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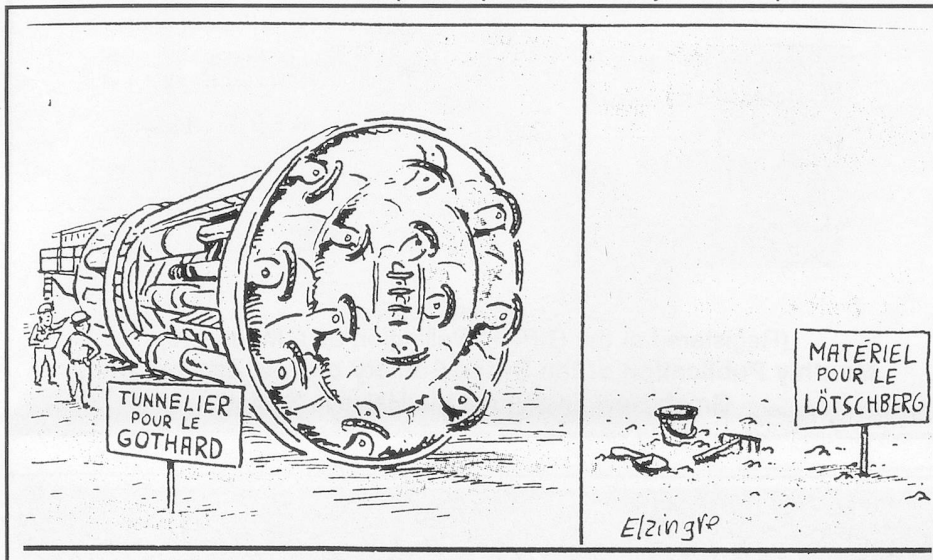
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GOTTHARD VERSUS LOETSCHBERG

The battle is raging between those Swiss cantons that favour exclusively the construction of the new train tunnel through the Gotthard and those advocating the reconstruction of both the Gotthard and the Lötschberg tunnels. This is presently dividing Switzerland into East (Gotthard) and West (Gotthard and Lötschberg). As the East is all German speaking and the West mainly French, the argument is developing into another fight between the German and the French speaking parts of Switzerland. Cartoonists were quick to pick on the subject as the picture shows.



On the left is the huge tunnelling machine for the Gotthard, on the right the tools to build the new Lötschberg tunnel.

ANTI-SMOKERS REJOICE

There are no Swiss tobacco companies left any more. The last Swiss cigarette manufacturer, the old and famous Burrus company of Boncourt (Jura) has been sold to the Rothmans group.

With this sale, the very last Swiss owned tobacco company has gone into foreign hands. Up to now Burrus controlled 22% of the Swiss market. Whether the Burrus factory in Boncourt will be kept going has not yet been disclosed.

SWISS ON THE MOVE

Traditionally the Swiss were considered as people very reluctant to shift houses or apartments. Once settled in, they used to live in the same place for years on end. The reason for this was also somewhat due to the difficulties in finding vacant flats and houses and so the tendency was to stay put.

Despite the fact that the accommodation market is still tight, more and more people are moving. In the city of Zurich alone, over 80.000 people had shifted in 1995. This represents one in every 5 persons, a very high percentage in an area where the number of vacant flats and houses has always been notoriously low. But somehow, these people managed it but, as the picture shows, transporting your belongings from one place to another seems to be a more challenging job than finding a new flat.



THE NETHERLANDS CLOSE ALL CONSULATES IN SWITZERLAND

For economical reasons, The Netherlands have decided to close all five consulates they were operating in Zurich, Basle, Geneva, Davos and Lugano and to retain only their Embassy in Berne.

(Your Editor denies categorically to be responsible for this move which some of you thought had been prompted by his Editorial in the September issue of the Helvetia where he joked about some Dutch family and place names).

TUNNEL ENERGY

Talking about tunnels, someone very clever, discovering that a lot of heat and sometimes hot water comes out of many train and road tunnels, decided to study the feasibility of making use of this free energy. It is now expected that in the year 2000 several hundred homes could be heated and provided with hot water emanating from nearby tunnels.

So if you want a house in Switzerland with free central heating, build it over a tunnel, but try to pick a train rather than a road tunnel, the air might be less poisonous for your lungs.

LAKE WINTERTHUR ? A FASCINATING PROJECT

As we all know, Winterthur's location is not a particularly desirable one. Apart from the small river Töss, which has been mostly covered over anyway, Winterthur has no river to speak of and certainly no lake. Unlike most other major cities in Switzerland that have either one or the other or even both, Winterthur sits there in its natural bowl, an industrial city with practically no attractive aquatic features at all.

But all this may well change in the future as a project is under way to create a huge artificial lake purely for recreational purposes. Although the local authorities, like everywhere else, are short of funds, the project is receiving much attention and it is fully supported by the local population. Winterthurers are tired of having to travel out of the city to engage in any type of water sport, so the idea of a man-made lake right at their doorstep appeals to them very much despite the high costs involved. The authorities are slightly worried about how to tackle the scheme, as nothing of this kind and of this scale had ever been attempted in Switzerland before.

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