

Comment

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fortunately not so and they have apparently become normally constituted and successful human beings. Asked by a family man how he brought up his children, Piaget said that he had to admit to his incompetence as an educator because his paternal fibre often contradicted his pedagogical theories.

(PMB)

COMMENT

A NEW PROPOSAL FOR THE "PEACE OF HOUSING"

Perhaps the only major source of social discontent in Switzerland is the high cost and shortage of housing. Council estates of the British kind are unknown in Switzerland and cheaply-built housing of a social nature is financed in the main by private institutions and submitted to the constraints of a free economy. The rent of an ordinary flat in any major town amounts to 100 francs a room per month which means that a working man may have to pay a third of his income in rent.

It is not surprising therefore that the majority of people are complaining against rich landlords and "speculators" whom they believe are amassing unmerited fortunes. Although rent control has been abolished the law forbids real estate companies to get the return on their investments in less than 15 years. The soaring costs of land and building have partially accounted for the high cost of new accommodation.

A Radical National Councillor from Zug, Mr. Brunner has had the peculiar idea of instituting an obligatory control by tenants of their landlords' books. He has presented this formula in an individual initiative. Needless to say, many house owners and "bourgeois" Swiss will reject this notion outright. The most radical-minded workers may also spurn it as an attempt to withhold rents from the control of the State. Yet the idea put forward by Mr. Brunner resembles the recent initiative by trade unions in favour of worker participation in management.

Workers, it is said, should have an eye in their company's books so that they can see for themselves that they are being offered a fair deal. Likewise, irate tenants struggling to meet their rent should be shown the proof that their landlords are justified in claiming the rents they do.

It should be interesting to see how the population will respond to Mr. Brunner's suggestion. If the National Council, which has first to examine the initiative, allows it to go through, then one can expect a majority of voters in the large towns to give their support.

(PMB)

SWISS NEWS

RUSSIAN-SWISS CONFRONTATION

The costly naivety of a Swiss teacher

The Bernese biology teacher Francois de Perregaux, 33 years of age, has been sentenced to three years imprisonment for having given his passport to a 28-year-old Russian physicist, Mr. Dmitri Mikheyev, who had sought to flee to the West. Mr. Perregaux was arrested on 3rd October, 1970 and it is not yet known whether these 11 months of detention will be subtracted from his sentence.

Everything had been undertaken for his defence. The Swiss Embassy in Moscow was represented at his trial (held in camera) as well as his father. The trial lasted for five days and the western journalists who attempted to penetrate the building were forced back by police in civilian clothes. Mr. Mikheyev had been arrested as he was about to board a plane at Vienna. He was sentenced to eight years of hard labour.

NATURAL DISASTER

A tornado devastates the Joux Valley

A tornado fell upon the Joux Valley in the Jura and damaged or destroyed dozens of houses in the villages of Le Brassus, Orient and Envy. Its force was such that several hectares of forest were uprooted, 100,000 cubic metres of debris and earth blocked the Molandruz Pass, and 20-ton lorries were tossed for tens of yards by the depression.

The tornado caused havoc in a camping site, blowing tents away and overturning caravans. Fortunately there were no death casualties, but six were wounded, two seriously. The tornado swept through most of the Swiss Jura. It uprooted woods at Romainmotier. It struck a saw-mill at Le Brassus and piles of logs were strewn over acres like match-sticks. The cost of the disaster was expected to run into millions of francs. Rescue teams were soon in the worst hit areas and organised the transport of tarpaulins to cover the many roofless houses.

THE DOLLAR CRISIS

Taking the necessary steps

The Swiss government saw the recent monetary crisis not unfavourably because it demonstrated the unhealthiness of the international currency situation, in particular the fact that the dollar was no longer convertible against gold. The Swiss National Bank had in the course of the previous months to mop up some two billion dollars. It acted concurrently with

other central banks in suspending further acquisition of dollars and closing the foreign exchange market. There was an exception for the benefit of stranded American tourists, who were allowed to exchange 30 dollars a day at a rate guaranteed by the National Bank of four francs to the dollar, marginally less than the rate of 4.08 francs to the dollar that had prevailed on the money market a week before the crisis.

The dollars that were circulating for free capital transactions were negotiated at the unexpectedly high rate of a dollar for 3.80 francs owing to the ruling disfavour of Euro-dollars and the expectancy of a settlement of the situation. The Swiss stock exchange suspended dealings in foreign stock in awaiting a clearing up of the situation. Swiss investors on the American stock market were uneasy about this lack of confidence and failed to follow the optimism of a market made buoyant by President Nixon's measures.

Swiss trade was expected to suffer from this presidential package, in particular the hard-pressed watch industry, which exports 20 per cent of its production to the USA. The machine industry, which exports about 8.5 per cent of its production to America, its third customer after Germany and France, viewed the surcharge with concern. The chemical giants of Basle had little to fear, since they are firmly implanted in America.

In the main, commentators deplored the slowness of reforming the monetary system and urged an early international consultation, striking the metal while it was hot. The Swiss National Bank has always maintained a policy of not being strapped with too many dollars, and the Swiss franc is still one of the only currencies entirely backed by gold. If gold is to be re-valued then Switzerland's reserves, now already comparable to those of Great Britain, will get a serious boost.

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