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# The Swiss Observer

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# SWISS EVENTS

## British Squeeze on Roche Products Shocks the Swiss

The British Government's decision to impose drastic cuts on the selling price of "Valium" and "Librium", two of Roche Products' best-selling tranquilisers, was strongly criticised by Swiss observers. Noting a staggering difference between the prices charged by Roche for the active ingredients of the two drugs, and prices of copies found on the free market, the Monopolies Commission ordered the company to slash the price of Valium and Librium respectively to 25 and 40 per cent of their 1970 prices. The Minister for Trade and Consumer Affairs, Sir Geoffrey Howe, agreed with the Commission's contention that Roche had made excessive profits. According to the Commission figures, the company had netted £24 million in profits from the two drugs since 1966, or nearly £4 million a year on total annual sales of £8.5 million. Moreover, Roche was asked to refund over £1 million as a penalty for overcharging. The final amount was to be discussed at discussions between Roche and the Department of Health. The new measures, if implemented, would save the National Health Service (which buys 90 per cent of Roche's output of Valium and Librium) about £10,000 a day. Judging from the statements by the Roche spokesman, the firm will not yield meekly to Government pressure.

Roche claimed that production costs were no basis on which to fix the price of a new medicine. Allowances had to be made for the enormous outlay in research; for the amount of effort wasted on non-marketable products. It also pointed out that Roche shareholders had never received dividends in excess of 1 or 2 per cent. Neither Sir Geoffrey nor Sir Keith Joseph, Minister of Health, were able to confirm this point.

It is a well-known fact to the Swiss that Roche have grown into the world's leading pharmaceutical empire (turnover estimated at £500 million) by ploughing back their profits. It has a nominal capital required by law. The few Roche shares that there are would fetch over £25,000 if their lucky holders ever felt inclined to sell them.

All this of course "bugs" the British. The Monopolies Commission might have struck at Roche just to force it to open its books. The *Sunday Times* spoke of an "extraordinary" company "that is so secretive that even its own executives do not know how it is really run".

The Swiss Press was generally amazed by the British decision which, it said was contrary to the rules of free competition. It recalled that Librium and

# COMMENT

## SHARING OUT FUNDS BETWEEN RICH AND POOR CANTONS

The concept of regional development can't be applied in Switzerland as it is in other countries, particularly Britain, as this implies a central government allocating development subsidies such as investment grants to "depressed areas". Such a centralised system would be incompatible with federalism as it is understood in Switzerland today. The problem of regional development is further compounded by the unsatisfactory share-out of cantonal and federal responsibilities and the need to overhaul the system, particularly in its fiscal implications.

Regional development therefore takes the form of a redistribution of federal funds according to the means of individual cantons. Following a "means-test", each canton is attributed

a coefficient representing its financial weight. The 25 cantons and half-cantons are classified in three groups — the rich, the poor and the moderately prosperous (everything being relative, of course). In the first category one finds Basle-Town, Geneva, Zurich, Basle-Land and Zug whereas the "poor" cantons would be Fribourg, Valais, Inner Rhodes, Nidwald and Obwald. The subventions received from the Confederation are the same for the cantons of a same category.

A new, fairer system is actually under consideration. It will leave unchanged, the minimum and maximum levels of subsidies granted at present to the richest and poorest cantons, but introduce a mobile-subsidies scale for the intermediate category which includes most cantons. If the richest cantons are given a means coefficient of a hundred, then Neuchatel would merit 92, and Outer-Rhodes 65, according to 1971 estimates. But as the economy develops, some cantons get richer faster than others, and the volume of federal aid must be adapted accordingly. This is the principle behind the rather complicated package to be examined by Parliament. Intermediate cantons will receive subsidies inversally proportional to their means coefficient. By that token, Berne would get 17 million francs more a year, Tessin 8, and Saint Gall 5. Vaud, on the other hand, would get less, and so would Neuchatel, Schaffhausen, Glaris and the Grisons.

The effects of the new provisions would be particularly felt by cantonal social security departments which award supplementary Old Age and Invalidity Insurance benefits. The Confederation would distribute a few extra dozen million francs of social subsidies under the envisaged scheme.

The proposed allotment of common monies to cantons according to their prosperity would be well on the way towards an "ideal solution" faithful to the ideals of cantonal autonomy and willing cooperation.

Per capita income just about doubles between the poorer cantons (Schytz, Uri, Appenzell) and the wealthiest (Zurich, Basle). But poverty is a relative notion. With a per capita income averaging over 7,000 francs a year, the Poorest Cantons would be classed as very prosperous in Britain.

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Valium were cheaper in Britain than nearly everywhere else; that their market prices were comparable to other similar products. Gleeefully, some commentators pointed out the two British companies (Berk and DDSA) encouraged by the Government to get in the tranquilisers

business by usurping Roche patents with the legal sanction of the Patent Act failed dismally. The two British firms have less than 1 per cent of the British market. A Swiss commentator attributed this to the "superior confidence" in Roche Products shared by the British medical profession.

explanation still seems to hinge on a confusion by the pilot between the beacons lying to the north and to the south of the main runway. After having overshot once to assess conditions at runway-level, the pilot apparently mistook the beacon to the south of the runway with the one on his approach course to the north. He crashed on the foothills of the Jura above Hochwald twelve miles beyond the runway which he probably thought still lay before him.

## THE WORST AIR DISASTER IN SWISS HISTORY

The crash of a chartered "Vanguard" airliner with 145 passengers, mainly women on a day-outing from Axebridge, Congresbury and Cheddar in Somerset, was by far the worst air disaster ever to take place in Switzerland. At the time of writing, 107 passengers and crew were known to have been killed. The worst accident hitherto recorded in Switzerland had happened in September 1963, when a Swissair "Caravelle" with 80 passengers, nearly all of whom came from the village of Humlikon crashed at Durrenensch after take-off at Furide. The accident bore some grim resemblance to the Hochwald disaster, as most of the victims were young people from a same village going on a day-trip to visit the National Fair at Lausanne. The third-worst crash occurred in February 1970 at Wuerenlingen, 47 people died in a crash which was probably caused by a time-bomb.

The pictures of the Hochwald disaster scene were brought to British

televiewers, who saw young Swiss Army recruits carry out their grisly task in the snow and arguing in Schwytzerdutsch. Identification of the victims was carried out by forensic specialists from Basle with the aid of R.A.F. experts. It proved particularly difficult as many bodies were mutilated, and because the victims, nearly all women, didn't carry identification documents on them.

An ecumenical service was held two days after the disaster at the Saint-Maurice Church of Dornach in the presence of relatives from Somerset. The Queen was represented by Mr. John R. Wraight, Britain's Ambassador in Berne, while Federal Councillor Hans-Peter Tschudi represented the Swiss Government. Ambassador Wraight read the lesson which was the Psalm "The Lord is my shepherd".

The Pope had sent his condolences to Bishop Haenggi of Basle.

Much has been written about the causes of the disaster. The most likely



### UNIVERSITIES MULTIPLY THEIR BUDGET BY SIX

A recent survey highlights the considerable effort carried out in developing Swiss universities. There are eight universities in Switzerland (Zurich, Basle, Berne, Geneva, Lausanne, Fribourg, Neuchatel and Saint-Gall) plus two Federal Institutes of Technology, at Lausanne and Zurich. There is thus one higher educational establishment for every 500,000 inhabitants — which amounts to a very high "density".

Expenditure on these centres of learning has increased nearly six times between 1958 and 1971. This jump is much greater than intervening rising costs. The expenditure rose from 153 million to 929 million francs during the thirteen years.

Universities are partially financed by registration fees and by work carried out for private customers (12.5 per cent in 1958, 6.6 per cent in 1971), by the

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Cantons (about 75 per cent on average in 1971) and by the Confederation. The two Federal Institutes of Technology are almost entirely financed by the Confederation, leaving a fraction of 4 to 6 per cent to the Cantons. The rise in

expenditure reflects the very heavy investments on Lausanne School of Engineering, which has been promoted to the status of Federal Institute of Technology held previously only by the Zurich "Poly".

for 800, equipped with movie projection and electronic voting facilities; a medium-sized hall (400 seats), four smaller halls (150 and 100 seats) as well as two committee rooms for 20 to 40 people, together with related services such as offices, radio and T.V. studios. A system of removable podiums and partitions allows for several different layouts within the halls depending on the size of meetings. It is possible, for example, to provide seating for as many as 2,000 delegates in one hall. The second part of the Centre contains postal facilities, an office for delegates, a large television and communications centre, adapted to the needs of large conferences, and a Press Centre.

## TRADE WITH SOUTH AFRICA: NESTLE'S DEFEND THEIR POSITION

At the end of last year, a Geneva organisation specialising in relations between Europe and developing countries published a study accusing 25 Swiss firms, including Swissair and the Federation of Watch Industries, of supporting the South African regime.

Rejecting many of these suggestions, Nestle-Alimentana, the Vevey-based food giant, called for a meeting with delegates of the Organisation. This reunion took place in Vevey in the presence of the company's Managing Director. Both parties took this opportunity to expound their views. The debate was controversial and impassioned, but remained within the bounds of courtesy.

Nestle's argument was that, as a business concern, it could not afford to embark on any ideological bandwagon. Its policy was one of strict neutrality, irrespective of the morality of the political regimes under which it was called to operate. Nestle's claimed that African wages in their South African subsidiaries are higher than average. African workers begin with three-week yearly holidays — the same as Europeans — and eventually benefit from an extra week. Wages were admittedly low, but so were prices. The company had to adapt its cost to the purchasing power of its customers, who necessarily included a majority of non-whites. The company's representatives stressed that promotion policy was strictly neutral and offered chances to black and white managers alike.

The objectors countered by pointing to the need for all companies involved in South Africa of making a

choice. If they decided to remain in South Africa, they should not do so only out of profit considerations, but take the opportunity of pressing for social and trade union reforms. More important, companies should build plants in African Homelands as the most effective single step of improving the well-being of Africans.

Nestle said that it was already engaged on this path. Progress towards these ideals was not easy and the available means were limited.

In another development, the World Council of Churches, whose headquarters are in Geneva, published a list of 650 western firms with stakes in South Africa. The purpose of this initiative was to inform investors with conscience.

The *Guardian* revelations on survival wages in South Africa received little coverage in the Swiss Press although it is no small problem, as African mining shares are among the most successful foreign shares on the Swiss Stock Exchange, as they are elsewhere in Europe.



### MR. LOSEMBE'S CASE STILL PENDING

The case of Mr. Batwanyele Losembe, a former minister of Zaire's General Mobutu, was in the hands of the Federal court during March and April and a final decision regarding his extradition was expected before May. Zaire had demanded Mr. Losembe's extradition for misappropriation of funds but the Federal Council decided to leave the decision to the country's Supreme Court. Mr. Losembe is at present residing in Switzerland. The indications are that he is not living off his savings as a former minister. Thus it is more than likely that he is guilty of embezzlement. This puts the Government in a delicate position, as Switzerland's traditional policy is to offer asylum only to *political* victims and not to common law offenders. Had General Mobutu wanted to put his former minister on trial in Zaire only out of a desire of, say, personal revenge, Berne's answer would have been "no": Mr. Losembe would then have been considered as a political refugee entitled to Swiss hospitality. But as embezzlement appears to have been committed, there would be no justification for rejecting the General's demand, but for the fact that the life of a man is at stake. Owing to the hazy distinction between political and judiciary powers in Zaire and most other African countries, the odds are that Mr. Losembe would not be given a fair trial. The possibility that Mr. Losembe would not be judged in his country following accepted judiciary procedure placed his extradition outside Berne's terms of reference. For this reason, the Supreme Court was asked to assess his "legal prospects" in Zaire and left with the final decision on the case.

It is likely that an expulsion order will be served on the ex-minister. He would of course have saved the Government much worry if he had chosen to live in exile in another country from the start.

The Government had another fact to bear in mind. There is an important Swiss colony in Zaire. Their welfare could be placed in jeopardy by incurring President Mobutu's displeasure.

## NEW GENEVA CONFERENCE CENTRE

An international conference centre has been officially inaugurated in Geneva by Federal councillor Pierre Graber who was accompanied by the Diplomatic Corps and local and federal representatives. This modern building will offer complete facilities for congresses and stands not far from the European Headquarters of the United Nations. Its erection was sponsored by the "International Organisations Foundation", a body representing the Confederation and the Canton of Geneva. The former has offered loans at moderate rates of interest in agreement with Parliament, while the latter made land available on similar terms as the loan. The Foundation had a twofold aim: to simplify the organisation of international conferences and congresses; and to ensure that suitably equipped premises would be available for the press during international conferences. The Centre is divided into two separate sectors, the first comprising a series of halls, including a large conference auditorium with seating

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## PRICES WATCH-DOG REVIEWS HIS WORK

Mr. Leo Schurmann, an M.P. entrusted with the important function of President of the new Prices Control Board and of Chairman of the Monopolies Commission, held a press conference to review the results of his efforts in combating inflation.

Noting that the only effective tools lay in credit restrictions, he nevertheless claimed a few modest successes in damping the demands of various organisations. He mentioned the case of a house-loan institution that had postponed rate increases at his request. Mr. Schurmann is also known to have persuaded Switzerland's caterers and hoteliers to waive important claims. His office in Berne, which has received thousands of complaints for alleged unjustified price increases has come to be known as the "Wall of Lamentation". Mr. Schurmann said that the Prices Commission's role should be more "incisive" than one of registering

complaints. He announced that he would call on producer organisations and Cantons to implement stricter price restraint. Mr. Schurmann recalled that inflation was basically the result of a materialistic mentality and expressed hopes that his many contacts would bring this home to the country's economic circles.

Referring to the work of the Monopolies Commission, Mr. Schurmann said that he had examined near monopoly situations arising in the electrical industry, and particularly in car insurance. All necessary measures would be taken to prevent any unjustified increases in these sectors.

As Mr. Schurmann was holding his Press Conference, the Government announced that Swiss residents would not be able to borrow more than 50,000 francs abroad. The previous ceiling was a million francs. This measure was intended to close an important loophole in its stringent credit controls.

The annual rate of inflation in Switzerland is about 7 per cent.

## Two Ministers Meet to Talk on Abortion

As a remarkable example of the close relations maintained by two neutral neighbours, Austria and Switzerland, the Justice Ministers of these two countries met for two days in Berne to review prospects for new and more liberal legislation on abortion, something which is not usually discussed between two countries at this level. The meeting had no further purpose than to allow an exchange of views between Mr. Christian Broda, Austria's Federal Justice Minister, and Mr. Kurt Furgler, his Swiss counter-part. Outlining the results of their talks in a news conference, the Austrian Minister called for an unlimited right to abortion for the first three-month period. Mr. Furgler did not air his views but said that he would require further examination of a report due from a special commission. Abortion will be discussed in earnest by the Swiss Parliament as a popular vote on abortion is in the offing.

## Commissioning of the Country's Last Big Dam

The last of four collector tunnels feeding the basin of the future dam at Emosson, above Martigny, on the border between France and the Valais, has been pierced and will allow the commissioning of Emosson's two hydro-electric plants before the end of the year.

Work has been going on at Emosson for twenty years. Built at the cost of 620 million francs, the dam is 180 metres high and 554 metres wide. It will contain 225 million cubic metres of water and produce 634 million kW of energy during an average year.

To fill the dam basin, tunnels have to be hewn through the rock to tap rainfall and melting snows from a wide area. The tunnel just opened is 18 km long and 3 metres in diameter. It collects the water from three glaciers: Trient, Saleina and Planereuse. The other three collectors catch the waters of the Giffre and Berard rivers, and those of the Argentiere glacier, near Chamonix.

Emosson will probably be the last big dam to be built in Switzerland.

## 20,000 Rotarians in Lausanne

Nearly 20,000 Rotarians from all over the world are awaited in Lausanne and its neighbourhood for the 1973 Rotary International Congress due to take place at Beaulieu Palace from 13th to 17th May. The Annual General Meeting of this world wide fraternity will take place during the week, but delegates will also take part in a Conference on the theme "A New Look at World Peace". Several distinguished speakers will address the Conference. Its participants will be treated to various functions, including art and technical exhibitions. Delegates will also be the guest of the many Rotary Clubs of the Lemanic area. The Congress had originally been expected in Zurich.

# PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS OF DIRECT DEMOCRACY

The Swiss will have a lot of voting to do during the coming year. The Government has just published the list of federal items for which the country's opinion is called for. They are as follows:

- 20th May, 1973: Abrogation of Constitutional Articles on Jesuits and Religious Orders
- 23rd September, 1973: New Article on Animal Protection
- 2nd December, 1973: Confirmation of 20th December, 1972 "Special Decree" conferring enlarged powers to the Government in monetary matters

Voting during 1974 will take place on 3rd March, 19th May, 22nd September and 8th December. The items put up for vote will be:

- Choice between a Socialist initiative on Sickness Insurance and a Government counter-project
- A left-wing initiative on a universal Old Age Pension Scheme (this initiative may be withdrawn)
- New Government-drafted Article on the Economy.
- Initiative by the National Action movement towards reducing the alien population
- Choice between an initiative by the National Action and a Government counter-project on revising procedure for the optional referendum ratifying international treaties

- Initiative by the Swiss Union of Students in favour of a new grants scheme known as the "Lausanne Plan"

- Institution of an alternative to military service consisting of a "civilian service" following the guidelines of the 1972 "Muncheinstein Initiative"

- An initiative sponsored by the Swiss T.U.C. calling for worker-participation in management. The Government may submit counter-proposals

- An initiative to legalize abortion

- A Government-sponsored initiative relating to the country's waterways and hydraulic resources

- A Government-sponsored initiative making the upkeep of national roads a federal responsibility

It is unusual for the Federal Council to fix voting dates so long in advance. The purpose of this precaution is to give Cantons and Communes ample time to prepare the votes which they too, will stage at the above dates.

Three other issues may be put to the electorate: lowering of legal voting age from 20 to 18; popular ratification of the Federal Council's election; creation of constituencies for elections to the National Council with each Canton.

These items are in the process of discussion in Parliament. In any event, the Swiss will have plenty of deciding and homework to do. Such is the price of direct democracy.

# Boeings in Rhodesia: "Switzerland had nothing to do with it"

Switzerland had no part whatever in the purchase of three Boeing 707 jetliners by Rhodesia, said an official spokesman in Berne. The three airliners landed in Salisbury in mid-April coming from Basle. The British Press had hinted that Switzerland had defied the U.N. embargo on all trade with Rhodesia.

Registered in Germany and owned by the German charter company "Calair", the three planes had been grounded at Basle-Mulhouse Airport for about a year while maintenance was carried out by the Swiss firm Jet Aviation. The jets were then bought by a

Liechtenstein company and immediately sold back to Air Rhodesia.

The Swiss Government said that the Liechtenstein company had never owned the planes, since they had been sold immediately after their purchase. The three airliners had thus never been registered, either in Liechtenstein or in Switzerland. Their departure from Basle-Mulhouse was therefore perfectly legal and carried out according to normal procedure. Their initial destination was Lisbon. The Government added that Switzerland had no control over the dealings with Rhodesia of the Liechtenstein company concerned.

## Campaign Against Free Advertisers

Swiss newspaper publishers are increasingly concerned about the proliferation of free advertisers. Their complaint has been taken up by Mr. Leo Schurmann's Monopolies Commission.

Free advertisers use up an increasing proportion of the volume of newsprint consumed by the Swiss. This situation has been encouraged by twenty years of uninterrupted prosperity. But now traditional papers, whose precarious situation has been lately eased by federal postal subsidies, find that they are deprived of valuable advertising income. They argue that advertising sheets get away scot-free without supplying editorial material. Those that have editorial content are of low quality and therefore cheaper to produce, they claim.

The effect of free advertisers on the income of traditional papers varies from one area to another. Market research polls tend to show, however, that advertisers remain faithful to the traditional newspapers as they are read more attentively than advertising sheets. They are therefore more effective as publicity instruments. Nevertheless, publishers will press their claim for a ban on free advertisers as such a measure would, in their view, be more efficient than a package of limited subsidies.

## A Freedom Smuggler Set Free

Mr. Hanz Lenzlinger, head of a firm called "Aramco" specialising in smuggling people out of Eastern Europe, has been set free by the Swiss Police after handing over to the authorities a man who had allegedly betrayed one of his Czech agents. The traitor, whom he had captured, was working for the East German government. The Swiss authorities, who are still probing into this unusual affair, claimed that as a private individual he had not been entitled to administer justice on his own behalf and arrested him provisionally. He and his captive have been released.

## Mr. Graber meets the U.N. General Secretary

Mr. Pierre Graber, Head of the Political Department, had talks in mid-April in Geneva with Mr. Kurt Waldheim, General Secretary of the U.N. Mr. Waldheim had come to Geneva for a special U.N. meeting and for talks on Namibia (South West Africa) with the South African foreign affairs minister, Mr. H. Muller. The discussion with Mr. Graber centered on the Middle-East situation. (Mr. Graber was due to go to Cairo in early May).

## How to Dispel the Insecurity of Foreign Workers

A Swiss Journalist once asked an Italian worker the name of the Swiss President. "James Schwarzenbach", was the reply.

An answer like this can only reflect the insecurity and isolation of the foreign working community in Switzerland, as James Schwarzenbach is considered in some respects as our Enoch Powell.

Two leading engineering trade unions have joined forces in tackling this human problem which the authorities are apparently ignoring. Realising that ignorance by the immigrant worker of the customs and habits of the host country are the first cause of mistrust and eventual tension with the native community, they have organised four-session courses for all newcomers.

The lectures consist in presenting the characteristics of the host country and in analysing the causes of mistrust. With the appropriate support of audio-visual means, newcomers are told what their rights are, and learn the advantages of peaceful co-operation between management and labour. These last two items are intended to destroy the feelings of insecurity of so many foreign workers, and to instil from the outset the mentality which has traditionally prevailed on Swiss shop-floors.

## 10th Anniversary of Anzere

Anzere, the first Swiss ski-resort built entirely from scratch, celebrated its 10th Anniversary this year. Plans for the new resort, which can accommodate 4,000 tourists and already offers ten ski-lifts and ropeways servicing 40km. of slopes, were finalised in 1962. Contrary to other similar ventures in France and in Italy, Anzere is no architectural revolution. Its planners preferred to remain on the same side but have all the same produced a remarkable "village" whose buildings are sufficiently large to be functional, but retain human and provincial proportions which marry well with the neighbouring environment. Although Anzere has achieved its majority, it is planned to increase its skiing resources by building a ropeway up to the Wildhorn (3,200m.). At present this mountainous massive is accessible only by plane. A curling rink and special tracks for ski-bobbers are also planned to increase the resort's amenities.

## Scandal brewing in Swiss TV

A Socialist National Councillor from Vaud, Mr. Gilbert Baechtold, has aroused a small storm after disclosing that he had made an enquiry with radio and TV employees showing that several members of management and high-level journalists at French-speaking Swiss Radio and Television were accepting bribes. More specifically, Mr. Baechtold claimed that illicit publicity had been carried out, and said that he had made a list of several programmes whose relevance could only be explained by assuming that some interests, commercial or otherwise, had bribed programme managers to screen. The National Councillor claimed that he could name names but said that the purpose of his enquiry was not to "knock down heads". It was to wipe out corruption from the broadcasting corporation.

His allegations were made in a full-page, five-column story in the Geneva paper *La Suisse*, which is read all over French-speaking Switzerland.

Reactions from the journalist community were swift. In a statement, the journalists said that they could not allow such accusations to be voiced without proof and demanded immediate precisions of the persons allegedly guilty of embezzlement. A similar call came from Mr. René Schenker, chief of French-speaking Television, who said he would pursue the matter further until it was completely cleared up. Mr. Baechtold was not going to get away easily with gratuitous allegations.

If Mr. Baechtold's case turns out to be founded, then it would bear some resemblance to a similar scandal at French Television last year. Several top officials were convicted of having been bribed into screening "clandestine publicity".