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The Nobel Prize for Medicine in Swiss hands



The highest honour goes to a professor of Zurich University. Rolf M. Zinkernagel has been awarded the Nobel Prize for Medicine for his services to research of the immune system. It is worth Sfr. 1.4 million. This is the twenty-fourth time the prize has gone to a Swiss citizen and the tenth time to a researcher working in Zurich.

The Swedish Karolinska Institute honoured the 52-year-old head of the Institute for Experimental Immunology for having laid the foundation stone of understanding the mechanisms of how the immune system distinguishes

between what is "foreign" and what is the body's own. Zinkernagel shares the prize with 55-year-old Australian vet Peter Doherty. In 1973 the two scientists together conducted research into how the immune system recognises virus-infected cells. This knowledge was as important for immunology as understanding the difference between red and green is for driving a vehicle. The fact is that the immune system saves us from death on a daily basis and that better understanding of it facilitates the search for new therapies to combat disease.

Zinkernagel originally intended to be a surgeon but opted for a life in the laboratory instead – and has already 200 publications to his name. The discoveries for which he has now been honoured are to be found in every medical manual.

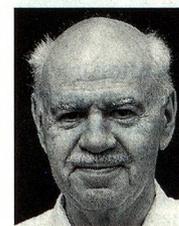
His interests extend well beyond research. A few years ago he spoke out against a ban on animal experiments, and today he is a committed opponent of the gene protection initiative. ■

Point of view

"At present Switzerland is concerned mainly with the weaker among us. We need something in the nature of a national exhibition to open our eyes, to make us see where our strengths lie".

Berne FDP National Councillor François Loeb

Bernd Schildger is the new director of Berne's zoo. This 40-year-old vet was previously assistant director of Frankfurt Zoo. His predecessor, Max Müller, had to leave the post on the grounds of weak leadership.



"Mein Kampf" (My Struggle), a portrait of Hitler, was his most well-known film. Now he has lost his own last struggle. Berlin-born publicist and documentary film-

maker **Erwin Leiser** has died aged 73. The world of cinema has lost a man who fought untiringly to prevent Nazi atrocities being forgotten.

People

Alfred Vogel was a nature healer and founder of Bioforce AG in Roggwil, Canton Thurgau. He has now died at the age of 94. An important pioneer and publicist

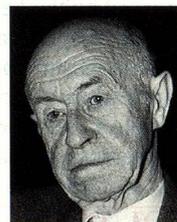


in the field of nutrition teaching and nature healing, he was convinced "that man is what he eats". His most famous book "The Little Doctor" has been translated into twelve languages world-wide and been published in two million copies.

Internationally reputed graphic designer **Josef Müller-Brockmann** has died in Zurich, aged 82. He was a path-breaker in the development of graphic self-portraits.

38-year-old ethnologist and development assistant **Nicole Bezencon Heri** from La Chaux-de-Fonds, Canton Neuchâtel, has been shot dead in Mozambique. She was killed by armed robbers while on duty. This mother of two was working for Swiss Development Cooperation on a hydraulic engineering project.

Oskar Reck, one of the great Swiss publicists and journalists, has left us. He died of leukaemia at the age of 76. Right up to the end, this former editor-in-chief was writing waspish commentaries on current events in "Basler Zeitung", "Weltwoche" and "Brückenbauer".



Swiss painter and sculptor **Martin Disler** has died prematurely at 47 of a stroke. A native of Soleure, he was one of the most internationally known Swiss artists.

As a woman, **Christine Beerli** was an unlikely choice to become a member of the Council of States' FDP group leadership. This Liberal Democrat from Bienne, who will now preside over 62 members of parliament, is aged 43.

The new general secretary of the Swiss People's Party (SVP) is **Martin Baltisser**. He is aged 27, comes from Canton Thurgau and succeeds Myrtha Welti. From 1992 to 1995, he was press chief of SVP Switzerland. ■

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Unterlagen und Beratung: Rektor Daniel C. Fridez

Snippets

- The Swiss population is being given an unwelcome present. Sickness fund premiums – which already rose in 1996 – are about to see another massive increase. According to place of residence and insurance category, this will range from a few percentage points to more than one-third – with the average being 12%. The sickness funds justify this by the rise in health care costs.

- Jobs, hops and malt lost. Three breweries – Gurten (Berne), Hürlimann (Zurich) and Cardinal (Fribourg) – are closing. 680 of the 3,500 jobs involved will go. The end of these famous breweries has provoked strong protests amongst the media, consumers and the respective cantonal authorities.

- Swiss Bank Corporation intends to close every fourth location – or 80 branches – in the next few years, with a loss of 1,700 jobs. Provisions rising to Sfr. 3.3 billion resulted in a loss of Sfr. 1.9 billion in fiscal 1996. For the last three years this Basle big bank has been assiduously restructured, refocused and reorganised.

- An era comes to an end in Berne. The Von Roll company is moving to Thun, and Von Roll Group is merging with the Armament Group of the Federal Military Department. Formation of the resulting firm, Von Roll Betec AG, will lead to 60 job losses, but on the upside 380 workplaces will be saved.

- Aluisse-Lonza has bought the American firm, Wheaton, for Sfr. 500 million, and has thus entered the world market for pharmaceutical packaging. Wheaton is a family company on the US east coast with 5,750 employees and sales of US\$ 450 million.

- 950 workplaces will be lost at textile machine manufacturer Sulzer Rütli by the end of 1997. Although the Sulzer group is the branch leader with a 25% world market share, its accounts are nevertheless in the red.

- Footballers too are now getting themselves organised. Their trade union, Profoot, has entered the Swiss Trades Union Federation. It is hoping for legal recognition. ■

*Texts: Alice Baumann
Photos: Keystone*

Switzerland in figures

- Bad news from economic researchers at the Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich. They are forecasting growth of a modest 0.9% in 1997 and a rise in unemployment of 5%. This means that joblessness will be up ten times on 1990.

- “Historical Statistics of Switzerland”. This is the name of a 1,200-page work containing figures about the country and its people over a period of several centuries. Subject matter extends from population development and agriculture through climate and causes of death to politics and economics. For example, it is possible to discover from which part of the country the most Swiss on average emigrated overseas around the turn of the last century: it was Ticino. Charts make the material easily readable. The commentaries appear in German, French and English.

This is the first compilation of the sort for our country; others such as France and the United States have possessed such important reference works for research, teaching and journalism for decades. ■

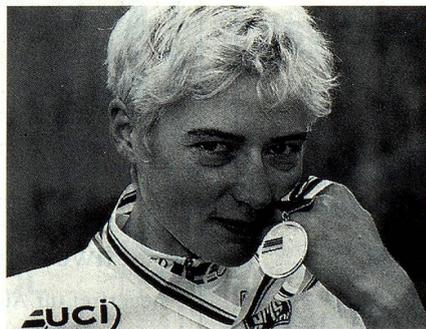
“Historische Statistik der Schweiz / Statistique historique de la Suisse / Historical Statistics of Switzerland”, Chronos-Verlag, Zurich 1996, 1,200 pages, ca. Sfr. 168 (plus postage). The book may be ordered from the Secretariat for the Swiss Abroad, Alpenstrasse 26, CH-3000 Berne 16.

New 20 franc note

A year after the new 50 franc note, the 20 franc note has now changed its face. It is red instead of blue, cannot be counterfeited and bears the portrait of composer Arthur Honegger (1892–1955). The old 20 franc note remains valid until further notice.

Cycling: a rain of medals for Switzerland

After 45 years, Switzerland has once again produced cycling world champions. 28-year old Alex Zülle from eastern Switzerland obtained a gold in the Lugano time trial. In pouring rain, he beat Englishman Christopher Boardman (silver) and Switzerland’s Tony Rominger (bronze) over the 40.5 km stretch. Zülle – as champion in his own country – greeted his award on the stand with a stream of tears.



A second gold medal was won convincingly by Barbara Heeb from Appenzell. She was the first Swiss woman to obtain a world championship title. A silver medal was won by Ticino’s Mauro Gianetti in the road race.

Zülle also won this year’s Spanish Vuelta. Three weeks, 22 stages and almost 4,000 km had to be ridden,

and at the end of it all the round-Spain race ended with a three-fold Swiss triumph. Alex Zülle won, with French speaker Laurent Dufaux and Tony Rominger from Zug as runners-up. After Ferdi Kübler, Hugo Koblet, Carlo Clerici and Tony Rominger, Zülle is only the fifth professional cyclist to have emerged victorious in one of the three great European country-wide races. ■

