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SWISS EVENTS

FEDERAL

Swiss-EEC Treaty: Should it be submitted to a Referendum?

The decision whether or not the Swiss people will be called to ratify the recent free-trade agreement with the Common Market has not yet been made definitely. In their policy statements, the Federal Council and the four main political parties have all expressed their inclination for such a referendum, which would naturally conform to the practice of direct democracy. However, there has been mounting opposition in some circles against this eventuality. Professor Dietrich Schindler, from Zurich, is openly against it. Submitting the Swiss-EEC Treaty to the people would also mean submitting all the international agreements Switzerland has signed in the past, he contends.

The problem is a delicate one owing to the shortcomings of the Federal Constitution. It says that "treaties with foreign states which are concluded for an unspecified period or for more than fifteen years must be submitted to the people for approval or rejection if 30,000 Swiss citizens entitled to vote or eight cantons so demand".

Thus the Switzerland-EEC agreement should be requested by the people in an *optional referendum*. The only precedent in the past was the 1920 referendum, relating to Switzerland's adhesion to the League of Nations. It was called by the Government. Professor Schindler reckons that the present Treaty has not got the same political substance and will not have any bearing on foreign political issues. It can therefore not be compared with the decision to join the League of Nations and does not warrant a Referendum.

Double Old Age Pension in September

Old Age Pension payments will be doubled in September as planned in the 8th revision of state pension schemes. Thus pensioners will be receiving 13 months pay this year. This will not however be repeated as considerable increases in Old Age Pensions are forthcoming anyway. The cost of this bonus payment will be 192 million francs, 50 million of which will be borne by the Confederation and 16 by the Cantons.

The new jet aircraft

The month of August has seen new developments with the "Milan-Corsair" affair. At the end of its summer recess, the Federal Council had a meeting in which the choice of the Air Force's new aircraft came in first place in the Agenda. After three years of extensive evaluation trials, countless calculations and debates, the Section of the Military Department responsible for Armaments firmly recommended the choice of the Corsair in preference to the Milan, its immediate competitor, as a replacement to Switzerland's ageing fleet of British-designed Venoms. Thus the earmarked 1400 million francs should, if the Military's recommendations are followed, be spent on 60 ready-made "Corsairs" from America.

However, three weeks after these recommendations had been submitted to the Executive, the Collegiate Seven had not yet made up their minds. This prompted Mr. Reiner Schulthess, Head of the Armaments Services, to resign. Amid growing impatience about the Government's delay in making up its mind, the French firm Dassault, makers of the "Milan", complained that the evaluation tests had not been conducted fairly and that the Swiss experts had been biased in favour of the American model. These allegations were immediately denied by a declaration from Berne, which stressed that the Corsair was the better machine for Swiss purposes. Although the higher echelons of the Military hierarchy are firmly in favour of the Corsair and are determined not to change their minds, this is not the case of many Army circles outside the General Staff, and more particularly among political circles, who feel that Switzerland's renewed involvement in Europe should be materialised by the choice of a European Aircraft.

The Federal Council announced that a decision would be forthcoming in mid-September. The delays incurred showed that our leaders were far from unanimous on the Military Department's recommendations.

MODERN LIFE

The physical debility of recruits

Although there are more playing fields and gym halls than ever before, the Cantonal Military Department of

Geneva registered appalling results at the physical test prior to recruitment. Moreover, 22 per cent of prospective candidates are not even deemed fit to pass the test and are assigned to complementary service or exempted from service altogether.

Mountaineering accidents

Of the many mountaineering accidents deplored in early August, one of the most senseless took place on the Weissmies (4025m), above the Saas Valley. A Danish couple a Copenhagen doctor and his girl friend had reached the Weissmies Hut at the beginning of the weekend and spent the night before engaging on the ascension of this peak.

The doctor took the lead. He was well equipped and appeared to be a perfect connoisseur of the mountain. This was not the case of his companion, who suffered from altitude dizziness and was not equipped with ice crampons. In fact, she had no experience of ice climbing. The doctor was gallantly carving vital footholds and encouraging her as best he could. When the couple reached the south-east face, the woman, who had been progressing with great difficulty, slipped on an ice plaque, dragging her companion in the void. A neighbouring group of alpinists saw the two fall 150 metres and buried in the gully where their vertiginous fall had ended. Both were dead.

Life expectancy

According to a recent survey by the Geneva-based World Health Organisation (WHO), life expectancy for Swiss men has risen from 68.7 years in 1958 to 70.1 in 1968, whereas the life expectancy of women rose from 70.1 to 75.8 years. Thus life span has increased 2 per cent for men and 2.4 per cent for women.

Dealing with other countries, the report shows that for a one-year old male baby, life expectancy has diminished in 12 out of 34 countries, and for men aged 65 in 23 countries. Females, if they are one year old, have increased their life expectancy in every country save one, and in six countries if they are already 65.

The WHO Report also evaluates the incidence of the principal causes of natural death. If cancer didn't exist, men in Switzerland would have a life expectancy of 72.8 years. If heart diseases were cured, they would on average reach the age of 77.1 years. Statistics show that heart diseases are still the primary cause of death, ahead of cancer, respiratory troubles and accidents.

BEHAVIOUR

A way to meet expenses

A member of the Valais Great Council who is also a communal president in the Sierre area and a most respectable personality of the Canton, has been remanded in custody in Geneva charged with running a profitable procuring racket. The case is clouded in secret and the name of the person has not been made known, in accordance with Swiss procedure.

Record bail

A record three million francs bail was demanded by the Geneva penal court for the provisional release of the former Managing Director of *Eurogas*, a garage chain operating in Geneva, Lausanne, Lucerne, Brussels and Martigny. He is accused in a 70-page indictment of ten different charges having led to the bankruptcy of his business with a total prejudice of 30 million francs.

Tourists set two hectares of pine on fire

Picknickers lighting a fire for a mid-day grill caused a fire in a forest near Vetroz (Valais) causing the loss of two hectares of pines and young oaks. Damages to the forest are estimated at several million francs. The picknickers, who had left the area when the fire broke out, had ignored visible signposts warning against lighting fires elsewhere than in authorised clearings.

A demanding boy friend

A 22-year-old woman, Anna Magdalena Hofer, was shot three times in the head and neck by her student boy friend the day after she had told him of her wish to break off with him. She had curtailed a holiday trip to England just to tell him this decision. The evening after her return, the boy friend, a 24-year-old student in Berne, arrived in her parent's apartment at Berthoud and made straight to her room. Her mother and her sister in the other room heard the outbursts of a stormy conversation and then three shots. They rushed to the room and found the woman lying in her blood and the murderer coolly leaving the room with a smoking gun.

"Now I'm going to join the Foreign Legion", he said. He didn't reach that far, and was stopped by a police patrol on the Lausanne-Geneva Motorway.

Drug money frozen in bank accounts

There is evidence that increasing quantities of drugs are being transited through Switzerland. Drugs hauls by customs and federal police have markedly risen lately and the Federal Attorney has decided to block several numbered accounts containing approximately two million francs. It is suspected that their holders are international drug traffickers and an enquiry is under way. This unprecedented move falls within present regulations. Banking secrecy may be lifted for the purpose of a judicial enquiry. But every precaution is taken to prevent the names of these holders from being known to other employees of the banks concerned other than management.

The federal police classifies drug smugglers in three categories: Those that buy it and carry it for their own use (usually LSD and hashish); the carriers who work for international rackets in cannabis; and the hard drugs organisations. Although there have been few catches among the latter category, it is believed that an increasing amount of hard drugs business is being carried out on Swiss soil.

The French daily *France-Soir* claimed in its 16th August editions that drug racketeers, finding life increasingly difficult in France and elsewhere, were trying to take root in Switzerland. According to the article, the Swiss police suspect that a heroin laboratory has been set up in the Basle area. In Basle, it says, drugs can be obtained openly with no difficulty at all. Tourists are approached by pedlars who offer them an heroin shot for two francs. This has dramatic repercussions in neighbouring Alsace, where drug addicts supply themselves either in Basle or in German cities such as Karlesrubhe. The paper says that Swiss courts handled 3680 drug cases in 1971, thirty times more than in 1968.

In another development, there has been slow but steady progress in Swiss-American negotiations on adapting their respective legislations in a common effort to prevent drug money from finding its way to a Swiss numbered account. Switzerland is willing to breach its legislation, which has so far excluded fighting fiscal offences not considered illegal on her territory. The exception will apply only in those cases where fiscal fraud is considered as a cover for other illegal activities, but the Americans will have to supply conclusive evidence. Washington, on the other hand, is asked to abandon

the idea of sending its own investigators to Switzerland. They will work together with Swiss agents. The agreement also provides for the exchange of information.

This is a rather dodgy matter. Racketeers are becoming wiser and usually operate as perfectly respectable investors, working in the name of acceptable companies. At each new step in the negotiations the Swiss Government automatically consults the professional organisations concerned. The Association of Swiss Bankers are particularly sensitive to any tampering with banking secrecy as they do not want exceptions to upset the confidence of their regular and innocent customers. The *Vorort* is not in the least bit inclined to make concessions to the Americans in view of the various difficulties they have created to Swiss exporters.

Fishermen caught in their own nets

Two professional fisherman on Lake Neuchatel whose nets had illegally small mesh were facing legal proceedings. Their catch was confiscated and sold on the Neuchatel market and the proceeds will be used to repopulate the lake. The two men had already been caught before using 23mm meshes instead of the authorised 27mm size. It involves considerable differences in fishing results. With a 23mm mesh it is possible to catch a hundred kilogrammes of fish in a night, whereas with the larger mesh the catch falls to 15 kilogrammes.

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MEMBER OF ABTA

Swissair won't buy the Concorde

Swissair has been known for a long time to consider the Concorde as a technically good plane but not conforming to its particular requirements. In a recent statement to the A.T.S., company officials have confirmed that Swissair's position had not changed and that the purchase of the Concorde in its present state is definitely not envisaged. They said that Swissair has kept a very close watch on the technical developments of the aircraft and arrived at the conclusion that its economic prospects were limited on the Zurich-New York route, which Concorde could not cover with full passenger and freight loads. The officials said that the range of the aircraft, too small for that route, had been designed to satisfy French and British requirements. The number of passengers for Zurich-New York would have to be reduced by a third. They referred to feasibility studies by B.O.A.C. which showed that to be profitable, Concorde had to make two daily flights with 60 per cent occupation factor and passengers paying 50 per cent more than on Jumbo jets. They emphasised that Swissair is an entirely independent company and can't indulge in any pro-European bias in its choice of new aircraft. This choice was based on entirely commercial considerations.

RACING

Regazzoni—champion of obstruction

The Swiss Clay Regazzoni driving a Ferrari, came second in the German Grand Prix at the Nurburgring in late July. The winner was the Belgian Jackie Ickx. Jackie Stewart, the present World Champion, deserved at least the second place but was consistently prevented from reaching it so by a crafty Regazzoni, who used all the tricks of his trade and the windy circuit of the Nurburgring in preventing the British champion from overtaking him. There followed a vehement off course argument between the two drivers, which the Swiss Press hardly related.

ECONOMIC AND TECHNICAL ITEMS

Revolution in the welding of plastics

A screwcutting and precision engineering firm at Le Landeron (Neuchatel, Switzerland) has perfected new welding pliers for plastics, bringing this delicate work within everyone's reach. These pliers, which are extremely simple and quick to use, make it possible to weld end to end perfectly, plastic profiles, belts, joints, etc. This instrument possesses many advantages the belts are guided in bushes (which are available for any profile desired) thus ensuring perfect parallelism, while a knife mounted on the pliers, makes it possible to cut the ends perfectly square. The ends to be welded never come in contact with the heating blade, the heat being transmitted only to the part of the belt protruding out of the bush; in this way it is possible to avoid any hardening of the plastic and, consequently, any molecular deformation. With this new system the belt no longer slides over the pulley, does not become heated and does not stretch; in this way it is also possible to weld a perfect bow.

The sole Agency of the product has been entrusted to Messrs Airguard Ltd., of 60 Lillie Road, London, S.W.6., and the Sales will be supervised by its Managing Director, Mr. W. W. Landauer (Swiss) which we feel sure will ensure success.

World PR Congress in Switzerland in 1973

The Committee of the Swiss Public Relations Association has agreed to organise the next World Public Relations Congress, from 16th

to 19th April, 1973, in Geneva, home of the International Public Relations Association secretariat. After Belgium, Italy, Canada, Brazil and Israel, Switzerland will therefore be welcoming public relations specialists from some 46 countries. The growing importance of public relations in private enterprises and public life will make this congress an event of international importance.

Independent lighting system

A Swiss firm in Geneva recently put on the market a new independent lighting system, called "Mobel", which won a silver medal at the last Inventors Salon in Brussels. This new system consists of a lighting unit mounted on a trailer weighing 693 lb. in all; the actual lighting equipment comprises a telescopic, tilting mast, adjustable for heights up to 80 ft., and an electricity generating set whose power is adapted to the group of floodlights used. This equipment offers many advantages. It can be put into operation extremely quickly, since it takes only one minute to mount the whole installation. In addition, the floodlight—or set of floodlights—can be pointed in all directions and operated by remote control from the ground. Depending on requirements, loudspeakers or aerials can also be fitted to the masts. This new mobile equipment therefore offers great scope; it is particularly useful to municipal authorities, whether for fire brigades, roadwork, sports events, etc.

Revolution in Supermarkets

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