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EXPENSIVE OFFICE

Max Leuenberger, the newly elected Federal Councillor has already created a stir when it was announced that he just spent 164,700 SFR of tax money to remodel his office in the "Bundeshaus". When Leuenberger took over the office vacated by Federal Councillor Ogi he did not like what he saw. Only seven years ago Ogi had spent several hundred thousands of Swiss Francs to create an office full of natural stones (nicknamed the "Granitbüro") to give an impression of solidity and permanence to his quarters. Leuenberger ripped it all out to create a more flexible office with lighter furniture that could be moved around according to circumstances.

The "Bundeskanzlei" in charge of expenditures for the "Bundeshaus" cannot understand what the fuss is all about. After all, it claims, previous Federal Councillors, amongst them Elisabeth Kopp, had spent far more public money to remodel their own offices. Perhaps the "Bundeskanzlei" has never heard of the popular expression: Two wrongs do not make one right".

And what happened to Ogi's "Granitbüro"? Has he taken it home or has it been installed in someone else's office who also wanted something solid and permanent? The report does not say...

SAMNAUN UPSETS TIROL

For years the valley of Samnaun in the lower Engadin has enjoyed a unique position: it is a duty free haven where Swiss and Austrians can shop to their hearts content at much cheaper prices than in either country. In particular liquor, cigarettes and cheaper petrol are the popular items and this traffic is a thorn in the eye of the Tirol authorities who claim that they are losing 20 million SFR a year in taxes on the petrol sales alone.

So Tirol is trying through diplomatic channels to kill Samnaun's duty free status. Samnaun's reply to the Tirol accusations is to point out that it employs quite a number of Austrian staff who take back to their country over 12 million SFR per year in salaries on which they pay income tax in Austria.

So the battle is on and Swiss and Austrian diplomats will now have many months or years of work ahead of themselves to try to come to a compromise over Samnaun's unique position. In the meantime, duty free sales go on full speed ahead in this remote valley.

ACCIDENTS GALORE

In 1994 some 740,000 accidents had been registered in Switzerland according to statistics published by the 80 Swiss accident insurance companies. Leisure time accidents exceeded work related accidents by over one third.

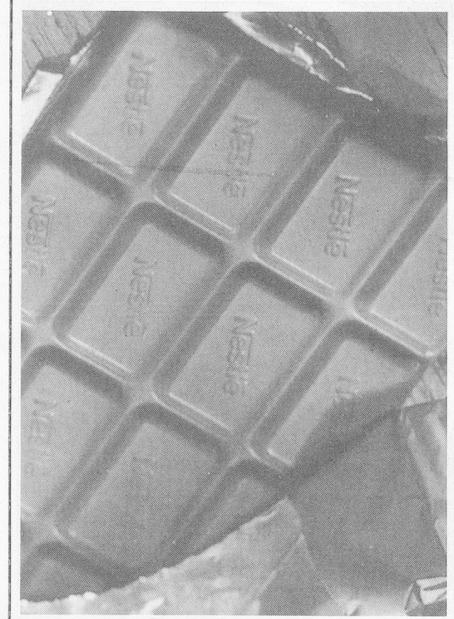
The lowest rate of work related accidents is recorded in the fields of banking, insurances and real estate whilst the highest rates are shared by farming, furniture manufacturing, timber work and construction where the risks are 20 times higher.

The average cost per accident came to around SFR 5000. This amount multiplied by 740,000 gives you a staggering SFR 3,700,000,000 or 3.7 billion SFR. A lot of money for the insurers to pay out. On the other hand, the insurers collected some 4 billion SFR in premiums, so they still finished on top. So if you divid 4 billion SFR by the number of inhabitants in Switzerland, you come to the conclusion that every person in the country, including children and infants, pays around SFR 600 per year in accident compensation.

APOLOGY

No doubt, all you very astute and observant readers, especially our friends from Taranaki, will have noticed that in the last issue inadvertently two pictures got interchanged. The picture at the top of page 3 had absolutely nothing to do with the text underneath and likewise neither had the photo at the top of page 10. Simple permute the two pictures and everything will make sense.

As an editor, it does not matter how carefully you put things together, there is always someone somewhere who manages to goof it up a bit. We trust that our Taranaki friends will accept our apology.



GOOD NEWS FOR CHOCOLATE LOVERS

According to a report in the magazine "Nutritio", chocolate is apparently not as bad for your health as was thought in the past. So no need anymore for you to sneak to your fridge in the middle of the night to "steal" a few bars of chocolate when no one can see you.

First of all chocolate does not affect your level of cholesterol, secondly, provided you keep your mouth clean (regularly brush using a good toothpaste) your teeth will not suffer either and thirdly 15gr of chocolate do not contain more calories than an apple.

A closer look at the report reveals that it comes from Vevey, world headquarters of Nestlé and that the magazine "Nutritio" in which it appeared is actually produced by this very same firm. Coincidence? Surely, Nestlé would not try to blow its own trumpet and make us buy more of its own chocolate than we have done so far?

In all fairness, the report also warns that chocolate is only good for you if eaten in moderation. If you scoff it down by the kilograms, it won't do you much good. But the trouble with chocolate is that it can become so addictive.



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