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COMMENT

AN INCREASINGLY SLUGGISH PEOPLE

Swiss social analysts find the compulsory military training system a useful help in studying the behaviour of youths. Since every able Swiss of twenty and over is bound by the laws of the country to serve as a recruit in our militia army, it is easier to assemble data on their behaviour and thus derive certain trends.

Among the findings thus obtained, specialists have noted steadily declining performances at the recruitment physical test, and a growing number of medical exemptions. This in fact contradicts the steadily improving performance of Swiss athletes. The explanation probably lies in the separation of the young between a bulk who work and enjoy themselves without recourse to sports, and a minority who play soccer rather than look at it only, or who consistently practise other sports. But such tests all indicate that increased standards of living do not promote physical health or better soldiers.

Investigations at recruit schools have also given an insight into the penetration of drugs among youth. About a quarter of young people between 18 and 20 have tried the milder forms of drugs, and up to a fifth of them have "graduated" to the "harder" varieties. Other enquiries show that there is a sharp drop in such habits or experiences at the age of 25. Hashish and marijuana are generally considered as soft drugs, Amphetamine, barbiturates, psychotropic drugs, opiates and the extracts from cocaine are considered by most authorities to lie at a second level of danger, followed by heroin, which is regarded as the worst drug of all since it induces addiction and can destroy the body. Most heroin addicts fail to break their addiction. There are about 600 young people in this case in Switzerland. They cost 12 million francs to keep alive. This sum is at present borne by the Cantons but may be assumed partially by the Confederation within the framework of new drug laws currently under preparation.

In a recent interview, the Head of

the Pharmaceutical Division of the Federal Hygiene Service, Mr. Jean-Pierre Bertschinger, said that the emphasis of legislative work in this field is to stop the inflow of drugs. It is thus more important to strike at pedlars and at the people behind the drug rings rather than at teenage consumers. Mr. Bertschinger expressed the view that penalties for young drug offenders should be reduced but those against traffickers drastically increased.

The controversy on whether or not to legalise marijuana and other drugs whose physical harm has never been proved worse than that of tobacco is naturally topical in Switzerland. The law-makers have to choose between liberalising the sale of such drugs and opening the way to a much larger consumption, or clamping down with the risk of increased crime and delinquence. Berne has however already made its choice and decided to abide by an international convention signed in 1961 pledging its members to prevent the free sale of drugs. Switzerland hasn't so far signed the 1971 Convention regarding the more sophisticated usages such as those of LSD, barbiturates and mescaline. It plans to establish the necessary legislation beforehand.

In the absence of ready figures at hand, it is difficult to say whether this problem is more important in Switzerland than elsewhere. One's impression is that drugs, coupled with a rejection of established standards of living and behaviour, is as much of a problem in Switzerland as, say, Great Britain or France. What is surprising is that the underlying revolt can't have sprung from poverty, unemployment, marxist propaganda and class consciousness because these things had been starkly reduced by the early sixties. It is more likely that the youths who haunted Zurich's Niederdorf and who were the first in Switzerland to attire themselves in the hippy way were powerfully attracted by the example from abroad.

The Swiss are culturally the most outward-looking people of Europe — as attested by the innumerable artists and creators who have gone elsewhere to breath more deeply and the others who have looked towards the border with nostalgia. The origin of the new drug cult

must therefore be partially pinned down on alien cultural influences and on the eagerness of the Swiss to submit to it.

P.M.B.

SWISS EVENTS

NO IMMEDIATE HELP TO THE SWISS PRESS

The Federal Council has shown no hurry to bring help to the Swiss press. A draft bill tabled by an Agrarian national councillor from Zurich, Mr. Ackeret, was sharply reduced in scope by the Government, who saw no cause for applying to this particular case existing provisions on federal aid to threatened economic activities. Mr. Kurt Furgler, head of the Department of Justice and Police, claimed before Parliament that there was no legal basis for State-aid to the Press. The National Council agreed with this view and approved the Government's proposals by a 63 to 57 majority. The proposals call on the Federal Council to submit a draft bill providing for long-term indirect help to the Press.

Mr. Ackeret had pleaded for immediate and important aid to the smaller papers whose precarious situation could put the diversity and independence of the Swiss press in jeopardy.

The Government's lack of apparent concern for the predicament of the Swiss press, characterised by the existence of an enormous number of newspapers (over 400) was attacked by several left-wing and independent national councillors.

PEACE HOPES RISE IN GENEVA

Geneva assumed its traditional role of diplomatic centre once again at the end of December with the opening of Peace Talks on the Middle East.

Scheduled to start on 18th December, the Conference began three days later with a suspense as to who would participate lasting up to the last minute. In the event, Israel, Egypt, Jordan, the United States, the Soviet Union and the United Nations were represented. Syria refused to turn up. Owing to the Arabs insistence at not being seated next to Israel, the tables were displayed in a Hexagon (Syria's row of seats remaining empty) and Israel was seated between the Russian and UN delegations.

The conference got off to a promising start before adjourning on 23rd. Mr. Henry Kissinger, US Secretary of State, appears to have played a prominent role in these positive developments. The Arabs and Israelis

agreed to discuss military disengagement before resuming the Peace Conference, hopefully by the end of this month. The Israel-Egypt Military Commission had held five sessions in Geneva at the time of writing and achieved consensus on the main points of disengagement.

Was a Swiss mast to blame?

Eric Tabarly's "Pen Duick VI", a favourite competitor in the round-the-world race, lost its mast for a second time having barely begun the third, Sydney-Rio lap. Pen Duick VI had already lost its main mast during the first Portsmouth-Cape Town lap and had to have it changed at Rio. The masts of French ketch were manufactured by the Swiss firm Albert Coeudevez, in Yverdon. When the main mast broke the first time, the firm had a second one sent to Rio by a French Air Force plane. The mast had to be cut in two and soldered again before being mounted because the plane could not take it. Coeudevez has insisted that the second failure, which seems to destroy Tabarly's chances of re-entering the race, was not due to faulty manufacture but to excessive stress at a steel bracket on the mast and faulty rigging.

Nadig still not up to form

While still not up to her 1972-Olympics form, Marie Therese Nadig remains one of Switzerland's main hopes for the European Cup and other competitions currently being staged in

Switzerland, France and Austria. The National Team will rely on her greatly at the forthcoming World Championships in St. Moritz. But the Appenzeller girl, who has averaged third or fourth position in downhill this season, has been constantly beaten in this event by the Austrian phenomenon, Anne-Marie Proel.

materialisation should take about ten years.

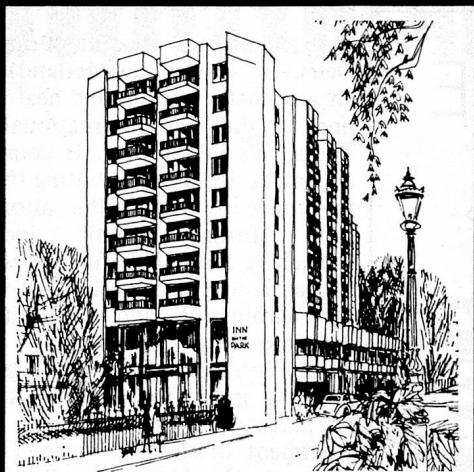
Largest purifying plant in the country

The communes of Visp, Visperterminen, Brig, Lalden, Baltschider and Ausserberg in the Valais have banded together to build the country's largest waste disposal plant in conjunction with the chemical company Lonza Ltd. The plant will cost 29.6 million francs and will take three years to build. It has been designed to clean the waters of a city of 260,000 inhabitants, which is more than the whole population of the Valais. The scheme will help to save Lake Geneva from more pollution. The Valais reaches out to the Lake and contributes to its pollution by disposing of waste in the Rhone.

Plethora of banks

Switzerland has 4,446 banks, or one for every 1,400 inhabitants. 557 of these banks belong to the Big Four (Swiss Credit, Union Bank of Switzerland, Swiss Bank Corp. and Volksbank) 1,232 are cantonal banks, 1,187 are regional banks, 1,164 are mutual savings banks, 129 are foreign banks. Bank branches have sprouted up rapidly during the past ten years. In some areas, more banks have been opened than was warranted by the market. But the terrific difficulties of getting trained staff and the growing costs of installations, due in particular to a rise in the frequency of hold-ups, have put an end to this tendency.

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Murder at Oberriet

The peaceful border town of Oberriet (St. Gall) had a taste of life in the Wild West one night in early January when a gang of armed men attacked the customs building and killed two customs officers. Within hours a thousand police in Switzerland and neighbouring Austria and Germany were mobilised to seek the gunmen, who had killed for no apparent reason Corporal Niklaus Muller and his colleague Jakob Zogg, both 38 and fathers of two children.

The attack occurred at about 4.30 a.m. on the night of 6-7th January. According to witnesses, two men at least dashed inside the customs offices and gunned down Corporal Muller, who was alone and about to be relieved by Jakob Zogg. For reasons one may never know, the latter arrived late to take up his round of duty. In the meanwhile, the gunmen stopped a party of seven people travelling in a VW Minibus. Sensing danger, its driver pressed hard on the accelerator and made off unscathed. But a few minutes later, the gunmen stopped an Austrian butcher at the wheel of a VW "Beetle". They bundled him into the customs office and sprayed him with bullets, seriously wounding him. Then came Mr. Zogg. As he alighted from his Renault R-4, the gunmen ordered him into the office and gunned him down in three sten-gun bursts and made off with his car. The Renault was later found half immersed in Lake Constance and police were also investigating the theft of a motorboat at Rorschach.

Police are trying to establish connections with a bank robbery carried out in Buchs the previous day. A gang of four armed men in a stolen Alfa Romeo had stormed into a bank of that town. While one of them held customers and staff with their arms behind their neck at gunpoint, the other three jumped over

the counter to snatch 200,000 francs in banknotes which they stuffed into a plastic bag. The various similarities between the two incidents have brought Police to follow both leads. Having robbed the bank, the four made off in their Alfa Romeo, but police and bank-staff punctured one of its tyres while firing at them. The bandits managed to change cars in a country road and make off in another Alfa Romeo. They were believed to be in their twenties. Some witnesses claimed that they could have been Arabs.

Petition for the recognition of Guinea-Bissau

Several movements including the Swiss League for Human Rights have launched a petition to the Federal Council asking it to recognise the tiny African territory of Guinea-Bissau, which recently proclaimed itself independent from Portugal with the backing of the United Nations.

SBC shares will be easier to buy

The Swiss Bank Corporation will ask its shareholders to approve a division of present 500 franc bearer shares into 100 franc units. This decision will be meant to make shareholding more democratic by allowing a wider fraction of the population to afford SBC shares. If the SBC Annual General Meeting approves the decision at its meeting on 19th March, 500 franc shares will be exchangeable for five 100 franc shares. The Board of the Group plans to increase its capital by an issue of 220,000 100 franc shares.

The Swiss Bank Corporation is the first of the large Swiss banks to make

such a move. It follows a similar decision taken by Nestle last autumn to subdivide its shares by a fifth in a spirit of democratic capitalism.

Illegal evangelical group expelled from France

An evangelical community with many Swiss and English-speaking members were expelled from France where they had started to build a new commune without permission from the French authorities. The group known as "Fraternity of Jesus" had begun to build a house and grow vegetables in a plot of land at Veigy, not far from Geneva, early in the Summer. Many people had joined them there to listen to the Word. The "Fraternity" was also concerned with a centre for drug addicts in Geneva. Accepting the decision of the French local authorities with resignation, they saw in it the Hand of God directing them to pursue their Service to Him elsewhere.

SWISSAIR INTRODUCES DC-10s TO THE FAR EAST

From 1st April Swissair will serve Far East destinations with new DC-10-30 wide-bodied jets and at the same time introduce a weekly DC-10 express flight from Zurich to Tokyo with only one intermediate stop at Bombay. This will cut travel time from Switzerland to Japan by more than eight hours to 17 hours 50 minutes, or to exactly the time a flight over the Polar route would take. Hitherto all Swissair services to Tokyo have included several intermediate stops resulting in a total travel time of some 26 hours.

During the past two years Swissair has recorded on its Far East route a traffic growth which often exceeded the capacity of the DC-8 jets in use. The introduction of the DC-10-30 trijets, capable of carrying 249 passengers and 14.5 tons of cargo, thus meets the increasing demand.

NEW INDUSTRIAL FURNACE

A furnace manufacturing firm at Delémont (Berne, Switzerland) exhibited an automatic continuous heat treatment line at the last International Machine Tools Fair in Hanover. It consists of an automatic loader distributing the parts on the conveyor belt of the automatic "T" type furnace with incorporated quenching tank. This furnace is equipped for hardening carbon steels as well as the gas carburizing and carbonitriding of mass-produced articles such as screws, bolts, springs, ball bearings, sewing machine and office parts, car parts, etc. It is particularly suitable for the heat treatment of sintered parts. The treated parts are bright, without oxidation or calamine and are removed automatically from the quenching tank by a special fluid system patented by the Swiss firm or by means of a bucket chain; they then pass automatically into a continuous washing machine.



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EBAUCHES LAMENTS “LIP” OUTCOME

The Neuchatel-based firm Ebauches SA which has a 43 per cent stake in Lip, France's bankrupt no. 1 watch company, has published a report outlining its position in the conflict.

Early last year, the 1,200 employees of the Besançon firm were given a month's notice because of Lip's financial difficulties. The workers reacted by staging a long-drawn work-in, which was the first ever organised in France. Professional agitators and social idealists converged on Besançon to spur the workers on and tell them to keep struggling. The unions, the Communist and Socialist parties, and all the intellectuals of France seized the affair to hit at the unacceptable face of capitalism consisting in expecting workers to pay for, by lay-offs, the mistakes of the managerial classes. After about two months of pirate work and shop-steward control, the French police stormed the Besançon factory. Negotiations were initiated by a Government-appointed mediator with the unions. They broke down because the unions adamantly refused to accept the slightest redundancies which both Ebauches SA and the French Government considered essential for the viability of the company. It was eventually fragmented into three groups specialising in watches, armaments and machines. The future of the latter two has been secured by outside companies.

All through this stormy episode, Ebauches has been strongly attacked by the Unions, who found an easy target in a new and fashionable campaign against multinational companies. French left-wing intellectuals joined the fray. The conservatives were worried about a Swiss firm dictating conditions to an essentially French company. Ebauches suffered all this, including the considerable financial losses incurred over the years through its involvement in Lip, with remarkable self-control. Communiques were scarce and restrained. But after a year, the company has now published a detailed statement of its gradual involvement with the ailing French company and answered critics who claim that Ebauches should have intervened from the start to prevent Lip's bankruptcy.

Ebauches claims that this was not possible (a) because of the insistence of the French Government on keeping Lip's management and capital in French hands, (b) because of the opposition of French trade unions, and (c) by the attitude of French political and financial circles "who claimed that all that was needed for the Lip's survival was a massive injection of Ebauches money".

In concluding its 30-page White Paper, Ebauches quotes the French writer Alphonse Allais, who wrote:

"Switzerland is a good cow, nice to look at and capable of delivering all that is asked from her". This quotation sums up the attitude experienced by Ebauches for the past year among French trade-union, business, political and government circles, says the Report.

Ebauches deplores the fact that the Lip labour force "conned by experts in political agitation" chose to reject all "rational solution" to their problems. The Neuchatel firm claims that in other countries, a compromise arrangement could have been reached before the debacle.

This statement was criticised by some observers who thought that it came far too late and lacked elegance.

THE SWISS WASHING MACHINE MARKET

It is estimated that almost 90% of Switzerland's homes have access to a washing machine; in 44% of these cases, the machine belongs exclusively to the family using it. Each year, between 100,000 and 120,000 automatic washing machines are sold in Switzerland. In 1971 sales amounted to 105,000 units, totalling 180 million francs in value. Domestic production lies somewhere between 30,000 and 50,000 machines per year. Swiss firms mainly produce large machines for collective use; as a general rule, they have a capacity of 13 lb of dry washing and are expected to stand up to repeated daily washes for an average period of 17 years. Consequently, they are comparatively expensive. For individual type machines and less expensive models, Switzerland usually resorts to imports. It is estimated that by 1975 the proportion of households without a washing machine at their disposal will not exceed 8% of the total. By then, 56% of all households will have their own washing machine.

A Swiss become European Flyweight Champion

The Bernese boxer Fritz Cherbet won the European Flyweight title by beating the Italian Fernando Atzori before 10,000 wildly cheering supporters at the Hallenstadion in Zurich. Cherbet won by a knock-out in the seventh round. Plans are under way for a world-title challenge. Cherbet is ranked by the World Boxing Association as the second boxer in the flyweight category.

Swiss private banks opens branch in London

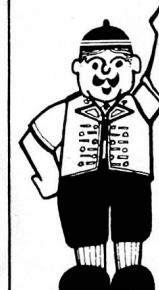
The private Geneva bank of Lombard, Odier & Cie has opened a branch in London called "Lombard Odier (UK) Ltd" with an initial capital of £1,000.

A boost for our skiers

A few weeks before the start of the World Ski Championships at St. Moritz, the Swiss team received a welcome psychological boost when they learnt that *Paul Berlinger* would be their official waxing specialist. A sales representative for a ski firm in Stans, Berlinger is also the country's foremost craftsman in the art of surfacing skis with a slippery layer of wax, a procedure which can be essential in competition. Berlinger had joined the national team at the Winter Olympics in Sapporo in 1972 and his contribution to Switzerland's performance (three gold medals, two silver and one bronze in skiing alone) is disputed by no one. The particular conditions prevailing in that northern Japanese city, where the proximity of the sea, low altitudes and a damp climate caused the snow to be soft and heavy, underlined the importance of waxing. Most specialists agree that the Austrian Anne-Marie Proell was robbed of victory by Marie Therese Nadig thanks to the superior waxing techniques of the Swiss. If Sapporo is anything to go by, Berlinger's services at St. Moritz are bound to give Bernard Russi, Roger Collombin and others added confidence against their Austrian and Italian rivals.

Waxing is almost entirely a personal skill relying on experience. Despite recent research, the chemicals used for that procedure have not evolved during the past fifteen years. A waxer must adapt the preparation of skis to weather conditions. He must also be a reliable weatherman, for skis must be prepared for a run several hours in advance so that the wax can settle. A freak change of weather before the start of a race can make the most painstaking waxing useless.

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