

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: - (1973)

Heft: 1666

Rubrik: Technical items

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GOVERNMENT WARNS OVER POWER CUTS

Opposition to the construction of new power stations in Switzerland is such that the Government has now had to warn of possible power cuts within the next five years unless the present deadlock is lifted. In a letter to the Federal Electricity Administration, Mr. Roger Bonvin, Head of the Department of Transport, Energy and Communications, underlined the urgency of putting in service at least one new nuclear power station by 1975. If this were not achieved, the power shortages which would inevitably be felt by then would require rationing current.

Switzerland has only three power-stations in service. Several more are planned but stalled by local opposition. Among the sites where new power plants were planned are Verbois, near Geneva, Kaiseraugst near Basle and Goesgen, near Solothurn. The struggle

between the regional electricity boards and the communes of the two latter villages has dragged on for years. The Great Council of Basle Country recently appealed to the Administrative Court of Canton Aarau (which borders on Basle-Country) against the erection of the Kaiseraugst power-station. This action having been rejected, the Great Council decided to bring the matter to the Federal Court. Similar wrangles have been brought about by the planned power station at Goesgen. The Public Works Department of Canton Solothurn has recently rejected the third appeal by Goesgen against the decision by the neighbouring commune of Daeniken to go ahead with the works. But the Department partially accepted a complaint by the company, called 'Gesegen-Daeniken AG', responsible for building the plant. This complaint had been lodged because of the stringent conditions set by Daeniken for the continuance of the works.

Strong verbal contest in Parliament

A violent verbal clash was fought out during two parliamentary sessions between Mr. Pierre Gruber, Head of the Political Department, and Mr. James Schwarzenbach, the leader of the right wing Republican Party. Supported by a handful of fellow national counsellors, Mr. Schwarzenbach attacked Mr. Gruber personally, calling him a 'little king', and criticised his foreign policy, in particular his alleged excessive trips abroad. Mr. Gruber who is known for his fast repartees, countered hard. By the accounts of the Press, he won hands down against Mr. Schwarzenbach. In another, previous exchange, Mr. Gruber firmly destroyed the arguments of a Christian Democrat parliamentarian who claimed that the minister's journey to Cairo in early-May had been a waste of time and contrary to Swiss neutrality. The opponent had argued that Egypt was in a state of war.

Technical Items

SWISS PARTICIPATION IN THE SKYLAB MISSION

The Bulova (Biene, Berne) timekeeping laboratory has received an order for a certain number of Bulova Accutron "countdown" alarm watches for the Skylab laboratory. These alarm watches are fitted with the same electronic tuning fork movement as that normally used in Bulova Accutron watches. The dials are of the "countdown" type, that is to say decreasing, so that each astronaut can see at a glance the time left for performing the programmed operations set for the mission. Over 50 space missions, including those of the Apollo programme, have already used timekeepers made by this Berne factory.

GIANT TURBINE-PUMP MADE IN SWITZERLAND

The Vevey Engineering Works Co. Ltd. (Vaud, Switzerland), specializing in the construction of hydraulic machinery, helped fit out the French power station at Vouglans, Ain. The French licensee of the Swiss firm built, according to a Franco-Swiss technique, the largest turbine-pump in France, which is also the biggest in Europe. The Vevey Engineering Works Co. Ltd. were commissioned to develop this new type of machine and carry out the corresponding trials on a scale model in their hydraulic laboratory; they were also commissioned to supply the constructional plans for the turbine-pump, to provide the electronic regulators and the pivot as well as to finish the wheel and the guide vanes. The Swiss firm was also responsible for supervising the assembly, starting up and testing of the machine under extreme conditions. These tests, which have just been completed, showed excellent results.

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SWISS ESCALATORS FOR THE STOCKHOLM SUBWAY

Stockholm is extending its subway and the AB Storstockholms Lokaltrafik has placed an order with Schlieren AB Stockholm — a branch of the Swiss Railway Coach and Elevators Co. Ltd., Schlieren (Schlieren, Zurich) — for 36 escalators for its new subway stations. The Swedish company has also taken an option on three other escalators. These are new types of escalator, designed specially to satisfy the very exacting standards required for subway stations. Unlike the standard models, designed for differences in height of only 13 to 20 feet, these new models will be used for differences in level of as much as 880 feet. The new escalators will be delivered in the spring of 1974.

GROWTH OF INSURANCE IN SWITZERLAND

In 1971, Switzerland came tenth of all countries in the world for the intensity of its insurance activity. First was the United States with 54% of the premiums paid anywhere in the world. The United States' share was in fact larger — 65% — ten years ago. During the same period, Japan has risen from sixth to second place with a share of 8%. It is followed by West Germany, Great Britain, France, Canada, Italy, Australia, the Netherlands and Switzerland (about

1%). In 1971, the total premiums paid in the world amounted to 137 billion dollars compared with 52 billion in 1961. This makes an increase of 163%. In this connection, it should be noted that the restoring of order in exchange rates at the end of 1971, as well as the increase compared with 1970 (about 115 billion) greatly influenced each country's share. If countries are classified according to premiums per head of the population, Switzerland is among the first, coming 3rd, with 199 dollars. It is beaten only by the United States (359 dollars) and Canada (206). On the other hand, it is ahead of West Germany (168), Australia (156), Sweden (152), the Netherlands (148), Denmark (133), Great Britain (130) and New Zealand (122). Next come France, Japan, in 14th place and Italy 19th.

Machine tool companies view future with anxiety

The Swiss machine and engineering industry is not over-optimistic about its short term prospects. Following the various troubles that have beset the monetary world, its competitive edge has been eroded and Swiss machine-tool firms had orders for 7.6 months work at the end of last year, as against 8.1 months a year earlier and 9.6 months at the end of 1970. 376,000 people, or nearly half of the industrial labour force, are employed in this sector. Its output in 1972 was worth 12.5 billion francs, three quarters of which were exported. The output of the metallurgical industry reached 1.5

billion francs. As a result of diminishing orders, there were 13,000 fewer persons employed in both industries in 1972 compared with a year earlier.

NESTLE — HIGHLY SUCCESSFUL MANAGEMENT

In 1972 Nestlé, the international foodstuffs group and Switzerland's biggest firm, once again proved the quality of its management. In spite of the keenness of competition on the foodstuffs market and continued uncertainty on the money market, the group was able to increase its turnover considerably and keep its profit margins. The group's turnover, totalling 15,770 million francs, about half of which was recorded in Europe and one third in America, developed fairly regularly in all sectors. Sales of chocolate and sugared products formed the exception since their share of the total turnover dropped from 9.8% in 1971 to 8.9% in 1972. On the other hand, sales of soups and pre-cooked dishes increased in higher than average proportions and now account for one fifth of all sales. One third is accounted for by soluble beverages and a quarter by dairy products, the rest being divided between various preparations. Thanks to a decrease in extraordinary expenditure and exchange losses, Nestlé was able to record a net profit of 652 million francs, i.e. 21% more than in 1971. These excellent results led the company to increase the dividends issued to shareholders.

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