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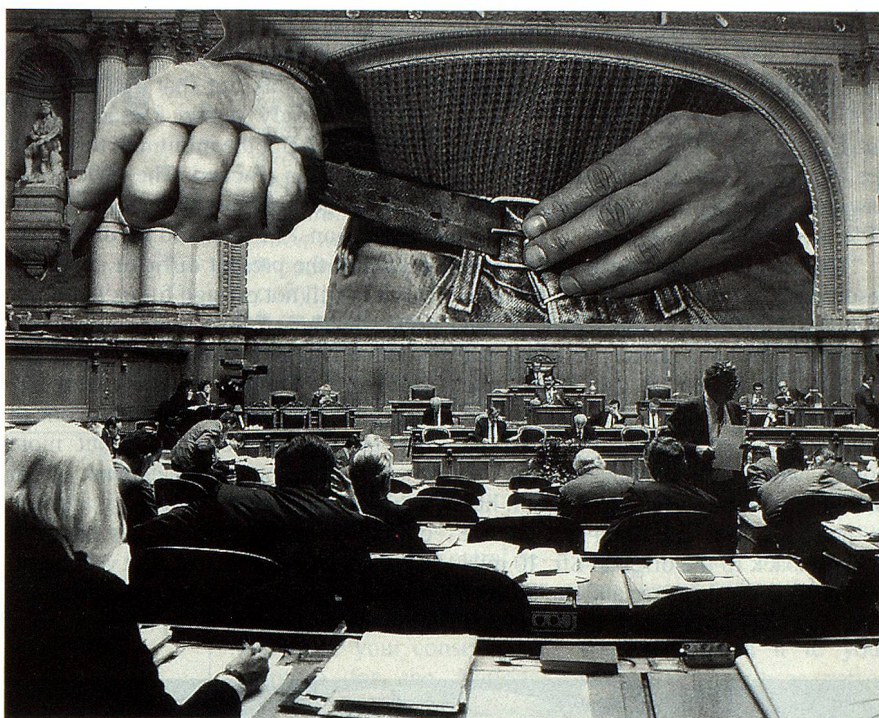
Office for Trade Promotion and the Swiss National Tourist Office, which are important for Switzerland's image abroad, are under austerity pressure. Is it not the case that Switzerland's presence abroad ought to be strengthened at present rather than reduced?

One simply has to be aware that the government has many tasks and we have to try everywhere to do with that little bit less. This is basically valid for all. But it does not mean that performance must be reduced. Perhaps we can work more efficiently with less resources. And it is also thinkable that there should be a little more imagination, a little more creativity, and a little less grumbling. I do not believe that it will only be good for Switzerland if we spend more money to promote certain things. The question is how we Swiss appear to others and what we have to offer in Switzerland. That is much more important for Switzerland's image. Switzerland must above all believe in itself.

You keep saying that it is basically possible to save everywhere. Is it acceptable to you as a Social Democrat to save in the social security field, particularly at a time of high unemployment?

When we ask the questions: "Can we save money on social security, on public transport, on the army, on agriculture?" naturally there is immediately and everywhere enormous counter-pressure. People say No, that is not possible. But when you look at the details, in social security, at the universities, in agriculture, in the army, you always come across small things which could in fact be done better, more simply and more appropriately. We must consider things carefully and also be conscious of the fact that no one wants to reduce social benefits. But at the same time we must take care not to demand too much from this country, so that it will also be able to perform in the future. It is precisely those who depend on the benefits of the state and have claims upon it who actually have the greatest interest in seeing that we succeed in balancing the budget. This means that there are indeed certain benefits which have to be re-examined – at least temporarily. But as I have said it is also a question of the most appropriate use of resources, and for this everything must be looked at.

Interview: René Lenzin and Pierre-André Tschanz



In election year parliament is having trouble deciding who should tighten the belt. (Photo cluster: Keystone)

Reducing the federal budget deficit and Switzerland's presence abroad

Squeezing the orange dry?

Together with the Fifth Switzerland, a number of institutions contribute to Switzerland's presence abroad. How are they affected by the present austerity drive?

Last year two out of the 16 Swiss schools abroad recognised and subsidised by the federal government – Milan and Barcelona – celebrated their 75th birthdays. The celebrations showed that they remain of substantial import-

thought – so that they claim a prominent role in promoting Switzerland's presence abroad. In spite of this, their subsidies are under threat – particularly those for the six schools in Europe. The Federal Department of Home Affairs – which is responsible – justifies this by the need to integrate Swiss children in European countries, which has never caused problems anyway. But the fact that the matter is being discussed in conjunction with the federal budget implies that the real reasons are indeed financial.

René Lenzin

ance to the Swiss communities in each city and that they are among the best-regarded private schools in their respective countries. Swiss schools abroad rightly consider themselves as meeting places and centres of Swiss culture and

Painful losses

This is only one example of cutbacks resulting from the federal budget deficit. Other institutions have already suffered painful losses. One of these is the cultural foundation, Pro Helvetia, which gets all its funds from the federal government. In the 1992–1995 financial plan

its resources were reduced from an original Sfr. 130 million to Sfr. 105 million, and the Swiss Office for Trade Promotion (OSEC) – whose annual federal subsidy for the 1989–1994 period was set by parliament at Sfr. 10 million – saw this figure reduced subsequently by 20% for 1993 and 1994.

“Work more efficiently with less resources” is the advice of Finance Minister Otto Stich (see interview on page 6). “We have already reduced our staff by 14% and at the same time increased efficiency”, retorts Martin Monch, head of OSEC, “but the time comes when you cannot squeeze an orange any more”. His organisation has in fact been able to bring the federal subsidy back to the original Sfr. 10 million at least for this year and the following, “but only after heavy lobbying and

same time although she says she understands the federal government’s problems, she points out that Pro Helvetia too has already shown a readiness to save money. But the minimum threshold has now been reached. The 1996–1999 draft budget contains an increase of Sfr. 118 million. “More could hardly be expected in the present difficult situation, but it is still not enough for us to do our job properly”.

What will be the consequences of the cutbacks? “Cultural relations with foreign countries will continue to be one of our tasks”, says Simmen, “but more could be done only at the expense of our work at home”. Pro Helvetia is already cutting down on its activities one at a time, i.e. one year art, the next year literature, then the theatre, etc. The cuts will obviously hurt everywhere, says

flation this year, wants to do more than just gripe. With its new strategy (see also Mosaic), the SNTTO plans to be even more active abroad than in the past: “We want to create a communications platform in which some of the resources of other organisations can be pooled”. Hartmann is referring mainly to the tourism industry, but he also has others in mind.

This immediately raises the question of a joint strategy by all involved, including Swiss Radio International, the Organisation for the Swiss Abroad and Swissair. These already work together very closely within the framework of the Coordinating Commission for Switzerland’s Presence Abroad (KOKO), which is part of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs. But this does not have any real lobby function when it comes to defending credits and subsidies in parliament. “We regard ourselves more as an acting body than as a soliciting one”, says KOKO Secretary Claude Borel, and the Commission’s Chairman, former State Secretary Klaus Jacobi, agrees: “It does not see itself as a lobby, that is a job for the individual members”.

OSEC Director Monch can readily imagine joint lobbying by KOKO’s members, “but they do of course have diverging interests”; and Rosmarie Simmen refers to “limited synergies only”. She points out that Pro Helvetia projects another, more differentiated image of Switzerland than the SNTTO for example. SNTTO’s Hartmann admits that culture is not an easy area but thinks closer contact could nevertheless have a positive effect: “One of the tasks of all the organisations concerned with Switzerland’s presence abroad is precisely to demonstrate the idea that undertaking more action which rises above one’s own sphere makes sense”.

In the eyes of Katrin Wyss, head of the Committee for Swiss Schools Abroad, the schools would make a good point of departure for joint action: “In many ways they embody Switzerland as a product. They stand for the high quality of our education system, they are open to the requirements of their host country, they train future generations of business managers and politicians, they organise cultural events, and they help create close links between Switzerland and their host country”. For Wyss this is reason enough to maintain the subsidies to the schools at their present level. This is true even if in the present situation it is by no means easy to avoid Otto Stich’s red pen. ■



Saving at the expense of Switzerland’s presence abroad? For example, branches of the Swiss National Tourist Office? (Photo: zvg)

an ironing out of differences between the National Council and the Council of States.” In fact even this amounts to a cut, since the subsidy is not indexed to inflation.

“That is a typical quantitative argument which cannot simply be applied everywhere” is the verdict of State Councillor Rosmarie Simmen, president of Pro Helvetia, on Stich’s recipe. At the

OSEC’s Monch, but particularly in “advertising the Switzerland trademark abroad”. Invitations to journalists and publications will be particularly hit. And the various chambers of commerce abroad will also feel the effects.

Increased cooperation?

All those concerned agree that overall more ought to be done for promoting the presence of Switzerland abroad. But Marco Hartmann, the new head of the Swiss National Tourist Office (SNTTO), whose federal subsidy was frozen at the 1993 level but has been adjusted to in-