

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:	1658
Rubrik:	Swiss events

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The Swiss Observer

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Published Twice Monthly at
63/67 TABERNACLE STREET
LONDON E.C.2
Tel: 01-253 2321
Telegrams: Paperwyse London

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COMMENT

THE DOGMA OF NEUTRALITY

The talks presently taking place in Helsinki with a view to an international conference on European security attracts little attention in Britain. As the Swiss have no Common Market, no Commonwealth and no Uganda, no Atlantic Alliance and no hostile Arab countries to cope with, this conference obviously receives more coverage there. There is another important reason: it is the first time that the neutral Swiss are represented at an international — and non academic — platform.

The Swiss delegate has presented a scheme, copied from medieval agreements between the old cantons, for settling differences between European states. He is still hopeful that the idea will gain acceptance.

Mr. Pierre Gruber, Switzerland's foreign minister, recently put his views on the Conference to the Swiss News Agency.

In a two-column interview, he

uttered the two synonymous words "caution" and "reserve" respectively three and two times. Indeed, there is no doubt that these words characterise Switzerland's foreign policy. Only by exercising "caution" is it possible to respect the non-involvement which neutrality requires.

Speaking of the mutual and balanced forces reduction in Europe, which western and Communist delegates are laboriously discussing in Vienna, Mr. Gruber said that Switzerland had not yet decided to join in the talks. She may decide to do so in order to know what is going on, and eventually to defend her interests. In any event, it will be impossible to table any proposal or support resolutions from either side as this would necessarily conflict with neutrality.

Thus Mr. Gruber implicitly admitted that Switzerland could not join in any political initiative abroad. Our foreign policy rests on the "principle of neutrality coupled with solidarity and universality," he said. The latter term appears to compensate for the passivity inherent in the former.

Although "solidarity and universality" are ideals claimed by every country, it is true that Switzerland is in a better position to defend them, thanks to her neutrality.

Mr. Gruber recalled that India and Pakistan, the United States and Cuba had all asked for Berne's good offices. This is a proof that neutrality has played and built a "capital of confidence in Switzerland" among the countries of the world.

But this capital should not be destroyed by inconsiderate statements, he warned. Hence the indispensable caution.

The policy of permanent neutrality is thus geared to defend the trust of others in Switzerland, or, in other words, our political image in the world. One could argue that striving to defend a country's image through considered caution does not represent an active principle of diplomacy. Yet it has helped to bring warring parties closer together (unfortunately after harm had been done).

Swiss foreign policy consists essentially in promoting and defending a national image in the eyes of the world. This can't do any harm to peace, in

contrast with the kind of national *self-image* which has led to a decade of fighting for an elusive "peace with honour" in Indo-China.

P.M.B.

SWISS EVENTS

The Desramault Case passes almost unnoticed

The Linda Desramault saga aroused surprisingly little interest in Switzerland. The Press reported it very briefly. However, much of it was played in Lausanne, where Mrs. Desramault was reunited with her daughter Caroline on Friday, 23rd March. Following the decision by a county court at Gosport, the care of Caroline was awarded to Mr. Rene Desramault, Linda's estranged husband. He brought the child back to France. A later ruling by the Versailles divorce tribunal, upheld by the Paris Court of Appeal, allowed Mrs. Desramault custody of her child. But Rene Desramault fled from his home in Northern France before the bailiffs had arrived to serve the order, and disappeared for several weeks before being discovered in Lausanne last September.

The Lausanne Cantonal Court took the case in hand. Rene Desramault took a teaching job in a school at Vevey so as to be near to his daughter, who had been placed in a children's home in Lausanne while the case was under examination.

The Court was faced with a new situation as it was not covered by any legal convention between Britain and Switzerland. After examination of the "dossier" and several hearings, it decided to give the child back to its mother. Mrs. Desramault rushed to l'Abris, the home where Caroline had been kept pending the decision. She hugged her daughter before the flashes of the cameras and touched bystanders, who included a Cantonal child-care official and the woman director of l'Abris". Mother and child sped away from Lausanne by car, shaking off journalists who had expected them to take the next flight from Geneva. In the event, Mrs. Desramault went to Dijon, where she boarded a special plane chartered by the *Daily Mail* and landed at Stansted Airport.

It was said that Caroline had never asked for her "mummy" while being in the custody of the child-care services of Canton Vaud. This was hardly surprising as Caroline had been taken from her mother at the age of one, and does not speak a word of English. After all that has happened to her, Caroline, who celebrated her third birthday only days after her return to Newcastle, will find it confusing to adapt to her new life.

Mr. Desramault is by all appearance excessively fond of his child (or jealous of his ex-wife?). He may appeal against the Cantonal Court's decision. He has already brought the case to the French "Cour de

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Cassation" and there is still a risk that a case which was first given prominence by

Mr. Edward Heath's involvement has not been definitely closed.

THE ANTI-JESUITS KEEP IT UP

Further demonstrations against the admission of Jesuits in Switzerland were staged at the end of March in the streets of Berne. Earlier, an "Action Committee for Confessional Peace" had petitioned in front of Parliament for a preservation of the two articles of the Constitution prohibiting Jesuits from exercising their activities in the country, and preventing the creation of new convents and orders. Then on 21st March, a large crowd of French-speakers calling themselves the *Comite d'action pour la souverainete nationale et pour l'autonomie spirituelle du citoyen* assembled before the Federal Palace. Several individuals came to join them from the German-speaking part of the country. Among them were Mr. Walter Jaeger, Republican national councillor from Basle, and Wilfred Naegeli, a Bernese national councillor representing the same political tendency. They had been the only two M.P.'s to oppose the proposed new constitutional legislation.

The main arguments put forward by the anti-Jesuits are that the Jesuit Order, a highly disciplined and allegedly domineering body, takes its orders from outside Switzerland and is thus liable to

throw an element of subversion into the Confederation.

However, the majority of commentators were quick to point out that other legal organisations also received inspiration from abroad. This, in fact was true of the Catholic church. Some papers suggested that the demonstrators were actually aiming not only at the Jesuits, but at the whole Catholic church.

There is little doubt that the two "confessional" articles which were introduced after the Sonderbund War will be suppressed from the Constitution after the Referendum due on 20th May.

OVER A MILLION FOREIGNERS

The foreign population of Switzerland increased slightly during 1972 and reached 1,032,285 persons at the end of last year, representing an increase from 16.1 to 16.5 per cent of the total population. 254,000 were active persons with residential permits, 341,000 were employed with an annual permit. Seasonal workers numbered only 20,000 because of the time of the census (December). Of the million foreign

people in Switzerland, 544,903 are Italians; 114,896 Spaniards; 114,106 Germans; 53,137 French; 43,298 Austrians; 28,072 Yugoslavs; 18,966 Turks and 13,060 Czechs. There were furthermore 91,000 borderer workers coming daily from neighbouring countries to work in Switzerland.

The authorities considers that measures aiming at a ceiling of 20,000 new foreign residents every year have worked. The number of foreigners is more or less stable, although residents show a sharp increase. Some relaxation of the measures is expected because of the desperate need of several industries for more labour.

THE SINEWS OF EFFICIENT GOVERNMENT

Speaking for the growing number of those dissatisfied with the present federal decision-making system, a national councillor from Aarau, Mr. A. Binder, has called on the Federal Council to examine ways of adapting it to modern requirements. Mr. Binder claims that the present separation of tasks between Parliament and the Federal Council, and Berne and the Cantons, has lost in efficiency. He said that the actual structure, which has developed in an empirical manner should change so as to define more clearly the competence of these various constituencies.

Moreover, Mr. Binder feels that the Swiss can't be adequately represented by a "militia" parliament sitting for less than

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a quarter of the year. Parliament is reduced to an "applauding machine" approving the decisions of an increasingly powerful Executive, he claimed.

These demands are in line with a general desire for somewhat more parliamentary supervision on the work of the Federal Council. Not that there is any separation or isolation between the two, but that a need is felt for extended sessions which would ease work-load and give Parliament more opportunity and leisure to assess the task and decisions of the Government. This would involve paying salaries to delegates.

Whether these suggestions will be considered seriously is doubtful under the present circumstances. During the same sitting, Mr. Binder also suggested that the present system of federal and cantonal taxation should be scrapped and replaced

by a single federal income tax, the returns of which would be shared among individual Cantons.

Among the various suggestions of governmental reform, one that is often put forward is to allow for more than one federal per canton. A recent poll showed that the majority of cantons were in favour keeping to the constitutional ruling: "no more than one federal councillor from each canton" whereas nearly all political parties wanted to abolish it.

Another problem, raised by the Government's 1972 Report, is the almost excessive reliance on specialised federal commissions. Over two hundred of them are at present carrying out ploys relating to every field of legislation. A revision of this practise is expected – and may be undertaken by yet another commission!

Mr Ernst Brugger visits Moscow

Mr. Ernst Brugger, Head of the Department of Public Economy, left for a busy week in the Soviet Union in the last days of March. It was the first time that a Swiss "minister" had visited Russia in an official capacity. Mr. Brugger's journey was in reply to a visit to Switzerland by Mr. Nikolai Patolichev, Soviet minister of foreign trade, some sixteen months ago. Negotiations had since been going on towards the creating a bilateral trade commission.

Difficulties had cropped up because of differences between Russia's planned system of economy and Switzerland's liberalism. Berne insisted that the Commission should not be an inter-governmental affair. The Swiss side was to include representatives of private industry. The first session of the new Commission, whose creation was announced during Mr. Brugger's visit in Moscow, was due to take place in June.

At present, Switzerland exports about three times more than she buys from Russia. Total trade both ways has doubled over the last five years and is worth about £35 million every year. The

Russians are interested in Swiss technology, whereas Switzerland could buy more natural gas and petroleum from the other side. Swiss business is interested in widening its outlet. The recent devaluation of the dollar has shown the precariousness of too much dependence on western markets. Ten per cent of Swiss exports go to the U.S.

In Moscow, Mr. Brugger had several meetings with Mr. Patolichev and other Russian officials. He opened Switzerland's first ever machine-tool exhibition in Moscow. About 70 firms were represented. A two-day symposium was held during the exhibition on "automation in industry". Swiss experts presented papers at this meeting. Switzerland's economy chief also went on an official sightseeing tour to Leningrad, Tiflis and Sochi, on the Black Sea.

A Lausanne firm has recently announced that it would import 5,000 Soviet-made Fiat cars. This would be the most important order ever made by Swiss business for Soviet manufactured goods.

Death of a Secret Agent

Mrs. Rachel Dubendorfer, one of the main agents of the Russian information network set up by Alexander Rado during the war, has died in East Berlin. Mrs. Dubendorfer was married to a Swiss before the war but lived in Geneva with a German called Paul Boettcher which she managed to present here as her legitimate husband until the Rado network was dismantled by Swiss intelligence in 1943 (see *Swiss Observer* of 15th December, 1972). Alexander Rado was credited with having informed (in vain) Stalin of the German invasion of Russia a year before it was launched. He is also said to have informed the Russians of the impending German counter-offensive at Kursk. He was the principal character of a book written in

the sixties called "The War was Won in Switzerland". Like Rachel Dubendorfer, he escaped arrest and was sentenced in his absence to a heavy jail sentence by a Swiss court. Both spent several years in Russian prison camps for the mistakes which led to the disappearance of Russia's most important observation post in the West.

ANTI-FASCIST DEMONSTRATION IN BERNE

About two hundred extreme-left militants milled around the Alfa Hotel in Berne, breaking windows and causing damages of over 100,000 francs in protest against the neo-fascist meeting which had been held a few days before in the same establishment in the presence of an Italian Neo-Fascist M.P. The demonstrators escaped towards the Federal Palace when four coach-loads of police supported by a water gun arrived. They remained five minutes on Federal Palace Square, splashing bags of red paint, before being chased towards the Waisenhausplatz, where they were definitely dispersed.

The demonstration took place while the Bernese offices of a neo-fascist organisation called E.N.A.S. were about to be opened. The ceremony was cancelled because of the trouble.

This incident revived demands that foreign political organisations should not be allowed to have offices in Switzerland. The controversy began last year when the Italian Communist Party opened a Secretariat in Geneva. The Press expressed fears that this would promote labour unrest and pointed out that the trade unionist in charge of the new office had led a wild-cat strike in a Geneva factory some while earlier. The Swiss Labour Party reacted by saying that the Italian Christian Democrats had also been authorised to set up a Swiss office.

The issue is a delicate one for the Swiss Government. The very infrequent strikes recorded in Switzerland during the past few years have nearly all involved foreign workers. The unrest has partly been due to the lower pay and generally inferior conditions of foreign workers in Switzerland, but also to their traditionally more militant attitude. The authorities feel, however, that it would be unfair to deprive workers so necessary to Switzerland's prosperity from their national political ties.

THE SWISS FRANC FLOATS ALONE

The monetary crisis has given considerable cause for concern to Swiss business circles who rely on exports more than nearly all their European competitors. The fall in the value of the

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dollar has struck the machine and chemical industries particularly hard and led Swiss bankers to support the Government's decision to let the Swiss franc float. Switzerland was one of the only western European countries not to take part in the agreement by six E.E.C. countries to let their currencies float collectively with respect to the dollar. This means that they now share the burden of buying excess dollars already in the hands of some of the countries party to the agreement, foremost among them Germany. Switzerland was not prepared to take the risk. It knew that its money would eventually be used as reserve currency by the six countries, which do not include the U.K., Italy and Ireland, and have to exchange francs against part of the dollars held by the Germans. A

two-tier system was also considered undesirable and not in keeping with Swiss monetary traditions.

The upward floating of the Swiss franc has meant that many imports are now cheaper. One man who has promised to make sure that consumers benefit by this situation is Mr. Leo Schurmann, the new prices supervisor. His office in Berne has by now investigated into nearly 3,000 complaints of price increases. The office has already registered several successes. Mr. Schurmann has obtained a pledge by restaurant owners that they would not increase their prices as originally planned, that off-license shops would sell their old stock at former tariffs and that the price of medicine will remain frozen until the autumn.

Mr. Schurmann has said that he

would act against every monopolies and other price-fixing arrangements. "We are discovering new ones every day", he claimed.

Meanwhile, Mr. Nello Celio, Head of the Financial Department, has promised that the stiff credit restrictions introduced last December to damp a overheated economy would be stringently maintained. Several communes have complained at the measures as they have led to a slow-down of the building trade. Many parliamentarians complain that the "urgent decree" which the people will have to ratify next December has in fact increased the discrepancies between various rates of regional development. But Mr. Celio says that such ills are necessary to keep Switzerland's economy growing within controllable limits.



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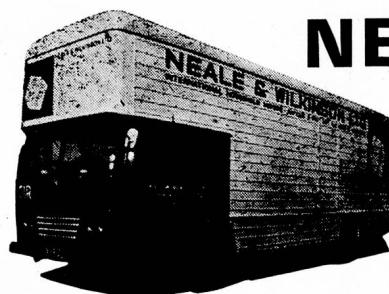
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100,000 "POISONOUS" GOODS ON THE SWISS MARKET

Following a new law enforced on 1st April, all consumer products officially classified as "toxic", and there are a hundred thousand of them, will be sold under five categories with distinctive labels. The new law standardises sales practises which varied from canton to canton.

Many common household goods such as salt, adhesive tape, shoe polish and cleaning powder falls under category No. 5, which is the least toxic. These goods will be allowed unattended sale in supermarkets but all carry a red label warning the buyer of potential dangers. Other goods such as turpentine, weed killer, presenting somewhat greater risks, will carry the same label but no longer be allowed in supermarkets. They will have to be sold over a counter. Category No. 4 includes low concentration chlorine and various mild chemicals which will only be on sale on demand, and forbidden to children. They carry a yellow label. Category No. 3, which covers strong pesticides, detergents for piping etc., will require an indentity document and full details of the buyer's home address. The dealer is held to take back unemptied recipients or packages containing these products. Categories 2 (hydrochloric acid) and 1 (warfarine, cyanide) are marked with a dead man's skull and a visible warning of danger. They are respectively sold with a communal and cantonal voucher. Some of the products falling under these two lethal categories had up to now been sold freely. Benzene, for example, will no longer be sold to private individuals but only to specialists or firms with the required authorisation.



SUCCESS OF NORDIC SKIING

Nordic skiing has gained tremendous popularity during the past four years. Nobody could have foreseen this development when Mr. Roger Bonvin, minister for transports and communications, opened in 1970 the first Nordic ski-run in the Franches Montagnes, a plateau in the Jura traditionally specialised in horse breeding. Now there are 22 separate runs covering over 200 kilometres in the area. The tracks are amply delimited with sign-posts and mileage signs. Nordic or cross-country skiing (as contrasted to Alpine skiing) is akin to rambling in the snow and has won over innumerable people more attracted by the "being in nature" than by the physical element of skiing.

In summer, the Franches Montagnes area provides for admirable horse rides for children and adults alike. A great effort is being made to prepare tracks and to separate riders from motor traffic. It should help to make the region a Swiss horseriders' paradise within a year or two.

NEW LAW FOR DEVELOPMENT AID

Swiss development aid should change significantly. Mr. Pierre Graber announced sweeping reforms in its structure, organisation and volume.

A new law on "co-operation and humanitarian aid" will place Switzerland's help to third-world countries on a legal footing. Secondly, the foreign minister announced a forthcoming reorganisation of the implementation of this aid. Hitherto, both the Political Department (foreign affairs) and the Department of Economy had managed it. The work will now be shifted to the Political Department.

Most important of all, the volume of this aid will grow. Although Swiss private "aid" in the form of investments reached 0.83 per cent of national product in 1971, public funds, stemming from the tax-payer's money, reached only 0.11 per cent of G.N.P. The two figures put together amount almost to the one per cent of G.N.P. urged by the United Nations.

However, 1972 saw a significant increase as the relative value of public aid reached 0.2 per cent of G.N.P., or 235 million francs in absolute terms.

Consideration of the trade balance shows that Switzerland is getting richer at the expense of developing countries. In 1971, she exported 20.6 per cent of her production to these countries, and bought from them only 8.7 per cent of her imports! Furthermore, countries classified as "developing" include Spain, Yugoslavia, Brazil, Iran, Hong Kong and others which are relatively rich.

Swiss public aid is divided into technical aid (educational, agricultural projects, etc.), financial aid (granting of untied credits to developing nations), and investment-risk gaurantees. Of this, only technical aid, which has a 400 million francs three-year budget, can be considered as a "pure gift". The other aid is in principle retrievable.

Switzerland joins with other industrialised countries in easing terms of trade to her poorer partners. Thus she adheres to the system of "generalised preferences" and to various agreements aiming at stabilising the price of vital export commodities.

To this must be added subscriptions to various U.N. humanitarian agencies and a fairly important Disaster Fund.

It is generally recognised that Switzerland's achievement in development aid lie in the *technical* field. The country is too small to launch vast programmes, but specialises in small projects (such as having watch makers and other craftsmen) which, it is hoped, will generate small industries and new talents.

The new law announced by Mr. Graber not only restructures Swiss development aid, it stresses that this aid should be "useful". From the wording of the bill emerges a very Swiss tendency

not to spend money in vain. Various guidelines will be laid down as to when and where a project can be considered as worthwhile. The history of development aid is rife in failure. Only by an intelligent assessment of the local situation, of the degree of goodwill and help offered from governments concerned, is it possible to bet safely on the success of a project in which millions may have to be spent. The new law purports to favour such assessments, and make sure that foreign aid is rational. This of course may prove difficult, as the African and Asian natives concerned may not necessarily have the same logic as a Swiss business manager.

A New Trade Union Leader

The Swiss Trade Union Congress (*Union Syndicale Suisse*) has elected a new President. He is Mr. Ezio Canonica, a socialist national councillor from Tessin. He was elected to a 114 to one majority. As a former chief of the country's building Union, he has worked predominantly among Italian workers and edited the Union's paper in Italian. He pledged, during a press conference after his election, that he would fight to improve the conditions of foreign labour and put an end to wages inequalities.

Regarding Switzerland's forty-year old "Peace of Labour", which has earned her industrial relations an excellent reputation, Mr. Canonica thinks that the climate of industry will inevitably change as the leadership of the Unions, actually fairly old, will have to be renewed. He added that Switzerland's involvement in Europe and the resulting ties with international corporations will have a bearing on Union commitments and thinking.

Thanks to the "Peace of Labour" and the general contentment of Swiss workers, who are among the highest paid in Europe, the Unions have had little "campaigning" to do. In fact, satisfaction has meant a tremendous loss of membership. All pay-claims and industrial decisions involving labour are discussed within an accepted procedural framework by management and the Unions. More often than not, the Unions condemn rare wildcat strikes by a fringe of (mainly foreign) workers, and stand with management.

It should be said that the Swiss T.U.C., as in Britain, is by no means the most militant grouping in Switzerland. The militants are found outside factories, in political caucuses. As in Britain, the engineering unions are more left-wing than others. But only the Labour (Communist) party openly calls for an overhaul of society, and an end to private industrial property.