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EDITOR: Pierre-Michel Beguin

Advisory Council:

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COMMENT

THE CONSEQUENCES OF REVALUATION

Although the revaluation of the Swiss franc was a perfectly logical decision under the circumstances prevailing after the floating of the German Mark, it took many people by surprise. Many federal press correspondents were conjecturing that such a step would never be taken, as the Federal Council had made it clear in the past that it would not resort to revaluation as a means of damping the present overheated state of the Swiss economy. But it took place nonetheless and took would-be speculators by surprise—which is how a revaluation should be. The Federal Council made propitious use of the new powers received from Parliament to readjust the value of the Swiss franc without having to wait for the assent of the two Chambers.

The Finance Minister, Mr. Nello Celio, explained later that the floating of the German Mark had been equivalent to a revaluation and had obliged the Swiss to follow suit, considering that 30 per cent of their imports came from Germany. If the Swiss franc had not been revalued, it would have meant an increase in the cost of German products for the Swiss consumer and speeded up an already alarming rate of inflation. By favouring the terms of trade of Swiss industry with respect to Germany, its first customer, an absence of revaluation would have spurred its export production and strained its highly taut production capacity. Furthermore, the undervaluation of the franc would have tempted foreign speculators in getting hold of this currency and encouraged capital inflow, all of which would have frustrated the

efforts of the government in credit restrictions. Mr. Celio added that the revaluation of the franc would have a welcome effect in putting a clamp on continuously rising wages.

Naturally, not everybody was pleased with revaluation. The watch industry lobby cried out that it could not have been decided at a worse time and that it would not make the struggle of Swiss watch makers to keep their position in world markets any easier.

But the average Swiss consumer had reason for satisfaction, as most of the goods of foreign origin on which he relies should be cheaper. They won't necessarily be 7 per cent cheaper. Importers may keep a margin to themselves to hedge against rising costs. Cars are the best example of unhampered competition since none are made in Switzerland. They won't be 7 per cent cheaper for the reason that import duties have also kept pace with the new parity of the franc. German cars should remain at about the same price because the Mark has risen. They will probably not be sold more cheaply until it has settled down to a safe and definite parity.

Revaluation should help British car exporters, whose share of the Swiss market has markedly decreased during the past two years. However, revaluation will probably do no more than offset an imminent increase in the price of British cars. It should come as a consolation to Britain's car manufacturers that the French and the Italian car industries are plagued by the same sort of industrial trouble and will also have to increase their prices, which means that they won't keep too much of a competitive edge on the British in Switzerland.

In practical everyday terms, revaluation means that every Swiss going abroad for his holidays will be 7 per cent richer and will be able to afford classier hotels and buy more souvenirs. Conversely, it means that tourists to Switzerland will have to spend more and tighten their belts. This will naturally affect persons of modest means and package vacationers. It may involve some difficulties for the tourist trade. The Swiss abroad who get their income from Switzerland, in particular those who receive Old Age Pension, will be 7 per cent more prosperous. Italian workers will be able to send larger subsistence packets to their families. Swiss residents with foreign securities will be 7 per cent poorer. Foreign borrowers who have drawn credit in Swiss francs will have to pay 7 per cent more interest. On the other hand, the Swiss who have borrowed money abroad in foreign currency will effectively benefit from a 7 per cent reduction in interest rates.

Before revaluation, you could buy 203 milligrams of gold with a franc, now you can buy 217 milligrams. This means that all gold hoarders have lost 7 per cent. The greatest hoarder of all, the Swiss National Bank, lost 1,500

million francs. As already mentioned, the cost of imports should diminish by 7 per cent, which means, to make an invidious paraphrase, that "you will be able to buy more with the franc in your pocket".

The most important effect of revaluation will bear on exports. In order to keep their prices unchanged exporters will have to cut them down by 7 per cent, which may well slash their profit margins. Prices of Swiss goods—Swiss watches, Swiss cheese, Swiss chocolates and the like—should therefore go up, much to our inconvenience as Swiss abroad. But this is really what the Government has wanted all along. It failed to get a 5 per cent export deposit passed by Parliament last year. Now an international monetary crisis has given it a welcome opportunity to cast upon thriving Swiss industrialists what amounts to a 7 per cent deposit without refund.

(PMB)

SWISS NEWS

SCHWARZENBACH LAUNCHES A NEW PARTY

Mr. James Schwarzenbach, the champion of "Swiss" Switzerland, has launched a new party called the "National Movement of Republican and Social Action".

With a General Staff of five senior citizens, including a publisher, a professor and an engineer, he presented the 12-point programme of his new movement to the Press. Its ideology is based on Article 2 of the Federal Constitution: "The aim of the Confederation is to preserve the outward independence of the fatherland, to maintain internal peace and order, to protect the freedom and the rights of the confederates and to promote their common prosperity".

The "National Action" is a patriotic movement. Its tenets are: Respect of Christian morals, belief in armed neutrality, the belief that Switzerland's best contribution to a free and federated Europe is her own military independence, opposition to unchecked immigration, opposition to foreign speculation in real estate, conservation of the environment, a vision whereby inflation is attributable to foreign financial powers, the demand for a strong middle class, the maintenance of Peace of Labour, the solidarity with elderly, sick and poor people, the requirement of a youth conscious of its duties towards the community, impartial mass media and parliamentary freedom from interest groups.

The Movement won ten seats at the recent cantonal elections in Zurich. This was only a beginning. The National Action will present candidates in 11 cantons in the October federal elections. These cantons will be Vaud, Neuchâtel, Berne, Zurich, Basle-Town and Country, Saint-Gall, Thurgau,

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Aargau, Zug and Ticino. There may also be a possibility of alliance between the new party and the Vigilant movement in Geneva.

The National Action has definitely lofty ideals. It will however also appeal to the lower instincts of the Swiss electorate. It is likely, for example, to enjoy the support of a local movement which has been demanding with a flood of pamphlets the expulsion from their homes of 5,000 foreigners in Geneva. They are asking for the bailiffs to knock at the doors of 5,000 families living in flats built after 1950. The State Council of Geneva should evacuate them all, claims the petitioners, and leave their flats vacant for Swiss people. The pamphlets call for a union of all Swiss against foreigners in order to solve the housing problem. The evacuation of 5,000 foreigners should be carried out to impose the "respect of our priorities and in order to give back to Geneva its Swiss character".

FEDERAL

The Federal Council has asked Parliament to vote for a special wage increase for federal public servants this Autumn. It is proposed to give postal and railway employees living in large towns an annual increase of 700 francs. Those living in towns of 20,000 to 100,000 inhabitants would get an increase of 600 francs and the rest 500 francs. This demand comes at an untimely moment, since the government's priority is to limit wage inflation.

However, the postal services, the railways and the federal administration are not thickly spread on the ground and need to remunerate their personnel adequately if they are to continue to offer the same quality of service. Federal employees number 123,000, some 5,000 more than five years ago. This increase is relatively higher than that of the total number of wage earners in the country, but despite this all public services suffer from an acute shortage of labour. The Post Office alone has on record 50,000 days of uncompensated spare-time work and 118,000 days of overtime. It also suffers from a high turnover of labour. In Zurich, one postal employee in ten leaves his job in a year, and one woman employee in three.

A disagreement between Mr. Pierre Graber, the Foreign Minister, and the Commission for Foreign Affairs of the National Council over the inclusion of Members of Parliament in the newly-created advisory Commission for the Study of Foreign Affairs ended with a concession by Mr. Graber. He announced with regret that the Commission would be shorn of parliamentarians, which will mean that seven members from the National Council and the Council of State will be replaced. The Commission for Foreign Affairs of the National Council had complained that the new body, intended to advise the Federal Council

on foreign political matters, would usurp its own responsibilities if it included parliamentarians. Mr. Marcel Chevallez, Mayor of Lausanne and President of the Commission had actually resigned over this issue.

CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTIONS OF VARIOUS SHADES

Four months after the implementation of the "urgent" proposals contained in the Oswald Report, many officers feel that the old system has not been improved. In particular, soldiers no longer stand at attention in the presence of officers. They stand at ease in a supposedly erect posture, which however tends to sag very quickly, and which apart from lacking in martial esthetics, is highly impractical.

Many officers are also critical of the fact that they have to be back in their quarters by the local *Polizeistunde*. Formerly they had the right to stay out at night. The new regulations deprive them of an advantage which they felt owing to them in view of their many months of extra service. The hardest nut to crack appears to be the interpretation of the new regulations of hair style. Before Oswald, the rule was that hair should not jut out from beneath the bonnet. The Oswald Report relaxed these requirements to suit the times and permitted semi-long hair, as long as it didn't overtake the collar. But it also laid down that it shouldn't be wavy, a contradictory prescription. Most officers disapprove the abandonment of the salute as a military duty and believe that an Army should set minimum standards of behaviour. The main complaint among officers is that the Officers and Petty Officers Associations were not consulted in the decision to readjust Army etiquette.

The doyen of the National Council, the fiery 85-year-old Socialist Charles Dellberg, stood up in the Military Court of the 2nd Division in Lausanne to defend a conscientious objector who could have been his grandson. His eloquent and well documented harangue proclaiming the political justification of conscientious objection however failed to move the divisional judge, who sent the 19-year-old dissenter to 4 months jail.

DENNER'S AMBITIONS

Mr. Karl Schweri, majority shareholder and director of the Denner chain of retail stores, held a press conference to announce that his company was ready to take over the chain of co-operative shops belonging to the *Konsumverein* of Zurich, offering shareholders 2,500 francs for their 200 francs nominal shares. Mr. Schweri dwelt with emphasis on the stagnant situation of the *Konsumverein*, which was giving dividends of only 10 francs per share. (The *Konsumverein* should

not be confused with the Co-op-Zurich, or *Lebensmittelverein*, which of course is a vast organisation on the same scale as the *Migros*).

He tempted *Konsumverein* shareholders with privileged buying conditions in Denner "discount" shops, with a bonus proportionate to the increase in turnover during the next ten years, which would yield a calculated 5,800 francs per share. He invited the thousands of small *Konsumverein* shareholders to give their support in writing and send their securities to the Zurich Cantonal Bank by 12th June.

Mr. Schweri required answers representing 70 per cent of the capital. Barring that, an extraordinary general meeting of *Konsumverein* shareholders would have to be held. Mr. Schweri estimated that by merging with *Konsumverein*, Denner AG could boost its sales turnover to 500 million francs next year. The merger would however involve the closure of 170 *Konsumverein* shops in the Zurich area.

(ATS)

RISE IN THE SWISS COST OF LIVING

The index of consumer prices, set at 100 in September 1966, had grown to 118.3 at the end of April. Prices had risen by 6.9 per cent since the end of April 1970. The Federal Office for Industry has separated all consumer goods into nine categories. Their price index was set at 100 in September 1966. Their position is now as follows: Food 112.9, drinks and tobacco 111.5, clothing 110.0, rent 136.5, heating and lighting 142.2, household durables 107.4, transport 115.6, health expenses 116.5, education and leisure 112.6.

(ATS)

ENTERTAINMENT

The 11th Golden Rose of Montreux was awarded to Austrian Television for its programme "Lodynski's Flohmarket Company". The Silver Rose went to the BBC for "Monty Python's Flying Circus" and the Bronze Rose was awarded to West German Television for its sketch "Ich bin". The Austrian contribution furthermore received the Press Prize and the Prize of the City of Montreux as the gayest presentation. A Press jury gave as first prize to "Ich bin" and awarded honourable mentions to "The Point", an American contribution, and "Love and Marriage" from Finnish TV. The Golden Rose of Montreux is an annual TV variety show contest organised by Swiss Television. It is a unique event whose importance has been increasingly recognised. For this year, it appeared that the humour shared by the Austrians and the British (a rather black humour with a strong tinge of Monty Python) rallied more enthusiasm than German and Dutch humour.

THE BOSSES AGAINST THE INITIATIVE OF EMPLOYEE PARTICIPATION

As related in our "Comment" in the 9th April issue, the three most important trade union organisations of Switzerland, comprising the great majority of Swiss trade unionists, launched an initiative asking for the Confederation to accept the principle of employee participation in management and to elaborate the necessary legislation.

The Committee of the central Swiss union of managers has expressed its unequivocal opposition to the initiative. The bosses believe that by empowering the Confederation to fix the modalities of employee participation, the initiative was giving the legislator unacceptable powers to interfere with the working of a free and liberal economy. Secondly, the initiative consciously avoided to delimit the scope and practical aspects of this proposed participation, with the possible consequence that such a loose constitutional provision could lead to a radical transformation of the Swiss social and economic order, which all rest on individual property and the readiness of entrepreneurs to assume risks.

The Committee further considered that the initiative was based on erroneous social conceptions and on an artificial ideological opposition. It was of a nature to kindle class struggle and bring back unrest in Swiss firms. The objection of the Committee was that employee participation was an ideal topic of discussion between employer associations and trade unions. It could easily have been debated in a free dialogue between the interested parties and solutions could have been found. The bosses found it most regrettable that the Unions should have resorted to political action rather than settle the issue of participation in a peaceful dialogue with employers and thereby pursue the kind of good relations which had existed between the two parties in the past.

(ATS)

ARCHEOLOGICAL FINDS IN THE LAKE OF NEUCHÂTEL

Underwater archeological excavations are being carried out off the village of Auvernier. The Archeological Service of the City of Zurich, working under contract with the Cantonal Archeological Services of Neuchâtel have brought up a series of bronze objects, wooden tools, cereals, a hatchet and a bronze razor, all of which come from a village of the late Bronze Age (3,000 BC) which appears to have been burnt down and abandoned by its inhabitants.

The experts believe that it will take some 30 years to fully exploit this important archeological site, already known locally as "Little Pompeii".

Such extended research will be in conflict with the construction of the projected National Highway 5 which will be built on the lake.

The archeologists involved in the excavations have asked the authorities for a year's reprieve to find out the full possibilities of the site before work on claiming land on the lake begins. The Archeological Museum of Neuchâtel has been enriched during the past 10 years with a series of finds made in the regions between the Lake of Neuchâtel and Biel.

PARLIAMENT'S SUMMER PROGRAMME

The Summer session of the Federal Chambers will begin on 1st June and last four weeks. The programme was prepared by the working committee of the National Council and the office of the Council of States. It will be very heavy, with 40 debate items. Above this, the Federal Council will give answers to 110 personal interventions, that is, 62 "postulates", 31 "interpellations" and 17 motions. Both the National Council and the Council of State will carry out their supervisory role in public administration by examining the yearly reports of the Federal Council, of the Federal Court and Insurance Tribunal, the accounts of the Federal Railways and the Post Office, the utilisation of alcohol tax and other "supply" items. The Chambers will also examine the report which the Federal Council was pledged to make after an eventual change of parity of the Swiss franc. They will then examine the new set of economic measures proposed by the government in the field of housing and consider plans to halt the rising cost of living. Certain questions will only be debated in the Council of States. Among them are the revision of a new bill on employment contract, on the question of reducing import tariffs on goods coming from developing countries and on the fourth stage of the enlargement of Kloten Airport.

During the latter half of the second week the National Council will examine a series of military problems, including the 1971 equipment programme and the dicey problem of securing training grounds. Then the order of the day will include a new bill on the protection of lakes and rivers, accompanied by a report on the popular initiative on this subject. The modification of air transport legislation, the financing of the Oberwald-Realp Railway and new regulations on working hours will also be debated.

The most awaited debate will take place on 23rd June, when the National Council will hear nine personal interventions on the subject of mass information media and debate on the crisis in Swiss-German TV and discuss the relations between Television and the Federal Council.