

Top pick : Jacques Dubochet

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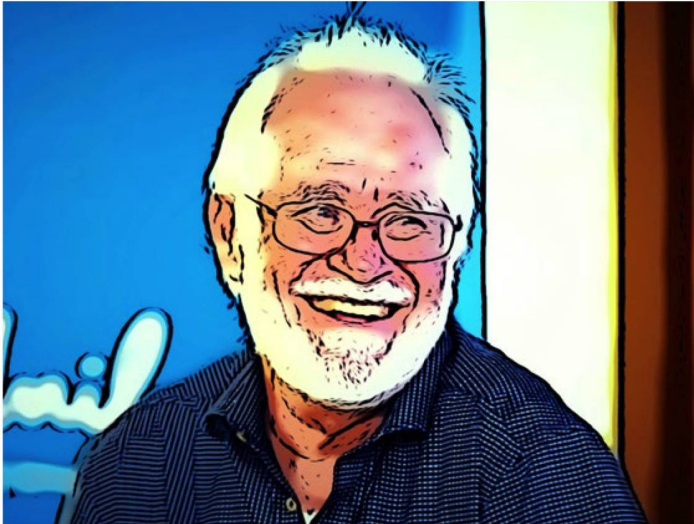
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Jacques Dubochet



One of the signs of an intelligent mind is said to be a sense of humour. Jacques Dubochet from the canton of Vaud, who was awarded the Nobel Prize in Chemistry in October, is without doubt a witty personality, and summed up his achievement by remarking that all he had done was invent cold water. Cold water? That's right, this French-speaking Swiss scientist has created a method to make it possible to flash freeze liquid solutions containing cells. This procedure, which is carried out using liquid ethane, makes it possible for samples to be observed in their natural state.

A member of staff at the University of Geneva joked to the media that the Vaud-born scientist and his colleague Alasdair McDowall had succeeded in doing what people making sorbets at home try to achieve: avoiding creating ice crystals. This is because crystallisation kills the cells in the laboratory.

In an interview with *Le Temps*, Jacques Dubochet revealed that his invention could be used in particular to "study Tau proteins, which are linked with Parkinson's disease and Alzheimer's when they accumulate in the brain". He added that he had a strong personal interest in the field as he is 75 years old!

The researcher's online CV, which delighted the international media, includes some real gems. It says that he was "the first official dyslexic in the canton of Vaud", which enabled him "to be poor at everything and to understand those experiencing difficulties". "One day he offered to take me to the hotel with his suitcase, but when we got to the car park I saw that he only had a bicycle for transportation," recalled a French researcher with amusement.

As a child, he was scared of the dark and this made him go to the library to try to understand where the sun was hiding. This fear may have stopped him from becoming a criminal, a path which this Vaud-based future Professor Calculus considered.

STÉPHANE HERZOG

Five new faces in the National Council

Five new National Councillors began work in Berne this winter. Rocco Cattaneo, an FDP politician from Ticino, has taken the place of Ignazio Cassis after his election to the Federal Council. The former cyclist attracted attention right from the off by cycling the 250 kilometres from Ticino to the capital. He was seeking to promote better safety for cyclists and more cycle routes. Irène Kälin of the Green Party has succeeded the retired National Councillor Jonas Fricker. The third new National Councillor is Nik Gugger of the EVP who takes over from Maja Ingold. Diana Gutjahr arrives in place of SVP National Councillor Hansjörg Walter, and the publishing and printing entrepreneur Hansjörg Brunner replaces the retired FDP National Councillor Hermann Hess.

Nestlé acquires Canadian company

The food group Nestlé has pulled off a billion-dollar takeover deal. The company from French-speaking Switzerland has acquired the Canadian firm Atrium Innovations for 2.3 billion dollars. The company headquartered in Quebec operates in the cosmetics, pharmaceuticals and food sectors and posted revenues of almost 700 million dollars last year. Nestlé indicated that this brings around 1,400 new employees into the group.

8.2 % Muslims by 2050?

Researchers at the Pew Research Center in Washington predict that the number of Muslims in Europe is highly likely to rise sharply over the coming decades. Even if further immigration is excluded, the Muslim population today of around 5 % of the total population is estimated to rise to 7.4 % by 2050. The researchers outlined three scenarios for Switzerland. The proportion of Muslims by 2050 will stand at 8.2 % if no more migrants arrive, at 10.3 % in the event of moderate immigration and at 12.9 % in the case of high migration, according to the researchers.

MPs call for the introduction of e-voting

Ten members of the Swiss Abroad parliamentary group have appealed to the governments and chancelleries of all the Swiss cantons at the initiative of National Councillor Tim Guldemann. They are calling for the Swiss Abroad registered on an electoral roll to be allowed to exercise their political rights at the next federal elections by voting for their National Councillors via the internet. In their letter, the ten signatories wrote: "The Swiss Abroad often receive their voting documents extremely late and sometimes even so late that they are no longer able to cast their vote in time. Only the rapid and nationwide introduction of e-voting can successfully resolve these issues."