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Road traffic levies: Abroad, too

Why has Switzerland introduced charges for using the roads? What does the heavy vehicle levy actually consist of?

These levies, particularly the heavy vehicle levy, were introduced because the *road costs* caused by motor vehicle traffic *were not being covered*. The present forms of the traffic levies are *intended to keep the administrative costs* (staff/finance) *as low as possible*.

With regard to the heavy vehicle levy: the Confederation imposes an annual levy on *Swiss and foreign motor vehicles and trailers* with a total weight *exceeding 3,5 tonnes* for the use of roads open to general traffic. This levy is fixed according to *weight*, not the number of kilometres covered. In the case of foreign vehicles which are only temporarily in Switzerland, the levy can be paid by the *day or month*.

Why has the motorway disc encountered no noticeable resistance, while the heavy vehicle levy has led to massive protests at home and abroad?

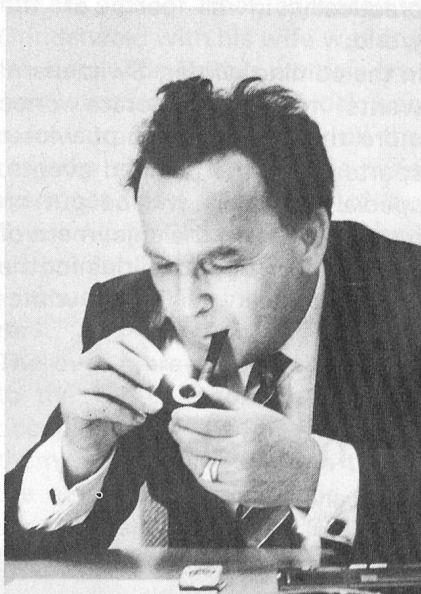
Individuals can accept the disc because *the sum of 30 francs is very modest* compared with similar levies abroad. Also, it is not new – motorway charges are to be found in several European countries.

The heavy vehicle levy, on the other hand, costs those affected much more than the disc. The Swiss transport industry fears that its competitiveness abroad will be hampered. *Abroad* the heavy vehicle levy is mostly regarded as a *tax* and not as a charge for using the roads. It is asserted that a tax of this nature contravenes the *bilateral traffic agreements* which Switzerland

has concluded with numerous countries. Consequently, some countries have taken retaliatory actions.

Which countries? Was the Federal Council surprised?

France, Czechoslovakia, the Federal Republic of Germany, Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, the GDR and



(Photo: M. von Graffenried)

Hungary have taken retaliatory action. The *scale* of this reaction was unexpected.

Were Swiss transporters asked to «call at the cash desk» even before the introduction of the new levy?

Yes, Sweden, Austria, Italy, France, Yugoslavia, Turkey and the Federal Republic of Germany (Value Added Tax on bus journeys) already had road traffic levies.

Would these protests have been avoided if Switzerland had in-

troduced a levy relating to load/kilometres covered?

It is largely because of its flat-rate nature that the heavy vehicle levy is regarded abroad as a tax and is therefore opposed. In 1980 the Federal Council proposed to Parliament the introduction of a heavy vehicle levy linked to capacity, that is to say, calculated according to tonnes/kilometres. However, Parliament accepted it only in the form of a flat-rate levy. The Swiss transport industry, in particular, pressed for this solution.

But the Federal Council intends to revert to its original proposal. It has instructed the competent Department to submit, as soon as possible, a draft for a heavy vehicle levy, within the framework of the overall traffic policy, *linked to weight/kilometres* and earmarked. This would replace the current temporary regulation. It could be levied widely and as long as the present *road account* shows a deficit attributable to heavy vehicles.

Have there been any changes in the reasons which led to the introduction of the heavy vehicle levy in 1980?

Basically, *nothing has changed*. Some elements, such as goods in transit on the roads, have even intensified.

It should also be remembered that, until the introduction of this levy, foreign heavy vehicle traffic travelled practically free of charge on our costly roads. For in Switzerland the price of diesel is higher than in neighbouring countries, so that foreigners do not fill up here and thus do not contribute to our road costs.

FDFA

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