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SWISS EVENTS

THE MATTMARK TRIAL

Almost seven years after the Mattmark Dam disaster, 17 engineers and local government officials stood trial on 22nd February before the High Valais District Court at Visp accused of homicide by gross negligence. On 30th August, 1965, 88 workers (52 Italians, 23 Swiss, 4 Spaniards, 2 Germans, 2 Austrians and one Romanian) were killed when part of the Allalin glacier on the mountain above the construction broke away and crashed down on the contractors' installations, including offices and a canteen. It was weeks before the last bodies were recovered from the deep mass of ice, rocks and earth that had obliterated everything in its path.

The 21-page indictment stated: "The omission of all preventive protective measures, on the one hand, and the failure to observe all the signs and portents of catastrophe, on the other, exclude any plea that a disaster of such magnitude was unpredictable". Singularly harsh, the indictment called it "absolutely incomprehensible" that those in authority did not take into consideration the grave possible danger threatening the construction camp (at 6,650 ft.) from the mountain above, especially in view of the fact that in 1949 a lesser avalanche from the Allalin glacier had come down at the same spot, and in view of further ice and rock falls in 1954, 1961 and 1963.

It was similarly incomprehensible that it had not been considered necessary to take safety measures and that no expert survey had been carried out or even ordered by the official supervisory bodies. The only thing that had been done was observation of the glacier from a distance.

The indictment added that proper heed had not been paid to either the warnings from other people or to the physical signs of impending catastrophe, such as the breaking away of blocks of ice, the appearance of crevasses and the forming of water pockets as late as the summer of 1965.

Despite the severity of this indictment, the Prosecutor demanded nominal penalty fines ranging from the equivalent of £100 to £200 and part of the costs. Stressing all the same that some 50 minutes before the avalanche the men had noticed that blocks of ice were coming down with increasing frequency. A warning system giving say, 15 minutes notice would have enabled many to save their lives, he added.

This was the start of a trial which proved surprisingly dispassionate, as though a span of nearly seven years

and a long enquiry had dulled the interest in the case. After so much preparation and the appointment of a special enquiring magistrate, the trial seemed astonishingly short. It was all over by the third hearing, and the verdict was to be made known a week after the end of the trial.

The lawyers for the victims' families began at once to attack the contradiction between the severity of the indictment and the leniency of the sentences demanded by the prosecution. If the accused were really guilty, said one lawyer, then one should have the courage to punish them according to Swiss law, which required 20,000 franc fines or three years imprisonment. This lawyer demanded that those really responsible for the Mattmark Dam disaster should be served a "serious" sentence.

However, the defence of the 17 accused came up with a battery of arguments. One lawyer said that the trial was contrived and useless. It had been staged solely to satisfy political and moral requirements, and to assuage the "unhealthy curiosity of public opinion". A lawyer defending three employees of Swiss Accident Insurance said that the families of the victims of Mattmark had already received £1 million in premiums and the proceeds of a national collection which had raised £350,000. He insisted that many of the assertions contained in the indictment were "exaggerated" and drafted in a "James Bond style".

Another lawyer said that the death toll of Mattmark was smaller than at other similar sites. There had been a total of 105 deaths at Mattmark (17 in site accidents and 88 during the avalanche) whereas there had been 110 deaths on the Grande-Dixence construction site alone. He defended the engineers' competence and sense of responsibility, saying that "had there been the least doubt about the safety of the site, then security measures would have been taken immediately. The erection of the dam might even have been abandoned altogether". He said that it was easy to build up theories and look up "literature" on the Allalin glacier after the disaster.

No one sensed any danger, he said, and the people of the valley would have spoken out much louder had this been the case. He named a number of sites set up on similar terrain and attacked experts who had stated that the Allalin glacier presented a threat only after the disaster, and had not said a word about it to the engineers on the site during a survey of the area not long before it happened. About the fall of some 40,000 cubic metres of

ice in 1949, he said that hardly anyone in the valley had ever mentioned it. He furthermore recalled a visit to the glacier carried out by an Innsbruck professor and his students in 1964 (the year before the disaster). He had never talked of any potential danger in a seminar held after the trip.

Following the Valais' legal procedure, the verdict was made known the week after the end of the trial. At the end of two-and-a-half days of secret debate, the Visp District Court acquitted all the 17 defendants and awarded them the costs, which will be assumed by the Canton. It appears as almost certain that this verdict will be contested by the lawyers for the victims' families and brought before the Federal Court. There have already been strong reactions in Italy and among Italian circles in Switzerland.

FATAL EXPERIENCE

A friend of mine, Mr. Frederick Ducommun, the civil engineer who was in charge of the site when the disaster happened, was among the victims. This is what happened to him:

It was late on a sunny afternoon. Work on the site was in full swing. The foot of the almost completed dam was resounding with the roar of bulldozers and excavators. Lorries with 6 foot wheels were rumbling away loaded with tons of rocks. Granite stones were falling with a crushing din in loading funnels and huge mixers were preparing the last ingredients of the enormous engineering construction. Some workers were resting for a later shift. Others were eating in the canteen.

At 5 p.m. Frederick left with a young Spanish engineering trainee for a routine check of the water gates in the concrete tunnel beneath the dam. On the way, his young colleague kindly offered to do the job for him. He entered the tunnel by climbing down one of the control shafts, checked the water gates and the hydraulic machinery and walked towards the exit of the tunnel on the side of the dam where prefabricated buildings of the site were situated, including the canteen where the two friends usually had supper together.

The exit latch was blocked. There was no way of pushing it open. He turned back and climbed up the shaft. He saw a huge hill of ice rising from where, a few minutes earlier, 88 men had been working, resting and eating. The mountain was perfectly silent. Not a sound. No engine and no man.

The glacier had crashed down during the few minutes he was beneath the dam and he had heard nothing. He stumbled among the huge ice boulders, stunned and wondering whether he was not going through some ghastly nightmare. He cried out for a human voice. But a chilling silence prevailed. Everything was still. The mountain had reclaimed its rights.

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FEDERAL

Battle for new housing legislation

Less than two years after the abortive initiative launched by the "Popular Families Movement" in favour of cheaper rents and protective measures for tenants, a new and highly controversial initiative was submitted to the people on 5th March. Launched by "Denner AG", a vast chain of discount stores noted for its previous price-cutting actions, the initiative planned to set up a vast "National Building Fund" with some 15 billion francs to finance housing.

The Fund would be topped up by Federal participation and by means of a progressive levy on industry bringing in 1.5 billion francs a year. The levy would be so devised as to tax more severely those big companies held responsible by the promoters for Switzerland's various ills and above all for generally excessive rents. The philosophy behind the initiative was that Big Capital, the sole beneficiary of the Swiss business boom, was also responsible for its side effects—the three most important of which are over-foreignisation, high cost of housing and pollution. According to this argument it was only justice that capital should pay for the housing which it had contributed to make so dear.

Apart from the organs of the Republican and National Action movements, there wasn't a newspaper in the country that supported this rather demagogical package. Nearly all the parties with the exception of the above mentioned ones and a number of cantonal Socialist parties turned it down and accepted instead the alternative set of articles proposed by the Government in the same poll on 5th March.

The Government's proposals are fairly complex in detail but in principle they are simple and two-fold. On the one hand, the Confederation is to guarantee up to 90 per cent of private loans granted to housing in a bid to reduce initial rents according to a scale adapted to young couples, large families and old people. The Federal guarantee would encourage available capital to be channelled towards social investments, it would also involve rent control. In practise, the Confederation would redeem loans and mortgages so that the absence of interest payments would not reduce the high level of rents. The second side of Berne's constitutional proposal is to offer safeguards against landlords.

Those who took the trouble to go and vote on 5th March overwhelmingly expressed their support and confidence in the Swiss Government. 24.33 per cent of the voting roll turned up, rejecting the Denner Initiative by 34,592 "no" against 5,631 "yes" ballots, and accepted the Government's counter-proposal by 34,513 "yes" against 6,368 "no" votes. On the same day, voters were called to sanction a federal order

on the protection of tenants. They supported it by a 40,549 to 931 majority.

Anti-army clergymen assailed

Mr. Rudolf Gnaegi, Head of the Military Department, made an unexpected outburst last month, when he appeared at a press conference given by the Army's Chief Medical Officer, and sharply criticised the "subversive" attitude adopted by 32 Catholic and Protestant clergymen who had announced by letter their decision to refuse any form of military service, including payment of the national defence tax.

Forty-three others had declared their solidarity with them in refusing to join the Army.

"This cannot be allowed to continue!" said Mr. Gnaegi, raising his voice at the press conference. "If nothing were done about such actions the apparatus of state would be eroded".

If the signatories of the letter sent to the Military Department put their decision into practice and "so neglect the duties imposed on them by the Constitution, then they will each be brought to justice".

"It is unbelievable", continued Mr. Gnaegi, "that in our society, free clergymen choose deliberately to adopt such an attitude and speak of a Christian spirit of solidarity while refusing themselves to meet the obligations falling on all citizens for the protection of the Confederation."

Mr. Gnaegi pointed out that in the near future the country would be called upon to decide on the establishment of an alternative Civil Service which would also be open for conscientious objectors.

In their letter the clergymen had expressed the view that the Swiss Army and its present concept "makes less and less sense in the international context and serve little other than economic and financial interests".

The sequel to this affair will depend on whether the clergymen decide to put their words into actions.

A few weeks later, the Federation of Swiss Protestant Churches issued a statement "regretting" the initiative taken by the 32 clergymen. The Federation expressed its "astonishment" that many of the signatories were ministers too old anyway to have been personally concerned by military duties. It was stated that the Federation of Swiss Protestant Churches had never opposed military service and had always rejected the attitude of plain rejection of National Service. The Churches were sympathetic to conscientious objectors, the statement added, but were of the opinion that they should perform some kind of complementary service. On no account should a citizen be absolved from military duties without carrying out an

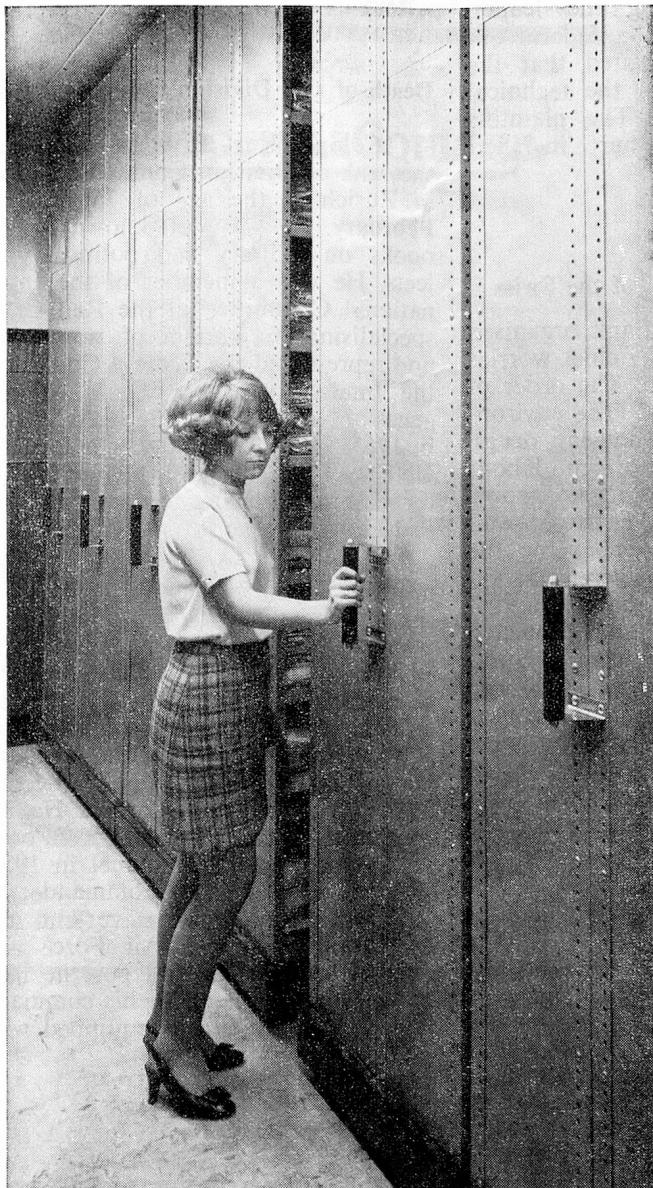
alternative service to the community. The statement recalled that the Federation had been militating for the creation of a Civil Service for some time. It had no disciplinary powers, the statement added, as these belonged to the cantonal churches and the parishes who had elected the 32 ministers democratically.

The British bank spying affair

At the time of writing, the case of two former employees of a Geneva investment bank who had given information on British-held accounts to Treasury officials in London had received very little publicity. The federal enquiry is now completed and it has surprised some commentators that files of the case haven't been transferred to Geneva. It is understood that Berne is still examining whether the British officials who were behind this case of economic spying should not be indicted under the 271st Article of the Penal Code. The two bank employees, now in prison, were held under the 273rd Article of the Penal Code on economic spying. Another surprise was that Mr. Pierre Gruber didn't bring the case up with the British Government during his February visit, although it had been disclosed ten days beforehand. Apparently, the Head of our diplomacy may have wanted to secure the goodwill of his British counterparts by closing his eyes on an incident which must have been embarrassing to them. If Swiss Justice finds the British Treasury officials guilty under federal law, then they will have to forget diplomacy and issue a warrant against them.

Ban on arms sales: The Government's alternative

The National Council accepted by a two-to-one majority a bill tabled by the Federal Council designed to replace the Constitutional law which would result from an Initiative launched two years ago and for which 53,000 signatures had been collected, which demanded a ban on arms exports to all but neutral European countries. The Swiss People will therefore be asked to reject the Initiative and accept the Government's alternative. This alternative strengthens control on arms exports and lays down fines of up to 500,000 francs and prison sentences of up to five years to those who infringe new regulations. It doesn't impose the same geographical limitation on arms exports demanded by the original initiative, which had been prompted by the Buehrle trial. The debate lasted for two days and the Commission appointed to study the implication of the Initiative ruled that it would be both uneconomical and politically unrealistic to put such a stringent ban on arms exports.



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CANTONAL

New airport for Berne

The Federal Council has given its approval to the creation of an international airport in the Seeland area in a letter sent to the Bernese Cantonal Executive.

If everything goes according to the Federal Council's plan, an old scheme dating from 1945 to equip Switzerland with four airports—Geneva, Zurich, Basle and Berne—will materialise. The project will inevitably have to overcome tremendous opposition from the communes directly concerned and a leading opponent to the building of an airport at the planned site of "Grands Marais" is already planning a massive demonstration in the Congress Palace of Berne.

The scheme, which will in the long run lead to the abandonment of the small airport at Belpmoos, which for geographical reasons could not be extended, had been talked about for a long time. However, the publication and the timing of the Federal Message (it came just before a session of the Great Council of Berne but was held secret by the Executive) came as a surprise.

The whole affair will prove highly complicated because it falls within both the Canton's and the Confederations attributions. Berne, as the Federal capital, has no doubts about the usefulness of a fourth airport, which would also serve Neuchatel, Fribourg and Solothurn. Moreover, the three existing international airports are slowly approaching their limiting capacity, so that the improvement of road and railway communications in Switzerland will not affect in the utility of an international airport at Grands Marais in the long term.

Considerable studies will be required, and most important of all, the assent of about 63 communes with 200,000 inhabitants for which the scheme already appears as a "non starter". The notions of environmental nuisance have now been well ingrained in the thinking of Swiss people. It is not only in England that authorities have trouble in finding new space for airports. The three airports of Geneva, Basle and Zurich have all been at the heart of a cantonal vote in the recent past. In Geneva, for example, the cantonal government managed to obtain 48 million francs for improving Cointrin Airport by a bare majority of 229 for 69,059 votes cast.

The case of five sacked TV producers

Five of the six television producers sacked from French-speaking television last year charged with distributing leaflets uncomplimentary of Televisions Management have sued their former employers for libel. They claim that they had nothing to do with pro-

ducing and distributing the leaflet, despite the findings of a federal enquiry, which had indicated that the papers in the offices of the technical services of Television. The plaintiffs claim to have been hurt in their honour.

MODERN LIVING

Inquiry on the concerns of the Swiss

The Swiss Credit Bank organised an opinion survey on the chief worries of the Swiss population. The order of priorities ran as follows: The environment, old age pensions, housing, drugs, school co-ordination, foreign labour and inflation. The majority of people primarily concerned by environmental problems were against enhancing the means of the State by increased taxation, but put forward the creation of more natural reserves and protected areas. For nearly 70 per cent of Swiss women, the danger of drugs was considered as one of the first five crucial issues facing the country. Men were apparently less worried about drugs as only 54 per cent consider them as a serious threat. The low concern for inflation led one to conclude that the Swiss were getting used to the rising cost of living and have accepted it as a fact of life.

The Cantons that offer better life expectancy

The Swiss have almost doubled their health expenditure in relation to their earnings during the past ten years. In 1960, four per cent of the National Income was spent on health. Today, the proportion is nearing ten per cent. But these figures do not apply evenly for the whole of the country. What is true on an international scale is also true on the national level. The wealthier the canton, the more hospitals and trained medical staff it can afford. Thus four of the wealthiest cantons of the country, Zurich, Basle-Town, Geneva and Vaud have superior equipment to all other cantons and this eventually means, according to a study made by the public health services of Vaud, that the life span of the Swiss will depend on whether they live in a rich or a poorer canton. In some cantons, there is one hospital staff for three patients, in others, one for seven. The extension of the human life-span has resulted in two-fifths of the hospital beds being filled by persons aged over 65. Improved health has therefore the effect of prolonging life, which in turn calls for more health services, more doctors, more specialised nurses and more money. This makes it all the more important to promote the nursing profession with better material rewards.

The more modern the hospital, the more staff it usually requires for each patient. The maintenance of long age thus claims a high price in energy and labour.

ARMY

Death of two Division Commanders

Colonel Karl Brunner, who held the rank of Division Commander, died in Zurich at the age of 75 on 15th February. He was well known for his books on military and political subjects. He was a member of the International Committee of the Red Cross specialising in matters of war rights and represented the Federal Council at the International Red Cross Conferences of New Delhi in 1958 and Vienna in 1965. He was appointed in 1965 by UNESCO as General Commissioner for cultural property in Jordan, Syria and Egypt.

Colonel Friedrich Rihner, a pioneer of Swiss aviation, died later in the month at Montreux, aged 81. He planned Swiss postal air services with Walter Mittelholzer in 1920. In 1928, he established a record by flying at an altitude of 6,562 metres with a load of 500 kg. He organised the first air meetings of Zurich in 1922, and led Swiss teams in competitions abroad. Having become an instructor in the Air Force, he was promoted to Colonel in 1938, and became Division Commander in 1943. General Guisan gave him the responsibility for the Air Force and Anti-Aircraft Defence, a post he held up to 1952. It was under his command that the Air Force was equipped with its first jet fighters.

COMPANY NEWS

Swissair launches "Interconvention"

In an endeavour to create a fully comprehensive service for the organisation of conferences and conventions in Switzerland, Swissair has taken the initiative with the foundation of INTER-CONVENTION, Congress and Convention Services Ltd.

The new company, shortly to be registered in Zurich, has a share capital of S.Frs. 200,000 (approx. £20,000), with Swissair as the main shareholder. The Association of Swiss Convention Centres has also agreed to participate in the capital. Hellmuth Scherrer, Swissair's general sales manager, has been elected chairman of INTER-CONVENTION's Board of Directors. Other Board members are Peter Nydegger, manager of the airline's projects division in its finance department, and Ernst Hegner, tourist office director of the City of Berne, in his function as chairman of the Association of Swiss Convention Centres. Paul Reutlinger, hitherto head of Swissair's congress service, has been appointed general manager.

INTERCONVENTION's objectives are the promotion and organisation of congresses, seminars, symposia and conventions of all kinds, and in

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Swiss Bank Corporation

The Swiss Bank Corporation announces that after writing off S.Frs. 23,465,985.86 the net profit for the year 1971, amounted to S. Frs. 141,586,692.35 as against S.Frs. 126,052,496.— the previous year. Special Reserves have been increased by S.Frs. 100,000,000 through transfer from internal reserves. Total assets amounted to S.Frs. 36,078,301,804.— as against S.Frs. 28,088,089,216.—

At the "Centennial" Annual General Meeting to be held in Basle on 9th May, 1972, it will be proposed to make a contribution of S.Frs. 2,500,000.— to the Staff Welfare Fund (same) and to place S.Frs. 65,000,000.— to Reserves and Special Reserves (S.Frs. 55,000,000), to pay a dividend of 16% (S.Frs. 80.—) as in the previous year and to carry forward S.Frs. 13,681,688.37 (S. Frs. 12,584,996.02).

The Board of Directors will also propose the special "Centenary" payments as follows:

The payment of S.Frs. 20.— per share (to cost S.Frs. 18 million on the eligible capital of S.Frs. 450,000,000.—) the allocation of approximately S.Frs. 21 million for special payments to pensioners and Staff, the payment of S.Frs. 6,100,000 to a Fund to be set up for a Scheme for Staff participation in profits, the payment of S.Frs. 15 million to a Centennial Foundation to be established for the support of cultural, scientific, welfare or similar organisations and the making of an exceptional payment of S.Frs. 360,000 to the Board.

In addition, the Board will propose an increase in capital from S.Frs. 500,000,000 to S.Frs. 550,000,000 by the offer of one new Swiss Bank Corporation bearer share of S.Frs. 500, cum dividend from the 1st January, 1972, for every 10 held. In view of the Centenary of the Bank, this is to be made at the price of S.Frs. 750.— per share.

ECONOMIC ITEMS

The detailed Basle Trade Fair and Exhibition Calendar

From 9th to 19th March, 1972 the 13th Swiss Art and Antiques Fair will be held in Basle for the first time, which in previous years always took

place in Berne. The 56th Swiss Industries Fair, the focal point and the main event of the Basle exhibition year, will take place from 15th to 25th April, 1972. With many important innovations, it bears the signature of the opening up of the European market. Then, devoted entirely to the specialist, is the 3rd International Wire Exhibition from 30th May to 3rd June, 1972, followed by a further trade fair, the 2nd International Packaging Exhibition from 6th to 10th June, 1972. Subsequently, Art 3'72, the 3rd International Art Fair, follows from 22nd to 26th June, 1972. The 7th International Trade Fair for Hardware, Tools and Household Goods, Interferex, starts off the season of autumn fairs from 3rd to 5th September. The 3rd International Surface Treatment Exhibition, Surface, accompanied by the important "Interfinish" Congress, will take place from 6th to 12th September. Under the name "Hitfair", the 2nd Information and Commercial Fair for Young People will then be held from 23rd September to 1st October. The 1972 Basle trade fair and exhibition year reaches a further climax with the Nuclex, the 3rd International Fair for Nuclear Industries, accompanied by technical conferences which, from 16th to 21st October, 1972, will again underline the standing of Basle as an exhibition centre. The extremely busy Basle trade fair and exhibition year will be brought to a close with a newly created exhibition, the Swiss Furniture Fair, which will take place from 16th to 20th November, 1972.

Two billion francs' worth of advertising in Switzerland in 1971

Advertising expenditure in Switzerland totalled some 2 billion francs in 1971, which represents an increase of 8 to 10% over the previous year. According to estimates, 39% of this amount was accounted for by advertisements in the press, 28% by advertising in shop-windows and shops, 15% by direct advertising, 7% by exhibitions, 6% by poster, 4% by television advertising and 1% only by advertising in movie theatres. Advertising companies and agencies recorded satisfactory results in 1971 and the part played by foreign agencies on the Swiss market has again increased.

Swiss atomic time for the Spanish Navy

The last parts of a big timekeeping centre, comprising two atomic clocks, have just been delivered to the San Fernando Naval Observatory at Cadiz (Spain). This equipment, produced specially by Oscilloquartz Co. Ltd., a branch of Ebauches Co. Ltd., Neuchatel, made the trip in rather particular circumstances. The two atomic standards were first of all set to the

right time in the Neuchatel Observatory. They were then taken by road to Kloten airport, where they were placed on board a regular Swissair plane for Spain and immediately connected to the plane's electricity supply. In Madrid, the equipment continued its journey by road and arrived at its destination under the best possible conditions.

Brazil: Switzerland's biggest trade partner in Latin America

Economic relations between Switzerland and Brazil are particularly active; in 1970, with imports totalling 148 million Swiss francs and exports 239 million, Brazil was Switzerland's biggest trade partner in Latin America. In addition, several Swiss firms have branches in Brazil; in 1969, Swiss investments in that country, totalling some 1.3 billion francs, placed Switzerland 4th among Brazil's foreign investors, after the United States, West Germany and Japan. In 1973, Switzerland will be organising in Sao Paulo the biggest industrial exhibition it has ever put on abroad. These few facts are taken from a report that the Swiss Office for the Development of Trade in Lausanne has just devoted to Brazil in its collection of "documentary reports" on foreign markets. These reports, which already cover 50 countries on all continents, are intended to give exporters the basic information they need to gain a footing on a new market or to complete their knowledge. Each report, about 30 pages long and drafted according to a carefully conceived plan, gives information on the country itself, its resources, its industrial production, its monetary system, its financial set-up, its foreign trade and its import regulations. These reports, published in both French and German, can be obtained from the Swiss Office for the Development of Trade, 18 rue de Bellefontaine, 1001 Lausanne (Switzerland). Their price abroad is S.Fr. 40 (including postage).

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