reasons. Following an interruption of her ovulations, she had submitted to a hormone treatment.



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