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COMMENT

SECURING AGREEMENT BETWEEN TENANT AND LANDLORD

Excessive rents and exploitation of tenants can be considered as part of the "unacceptable face of capitalism". Without upsetting the mechanism of a capitalist economy, the Swiss Government has all the same attempted to reduce its ill effects in the field of housing. A persistent shortage of housing and the general boom in the economy have led to a tremendous demand in housing — hence speculation on land, high rents and increased costs.

Part of the Government's struggle against this situation consisted in creating, in June 1972, "conciliation commissions" in the main cities and communes. Managed by local and cantonal authorities, these commissions bring together delegates from tenants and owners associations and try to bring about a peaceful settlement when an aggrieved tenant lodges a complaint. House owners are usually represented by estate agencies. Ninety percent of flats in Geneva are managed by agencies on behalf of their owners — who are usually very wealthy individuals or companies.

Conciliation commissions offer their services free of charge. When a tenant disagrees with a rent increase acceptable under the terms of the lease agreement, he can call the commission for advice and be given the opportunity to meet the other side. The public servant running the commission will often intervene actively to bring about a compromise solution. A settlement is in fact achieved in 70 per cent of cases although in Geneva, which suffers from a serious housing problem, the commissions only bring the two parties to an agreement in 50 per cent of cases. The aggrieved tenant can then either go to court or abandon his case and pay the required rent.

The framework within which these commissions operate is very loose, and a recent study has shown that they worked

on widely different lines according to local conditions. This is because the Federal Decree which gave birth to these commissions is rather vague and gives them a wide margin of initiative. Commission chairmen are not given guidelines on how to act in particular circumstances and must improvise. The principles these chairmen are to base their judgment on are set out in the decree:

— The proposed rent must be within the limits of rents demanded in the same area for comparable flats or premises, due account being taken of their site, age, condition and disposition.

— Rent increases must be justified by the rise in the cost of living or by the extra service supplied by the lessor.

— Rents applied for recently-built flats should be calculated so as to allow for an acceptable gross yield and to cover costs. When the cost of land or construction has been obviously exaggerated, it is not possible to invoke this fact as an argument to put up rents.

— Rents should only aim at preserving the purchasing power of the risk capital that has been invested in the rented object.

— Rent increases should not go above limits recommended in general agreements between lessor and lessee associations.

The many conciliation commissions in operation for the past year have found these principles insufficient and partly inapplicable. For example, they can't always apply the notion of "standard rent" for an area because of the great variety of rents that already exist for similar premises in some areas. Calculating the purchasing power of risk capital, defining the value of additional services by landlords and knowing when the cost of a site has been excessive are some of the problems the 30th June 1972 Decree sets forth without answering.

This empirical system has nevertheless achieved satisfactory results. About 3000 cases have been examined in Geneva, and similar figures are recorded in other towns.

HOME NEWS

BERNE ACTS AGAINST THE "BÉLIERS"

The recent occupation of the Belgian Embassy in Berne and the heckling of a Bernese official at an annual event at Saignelegier have prompted the Berne Government to act against the Béliers Separatist movement in the Jura.

The Bernese Executive has decided to bring charges on the second of these two incidents. A group of separatist militants prevented the President of the Bernese Executive Council from making a speech at the *Marché Concours*, an annual event which attracts more than five thousand people. The meeting was seriously disrupted by bangers and smoke bombs. The hall had to be evacuated and some damage was caused to the band's musical instruments. Charges will also be brought against the Béliers for having recently occupied the Delémont Police headquarters.

Following these incidents, the Executive have asked the Supreme Court of Berne to name a magistrate to enquire into the actions of the Group. It has also proceeded with a revision of present legislation so as to strengthen repressive measures against such actions in future. It will ask the Great Council (Parliament) of Berne for extra credits of 430,000 francs to keep a small force of police on 24-hour alert.

These measures were stated to be in "defence of the security and freedom of the Jurassian population".

Mr. Roland Béguin, General Secretary of the *Rassemblement Jurassien*, the main Separatist Organisation, said that Berne was attempting to "protect its régime of domination over the Jura." The Béliers warned that they would "fight till the final victory, whatever police and legal reprisals might be".

Several papers wondered whether it was wise for Berne to react as strongly as that. The *Tagesanzeiger* recognised that the Béliers created a problem by their constant flouting of constitutional order in the Canton but questioned the wisdom of "hitting the table with the fists". As for the Socialist *Tagwacht*, it has no doubt that Berne over-reacted against the "Cowboy and Indian games" of people making themselves ridiculous and isolating themselves from the Jura's population. The paper said that the Béliers were not worth so much trouble and suggests that the set of measures was an act of personal vengeance by the head of the Cantonal government for having been prevented from speaking at Saignelegier.

P.M.B.

Tschombe's kidnapper extradited

The Federal Court has decided to extradite Francis Bodenau, the man who kidnapped Mr. Moise Tschombe, the late President of Zaire and rebel prime minister of Katanga.

Francis Bodenau, a French adventurer, had contrived to be enrolled on Mr. Tschombe's staff. When the former president, who had previously been overthrown, took a chartered plane to go from Ibiza to Majorca, on 30th June, 1967, Bodenau was at the controls of the plane and flew it to Algiers. Tschombe was placed under house arrest in that city, where he died three years later. Bodenau was arrested on 2nd December, 1969, in Switzerland on an international warrant issued by Spain. The following January, the Spanish authorities demanded his extradition. Bodenau was set free on bail of 30,000 francs on 10th July last. He now seems to have disappeared so that the Court's decision will be without immediate effect.

In another development Mr. Mario Losembe, former foreign minister of Zaire, was tried in abstentia in Kinshasa. The Federal Court decided last June that Mr. Losembe should not be extradited to Zaire, where he was wanted for embezzlement of funds reaching several million dollars. Mr. Losembe was sentenced to 24 years hard labour.

Shoe industry struggles

The Swiss shoe industry is passing

through a difficult period. Its production last year of 11.2 million pairs of shoes was 27.1 per cent inferior to the record production of 1964. Imports have grown steadily. 20.9 foreign pairs of shoes were sold in Switzerland in 1972 against only 9.6 million home-made ones. The industry's turnover amounted to 369 million francs. The position has not been improved with the continuing *de facto* revaluation of the Swiss franc, and the rise in the cost of leather.

Over half of the transport companies loose money

Sixty-six per cent of public-transport companies in Switzerland made a loss last year. There are very few tram or bus companies that have broken even. Zurich transport has made a loss of 25 million francs while in Basle transport companies have made a 12 million-franc deficit. One of the few profitable undertakings in this field are the "tube" in Ouchy and cable-railway leading to the Dolder, in Zurich.

Death of a Nobel Prize Winner

Dr. Walter Rudolf Hess, a Swiss physiologist and co-winner of the Nobel Prize for medicine in 1949, died on 12th August, at Ascona, aged 93. Dr. Hess was a leading brain researcher and among the first to draw a map of the brain and establish the correlation between the brain's anatomy and the body's physiological functions.

North Korea to open a commercial mission

Switzerland and North Korea have agreed to open commercial missions in Zurich and Pyongyang. These two missions will also have consular prerogatives. North Korea is interested in Swiss watches and machinery while Switzerland could buy some of that country's raw materials. The two states have not established diplomatic relations. Switzerland has an embassy in South Korea where there is a small Swiss colony.

Zurich's James Bond leave Europe

The Swiss businessman who has made a name in transferring people in Communist Europe to the West has been asked by the Swiss authorities to put an end to his activities "in the interest of east-west détente." Mr. Hans Lenzlinger, boss of a firm called *Aramco* which claims to have brought 150 persons to the West at an individual cost of up to 50,000 francs, has transferred his headquarters to the United States. He has also been warned by West Germany that he would be arrested there and extradited to East Germany. Following the Fundamental Treaty between the two German states, the East Germans have complained at the continuing escapes of its people to the West.

1974 – Tours in Horse-drawn carriages through the Jura

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anniversary, the Swiss Automobile Club has come up with a bright idea. As from next spring, it will be organising excursions through the Jura in horse-drawn carriages, lasting from one to two weeks, in keeping with the motto of doing without motor vehicles. The Tours will start at Saignelegier where the

venturesome traveller will receive a detailed itinerary, provisions and camping equipment. Participants will stay at inns where the horses will be looked after. The routes leading through fields, woods and meadows will be carefully chosen by the tourist organisation, Pro Jura.

of Swiss marksmen, but also soldiers who act as markers and secretaries. The Federal Council supports these activities by supplying weapons and ammunition.

Mr. Paillard recalled that King Fouad of Egypt used to join members of the "Club suisse d'Egypte" in shooting meetings and usually scored very honourably.

Animal lovers sue Geneva

The Committee that sponsored a Cantonal Initiative in Geneva calling for a complete ban on hunting in the Canton have appealed to the Federal Court for an injunction forcing the Geneva Government to organise a speedy referendum on the subject. Normally, when an "Initiative Committee" has gathered a sufficient number of signatures (10,000 in Geneva) backing its proposed alteration of the cantonal constitution, the Government is held to call the people to the polls within a year. The proposals to ban hunting in Geneva were supported by 24,000 signatures and submitted to the cantonal chancery well over a year ago. The Committee says that a referendum should have been held by 8th June last. The Federal Court was asked to compel Geneva to organise this vote on 23rd September. But the cantonal authorities explained that it was not possible to give due attention to the Committee's proposals as the working group in charge of the matter had another bill on hunting under examination.



Labour shortage at the Vatican: Not enough Swiss Guards

The Vatican is suffering from an acute labour shortage in one particular and important department: Security.

Owing to the growing difficulty of finding new recruits for the Swiss guards, the Pope is at present inadequately protected. The disbanding of the Palatine and the Noble Guards in 1970 left our compatriots at St. Peter's overburdened. While there should theoretically be a hundred Swiss *halberdiers* in Rome, there are at present only 66. Twenty-six volunteers have strengthened this force during the summer, but the solution was only temporary. Recent wage increases, benefits and improved conditions have made the job more attractive. But to seek employment in the Vatican goes against the times. Colonel Franz Pfyffer von Altishofen, 56, who assumed responsibility for the Swiss Guard last year explains this by the decline in religious fervour, and by a greater job availability at home. Another important factor is the ban on marriage imposed on all young recruits. They must moreover show exemplary standards of morality. This may be asking a lot of many young people today. Those who are busy marshalling tourists on St. Peter's Square are nevertheless said to be quite content with their present situation.

51st ASSEMBLY OF THE SWISS ABROAD

The Swiss abroad held their 51st Annual Assembly at Saint Gall on the weekend of 18–19th August. We shall be reporting extensively on that important event in a forthcoming issue. It was attended by 500 people. Among the speakers were Mr. Kurt Furgler, Head of the Department of Justice and Police, and Mr. Jean-Claude Nicole, Central President of the Nouvelle Société Helvétique. The theme of the Assembly touched on the life and relevance of Swiss societies abroad. But much of the speeches and debates related to political rights. If a Bill currently under review is passed, the Swiss abroad will have almost equal political rights to their compatriots at home provided they come to Switzerland to vote. Will they make the journey, will they avail themselves of their new rights? These and other questions were recurrent in the speeches. Also high on the Agenda of the various working committees was the new law on assistance to Swiss abroad. This law, which takes effect next year, will transfer responsibility in this matter from the Cantons to the Confederation.

Swiss sports abroad

A well noted speech was Mr. Lucien Paillard's. As Assistant to the Director of the Secretariat for the Swiss Abroad, Mr. Paillard made a round-up of the sporting and athletic activities of the Swiss around the world. He said that there were 14 Swiss rifle clubs abroad. Speaking mainly about marksmanship, which is perhaps our most traditional sport, Mr. Paillard enumerated the various difficulties encountered by Swiss rifle associations. These difficulties were due to firearms laws which varied from country to country and even from town to town. In Lyon, France, shooting is prohibited by the authorities and Swiss there can only shoot thanks to a comprehending businessman who has offered them the courtyard of his factory. In other countries, it is forbidden to keep a weapon at home. This means that consulates and embassies have become ammunition depots. In Holland, civilians are not allowed to practise shooting and members of the Rifle Club must shoot with the Belgians. But not only puts firing ranges at the disposal of the Swiss marksmen, but also soldiers who act as not only puts firing ranges at the disposal



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THE MARRIAGE STAKES

The Swiss have proved more and more eager to marry. The number of married people has risen from 57 to 67 per cent of the population over the past thirty years. But there are still 1.3 million bachelors in Switzerland intent, for the most part, on marrying. They have built up the market for a thriving industry of marriage bureaux. There are over 600 of them in the country. Some are highly reputable institutions aided by computers and psychologists, others only have a letterbox. It is easy to open such an agency since all one needs is a letterbox address and enough money to start advertising. This naturally brought about abuses of all kinds causing concern to the reputable firms afraid that the trade might get a bad name. Costs vary enormously. They can be as high as 3,600

francs for a subscription. One firm will charge a flat rate of 1,320 francs plus 600 francs if a marriage ensues. Another guarantees "a thousand introductions" for a 760 franc annual fee.

An important marriage agency in Zurich charges according to the work involved in finding customers a wife or a husband. A factory girl needn't pay out anything, as she is immediately marriageable. Marrying a secretary or a farmer is something quite different, but an engineer will always find a candidate.

Other agencies make sure their clientele is mentally and physically fit and accept only people of pleasant demeanour. Others ask candidates to fill in questionnaires which are then compared by computers. This allows for an "optimized" marriage.

SWISS CHURCHES IN "GUARDIAN"

The Central Committee of the World Council of Churches (WCS) held its annual session in Geneva during the last week of August. Mr. Hans Peter Tschudi, Head of the Department of the Interior (Swiss Home Office) spoke at the inaugural session.

The WCS is an organisation grouping 263 non-Catholic churches from 90 countries. Its Headquarters are in a residential Geneva suburb. The annual meetings of its Committee are usually staged abroad. Two years ago, it took place at Canterbury and last year, it was held in Utrecht, Holland. Although the present session was scheduled to be held at Helsinki, it was moved to Geneva for reasons of economy. The WCS is facing a financial crisis due mainly to a falling support from American and other churches and the fall of the dollar.

The WCS has moreover been under fire for its political stand — or more particularly, its public declarations, many of which have been disowned by member-churches. The Federation of Swiss Protestant Churches has in particular criticised the WCS and its Secretary General, Mr. Philip Potter (Jamaica) for speaking out on various issues without these statements receiving the backing of member-churches. One issue where the WCS has offended many of its members is *racism*. The WCS recently sold all its shares in companies involved in Southern Africa. It has also set up a fund to carry out its programme against racism and allocated resources to a number of liberation movements in Africa. This support amounts to a few hundred thousand dollars a year. Needless to say, this has incensed the churches of South Africa and others elsewhere claiming that good Christian money is

being handed out to "terrorists" whose purpose is to "butcher innocent people".

A recent attack against the WCS appeared in a half-page statement paid for by the "Group of Ten" in the *Guardian* of 23rd August. The Group of Ten is a new organisation founded by South African and British interests with the purpose of defending South Africa's image. Its statement in the *Guardian* also mentioned the attitude of Swiss Churches. It claimed that the Church of England and many Protestant Churches in Switzerland were getting increasingly doubtful about the WCS World Programme against racism. It claimed that many churchmen in both countries were astounded to learn that the Programme was managed by people outside the church and unconnected with its life. The statement said that the WCS was offering support to organisations backed by Communist (i.e. non-Christian) powers. It added that the real killers were liberation fighters murdering the innocent inhabitants of isolated villages and accused the WCS with being more concerned about Revolution than improving the standard of living of Africans".

FIRST LOCAL TV IN SWITZERLAND

A local organization campaigning for a local television system in Canton Fribourg has obtained a trial concession for ten days. The organization was allowed to broadcast daily through the telephone network and the channel normally used by the French "France II" service at off-hours. This authorization was given on a trial basis by the Department of Transport and Telecommunications.

An experiment that failed

An experimental holiday camp in the Alps above Sion was closed down after young children had been seen smoking, living in filth, sleeping naked and together at all times of day.

The camp was organised by Evolene on a chalet by the Geneva Protestant Centre. It was led by a psycho-sociologist Mr. Pierre Gangebin, whose intention was to give the 23 children aged five to 10 under his care for six weeks the opportunity to develop their capacities. With seven other teachers, he carried out an experiment in developing the children's faculties by giving them the maximum of freedom.

But neighbours complained when they saw the state of neglect of the children and the premises. Parents asked for an investigation when they received letters from their children complaining about conditions at the camp. As a result, a public health inspector from the Valais, Mr. Andre Vitali and a police officer climbed to the chalet and visited it in the absence of its leaders.

"The place was in an infernal and undescrivable mess", he said.

"We found kids of five to ten years of age smoking in the midst of garbage. Some of them were not even dressed. I saw children playing on the roof of the chalet with daggers. Chairs and tables were overturned in the refectory. Plates were unwashed or broken. Everything was in an utter mess".

Mr. Vitali said that he had begun to write his report and left it on a table. When he came back, his notes had been smeared with jam. Nevertheless, he remarked that "most of the children seemed not to complain about the situation and were in good health".

The camp organiser strongly denied that they had left the children all to themselves.

"The casual observer may think that we were irresponsible, but this was certainly not the case. We are a team of psycho-sociologists and our purpose was to bring to light the secret potentialities of the children".

They stressed that the experiment had been undertaken very seriously and that many children regretted to leave the camp. "What was aimed at was to encourage the children to organise themselves, to act independently according to their initiative and capacities. We have certainly not allowed them to do everything they wished."

The organisers added: "The experiment should have been allowed to go through until the end of the camp, on 26th September, to draw conclusions. The children have always given us the impression of being happy, of being given a better chance to develop themselves and to understand themselves better outside the overwhelming influence of adults. It is necessary that they should take the

initiatives that will characterise their way of life".

In the meantime, the owner of the chalet, the Rev. Denis Mermod, from Geneva, initiated proceedings against the organisers of the camp for its "moral harm" to the children, their parents and local residents. He said that he had disassociated himself completely from the methods used during the camp and had asked for a replacement for some of the teachers.

Defence document confirms old options

The Federal Council has drafted a major policy statement on defence. It was introduced at a Press Conference by Mr. Ruedolf Gnaegi, Head of the Political Department. The report said little that was new. It outlined Switzerland's fundamental options and came to the conclusion that the country's defence potential had to be preserved and modernised. Accepting that conditions prevailing in Europe were gradually more secure, it stressed all the same that there remained a threat and that Switzerland should stay vigilant. The Federal Council carried out a rather skimpy analysis of the world political context to prove its point but it didn't provide any insight on where the Government actually saw danger. No details were given either on what kind of Army was required. All the hard decisions — such as buying new combat aircraft — were left out. Despite its examination of the various crisis situations which could confront Switzerland and its assessment of the advantages of federalism for defence, this long-awaited report was no more than a re-assertion of principles already established in the days of General Guisan.

Special emphasis was laid on the importance of popular support on defence. Switzerland must make a potential enemy aware of the fact that any attack on her territory would not pay. This not only called for weapons as efficient as those of our potential enemy, but for the will of the people to fight to the last ditch for their independence.

NO NEWS OF PERON'S GOLD

The Swiss police has denied that it had opened an enquiry into the alleged sale of 400 tons of gold on behalf of General Juan Peron, as indicated by the Geneva correspondent of the Sunday Telegraph on 9th September. The authorities point out that there would be nothing illegal about such a deal. It was later learnt that the deal had been suspended. Swiss banking circles are prepared to accept that Argentina's former leader has stored a considerable amount of gold. It is on record that he transferred at least 500 million dollars into Switzerland after the second world war and that he has a considerable fortune. It is also established that Peron transferred some of this fund back into South America in the middle fifties, after he had been ousted from power, in order to finance his comeback and promote revolution in Latin America. The CIA intervened to have these funds frozen. The eventual buyer of this treasure would be an oil producing arab country. Such countries are the only ones with available liquid funds and tradi-

tionally interested in holding gold. The recent loss of buying power of the dollar would have made a deal of this kind all the more interesting. But nothing has been confirmed as to the whereabouts of the gold, currently worth £650 million, its real origin and destination. One thing is certain, the deal would be carried out as a private transaction. Bringing such an amount of precious metal onto the bullion market would cause a crash of the price of gold, currently hovering at 106 dollars an ounce. There was indeed some speculation in London that the probable sale of 400 tons of gold was rumoured by circles interested in producing a slump of the price of gold. But the story hasn't affected the bullion market so far.

SWISS WOMEN FIND NO FULFILLMENT IN THEIR KITCHEN

An opinion poll has disproved the belief that Swiss women considered themselves entirely satisfied by their house-work. The tradition according to which Swiss women were entirely devoted to the three K's (*Kirche, Kinde, Kuche*) appears to be no longer valid. The survey showed that most women would like to work again as soon their children are of an age allowing them to do so. 60 per cent of a sample of 4000 married women answered in this way. 35 per cent had not yet made up their mind on the problem.

The most common ground for wanting to get back to work was the need for more human contact. The love of their profession came as a second answer. The wish to be financially independent was a relatively unimportant consideration. A great many women already work but intentionally limit their activities to part-time occupations for the good of their marriage and their children.

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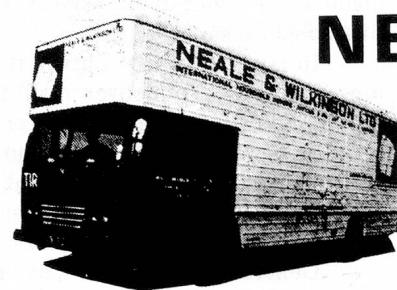
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RIF-RAF AT LAUSANNE

A milling crowd over about 1500 youths broke through the gates of the Beaulieu Centre in Lausanne where the 54th Annual *Comptoir Suisse* had just been opened and fought a pitch battle with police for over an hour. Six policemen and a police dog were wounded. Several of the demonstrators, armed with axe-handles, catapults, ball bearings, petrol bombs and paint tins, were arrested. The demonstration was in protest against Portugal's participation to the *Comptoir*, a popular annual event which this year drew the participation of 2500 exhibitors over an area of 145.000 square metres. Portugal, Bulgaria and Tunisia were guest-countries this year and all staged a customary exhibition. Shortly after the inaugural ceremony, about 3500 demonstrators marched towards the Beaulieu exhibition complex and heard speeches. About half the demonstrators — who included delegates from the churches and the local Agrarian Party — then walked away peacefully. But a hard core of militants who (it turned out) had come mostly from outside Lausanne, mainly from Zurich and Geneva, started to storm the main gates of the *Comptoir*. The three or four policemen on duty were at first completely overwhelmed but the "Brigade anti-emeute" was soon on the scene. They fought a vigorous battle with the demonstrators, who were only dispersed with tear gas. The battle took place before several hundred spectators strongly approving the determination shown by the forces of law and order. The neighbouring exhibition was being staged as if nothing happened. The trouble near the gates of Beaulieu took place against a background of piped music and loud-speaker announcements and adverts under a warm and pleasant sun. The demonstrators all the same caused an estimated 10.000 francs' worth of damages.

Two Swiss in the round the world yachting race

Two Swiss are taking part in the round the world sailing race: a well-known yachtsman from Lausanne, Serge Bays, and a Ticinese residing in Paris, Guy Piazzini. Bays, 27, has participated in many races on the Léman. He is now trying his skills at something quite different on board the "Tauranga", an Italian yacht sponsored by an Italian magazine, which was believed to be among the first six a week after the beginning of the race.

serve the cause of peace whenever she could. He explained the purpose of his visit by the wish to experience at first-hand the problems of the middle-east. Such an intention was harmless enough although it was not likely to alter the course of history. The trip highlighted the new "globe-trotting style" that Swiss leaders have gradually tended to adopt with more personal contact with foreign leaders.

CURFEW IN ZURICH

On Wednesday night, 5th September, the lights in the streets of Zurich were switched on late and only partially, the lighting of large buildings was dimmed, lending a war-time appearance to the town. The reason for this curfew was to make the *Zurchers* aware of their dependence on electricity. The temporary measure had reduced their consumption by only 4 per cent. It had been decided by the authorities in their campaign before a vote on the City's contribution to the Goesgen-Deaniken nuclear power-station in Canton Solothurn. Although the situation is not yet serious, Switzerland will be faced with an acute energy problem if she doesn't hasten the pace of its nuclear power-station programme. Every nuclear power-station actually in the planning stage has met with strong local opposition and the Government has warned that it would have to resort to rationing if the situation is not improved.

Once daily postal service in three large towns

Zurich, Basle and Bern have been compelled by very serious labour shortages to reduce their daily postal deliveries from two to one. Of the four largest Swiss towns, Geneva is the only one where the situation is provisionally unchanged. Thanks to the recruitment of over 60 postwomen and the operation of a private delivery service mailing the city's only evening paper, it is hoped to maintain a twice-daily service for the foreseeable future.

In large cities like Zurich, it was no longer possible to deliver mail twice a day. Zurich's postal services suffer from a shortage of 750 workers. The main reason why the Post Office is so short of staff is that monthly wages are on average 200 to 400 francs lower than in industry.

Geneva's postwomen perform the same duties as their men colleagues, a 24-year old woman having followed a crash training program earns 1630 francs a month. A man of the same age and experience would be earning 1750 francs a month.

Mr Graber visits Israel

Mr. Pierre Graber, Switzerland's foreign minister, paid a four-day official visit to Israel at the beginning of the month. He had a series of talks with his Israeli counterpart, Mr. Abba Eban, and with prime minister Golda Meir.

This visit has been planned a long time ago and paralleled a visit to Egypt earlier this year. By visiting both parties in the middle-east conflict, Mr. Graber underlined Switzerland's neutrality in this troubled area. A visit to Israel alone, or to Egypt alone would have been unacceptable and highly controversial. Mr. Graber's trip to Cairo had already been criticised by parliamentarians who questioned its conformity with neutrality, and by others who doubted its usefulness. Mr. Graber took again the opportunity of reasserting Swiss neutrality and stressing that this traditional stance should be of use to other countries as it had been to Switzerland. He said on his arrival that Egypt had not asked Switzerland to convey any message to Israel, but on his departure, he would not comment on an eventual mediatory role in the Middle-east crisis. He stressed however that Switzerland would always be ready to



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