

**Zeitschrift:** The Swiss observer : the journal of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK

**Herausgeber:** Federation of Swiss Societies in the United Kingdom

**Band:** - (1970)

**Heft:** 1594

**Rubrik:** Swiss news

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**Download PDF:** 03.02.2026

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# The Swiss Observer

Published Twice Monthly at  
63/67 TABERNACLE STREET  
LONDON E.C.2  
Tel.: 01-253 2321

Telegrams: Paperwyse Stock London  
HON. PRESIDENT: Robert J. Keller  
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ceptional burden of import levies on agricultural products. She will moreover have to adapt her fiscal system and introduce value added tax, all things which will be exceedingly costly. Switzerland, quite apart from the problems of labour and neutrality, would have quite a job in adapting her agriculture and her particular defence to the conditions of entry in the EEC. She too would have to pay an initial heavy cost.

The sun had settled behind the Georgian buildings of Fitzroy Square. Monsieur Iselin closed his folder and ended his masterful exposé. A heated applause broke the awed silence reigning in the dim Society Room at Swiss House.

(PMB)

## COMMENT

### EPILOGUE TO THE VOTE ON JUNE 7th

All the Swiss in responsibility must have sighed with relief on Sunday evening, June 7th, when it was known that the Schwarzenbach Initiative, aiming at repatriating 309,000 foreign residents in Switzerland, was rejected in a nation-wide referendum. It was a close win, however. 54 per cent of those who went to the polls—and they turned up in record numbers—voted against the Initiative and 46 per cent in favour. This is a staggering result when one considers that every party (except fringe movements like the Vigilants in Geneva and Schwarzenbach's own party in Zurich) strongly recommended a rejection of the initiative. And not only the parties, but the unions, the churches and almost the entire Press. In fact there has never been so much briefing, admonestation and preaching in some Swiss papers than at this time. They took the greatest pains to disclose and develop the complete Schwarzenbach dossier so that readers really needed a good dose of ill-will and political carelessness to go to the polls ignorant of the implications of the Schwarzenbach Initiative.

The fact that 46 per cent of voters did vote for Schwarzenbach in spite of all this massive propaganda staged against his initiative from all sides just shows that neither the Press, the parties and the churches have any measure of influence in curbing votes that spring from ingrained feelings and emotions. It is by no means the first time that the doubtful influence of the Press in a period of national decision was demonstrated and it is most probable that nearly all those who rejected the Initiative would have done so any way. The results in Geneva were most significant. Although the town and the Canton rejected the Initiative, there were a majority of supporters in the electoral wards of Les Paquis, Les Acacias et La Jonction, all parts of Geneva with a strong working class population. These people have then voted, almost deliberately, against their parties and

their unions. A commentator has written that the workers, the lower paid and all those who feel that they have been left behind by the wave of prosperity in recent years made no distinction between the foreign labour issues and the other social problems. In voting with Schwarzenbach they were not only expressing a primary dislike of their foreign mates, but standing against the Capital and the rich (i.e. those who benefit the most from foreign labour) and expressing their general social grievances.

The participation to the referendum was of 74 per cent, the highest participation since the referendum of 6th July 1947 in which national old age pension was approved by the people participating at 79 per cent. On June 7th Schaffhausen held the record with 87.3 per cent and six other cantons had average participation of over 80 per cent. Berne, Fribourg, Lucerne, Nidwald, Obwald, Schwyz, Solothurn, and Uri were the cantons and half cantons who accepted the Schwarzenbach Initiative. The greatest surprise of all came from Berne, which (with its Juraian industries) has compelling interests in keeping its foreign element. The other cantons on the list all have very few foreign workers (less than the 10 per cent limit) and a theory put forward by a commentator to explain this vote was that, if Schwarzenbach had his way, these cantons would get the excess of workers forced out of the industrial cantons and thus be favoured in their economic development.

The pro-Communist Labour Party was the most outspoken opponent of the Initiative, not so much out of concern for the welfare of Swiss industrialists as that of seasonal workers, who helplessly live under the care and mercy of their employers and whose already pitiful plight would have been worsened as a result of the massive repatriation of foreign residents.

Women were not allowed to take part in this referendum because, as readers know, they may only vote in cantonal issues, and this only in a minority of cantons. However unjust this state of affairs it was perhaps a boon in this vital referendum, for the good reason that women often tend to vote emotionally, that they have at least as many emotional complaints against foreigners as the men. There are therefore very good reasons to suppose that if women had had their say, then Schwarzenbach would have had his way.

(PMB)

## SWISS NEWS

### POLITICAL

Although political life was overshadowed by the imminence of the 7th June vote in Switzerland, there were other events worthy of note. The Council of States and the National Council were in unusual disagreement over a new housing bill. The National Coun-

cil was ready to grant to landlords the right of cancelling the lease of their tenants under special circumstances and the Council of States would have none of it. The issue was not only one of settling the rift between the "have and have-not" of our society but there were economic and constitutional problems involved as well. Housing legislation has always been a cantonal preserve and the Council of States, which represents the cantons and is necessarily more federalistic in outlook, was in favour of a legislation tailored to the individual situation of each canton. A conciliatory commission was brought together and it arrived at the agreement that when a lease cancellation brings the tenant into proven and unsurmountable material difficulties, a judicial body elected by each canton will be empowered to prolong the lease by one year. This statement and further refinements will have to be passed by the two councils this month.

Switzerland as a whole is acutely short of housing, the main cause of this situation being partly a voluntary credit squeeze by the banks aimed at cooling the economy, and partly the fact that Swiss savings have at present outlets more lucrative than building societies (or their Swiss equivalent). This means that there is just not enough money available to build the new houses which are so badly needed. But in Geneva, where the situation is the worst, the Workers' Union, the Managerial Association of the Canton and a Geneva savings bank got together to work out a scheme involving the construction of a new town with over two thousand flats and 7,000 inhabitants. Work has already started. The site of the new town is a vast nursery which was bought wholepiece by a local firm, which is thus financing the project and spending the money which the banks could not afford to give.

#### FOREIGN POLICY

Although the case is not one to affect the destiny of nations, the Von der Weid affair has doubtless given a few bad nights to Mr. Pierre Graber, the new head of the Political Department, and to the Swiss Ambassador in Brazil. Jean Marc Von der Weid, a

Brazilian and Swiss double national youth who got politically involved in Brazil, the country in which his family has lived for two generations, who was arrested and tortured by the regime. Under such circumstances, he should have been visited and defended by the Swiss Embassy and enjoyed the protective rights of his Swiss nationality. The Ambassador was belatedly informed of his plight and decided not to take any action owing to the fact that Von der Weid had destroyed his Swiss passport and that his family had outspokenly refused all mediation by the Swiss authorities in the affair. He was nonetheless called back to Berne for explanations.

Since Cambodia and China have become estranged, their respective diplomatic representations have been stranded in Pnom Phen and Peking. It will be for the Swiss Ambassador in Peking to take care of the relations between the two countries and Swissair will be transporting the diplomats back to their bases.

Representing the interests of other countries can be a risky business. Switzerland represents the USA in Cuba. Last month twelve Cuban fishermen were kidnapped by anti-Castroists and the building of the American Embassy, occupied by the Swiss Vice-Consul and an Embassy clerk, was stormed by an angry mob for 70 hours. Switzerland was accused by the vexed Cubans of complicity with the Americans. The fishermen were eventually freed and our Vice-Consul could breathe again in freedom and safety.

#### ECONOMY

Mr. Celio, head of the Department of Finance, failed in his attempt to lift the limits in time and amount of the two direct taxes through which the Confederation gets its livelihood—the military tax and the turnover tax—which are laid down in the Constitution. The obstruction came from the Council of States.

Hardly a year after the ruling Federal Decree on the establishment of foreign banks, the present regulations are going to be stiffened considerably according to a new law still in its draft-

stage. There are apparently too many unsound foreign banks in the country.

The four chemical giants of Basle—Ciba, Geigy, Roche and Sandoz—have held a conference to inform the Press on their common situation. The industry had at present some difficulties such as: the complication and cost to the companies of present medicine legislation (testing and control was too lengthy in many cases); patents were insufficiently protected so that inventions which had cost years and millions to produce could too easily be copied; there was an acute shortage of labour; research was going through a difficult phase as only ten to twenty of the 100,000 products elaborated each year in the industry's laboratories could be used commercially. The four companies employ 45,000 people in Basle and 118,750 in all. Their combined turnover is 13.1 billion francs.

#### OTHER FIELDS

The President of the Swiss Society of Authors, Mr. Maurice Zermatten, having contributed to the Swiss Little Red Book, the younger and militant members of the society claimed for his resignation. Mr. Zermatten remained in office and 22 dissidents walked out of the Society last month. They included the most prominent Swiss men of letters: writers like Frisch, Durrenmatt, Walter Diggemann and Jörg Steiner. The Society has 429 members, the majority of whom are over 60, and the condition for admission is to have published at least two books of recognised value.

The idea of an intercantonal police force, which sprang with the disturbances of 1968, is still being debated by each canton. As a Federal Police Force has been ruled out, the scheme is that each canton should reserve a part of their police force and lend it to fellow cantons which have temporary difficulties with law and order. The idea is gaining ground but no concrete steps have as yet been taken.

Rene Payot, probably the best-known French Swiss journalist, has died in Geneva. He was particularly appreciated in war-time France, where his broadcasts from Sotterns gave hope to millions of occupied Frenchmen.

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