

Swiss events

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SWISS EVENTS

FEDERAL

Speed limits

From 1st January of this year, a 100 k.m.h. speed limit has been imposed on Swiss motorists on all roads other than motorways. The new regulations will apply for an experimental period of three years. The Federal Council has also announced a new scale of fines against breaches of the highway code.

Switzerland seen by "Newsweek"

The American magazine "Newsweek" published a full page report on Switzerland in its first issue of the year. The article is hardly flattering and depicts our country as a "haven of male supremacy" where women are downtrodden "on a scale which one can hardly imagine outside moslem countries." The article praises the material welfare of the Swiss but criticises the "hypocrisy" of their banks, which accepts unclean money, and the puritanical attitude of politicians like James Schwarzenbach, afraid that the inflow of foreign workers will destroy the Swiss work ethic. The author wonders

why he always leaves Switzerland with a "sigh of relief."

New Ambassador in Ankara

Mr. Jean Denis Grandjean, who was the First Secretary at the Swiss Embassy in London from 1966 to 1968, has been appointed by the Federal Council to the post of Ambassador to Turkey. He had previously been ambassador in Algeria. He takes the succession of Mr. Arturo Marcionelli, who has been transferred to Rome. Mr. Grandjean was born in Délémont in 1915 and hails from Bellerive (Vd).

Seat belts obligatory

The Federal Department of Justice and Police has submitted to the Cantons and relevant organisations an amendment to the 13th November, 1962 law on road traffic. According to its new proposals, occupants of the front seats of motor cars will compulsorily have to wear their seat belts, and children will be forbidden from sitting on the front seats.

The Department notes that only 35 per cent of motorists use their seat belts on open roads, and 14 per cent on city streets.

SALT talks

Following the signature of a first Strategic Arms Limitation Talks agreement last May by President Nixon and the Soviet leaders, a new series of SALT negotiations have opened in Geneva. The agreement concluded in Moscow after two and a half years of talks in Helsinki set a limit to the ballistic missile strength which the two super powers could possess. The new talks, veiled in secrecy, will attempt at enlarging the scope of the original agreement to a wider range of offensive weapons. It is understood that they will touch on the arms stored outside the super powers, particularly in the countries of western and eastern Europe. The negotiators will have to agree whether these arms can appropriately be considered as "strategic." The American and Russian sides are led by ambassadors who are expected to meet for at least a year.

CANTONAL

The Pfuertner Affair and its unclear legal implications

The controversy of Father Stephanus Pfuertner is far from abating. In a conference delivered during the summer of 1971 at Fribourg, the Dominican priest had claimed that every man had the right to happiness, and that this included the enjoyment of sex. This somewhat Epicurean point of view, well in keeping with worldly

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thinking but at variance with the teaching of the Church, shocked the Catholic Hierarchy. Father Pfuertner was sent on a sabbatical leave for a year and allowed to resume teaching at the beginning of the present university year. When it was known that he had not entirely relented, and that some of his lectures were impregnated with forbidden Hedonistic ideas, the Father of the Dominican Order made it known to the Swiss Conference of Bishops that he had deprived the Dominical intellectual of his "missio canonica" or right to teach. However, this measure was not communicated to Father Pfuertner himself and it is understood that he has not yet effectively been banned from teaching. It appears that relevant Catholic authorities want to avoid taking steps which could be seen as reactionary.

The whole affair has sprung a theological debate. Are Father Pfuertner's views Christian? Is his theology Thomist? Such are the headings of lengthy articles appearing in the Swiss Press. But the debate becomes even more involved when it comes to define the actual status of the Catholic Faculty of the University of Fribourg. It is known that a convention, due to be revised, was drawn during the days of the Kulturkampf between the Canton of Fribourg and the "Order of Preaching Brothers." As this entity is distinct from the Vatican, which is a sovereign State, it means that a Canton has signed a contract of a kind unknown to Swiss civil and public law. The legal question of deciding "who decides what" in the Pfuertner Case has already inspired several heavy dissertations in Swiss papers. The responsibility of the Swiss Catholic Organisation, the Vatican, the State Council of Fribourg and the Dominicans is a particularly confusing matter whose details do not seem to be grasped by many Swiss journalists. The Pfuertner Affair unrolls as the Swiss people prepare to abolish from the Constitutions those two articles which

prevented Jesuits from exercising their ministry and new religious orders from being established in the Confederation.

Swiss banker on trial in Sweden

A director of a distinguished Geneva bank was tried in Gotheborg, Sweden, after having been held in custody for two months, on charges of having illegally exported 400,000 francs' worth of Swedish Kroners in cash. The banker was on a regular visit to Sweden to entertain relations with customers and seek new business. He claimed that he had not intended to send the money out of the country but had planned to return to Sweden after transiting in Copenhagen.

First Swiss office computer

The office equipment manufacturer Paillard has launched Switzerland's first computer. Priced at somewhere between 50,000 and 80,000 francs this computer is aimed at small and medium sized undertakings and designed for accounts and stock-keeping. It should help to recover the cost of the manpower thus saved within four years. The new machine was launched by the firm during a reception at the Hotel Beaurivage at Lausanne. It is called the Hermes Data System 210 and is expected to help the company to recover from the bad straights which it had crossed a year ago.

The people of Zermatt against a road

By a 937 to 405 majority, the citizens of Zermatt voted against a proposed extension up to their famous resort of the road that climbs from the Rhone Valley up to Taesch via Visp. This communal vote was in fact a consultation, because the Great Council of the Valais and the Canton's Executive

Council had already decided to build the six kilometre long Taesch-Zermatt stretch, which was budgeted at 25 million francs. It had been agreed from the outset that work on the road wouldn't begin before Zermatt had provided the necessary parking facilities below the village. Space for the thousands of cars that could be expected, would require hewing a cavern at the expense of the commune. Thus the recent vote at Zermatt expressed its population's opposition to the parking and will naturally compel the Great Council to review the original project. What the people and the innumerable friends of Zermatt want is to end the road at Taesch and build the parking there. Such a plan would be far more realistic because more and cheaper space is available there. An increased train service would complete the final lap of the journey undertaken by thousands of motorists.

Basle changes its taxi system

Among the local questions which the citizens of Basle were called to answer on the 3rd December vote which was staged throughout the country and included the Swiss-EEC Agreement, the town's taxi legislation carried the most interest. In order to put some order in the fares anarchy which characterised Basle's taxi trade, the authorities decided to institute two kinds of taxi categories by delivering "A" and "B" licenses. Holders of "A" licenses were entitled to park in specially reserved bays, and in particular at the main railway station, and paid more for their license. They were held to maintain a regular 24 hour service and a telephone calling system. Independent holders of "B" licenses paid less for their concession but were not entitled to reserved waiting space. They were free to work when they liked. This decision was fought in court because it was considered illegal. The government legalised it in obtaining the overwhelming support of Baslers who were angry at the virtual impossibility of even unloading a passenger in front of the station.

Tear gas and stone throwing in Zurich

Two hundred and sixteen demonstrators were arrested in Zurich on Saturday night, 16th December, during a riot in and around the youth club "Drahtschmidi" in the centre of Zurich. The demonstration had been organised by the Committee for a self-governing youth centre and had been authorised by the police. Some three hundred youths had started their march at the Odeon Restaurant, followed the Limmat embankment and turned into the Niederdorf and gathered on the Hirschenplatz before proceeding to reach the Drahtschmidi youth club on

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the Wasserwerkstrasse, in the immediate vicinity of the "Zurich" hotel. This was where their demonstration was supposed to end and the organisers urged them to go home through a megaphone. But a determined minority thought otherwise and broke the building's door open. A short while later, they brought in electronic hardware to organise a party inside the premises.

The heavy hand of the law was not long to come. The police, which had been supervising events closely, mustered about all the anti-riot forces in the canton: 280 men from the city police and fifty others from the cantonal police. This formidable force of men armed with helmets, shields and tear gas bombs closed the adjoining street and prepared to storm the Drahtschmidi. An officer gave the young revellers two minutes to clear out. By the time the ultimatum had expired few of them had got out. The police entered the building and arrested over two hundred youths in a swift operation. Their captives were questioned during the night in the large building of the Criminal Police and set free during the early hours of the morning as distraught parents waited outside. Of the 216 demonstrators arrested, 156 were boys and 59 were girls. The great majority were under 23. One lone man was 67. The entry of the police in the Drahtschmidi was followed by dispersed fighting during which stones were thrown at the police. A well aimed petrol bomb was also thrown and began setting the uniform of a policeman on fire before his comrades intervened with a fire extinguisher.

Gas discovered in Berne

Traces of gas have been found at Linden bei Oberdiesbach in the canton of Berne. The fifteenth drilling hole bored on the Swiss plateau since 15 years has produced sizeable quantities of gas which give off a plume of fire. It is too early to assess the commercial value of the find, which required drilling down to 4,000 metres deep. Further drilling down to about 5,000 metres will be necessary before the prospects of this site can be measured. Similar traces of gas have already been found on drilling sited at Pfaffnau-Sud and Pfaffnau-Nord in Lucerne and at Essertines in Vaud. They were not considered exploitable. The company that manages these drilling operations is the Bernische Erdol AG. It works with the technical assistance of the French company Petroles d'Aquitaine S.A. Among the shareholders of Bernische Erdol are the Canton, the Bernese Cantonal Bank, the Bernese Electricity company and Swiss Petrol Holding AG.

New station in Lucerne

The Federal Railways have decided to rebuild Lucerne's central rail-

way station completely on its actual site. The station, which was built in the heart of the town in 1892, was gutted by fire on 5th February, 1972. Experts had hesitated for some time on whether to repair the station or rebuild it completely. The latter solution has been definitely adopted and it has furthermore been decided to site the new station where it is now, at the end of a railway line. Works are expected to begin in 1976 and should cost from 60 to 100 million francs.

New medical justice

A trial with some "Clockwork Orange" aspects was held in Aarau. A 25-year old man accused of sexual aggression against children was in the dock, where he had already stood two times on similar charges. After careful consideration and consultation with psychiatrists, the judge decided to replace the one year's prison sentence, which would normally have retributed his behaviour, by a sex inhibiting treatment. This outcome, the first of its kind, aroused the interest of the whole French Press.

The treatment prescribed was to take weekly injections or pills of cyprotenonacetate, a drug developed a few years ago in Germany which reduces the sexual drive. Should the accused refuse to submit to this treatment and thus recover his usual irrepressible faculties, then he would serve his full suspended prison sentence. The Aarau judge has therefore made regular absorption of a sex repressor drug hang as a sword of Damocles over his head. Many people have tended to question the ethics of this decision. However, the judge had acted only on the advice of two psychiatrists who had told him that no psychiatric treatment and certainly no repressive treatment such as prison could cure the man. Chemical castration was the only way of making him fit in society.

MODERN LIFE

Shortage of Swiss Diplomatic staff

The 6th December issue of "Die Welt" had an interesting report on the recruitment problems of the Swiss foreign service. Officials at the Political Department consider that our embassy network will begin to suffer from serious shortages very soon unless more new men are attracted by the service. At present, only about eight new diplomats are formed every year. This would result in staff shortages of over eighty by the mid 80's. The reasons for this are not that our diplomatic services will be greatly extended (besides places like Hanoi and Dacca the network is

more or less complete) but that a considerable proportion of diplomats will be retiring within the next ten to fifteen years. War time circumstances led Switzerland to promote many diplomats in charge of third parties. These diplomats were almost too numerous at the end of the war but were kept in office. As a result, a diplomat could have considered himself exceptionally successful if he reached the top job of ambassador before the age of fifty. A man beginning this career today has good chances of becoming ambassador in his early forties.

The other advantages are significant. Diplomats are much better paid than before (they start at 2,700 francs a month as trainees) and do not have to rely on a personal fortune or a famous family name. They are not kept in the same post for longer than about four years, contrarily to what happened before the war, when some ministers spent their careers in the same city. These advantages do not seem to attract potential candidates who find more opportunities at home. Besides, the glamour of diplomacy has faded. So has the appeal of living in Africa or Asia.

It will be difficult to reverse the trend unless the opportunities of business and industry decline and give rise to more interest for the civil service. Academic standards must remain high. Even if the prerequisite of a university degree is abandoned, prospective diplomats will nevertheless have to be submitted to a severe and selective examination to maintain the high standards of the foreign service. Ambassador Antonio Janner, Head of the Political Department's administration, reckons that 335 diplomats will be needed by 1985 while the effectives will only reach from 250 to 274 diplomats on present trends. The situation was caricatured in a cartoon depicting an angry Queen at a diplomatic presentation looking at a robot. "The Swiss are short of staff!" whispers Prince Charles in her ear.

Economic developments

The Council of States have approved the set of five urgent decrees decided in December by the Federal Council to combat inflation. Most members were agreed to the measures' justification. They brought to ten the number of urgent economic and financial measures taken by Mr. Nello Celio during the past six months. The package includes credit provisions (credit ceilings, minimum reserves, controlled stock issues), reduction of fiscal facilities for investment; measures to stabilise the building trade and to control prices and eventually wages; extension of a previous decree providing for export deposits.

The association of building contractors immediately deplored the

measures in a statement signed by 1700 firms. It claimed that further federal intervention in the building sector would cause many small firms to go bankrupt and have overall disastrous effects. The Government package was not accepted with glee by all quarters but acknowledged as necessary to stem inflation and preserve the competitive edge of our industry in many sectors. Inflation in Switzerland ran at 9.8 per cent a year (against 11.6 per cent for Britain) during the second half of 1972. This rate is slightly higher than the European average.

National statistics show that the Federal Government and the cantons share much of the blame for the economy's overheat because it has not been a model of thrift. The Gross National Product rose from 37.06 to 100.83 billion francs from 1960 to 1971 whereas public expenditure rose from 6.46 to 24.3 billion francs during that period. Thus the Swiss produced 2.72 times more goods and services (measured in francs of diminishing value) while the State spent 3.76 times more. Proportion of public expenditure to PNB rose from 17.4 per cent to 24.1 per cent during these eleven years.

It has been announced that the planned increase of Federal taxes will not take effect before 1974. The two main federal taxes are National Defence Tax and Turnover Tax and will both be increased by about ten per cent.

Trade Unions firmly rejected the idea of a wages supervision by the Federal Council. The December package entitles the Government to open an enquiry in the event of excessive wage increases and discussions with trade unions to keep them in manageable proportions. It was expected that many members of the National Council, which has far more socialists than the Conservative Council of States, would also voice their opposition to this motion. One of their strongest arguments is that it is not wise to risk the Peace of Labour for some financial objectives.

Shareholder information

The Association of Swiss Financial Analysts note in their 1972 Report that the information given by Swiss firms to their shareholders remains insufficient despite recent progress. The association had addressed a number of questions to 22 representative companies in the main branches of economy and recorded that on average answers to only 42 per cent of questions were supplied. Firms remained particularly cagey on the effects of monetary changes on their consolidated accounting. Other points on which companies were unwilling to supply information were the aims and fiscal status of their reserves, the purchase or economic value of their fixed assets,

financial costs, labour costs, share statistics, percentage of subsidiary participation and financial programmes.

In some instances, the information received by the financial analysts was such that a wrong interpretation of the activities and progress of the firm concerned could be made.

The report considers that the slow-down in efforts to give shareholders a better insight on the state of their investments is partly due to the preparation of new laws on the Swiss joint stock company. Firms will want to conform to the new legislation before taking new initiatives in the way of shareholder information. Other firms have reduced their efforts once they had reached a position where complete information was no longer important to their financing. The report notes that of the companies questioned, Swissair was the most helpful and supplied answers to 86 per cent of questions. Rocco was the least willing and supplied only nine per cent. Publication of cash flow was a growing practise already adopted in Switzerland by Brown Boveri, Fischer, Iner Interfood and Sulzer.

Swiss machine industry

The leaders of the Swiss machine tool and engineering industry, which is the country's most important industry, held their traditional "Press Day" on 9th November. A meeting was held on that occasion to examine the changing structures of the industry, which is now faced more than ever before by the "bottlenecks" of labour shortages and rising costs. According to one of the speakers, Mr. M. A. De Meuron, President of the Board of Gardy S.A., the difference between the required and available manpower in the machine industry will rise to somewhere between 330,000 and 618,000 workers by 1990 on present trends. The only way to curb this evolution was to rationalise.

Among the various solutions envisaged, the setting-up of production plants abroad was strongly encouraged by another speaker, Mr. M. Kreis, General Manager of Wild Heerbrugg, who pointed to the advantages of lower wages level and direct access to the desired markets. Such a solution (which has, incidentally, been suggested for a long time by Mr. James Schwarzenbach) would however have various disadvantages, such as lower workmanship, transport and communications problems and the risk of nationalisation.

Another speaker, Mr. H. C. Bechtler, President of the Board of LUWA, said that an adequate balance between diversification and specialisation had to be struck to resist against the increasingly fast obsolescence of everything that was produced. By specialising, small firms could still remain in

the forefront of progress but were assuming a considerable financial risk. Mr. P. Hummel, of Brown Boveri, warned against unwarranted hopes on the results of mergers. It was pointless to expect much more from the merger of two sick companies. Mergers could only succeed if the staff of the firms concerned were adequately prepared, he said. Mr. Hummer expressed surprise that mergers were carried out at all, considering the opposition which mergers usually create from trade unions, shareholders and management.

Machine industry registers diminishing orders

The Swiss machine and capital goods industry has registered a further reduction of its order book during the third quarter of this year. With a diminution of 3 per cent, the work load of the machine industry has now fallen to 7.5 months, against 8.6 months a year ago. The fall is to be attributed to a marked slow-down in exports. Only the textile machine industry has recorded an improvement of its order book. It has work for the coming 9.8 months. But the machine tool industry only has seven months of work ahead, the instruments industry has orders for 16.6 months, a month less than a year ago.

As a result of this situation, several important firms have made losses this year and had to draw on their reserves. Thus SIP (Société genevoise d'instruments de physique) registered a six million franc shortfall in turnover last year (when it reached 60.8 million francs) and made a two million franc loss.

Ciba-Geigy and pollution

The Ciba-Geigy chemical group must be considered as a model example in the field of environmental protection. It is currently spending 15 per cent of its investments on developing ways of combating pollution. It claims to have eliminated 90 per cent of the

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TECHNICAL ITEMS

gaseous effluents of its plants in Switzerland (namely Kaisten, Monthey and Grenzach—and shortly at the Klybeck plant in Basle). Considerable efforts have also been devoted on stemming the flow of fluid waste. The group has paid 18 million francs for a new, 21 million franc purifying plant near Monthey. Similar efforts are planned in Basle in co-operation with other chemical firms. The group has set up a special research department and intends applying stringent anti-pollution measures not only in its factories in Switzerland, but also in its factories across the world. Over 6,000 shareholders (among them a great many employees) and journalists were recently invited to witness the fruition of these efforts at the Ciba-Geigy works of Schweizerhalle and Kaisten.

Contrary to general opinion, industry is not the principal cause of pollution. In Switzerland it accounts for 30 to 40 per cent of water pollution, 15 to 20 per cent of air pollution, and less than 10 per cent of solid waste.

The "Eurostar" for a CIBA-GEIGY invention

At the 14th International Packaging Contest, held in Barcelona, the European Packaging Federation awarded Ciba-Geigy the "Eurostar". This distinction, the most coveted in Europe in its field, was awarded in recognition of the Swiss firm's invention of a special polypropylene barrel with a capacity of 175 litres, for the transport and short-term storage of chemical products in granulated, paste or liquid form. Weighing only 22 lb., this barrel is very easy to handle. The space required is reduced to a minimum, since the empty barrels can be fitted into each other, then transported and stocked on pallets. 45,000 barrels of this kind are presently in use in several Ciba-Geigy factories. This patented barrel is now also being manufactured for the firm's clients.

Swiss watchmaking on display in Moscow

The International Exhibition of Watchmaking Machinery, Appliances and Tools "Inchasmash 72" was held in Moscow from 17th to 26th October, 1972. Organised by the Russian Chamber of Commerce, this exhibition forms part of the efforts being made to strengthen the economic and commercial ties between the USSR and western countries. Wishing to ensure Switzerland's industrial presence in Eastern European countries, some thirty Swiss firms took part in this event. One of them, Ebauches Co. Ltd., was represented at "Inchasmash 72" by three of its affiliated companies: Oscillioquartz Co. Ltd. (Neuchâtel) which, in addition to various types of quartz clocks, presented the model of a new atomic clock developed in its laboratories; Ebauches Electroniques Co. Ltd., Marin, displayed a whole range of electronic alarm and table clocks; finally, Technica Co. Ltd. (Granges) exhibited different high precision machines as well as measuring appliances.

Nestlé in Greece

The Greek government has announced the signing of an agreement between the Swiss company Nestlé Alimentana and the Greek firm of Provigal, with a view to setting up a milk processing plant in Thessaloniki. The new company, known as Nestlé Hellas, will process some 150,000 tons of milk a year to start with, output being raised subsequently to 240,000 tons. The initial investments will total 10 million dollars to which another

3,300,000 dollars will subsequently be added. Nestlé Alimentana will provide fifty per cent of the capital in Swiss francs. The remainder will be supplied by Provigal in Greek currency and land. The Swiss company will also contribute the technical processes and production methods. The agreement stipulates that imports into Greece of condensed milk will stop completely once the factory starts production. At present these imports represent some 25 million dollars a year.

Growing expenditure on the environment

In Switzerland, public departments at present spend three-quarters of a billion francs a year on the protection of the environment. According to the latest statistics available, in 1970 the Confederation, cantons and communes spent on this sector (water protection, water supply, sewage disposal, etc.) 733.4 million francs (US \$193 million) i.e. 188 million (US \$49 million) more than the previous year. Per head of the population, expenditure on this sector amounted to 117 francs (US \$30.80) in 1970 compared with only 41 francs (US \$10.80) in 1965 and barely 17 francs (US \$4.50) in 1961. During the last ten year period 1961-1970, the Confederation, cantons and communes spent a total of 3,446 million francs (US \$907 million) on the protection of the environment, of which 2,659 million (US \$699.9 million) was accounted for during the last five years.

Sports league table

A Swiss newspaper read throughout the country asked its readers to pick their "best sportsmen" of the year. The paper was thus able to publish two tables, one for Swiss athletes and one for world athletes, showing the rating of the Swiss public for the performances of these competitors. The first three in the Swiss table were Bernard Russi (ski Sapporo medalist), Marie-Therese Nadig (two gold medals in skiing at Sapporo) and Fritz Chervet (European flyweight champion). Karl Odermatt and Mario Prosperi (half-back and goalkeeper of the Swiss national football team) were respectively in sixth and seventh position. Athlete and long-jump national record holder Neta Antenen was only ninth. Clay Reggazzoni, the racing ace, was 21st.

As regards world athletes, the Swiss rated Eddy Merckx (Belgian cyclist champion), Mark Spitz (swimming) and Lassen Viren (long-runner), as the three top athletes for 1972. A few Swiss appear in the world league: Bernard Russi (5th), Marie-Therese Nadig (12th) and Gerald Rigolet (ice-hockey keeper) (16th). Shane Gould was elected sixth best athlete and Valery Borsov seventh. John Akii-Bua came 14th.

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