

Zeitschrift: The Swiss observer : the journal of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK
Herausgeber: Federation of Swiss Societies in the United Kingdom
Band: - (1972)
Heft: 1638

Rubrik: Swiss events

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SWISS EVENTS

Reform of sickness insurance

A federal commission set up in 1969 to lay down plans for a new system of sickness insurance has officially produced its findings in a 280 page report.

The Commission proposes to make sickness insurance obligatory. Wage earners would be called to contribute 1.8 to 2 per cent of their income, half of which would be supplied by their employers. For the independent professions, the system would be similar to that actually in force for Old Age Pension. This obligatory insurance would cover hospital fees from the sixth day of incapacity onward, until a week before the end of a hospital stay.

The Commission also recommends that employers should take up a compulsory insurance covering 80 per cent of the lost wages of their employees in the case of prolonged illness.

Although some members of the Commission favoured the idea of an

insurance cover for medicine, it finally decided to leave this to the discretion of the Cantons. The purpose of these recommendations was to transfer into the care of trustworthy hands, namely insurance companies, the 5 billion francs currently spent on health every year. Nowadays, a large proportion of uninsured people of small means have recourse to charitable institutions, communes, rebates, to meet hospital fees when they are not simply exempted from complete payment. The proposed system would do away with all this. It reckons on an insured national health expenditure of 5,250 million francs in 1974, 3,250 million of which would be raised from obligatory insurance, 1,150 million charged on employers and 850 million contributed by the State.

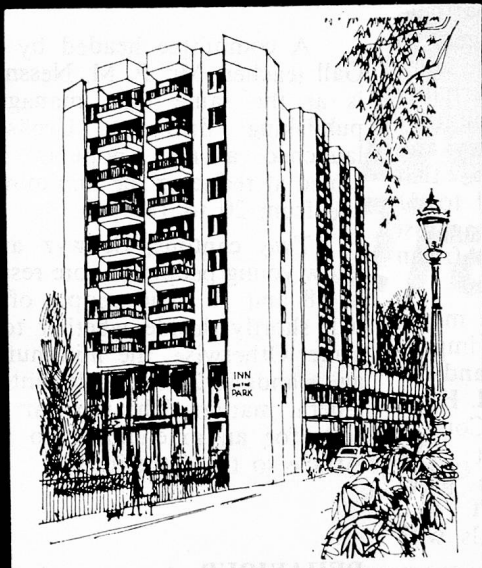
The recommendations also emphasise the solidarity between the wealthy and less prosperous members of the community in the field of public health. The Report will be submitted to the Cantons and various political economic associations, who are called to voice their opinion by July. Its proposals will be examined in Parliament, but there is little chance that they will become law before one or two years. The Socialist Party has launched a similar initiative, in favour of generalised sickness insurance. Should it gather the required signatures, then it won't be the first time that voters will be called to choose between competing proposals stemming from the government and a party.

Federal loss

The income and expenditure account of the Confederation showed a 294 million franc deficit in 1971. Total revenue of the Confederation in 1971 was 7,814 million francs (£781 million), its sources of income breaking up as follows: Income and fortune tax (including turnover tax), 2,015 million; Stamp Duty, 402 million; Purchase Tax, 2,619 million; Customs, 2,556 million; Others, 222 million.

The reason for the deficit lay in sharply increased overall expenditure, partly due to greater federal subventions in every field. The main expenditure items take up the following proportions in the budget: Social Security (17.8 per cent), Education (8.5 per cent), Defence (24.9 per cent), Agriculture (10.3 per cent), and Transport (17.8 per cent). Total expenditure on civil and military defence reached 2,232 million francs, a 10.8 per cent increase on 1970 figures (but more or less the same proportion of expenditure as in 1970).

The Federal Council plans to put the situation back on a square footing by increasing the level of Turnover Tax, which it is entitled to do by 10 per cent without having to consult the people and the Cantons. It will also introduce Value Added Tax. It is estimated that an increase of Turnover Tax can be expected to yield some 550 extra million francs a year by 1975. VAT on the other hand can bring in several billion francs and it may become the main Federal Tax of the future.



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Croat nationalists in Switzerland?

The French daily *Le Monde* wrote in its 26th April issue that leaders of the "Matica Hivatska", a Croat Separatist organisation claiming responsibility for blowing up an airliner earlier this year, were operating from Switzerland. The Department of Justice and Police said that it knew nothing about this, but rumours were circulating that Croat nationalists are active in Switzerland, particularly among the 18,000 seasonal Croat workers employed in the country. Also known as the "Oustachis", they are fighting for the independence of Croatia, a Yugoslav province whose capital is Zagreb. They blew up a Yugoslav airliner, killing 27 passengers, and derailed an express train. They have also claimed responsibility for the assassination of the Yugoslav Ambassador to Sweden and have killed 77 people in explosions in Belgrade.

Experts on these matters do not believe that the leaders of the movement are in Switzerland, although there may be a network of underground cells.

A Croat priest working in Basle among his compatriots is said to be engaged in political activities and inducing fellow Croats to support the Separatist movement. If these facts are proved, then the authorities will stop them soon enough. Switzerland has never welcomed outside subversive activities. According to other rumours, secret Croat meetings are held in a central Swiss monastery. The Second Assembly of the Croat *Intelligentsia* will be held in Lucerne in early July. Perhaps more details will emerge on that occasion.

New adoption laws

The National Council opened its Spring session with a debate on new adoption legislation. The Federal Council had proposed a new law, replacing the existing one, which dates from 1907, and allowing parents to adopt children at 35 or over (and not at 40 as hitherto), or after five years of marriage. This was contested by exactly half the Council, which claimed that 35 was too high a limit for adoption in this day and age and demanded a lowering to 30 of the minimum age for adoption.

Mrs. Sprend, a Radical National Councillor from Fribourg, and a doctor, played an important role in the debate. Firmly in support of adoption at 30, she claimed that a married couple could nowadays know at an early stage whether they could have children or not, and that it was therefore not necessary to wait for so long.

Moreover, it would be cruel to ask a yearning, infertile married woman to wait until she was 35 for the authorisation of adopting a child. When the issue was put to the vote, there were 65 votes for the 35 year limit, and 65 votes for the 30 year limit. The President, Mr. Vontobel, decided in favour of the 30 year limit with a casting vote. It now remains for the two Houses to agree, since the Council of States had voted in favour of the 35 year limit. They may also have to find a mutually acceptable solution regarding the minimum age at which a single woman can adopt. The National Council decided that it should be 30, but the Council of States has not yet decided on this point.

Other aspects of the new bill were left unchanged, namely that there must be an age difference of 16 years between the adopted child and his new parents, and that a child can only be adopted six weeks after his birth, lastly that a child once adopted could not be claimed back by his kindred parents.

African delegation in Berne

An important delegation from the Organisation for African Unity (OAU) visited Berne on 18th-19th April. It was led by Mr. Moktar Ould Daddah, its President for 1972 and President of Mauritania. Also included in the party were the General Secretary of the Organisation, and several foreign ministers and high officials from African countries.

The purpose of this mission was to bring to the awareness of our leaders in Berne the realities of Apartheid and political injustice practices in South Africa and the Portuguese colonies. The delegation, which is currently making a tour of Western countries later left Switzerland for Turkey and Japan, had come in the hope that Switzerland would be prepared to do something in their struggle against white domination on the African continent.

This, in effect, would have meant a willingness by Switzerland to impose controls on Swiss investments and exports in the countries concerned. However, this conflicted with the Confederation's central political tenet: The universality of relations with other countries. Switzerland doesn't deal with particular regimes, it deals with States, good or bad.

There was no question, therefore, of Switzerland inflicting some sort of embargo on South Africa or Portugal. The arms export question was readily solved, since these countries are included in the Arms Ban list. But Berne, prepared indeed to help OAU countries materially, was not willing to send arms to African liberation movements. The only concession which appears to have been made to the visit-

ing delegation, was a rather hesitant promise to tighten Export Credit Guarantees to businessmen dealing with countries of Southern Africa.

The OAU Delegation had to be reconciled with the realities of a free and mixed economy, and this is why Mr. Ould Daddah made a plea to Swiss business in his closing Press conference, reminding them that, although investment in South Africa was a more profitable short term proposition, the future of the Continent lay in Free Africa. "Africa will remember her friends" he concluded.

Little support for a break of normal relations with South Africa transpired in the Swiss Press. The argument put forward was that if Switzerland had to wield sanctions against countries with unjust regimes, then the list of those affected would have to comprise several more names than those of South Africa and Portugal. Some of the 41 member states of the OAU would have to be included, remarked one invidious commentator.

Nevertheless, the OAU Delegation left for Turkey apparently satisfied by the results obtained. It had been decided to open an OAU Office in Geneva. Mr. Ould Daddah and his team had been welcomed at Geneva Airport by Mr. Pierre Graber and several local and federal officials. Mr. Graber had specially curtailed his official stay in Paris in order to meet the delegation, which also had talks with Mr. Nelio Celio, President of the Confederation.

Initiative for voting at 18

A committee headed by a Saint-Gall teacher, Mr. F. M. Nessmer, who is at the same time manager of a publishing firm at Urnäsch has launched a new popular initiative aimed at reducing the minimum voting age from 20 to 18.

Two cantons, Schwyz and Zug, allow young people to vote respectively at 18 and 19. The people of Geneva will shortly decide whether to do the same. Otherwise, the minimum voting age stands at 20 for both cantonal and federal matters. The popular initiative calls for an amendment to the 74th Article to the Constitution.

BEHAVIOUR

Insane killer

A 21-year-old student in Lausanne was suddenly seized with a fit of madness. He sprang out of his home armed with a kitchen knife, slashed away at passers-by, hurting seven of them in a few seconds and seriously wounding five of them. One of the victims, a

nine-year-old girl, died in hospital. The young madman was eventually overcome by a policeman and members of the public. He had been following treatment in a psychiatric hospital.

Fortune teller on trial

An exceptional audience heard the verdict of the district court of Neuchatel in the case of a local painter accused of having told their future for money, to some two hundred people. The indictment said that the defendant had "exploited public credulity".

The painter pleaded not guilty to breaking the law and referred to the numerous horoscopes currently published in many newspapers. He claimed that he was playing a "normal and useful part in society". If this were not so, his skills would not be required by so many people.

At the end of two tumultuous hearings, he was sentenced to pay the costs and to a fine of 500 francs. This rather lenient sentence took account of the favour in which fortune telling, clairvoyance and astrology are presently held as illustrated by the high attendance at the trial.

Mattmark Appeal

The relatives of the victims of the Mattmark Dam disaster have appealed against the judgement of the recent trial at Sion of 17 persons considered to have shared various degrees of responsibility for the disaster. They were, in effect, acquitted. The new trial will be held at Sion on 27th and 29th September.

Attempted skyjack by a lunatic

An early morning Swissair flight from Geneva to Rome last April was the scene of an attempted hijack by a lunatic.

Mr. Victor Maimone, 30, had bought a one-way first class ticket just before the flight. As the Swissair DC-9 airliner was circling Rome before landing, he emerged in the pilot's cabin holding a box which he claimed contained dynamite. He told the captain to head for Argentina. When he had finally accepted the fact that this was impossible, he cried out: "I want to speak to the Pope and the American Ambassador in Rome. I am ordering you to land at Ciampino and not Fiumicino Airport, or else I'll blow up the plane".

The DC-9 landed at Ciampino, where a solid detachment of security men were waiting. A police officer in civilian clothes drove up to the plane in a car, and asked the hijacker to come down to be brought to the Ambassador. He did . . . and was arrested.

Maimone, it turned out, had already a number of escapades to his name and had escaped from a psychiatric institution shortly before his hop to Rome.

Vietnam

Demonstrations burst out in several large towns in protest against the stepping-up of the American air war in Vietnam. The main ones took place at Zurich and Lausanne. In Zurich, about two thousand, mainly young people assembled at the Volkshaus and listened to pacifist and anti-American speeches. The demonstration, which had been authorised by the authorities, then moved towards the American Consulate, where an effigy of President Nixon was burnt. The demonstration broke up without incident.

Several Socialist and left-wing movements issued statements condemning American involvement in Vietnam. The Basle-Town branch of the

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Socialist party voted a resolution expressing its "consternation" at the "massive bombardments" being carried out by American forces of South and North Vietnamese cities. The resolution "severely" condemned this form of "bomb terror", whose main victims were innocent civilians.

In Lucerne, city authorities prohibited the "22nd April Committee" from staging a photograph exhibition on Vietnam in one of the town's main squares. Reasons put forward were the "political tendency" of the photographs. The would-be organisers intended to symbolise their "solidarity with their Vietnamese comrades".

Severe sentences served on anarchists in Zurich

Three young people charged with damaging the Police Headquarters in Zurich and the Town Hall in two separate bomb incidents on 25th December, 1968 and 31st January, 1969 were served sentences at the end of April of up to six years imprisonment by the Supreme Court of Zurich. One man, aged 26, was sentenced to six years, from which 602 days of preventive detention had been deducted. A 24-year-old girl was served a four year jail sentence, less 602 days, and another youth, aged 22, was sentenced to eighteen months' imprisonment. They had used explosives supplied to them by an Italian anarchist, Angelo Pietro Della Savia, with the intention of "frightening the establishment and inducing it to respect the anti-authoritarian striving of the young".

Illegal immigrants

An Italian playboy narrowly escaped the Basle police after having illegally brought twelve Turkish peasants into Switzerland. This "labour" racket appeared to bring in handsome returns, as the man, whose name has not been disclosed, was about to purchase a luxury villa at Gstaad.

His operations led him to Turkey, where he found destitute peasants willing to give away all they had to find some work in the Swiss paradise that was presented to them. In exchange for their belongings and a pledge that they would pay him half of their wages in Switzerland, the man undertook to pay for their journey and find them illicit employment, which is not difficult owing to the leniency of the law and the tightness of the Swiss employment market.

With a party of twelve illiterate Turks, who apparently had been ruined by the crackdown on the culture of hemp in Turkey, he arrived at the Basle border, pretending to be a guide leading a party of tourists into

the country. There were no difficulties at the customs, but the manager of the hotel where they put up in Basle became suspicious after a few days.

He was surprised that the "guide" should pay all the bills, and the bleary-eyed people in his care didn't look very much like tourists either. He shared his feelings with the police, who interviewed the "guide" but later set him free. The same night he escaped with all the money of the unfortunate immigrant workers, who were given a hard taste of paradise. They were later looked after by the Salvation Army.

A declaration by the Department of Justice and Police confirmed that an illegal immigrant racket had been going on all the time, especially since the summer of 1971. The federal authorities had noticed a growing tendency among employers not to respect the labour quotas instituted last year and asked local police forces to periodically inspect factories in their area. An employer found with illegal labour is liable to a maximum fine of 2,000 francs, which is not much of a deterrent. Although he usually pays their Old Age Pension and Taxes, he often neglects to pay Accident Insurance.

Engaging in labour smuggling is often a lucrative venture. A man recently convicted of importing Portuguese workers had earned 62,000 francs. He was fined 5,000 francs.

Hurricane over Vaud

The Lake Geneva area was swept during the last week of April by the strongest *Bise* recorded since 1966. The *Bise* is a regular wind blowing alongside the Jura from the north east and occasionally lashing up waves on the lake which are as large as those met during a Mediterranean gale. This was certainly true at the end of April, when over fifty boats were sunk on their moorings. There was also extensive damage in Vaud, Geneva, Fribourg and the Jura. Trees were uprooted, houses lost their roofs and damage to property ran into millions.

LABOUR

Trade Union backs foreign workers

The main Swiss trade union with a Christian label sent a petition signed by over ten thousand signatories to the Federal Chancery. The union, "The Swiss Christian Federation of Metal Workers", demands equality of treatment for foreign workers in the field of social security. Taking note that social security legislation is currently under review, the petition asks of the law-makers to allow foreign workers to enjoy the same advantages as Swiss nationals. More precisely, the

petition requires that workers definitely leaving Switzerland should have the choice between a complete repayment of his private employers pension, plus interest, or have it transferred to his own country.

This initiative is one of the many examples of showing that Swiss unions have the interests of foreign workers in Switzerland at heart. Although the famed June 1970 Referendum indicated that the majority of Swiss working people were biased against their fellow workers from abroad, and that they supported Mr. James Schwarzenbach (although not for the reasons he advocated), the unions have shown considerably more sense of responsibility. To some extent, the rift between official trade unions and the feelings of workers, current in the U.K., is seen in Switzerland, it is a question of degree in militancy. In Switzerland, it hinges on a difference of outlook towards the foreign labour problem. Union officials are more inclined to be understanding towards them than many fellow workers.

ENVIRONMENT

Work at "Super-CERN" well under way

The construction of the new "Super-CERN" nuclear accelerator near the site of the CERN Laboratories in Geneva is well under way. It will take eight years before the 300 billion electron-volt machines are switched on. With the help of superconducting magnets, the power of this 2km-wide instrument stretching into France will be doubled. The most powerful accelerators of this kind in the world are those of Serpoukov (USSR, 70 GeV) and Batavia (USA, 200 GeV, in the course of completion).

The prospect of CERN's extension naturally alarmed local residents who feared that the lush countryside at the foot of the Jura would be spoilt by ugly box-like laboratories and an influx of European physicists. A Press conference by CERN reassured them that nearly all the new installations will be buried underground. A few new buildings will be erected on French territory and the Confederation will buy a 200 metre wide plot of land on each side of the accelerator ring. This is to make sure that any change of soil consistency resulting from new buildings would not affect the operation of the accelerator. Super-CERN will require only 800 new scientists, thus the area will retain its agricultural and non-industrial vocation.

Workers on the French section of the site belonging to the CFDT (Confédération française des travailleurs)

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union staged an unlimited strike for a 14 per cent wage increase and improved working conditions. No one could blame them. All of them, Algerian, Portuguese, Spanish, Tunisian labourers, were earning a basic 4.05 French francs an hour. This means 3.25 Swiss francs, as compared with the 7.50 to 9.50 francs an hour normally earned by building workers in Switzerland. They were housed in cramped barracks devoid of adequate sanitation. A Swiss reporter who crossed the border to investigate said they were as bad as any of the installations offered to foreign seasonals employed in Switzerland.

"The Apostle of Lake Lugano"

The most perseverant champion of conservation in the Tessin is a Mr. Ghiggi, a municipal worker entrusted with cleaning the shores of Lake Lugano. With such a job, Mr. Ghiggi had first hand experience of the deteriorating pollution of the lake and sounded the alarm very early on. Hardly noticed at first, his influence eventually led to the building of a small purifying plant near to Lake Muzzano, and helped to give rise to a general conservationist movement in the Tessin. The most concrete results of his efforts came when the Great Council of Tessin voted credits of 34.6 million francs to clean the communal waters of Lugano, Locarno, Mendrisio and Chiasso. All in all, the Tessin has currently allocated 83.6 million francs to anti-pollution investments.

Mr. Ghiggi began his campaign by securing the support of a Zurich specialist, Mr. Gygax. Together, the two men produced pollution charts of mountain streams, rivers and lakes and an impressive photographic evidence of pollution. It was long after he had begun struggling to save Lake Lugano from its dirt that the "Tessin Association for the Protection of the Environment" was created. Mr. Ghiggi is at present involved in another similar movement, "Acqua Pulite", which is particularly concerned with protecting the plain of Vedeggio, which supplies Lugano with most of its drinking water.

The large water abduction and purifying schemes under way in Lugano have affected the town's aspect. An important site has been opened in the Parco Ciani, and it will be necessary to temporarily remove the monument of the Piazza Indipendenza. It is expected that the causes of the lake's pollution will be overcome in about ten years time.

Night Flight Ban at Swiss Airports

The Swiss Federal Department of Transport has amended the Operating Concessions for the airports of Zurich and Geneva by a night flight ban to enter into effect on 1st November, 1972 (between 22.00 and 06.00 hours). The following general operating restrictions will apply:

- reduction of flights which form the object of a special permit or have to be approved as scheduled operations,
- the noise reducing approach and climb-out procedures,
- the noise limits for night flights,
- limitation of traffic to defined preferential runways.

In addition to this the airports will be closed to line traffic from midnight delayed departures or arrivals will be tolerated until 00.30 hours.

The Airport Management may, for important reasons, grant exceptional permits also after 00.30 hours. In the morning, landings are allowed from 05.00 hours and departures only from 06.00 hours.

The same rules apply to non-line operations and unscheduled flights of scheduled carriers. The Airport Management may tighten the curfew period by setting the beginning one hour earlier and let it end at 06.00 hours.

The ban for private aircraft traffic is to be decreed by the Airport Management.

THE JURA

Hustle at Reconvilier

A Separatist demonstration was disrupted on 23rd April at Reconvilier by a small but determined group of anti-Separatist members of the "Union

des Patriotes Jurassien" (UPJ). About a thousand Separatists had assembled in the square of the town's school to listen to their leaders attacking Bernese domination. A few UPJ members were waiting for them in the school grounds and there ensued a scuffle, which fortunately wrought damages limited to about 2,000 francs and a few bruises on both sides. The situation became very tense as rival factions tore down each other's flags and started gripping each other.

The police detached a company of Grenadiers, who fortunately never had to intervene. In the course of their demonstration, the Separatists made a bonfire with several hundred copies of the Civil Defence's "Little Red Book". The main themes of Mr. Roland Beguelins speech were: Discrimination against the Jura in the field of investments and road equipment. Demand for immediate credits of 40 million francs in compensation. Appeal to the inhabitants of the Jura not to be lured away from the Motherland by new industrial concentrations being set up in other areas of Switzerland. Rejection of Bernese financial legislation, guilty of disrupting communal life and leading to an increase in taxation.

The General Secretary of the Rassemblement Jurassien had these points passed in a common resolution. A second resolution was submitted to the vote after a second speech by Mr. Claude Rebetez, member of the Groupe Bélier. He attacked the Military Department for having purchased 85,000 square metres of land adjacent to the existing firing range at Reconvilier. It was alleged that these appropriations had been hidden from the local population and that their purpose was to "prepare the military occupation of the Jura". The manifesto mentions two previous examples to back this claim: The Franches

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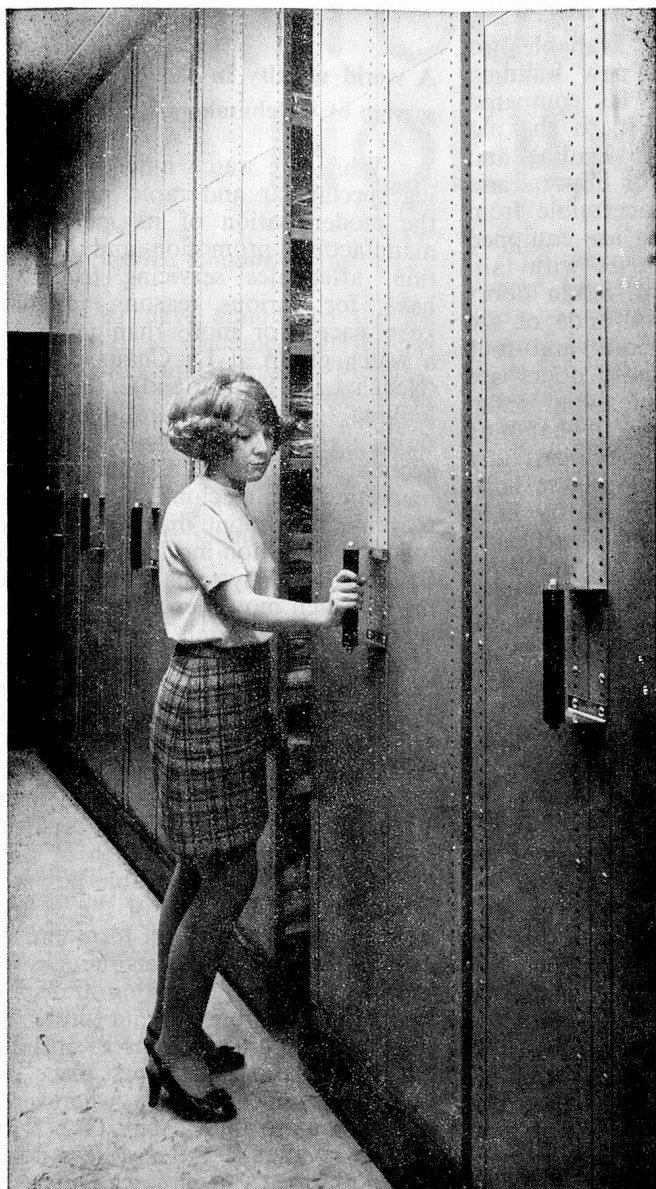
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Montagnes military range, the purpose of which was alleged to be the "neutralisation of autonomist forces", and a Jurassien demonstration at Bure, during which the police had been issued with 10,000 rounds of war ammunition. The same resolution denies the Federal Department all confidence and accuses it of having recourse to "devious methods".

The Military Department later explained that the plots in question had been voluntarily sold by local farmers and that the purpose of extending the Reconvilier range was to increase its security.

The Reconvilier demonstration was cut short because of the incident. Leaders of both warring groups spoke through loud speakers, appealing for calm. The UPJ hecklers had earlier retreated to a neighbouring private property and attempted to smother the speeches made in the school court by turning wood-cutting machines on at full screech. Separatists later conglomerated in front of the property and ripped off its gateway.

Incidents like this may stop if the discussions which, according to the *Journal de Montreux*, the Head of the Justice and Police Department, Mr. Kurt Furgler, may have within a month with the Separatist leadership are successful. The trouble is that there is nothing the other side can say which the other has not already heard on innumerable occasions.

(Note, this meeting took place in the first week of May. We shall be reporting in the next S.O.)

BUSINESS

Slow progress of watch exports in 1971

Although Switzerland's overall exports increased by 6.7 per cent in 1971, the watch business registered only an 0.8 per cent increase in overseas sales. These disappointing results were due to the revaluation of the Swiss franc and to a general slackening of world trade. In its Annual Report, the Watch Federation notes that the regulations governing watch exports since the 1930's, which made this crucial branch of the watch industry a special case, were abolished on 31st December, 1971.

Exports in 1971 totalled 2,650 million francs, of which 200 million went to Germany, 182 to Italy, 159 to Great Britain, 484 to the U.S. and surprisingly, 251 million francs to Hong Kong.

Swissair opens new cargo terminal at New York

On 1st May Swissair opened a new cargo terminal at J. F. Kennedy Airport, New York. Costing some £3.6 million, it was constructed over the past 20 months and is Swissair's

largest building outside Switzerland to date.

The covered area available for cargo handling in the new building amounts to 80,730 sq. ft., compared with about 15,000 sq. ft. in the old premises. A total of 16 loading and unloading bays, eight for imports and eight for exports, are accessible from the road. Three of each are equipped with levellers to fit lorries with tail-gates set at any height. Seven doors are located on the apron side of the building, three for exports and four for imports two of these doors are connected to a new automated pallet stacked system, capable of handling all sizes of pallets and igloos currently in use. It has a special scissor hoist arrangement, adjustable to lorry floor height and thus permitting direct pick-up. In addition, the two stacker loading lifts are equipped with scales. Up to 20 pallets/igloos or containers can be stored in the stacker on two levels.

Sulzer Report

The Sulzer Group expects a fairly good year in 1972. 2,900 million francs' worth of new orders were recorded in 1971 (2.7 billion in 1970). Sulzer Brothers AG of Winterthur received invoiced orders worth 1,100 million francs. The most profitable line remains its weaving machines. Turnover for foundry products has diminished and prospects for marine diesels are dimmed by the predicted slump in world shipbuilding. Orders for weaving machines have been reduced from Great Britain and the US, but have increased from Common Market countries and Brazil.

Slow down at Alusuisse

The Swiss firm, Alusuisse, one of the largest in the aluminium production industry, has shown a 50 per cent loss in consolidated profit, as it reduced its group turnover by 11 per cent to 2,050 million francs in 1971. These results are mainly the consequence of a slump in the aluminium market following a period of high demand and the development of excess capacity.

Brown Boveri accused of "dumping"

The Baden-based electromechanical giant Brown Boveri has had to answer charges of dumping, or "selling at less than fair value", thereby "injuring" American competitors. The case was filed by Westinghouse and General Electric, two American firms which together control 70 per cent of the US heavy electricals market. Other European and Japanese companies had to answer the same charges. According to the plaintiff firms, Brown Boveri had been depressing its prices on large 10-MVA transformers, tendered for in 1970, by 5 to 16 per cent.

TECHNICAL

A world novelty in the service of watchmakers

While the watch industry is making spectacular and rapid progress in the modernisation of its methods of manufacture, promotion and distribution, after-sales servicing techniques have, for various reasons, failed to keep pace. For more than ten years, a watch group at La Chaux-de-Fonds (Neuchatel, Switzerland) has been looking for means of rationally integrating after-sales service into the economy of the watch industry. After marketing a machine for cleaning movements without dismantling them, followed by a non-mechanised unit for the rapid and systematic reconditioning of watch movements, the firm concentrated its research on producing a flexible type of equipment capable of being made to "grow" as the user's needs became greater. The outcome was a completely new system, comprising a full set of equipment consisting of three autonomous and complementary units: a cleaning set, a repairing set and an armrest set. Each of these units is packed in a portable box with a handle. All elements of the system, from the point of view of form and the materials used, have been thought out with a view to facilitating transport, installation, and present and future use. As there are no problems of installation or initiation, the work place can be set up in 5 minutes wherever a table not more than 6 cm. (2 3/8 in.) thick is available. After a few dozen repairs, carried out either at home, in the retail shop or in the workshop, the initial investment is already written off.

A series of battery movements unique of its kind in the world

At a press conference held simultaneously in Geneva, New York and Hong Kong, Ebauches Co. Ltd. (Neuchatel, Switzerland), the biggest producer of watch parts in the world, presented to the press the novelties it is exhibiting at the Basle Fair; these comprise a complete range of new electronic movements called the "Swissonic Line". This is the first time, in the history of watchmaking, that a firm has been in a position to announce the launching not only of a single model but of a whole range of movements all belonging to the electronics category. These new movements are provided with resonators representing three electronic generations: sprung-balance, tuning-fork and quartz. Another, the latest and the most spectacular of them all, represents the fourth generation known as "solid state", this movement is fully electronic.