

Red Cross streamlines its organisation

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SWISS JUSTICE HITS HARD AT MRS IRVING

Mrs. Edith Irving, wife of Clifford Irving, author of a hoax autobiography of American millionaire Howard Hughes, was sentenced by the Zurich Cantonal Court to 2 years imprisonment on charges of fraud, and forgery of documents. Two months' jail served in an American jail for similar charges were deducted from this sentence.

Mrs. Irving, 37, German-born artist of Swiss nationality, was accused of having deposited in a Swiss bank cheques to the amount of 650,000 dollars payable to a person named "H. H. Hughes" by the American publishers McGraw Hill in settlement of Howard Hughes' "autobiography". Mrs. Irving cashed three cheques — intended for the reclusive millionaire — with the help of a forged passport to the name of Helga H. Hughes, and transferred the sum to another Zurich account.

Mrs. Irving had admitted to these charges during the inquest and her trial lasted barely two hours. Her lawyer pleaded for a sentence inferior to 18 months jail. This, according to Swiss procedure, would have entitled her to an unlimited suspension. One of the three judges shared the same point of view, and supported the Prosecutor, who had also demanded 18 months, but the two other judges overruled his decision and obtained two years. Thus Mrs. Irving's sentence was harsher than the one demanded by the Prosecution: an occurrence not rare in Swiss courts. The Prosecutor explained the leniency of his demands by stating that the accused was not the principal culprit and that her husband would probably be paroled before the expiry of his sentence (two-and-a-half years in an American jail commencing last 28th August). Mrs. Irving would thus be imprisoned while her husband, who had engineered the hoax, would be free.

The court was told that Mrs. Irving had accepted to play her husband's game in order to save her marriage. She wanted

to prove to him that she was as capable of action as Danish folk-singer Nina Van Pallandt, linked with her husband in an affair. She claimed that her husband had intended to surrender the money and that his hoax was primarily to serve his literary fame. The judges recognized that Mrs. Irving deserved mitigating circumstances, but stressed the seriousness of her acts, liable under Swiss law to seven-and-a-half years' jail.

Mrs. Irving, who had voluntarily returned last September to face trial in Zurich, said that the sentence was disastrous for herself and her two children.

DISAPPOINTING EXPORTS OF SWISS WINES

A very small fraction of Switzerland's annual output of a million hectolitres of wine is exported every year. Despite strict guarantees of quality 7,000 hectolitres, or about 7 per cent, were exported in 1971. Three-quarters of it went to Common Market countries. Swiss wines have found a traditional market for a long time and it is surprising to note that Neuchatel's production scores best in the export table. This is apparently linked to the reputation of Swiss watches, most of which are produced in the Canton of Neuchatel.

Wines intended for export are examined by a federal commission for

their taste and chemical content. If they pass the test, they obtain an export subsidy.

NEW INSURANCE PREMIUMS FOUGHT IN THE FEDERAL COURTS

The administrative division of the Federal Court rejected an appeal lodged by the *Touring Club Suisse*, the "Swiss Association of Abstinent Drivers" and three private motorists against the decision by Swiss insurance companies to increase their average motor insurance premiums by 18 per cent.

Although the increase had been accepted by the federal government, the applicants complained that it was "abusive" and allowed insurance companies to build up excessive reserves. The court decided that the step taken by the companies concerned could not be termed as abusive and referred the complainants to an expertise showing that the funds controlled by the companies were at an acceptable level.

The owner of a "Mini" or a car of a comparable size now pays 292 francs a year for a comprehensive insurance if he is above 25 and has held a license for over two years.

HELP TO SWISS PRESS BY CUTTING POSTAL RATES

The Federal Council has offered to help Switzerland's extremely fragmented Press by ordering reductions of postal rates for newspapers. This assistance, the most "politically uninvolved" which was at hand, will help many of the 330 papers of Switzerland to survive.

RED CROSS STREAMLINES ITS ORGANISATION

The International Red Cross Headquarters in Geneva announced sweeping changes in its organisation. Mr. Marcel Naville, retiring President of the International Red Cross Committee, held a press conference and observers noted that this broke I.R.C.C. practice.

Answering the many criticisms that have been levelled at the Organisation because of its alleged lack of efficiency, Mr. Naville defended the excellency of its professional staff, but admitted that some personnel employed for short emergency stints had not proved equal to the importance of their task. He stressed that without more funds, the International Red Cross could not operate on full-timers alone and had to resort to contingency staff in times of crisis. The International Red Cross in Geneva has a yearly budget of about 14 million francs, seven million of which are guaranteed by the Confederation.

Mr. Naville said that a management study by a specialist from Berne University on ways of reorganising the International Red Cross administration

was actually being examined. This report suggested three major innovations to improve the efficiency of the I.R.C.C.: A new Assembly of 25 members responsible for "defining objectives"; an Executive Board of a higher professional standing than hitherto supervising the planning of the I.R.C.C. and its publications; a new management comprising permanent executives. They would implement the decisions of the Executive Board.

There have been various differences within the Red Cross leadership. These have led to the resignation of one of its most prominent members.

The Red Cross has asked another specialist to make a study of the role that the International Red Cross and International Red Cross societies should play in the world today.

Various criticisms have been voiced against the apparent lack of efficiency of the Red Cross in dealing with the situation in Vietnam and in handling the prisoner of war problem resulting from the Indo-Pakistani war of December 1971.

ANTI-JESUIT DEMONSTRATION IN BERNE

Over three thousand people demonstrated in the streets of Berne against the abrogation of two articles in the Constitution banning the active presence of Jesuits and new convents or religious orders from Switzerland. Parliament voted last September to suppress these articles from the Constitution. Its decision will be ratified by the people in a Referendum to be held on 20th May.

Calling themselves an Action committee for the maintenance of confessional peace, the demonstrators called on their compatriots to keep Jesuits and new orders away from Switzerland, thus defending the country's "confessional peace".