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COMMENT

THE ADVENT OF THE SHOPPING CENTRE

With the recent opening of the Balexert Shopping Centre on the outskirts of Geneva, the Spreitenbach Centre outside Zurich has its western counterpart. There have been shopping centres in Britain for a long time, but to our knowledge none of them can compare with these two gigantic shopping precincts for their size and the variety of goods they have on offer.

The shopping centre is the last stage of an evolution which has successively known the individual shop, the department store and the self-service supermarket. There was a time when housewives living in large towns would find the time more than absorbed in preparing the mid-day meal and cleaning the house during the morning. Shopping was a real expedition, both from the point of view of human contact and husbandry.

Eventually the American example, Gottlieb Duttweiler and others developed sales techniques enabling thrifty Swiss housewives to buy their family needs cheaper and the supermarkets gradually took precedence over the individual shops. Cheapness was not the only ground. There was also expediency, particularly appreciated by working women, which made them forsake the old human relationship found in the small shops.

Large towns, capitalism, the increase of purchasing power and the development of public transports had favoured the growth of the department store in the last century already. The shopping centre brought together the

advantages of both the department store and the supermarket. The principle at the Spreitenbach Centre is to sell as much as cheaply as possible. It is also to sell all the things which can be found in a department store.

The capital advantage of the shopping centre is, of course, that it usually incorporates a vast car park. The big city shops have been steadily losing ground because of the difficulty of reaching them by car at a time when more housewives like to use a car on their errands. The signs are that large and traffic-clogged towns could eventually cease to attract shoppers for common goods and give way to vast shopping precincts built from scratch outside them. The new department stores, and in particular the new *Globus* in Zurich, are trying to correct this tendency by equipping themselves with underground parking lots.

The Spreitenbach Centre is a gigantic conservatory of almost all the goods that money can buy. To walk along its two 500-metre long floors is comparable to walking along Oxford Street and considerably more convenient. The main snag with Spreitenbach is that, with the present state of works on the Berne motorway, it takes at least 30 minutes to reach it by car from the heart of Zurich.

It has a vast car park—sufficiently vast, it seems, to accommodate cars in peak shopping periods—and it is possible to bring goods to these cars by one of the wheel-baskets amassed at the entrance. In contrast with many British shopping centres, only the vast retail organisations have a space at Spreitenbach. For instance, a new shopping centre has been opened recently in West London with a special bridge and escalator linking it to Shepherds Bush underground station. There are some 80 units to let of which less than a third have so far been reserved. The only big outfit is a Lipton supermarket and, indeed, the whole centre seems far from being airborne.

Not so with Spreitenbach. It has six to eight million visitors a year and business is kept steaming thanks to such Swiss household names as ABM, Sprungli, PKZ, Migros, Bata, Swiss Credit Bank, Denner, Vilan, Gottinger und Riehen and Zurich Insurance. This list shows to some extent the variety of goods and services that can be obtained in such a concentrated area. The whole premises give the impression of carefully groomed prosperity. The floor is of glistening imitation marble. There are illuminated fountains and white garden furniture for relaxation on the middle of the floor. The place hums with a soft and soothing piped music. It chips with chromium and glass. There are sufficient escalators to encourage shoppers to go to upper floors. These escalators are flat and can be used by housewives pushing prams.

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The Balexert Shopping Centre is similar. The promoters, Migros and Grand Passage SA, have attempted to lend it the same atmosphere as the main shopping streets of Geneva. The sales surface is as large as a square field 160 yards wide. The car park is twice as large. There are further vast spaces on the mezzanine for strolls and terraces helping to mingle pleasantness with usefulness. Thirty-seven important businesses have opened shop there and employ about 600 people.

The next development will be the staff-less shop. *Carrefour* has pioneered in bringing goods straight from lorries on to the shelves and a Migros super-

market in Zurich has no cashier. Two ideas have already been experimented and will be applied sooner or later. One is for each shopper to have an account with a supermarket, to record his purchases on its computer and settle the account monthly by credit transfer. The second is for the shopper to inform a computer of the goods required by using a keyboard and waiting for them to be conveyed automatically.

If these ideas are worthwhile then there is no doubt that Switzerland's powerful chain stores will be among the first to make use of them.

(PMB)

SWISS EVENTS

DIPLOMACY

Rapprochement with France

Mr. Maurice Schumann went to Berne on an official visit on September 15th and 17th before moving on to Zurich to attend the memorial ceremony to Churchill's famous 1946 speech. He met the Federal Council and engaged in a 10-hour conference session with the Swiss Government.

He was put in the picture of the Swiss position regarding her association with the Common Market and reminded that her neutrality placed certain bounds on the extent of her European involvement. The subjects raised in the Report by the Commission on neutral candidates were debated, in particular the technical problems related to the watch industry. There were disagreements on agriculture, Mr. Schumann requiring of the Swiss that they should buy more EEC foodstuffs.

Another item which the French were particularly keen to press forward was the eventual acquisition of 90 French Mirages of the "Milan" type in replacement of the outdated Venoms of the Air Force. The experts of the Military Department are known to favour the American "Corsair" ground assault jet fighter but have not yet made their final decision. It is reckoned in Berne that the "Milan" is now more likely than ever before to be adopted.

There is no doubt that a defence contract of this magnitude would serve to strengthen Franco-Swiss relations. It would certainly encourage the French to support Swiss demands regarding association to the EEC. Traditionally France's attitude was diffident towards the concept of permanent neutrality and she was not willing to compromise with Switzerland in the field of common agricultural policy.

However, her attitude has tended

to change and the French Government is well aware of Switzerland's financial importance, enhanced by the recent monetary crisis. A rapprochement with a central small European state would actually be in keeping with traditional Gaullist policy.

A new diplomatic offensive?

There is some evidence that Berne is intending to increase its diplomatic commitments in the world. The possibility of a Swiss participation in a future conference on European security is being given serious consideration. Switzerland has recently passed agreements with Rumania and Yugoslavia and will be shortly opening negotiations with Poland. Many commentators feel that it is time for Switzerland to belong to the International Monetary Fund and become a full-fledged member of the Group of Ten. Both steps being amply justified by Switzerland's financial weight in the world.

Besides the indications that things may start moving faster on the Swiss diplomatic front, the position taken up by Finland, a neutral country, on the recognition of East Germany has been given full notice in Berne and may be taken as an example.

ENVIRONMENT

Dustmen's "scandal" in Berne

Scandal was the word used by Bernese conservationists to describe the revelations of a radio reporter on the handling of the town's refuse. As this happened less than two months after a serious case of pollution in the Aar, their feelings were still highly sensitised.

It appeared that about 40 lorries carried refuse every day from the

town's incineration factory to an open-air dump at Illiswil, near Wohlen, 10 kilometres east of the city. Following investigations by the University of Berne, it was proved that petrol residues, oils and acids included in the dump at Illiswil had been responsible for the total pollution of the small lake of Wohlen.

The management of the incinerating plant explained that these mishaps were due to its annual closing down during May made necessary by the revision of its boilers.

Only nuclear power stations to be built in the future

Professor Urs Hochstrasser, Director of the Division for Research and Commerce at the Federal Department of the Interior, disclosed that practically all the power stations to be built in Switzerland will be nuclear power stations. At the end of next year the three power stations erected at Beznau and Mühleberg will be supplying a fifth of the country's electric requirements.

The gases produced by these nuclear plants are released in the atmosphere after an appropriate treatment and their radioactivity is less than a hundredth of natural radioactivity. Liquid effluents are equally processed in a special plant and rejected in rivers in accordance with official prescriptions. The harm on a person drinking nothing but river water has been measured as less than one per cent of the natural sources of pollution.

The cooling of nuclear power stations has however presented more difficulties. New federal directives put a limit to the tolerable heating of rivers in the cooling process of nuclear power stations and prescribe the erection of cooling towers. However, their construction no longer depends on the Confederation but on the Communes and can therefore be delayed by local opposition. This is the case of the power station due to be built at Kaiseaugst. Its completion will be entirely dependent on the assent of the communal electorate.

The smell of a fertiliser factory

In the small village of Saillon (Valais) a Lausanne firm set up an ultra modern plant to convert chicken dung into fertilisers. It cost two million francs to install and had a processing capacity of four tons of manure an hour. Very soon, however, the operations of the factory attracted the complaints of neighbouring farmers unhappy about the dust and the smell produced.

Many hundreds of thousands of francs were spent in improving equipment within the plant, but the smell