

Trams strike just averted in Geneva

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Northern Ireland Advertised

A two full-page publicity feature calling on businessmen to invest in Northern Ireland appeared in a February issue of the "Journal de Geneve", which rates as French-speaking Switzerland's "newspaper of record" and is read by bankers and industrial circles.

With heavy headings and numerous quotes from European papers and business magazines, the advertisement stresses that despite the troubles, industry in Northern Ireland is booming. Investors get generous subsidies from the Government, which has launched a massive training scheme. Labour is plentiful and, what is more, not inclined to industrial strife. The advertisement stresses that Ulster's strike record is the third of Britain's; that production has risen considerably faster than in the British mainland; that Northern Ireland's

trade unions do not take their orders from their London Headquarters and that industrialists who have a stake in Northern Ireland are all very satisfied with business prospects.

The advertisement stresses that no important plants have been damaged by incidents since the beginning of the present troubles three-and-a-half years ago.

American and German multinational companies have built large and modern plants in Northern Ireland — offering them an important gateway into the British and former EFTA markets. Some important French and Italian firms have also settled there. As no Swiss firms have so far followed suit, the conditions depicted by the advert could offer a powerful incentive. Swiss firms find it hard to expand at home owing to labour and credit restrictions. Northern Ireland could conceivably offer the best terrain for new enterprises in western Europe. It is more than likely, however, that potential investors will be put off by the troubles. Although some firms have expanded their plants in Ulster since the troubles, very few, if any, have actually taken root in the province during that period.

CHILI'S UNPAID DEBT

The Swiss Government is believed to be considering action against President Salvadore Allende's administration for the non-repayment of debts to the amount of about 12 million francs. Chili's debt to Switzerland (consisting mainly of export credits) was funded by an agreement signed in July last year. Chili was offered an extended deadline. Repayment was to be settled in thirteen six-monthly instalments starting in 1975 and first interest repayments (5 per cent) were expected late last year. It appears that Chili has found it difficult to honour its commitments, and that the Federal Division of Commerce will perhaps reconsider its attitude in respect of Swiss-Chilian trade. Switzerland will however not take any initiative without the support of the "Paris Club" which comprises Chili's creditors. Switzerland's stake is no larger than 2.5 per cent of Chili's total foreign debt. Furthermore, Swiss property hasn't yet been nationalised by President Allende's Marxist administration.

Guerrillas at Large

The Swiss authorities have opened an inquiry into the activities of Arab guerrillas in Switzerland. The case was triggered off by the arrest of three Palestinians carrying forged Israeli passports in Austria. They had come into the country from Switzerland with the alleged intention of attacking refugee camps in Austria. It is known that these camps offer a haven to many Jews from Eastern Europe.

The Swiss enquiry led to the following results: On 3rd January, three Arabs with Syrian passports and tourist visas

landed at Cointrin Airport, Geneva, where they were met by a contact, who exchanged their Syrian papers with Israeli ones. They left for Vienna on 6th January by train. On 17th January, the same liaison man received a second group of three Arabs carrying Syrian passports and tourist visas. The group exchanged these for Israeli documents and they left by train for Vienna, where they were arrested for carrying forged documents. The contact in Vienna who had welcomed the former group immediately organised its escape to Italy. The three managed to cross the Italian border but were arrested soon after. All six men have admitted to being Palestinians and some being members of the Black September terrorist organisation.

Further enquiries on the Swiss end have shown that the Geneva contact, Mohamed Boudia, 39, resident in Paris, had lived in Geneva in the flat of a Swiss girl. She had helped him to get an air ticket to Vienna under a false name. In her flat, Police found the name and address of the Vienna contact and various instructions on the manufacture of explosives. At the time of writing the girl had not been charged.



TRAMS STRIKE JUST AVERTED IN GENEVA

A tramway and bus strike planned to begin just as the Geneva Motorshow was about to open has been averted at the last minute following discussions between Management and the 800 drivers and conductors of Geneva's urban transport services.

The drivers' demands consisted, among other points, of a starting wage of 2,159 francs a month (£330 a month at the present rate of exchange) and a shortening from fourteen to eight years of the period of employment required to reach the top of the salary scale. The drivers also demanded a 40-hour week (something which is not yet frequent in Switzerland) and said they were entitled to their claim in view of the nervous stresses incurred in their activity.

Management called these claims extravagant and said that engineers with five years' study behind them began their careers with lower salaries. Geneva tram drivers, starting at 23,877 francs (£3,150 a year) and ending at 32,019 francs (£4,280) were the best paid in Switzerland. Management added that the satisfaction of these demands would have worsened the already heavy deficit of the Geneva transport system. This deficit is actually paid by the taxpayer.

An agreement was eventually reached following which a rise originally planned in 1974 will be backdated to 1st January, 1973. The period needed to reach the top of the wages-scale will be reduced to ten years.

Strikes are practically in-existent in Switzerland — which is hardly surprising when unqualified people earn £4,000 a year.

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