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Comment

A CANTON BANS HUNTING

For the first time in the history of mankind, a community has decided to ban all hunting on its territory. This is the outcome of a vote that was held in Geneva on the weekend of 11th–12th May. A fifth of the electorate (which is considered as a good figure in Geneva) turned out on a sunny day to the polls to give a 5–2 majority support to the sponsors of an initiative banning the hunting of all mammals and birds throughout the canton. The vote was the outcome of an initiative backed by 24,000 signatures. It means that the hunting issue will be inscribed in the constitution. This had been criticised by most local parties, who considered the issue too trivial to be mentioned in the Canton's most important legislative text.

The outcome of the vote, in which the people also rejected counter-proposals by the Geneva Executive to authorise hunting but increase its restrictions, showed the small influence of politicians who had all either defended the initiative or supported the counter-proposal barring one exception.

In fact, many commentators considered that the verdict was a show of sentimentality and not backed by commonsense. They noted that the tiny canton's fauna was adequately protected by existing regulations and that hunters offered a service to the community in eliminating animals representing a health hazard or causing a nuisance to farmers. Now that hunters are banned, it will be necessary for the authorities to keep the animal population under control, they said. Even before the vote, the game-keeping services were called to destroy several dozen foxes, boars, wild cats and other animals every year. The new situation will also give a great impetus to poaching.

Sharing this feeling, voters in country areas supported the Executive's counter-proposal but were, of course, far outnumbered by the townspeople.

There was a possible element of social vindictiveness in the issue at hand. The sponsors of the initiative had condemned the "cruel, dangerous and

useless entertainment" of a mere 500 registered hunters. At all events, it reflects once more that environmental concern had become deeply established in the mores of the Swiss people.

This concern will show even more as local opposition builds up against the planned construction of a nuclear power station at Verbier. The Federal Department of Transport, Communications and Energy has given its authorisation to the project following the advice of federal committees on nuclear safety and environmental protection. But the cantonal and communal authorities are far from agreed on the construction of a major power station to be cooled directly by the Rhone, and a drawn-out struggle reminiscent of the battle over the Kaiseraugst installations can be expected.

SWISS EVENTS

Chilean refugees adapting fast to Swiss life

354 refugees from Chile have settled down in Switzerland since the Army Coup in that country last September. Of these, 229 have enjoyed official help, 43 have entered by their own means and 82 have been helped by a church-sponsored charitable organisation. Not all the refugees have definitely been allowed to stay. But while their situation is being examined by the authorities they are rapidly integrating into Swiss life. The Central Office for Refugees said that nearly all these refugees now had a lodgings of their own and a stable job.

Elderly couples prefer to be pensioned together

Very few married people have availed themselves of the opportunity offered to them on 1st January, 1973, to draw their own half of their joint Old Age Pension individually. Demands for separate disbursements have been registered from only ten per cent of

married pensioners. This could be a reflection on the health of elderly marriages, but according to a women's organisation, this is not necessarily so. Many elderly women are apparently ignorant of this scheme while others consider that the halving of the couple's pension should be done automatically.

The harm of studded tyres

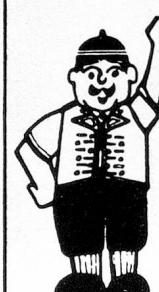
The Federal Council has awarded subsidies totalling 4.35 million francs to Vaud and Berne for the re-surfacing of the first stretches of National Highway N1 (Gland–Lausanne, Berne–Koppigen and the Bipperramt stretch) which have been worn out prematurely owing to the use of studded anti-frost tyres. The two cantons had appealed for financial aid to the Confederation because their road budget could not cover this additional expense. The Federal Council accepted the demand. Article 36 2–5 of the Constitution allows the Confederation to help out cantons who are generally responsible for road maintenance, under certain special circumstances.

TIPS TO BE BANNED ALL OVER THE COUNTRY ON 1st JULY

The automatic inclusion of service charges or hotel and restaurant bills, which has been a practice in the main cities for several years, will shortly be enforced throughout the country. As from 1st July, people will be able to enjoy a meal in full awareness of what they are spending. There will be no nasty surprises after coffee or embarrassed mental calculations. The relief and simple logic of an inclusive bill is to be generalised following the decision by the Federal Council to extend an agreement signed on 5th December last between the country's catering and hotel organisations to the organisations representing the employees of this sector.



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PROGRESS IN THE INTEGRATION OF HANDICAPPED PEOPLE

In its 1973 Report, the Swiss Federation for the Integration of Physically Handicapped People welcomed several important new steps which have promoted their cause. The Report notes that bills to be voted by Parliament on housing and the encouragement of house-ownership specifically mentioned the problems of handicapped people. It recalled that the Post Office, the Federal Railways, the Federal Transport Office and the Syndicate of Public Transport Companies had adopted the Federation's recommendations and would be issuing directives to help the life of handicapped people. The Federation expressed the hope that these efforts would be carried further. It regretted that the present draft of the planned Constitutional Article on housing did not mention the case of physically-handicapped people and considered that the building of special flats for such people was not sufficient, claiming that all buildings and flats should be so designed as to accommodate people with physical difficulties. This would be the most efficient help to their integration to the life of the community. The Report noted that some of its recommendations to the transport authorities had been rejected for practical reasons. One of them was to limit the gradient of all ramps to 6 degrees. This specification was not kept because it would have called for excessively large constructions. The Federation hoped that

new regulations taking account of the needs of handicapped people would eventually be enforced on escalators.

Snake exhibition in Zurich

The most important snake exhibition ever held in Switzerland is currently open to the public until 14th July at the Zoological Museum of Zurich University. The reptiles belong to a specialist from St. Gall, Mr. Kurt Wusch, who presented an impressive family of cobras, pythons, mangas, mygales and adders to the Press in a preview to the exhibition. Mr. Wusch told journalists that there were only two kinds of dangerous snakes in Switzerland: the "vipera berus" and the "vipera aspis". But no one had been fatally bitten by these animals in Switzerland since 1960.

AN URGE TO KILL

A 14-year-old schoolboy murdered a 7-year-old child because he had been seized by a sudden urge to kill. The discovery of young Guenter Ortner, who had disappeared the day before after leaving the village school of Rhans, near Buchs (SG) on his way home, caused a great upsurge in the area. Following a night-long search by local police and troops camping in the area, his naked body was found beneath a heap of stones in a quarry. A coroner confirmed that the child had been murdered. The Press spoke of sexual assault. The discovery of the culprit was made easier by the theft of a

machine-gun from an Army unit carrying out a repetition course near Rhans. An officer reported the theft to the police who thought of a possible connection with the murder. A long enquiry among troops and people living in the neighbourhood enabled a precise description of the suspect to be drawn. He turned out to be a 14-year-old schoolboy from the same school as his victim. He admitted to committing the crime and the theft after a long session of questioning. "I don't know what happened. I suddenly felt an urge to kill", he said. The two had met by coincidence staring at two Army horses grazing near the quarry.

THE GOLDEN ROSE OF MONTREUX

The 14th Golden Rose of Montreux was held in early May on the "Swiss Riviera". This unique television variety contest brought together all the major television organisations of the world including those of Eastern Europe. The only main country not represented was Japan, but countries like Iran, Pakistan and Malaysia were present for the first time and showed the international jury at Montreux their idea of fun and entertainment.

The Golden Rose went to Spain, the Silver to ITV for a programme featuring Barbra Streisand and Ray Charles, and the Bronze went to Holland. The Press Prize went to Norway. The BBC 2 programme "Aquarius" showed

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parts of the Swiss contribution, which came from French-speaking television. It consisted of sketches of a rather plump humour showing the various aspects of fire prevention. The contributions of some countries of eastern Europe, notably Hungary, aroused great interest. By most accounts, this year's edition of the Golden Rose Festival was very successful and it seems certain that this annual competition will continue to gain in importance and in international audience.

COMPANIES

April–May is a traditional period for shareholder meetings. Several important Swiss companies have recently held their Annual General Meetings. These meetings were usually informed of continuing good business tinged with some concern for the future.

During a 3-hour meeting in Zurich, Nestlé–Alimentana shareholders approved the deal with L'Oréal, the French cosmetics empire, giving Nestlé a 49 per cent stake. Some speakers stood out against the deal, arranged so as to further diversify the corporation's activities, by warning against the threat of nationalisation. The meeting also agreed to an increase of capital to finance the partial take-over. In his report, Mr. Pierre Liotard-Vogt, Nestlé's Chairman and Managing Director, stressed the adverse effects of inflation and monetary uncertainty on the company's business. He also expressed alarm at the considerable rise in the cost of petroleum-derived products which the

demands of the oil producers had unleashed.

Sulzer's shareholder meeting approved all the recommendations of the Board. A 14 per cent dividend was distributed from the company's 161.5 million franc capital. Mr. Edwin Stopper, former governor of the Swiss National Bank, was elected to the Board. The meeting was told that Sulzer's workload was assured for the next 14.6 months (as against 9.9 months a year ago) but that this didn't dissipate the firm's worries as there were likely to be more problems in finding adequate manpower. Mr. Georg Sulzer, Chairman of the Board, said that if the third initiative on "over-foreignization" was accepted, 2,700 workers in the group's Swiss factories, or 13 per cent of Sulzer's total labour force, would have to leave.

Ciba-Geigy's meeting hadn't been held at the time of writing, but the Chairman's Report containing the group's vital statistics had been sent to shareholders in view of the meeting. The giant chemical group reported a world turnover of 8,154 million francs in 1973 (1 per cent increase). The mother company in Basle had registered a 2,981 million franc turnover (13 per cent increase). The exceptionally favourable results of the Swiss factories reflected the relative strengthening of the Swiss franc during the past year. Shareholders are offered a 22 franc per share dividend.

Another major company to hold its A.G.M. was Ebauches S.A., which holds a virtual monopoly on the supply of components to the watch industry. Shareholders met in Neuchâtel and

accepted a 60 franc dividend per share. The company had netted sales of 627 million francs in 1973 and made a profit of 3.7 million francs.

Five shops closed per week day

Between four and five small shops have disappeared every day in Switzerland during the past five years as a result of supermarket competition. Mr. Otto Fischer, Director of Switzerland's small trades association, said that there were 19,712 shops in 1968 and only 13,272 at the end of 1973, meaning that 6,500 family affairs had disappeared during that period. The main cause of this development is not only to be tagged on supermarkets, which existed before 1968, but on the development of huge shopping centres with parking facilities outside the main cities. Two of the largest in the country are at Balexert and at Spreitenbach, on the outskirts of Geneva and Zurich. This formula relies entirely on the generalisation of private car ownership and is tailored to motoring habits. As a result, Switzerland's one million old-age pensioners, many of whom have limited means and do not own a car, find their shopping facilities reduced from year to year. Mr. Fischer warned that Switzerland's new shopping structure would collapse if the country's petrol supplies were really cut off.



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