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regions". So far so good. But then the voter is also asked to approve or reject a credit of 21.5 million francs for the expansion of the heating system of the university and the cantonal hospital. How should he — or she — have the technical knowledge to know whether these millions would be well spent — even if the cantonal parliament recommends such expenditure?

It is an undeniable fact that the constant flow — not to say flood — of voting proposals leads to apathy on the part of the voters and to sometimes shamefully small participation on their part. Thus it can happen that certain proposals are accepted or voted down by only 18 to 20% of those entitled to vote. This is quite understandable, since the average voter has neither the time nor the inclination, nor indeed the knowledge to thoroughly study both the flood of explanatory pamphlets he finds in his letterbox or to properly gauge the consequences of the decision he is supposed to make.

Having to go to the polls too often and being asked to decide on things about which even the experts have differing opinions is putting an enormous strain on democracy. It leads to what I am tempted to call voters fatigue and, if not to a malaise within the population, then at least to indifference and unconcern and the result finally becomes a kind of lottery.

If the British voter has — perhaps — too little say in important matters which help to shape the future, the Swiss voter

has too much. This is a conclusion I have come to during the 18 months during which I have been able to observe the Swiss political scene at close quarters. A

healthy compromise solution between the two systems would seem to be desirable.

Gottfried Keller

technical items

NEW TOOLS FOR THE HANDYMAN

A Swiss inventor at Orselina (Ticino) presented two very useful new tools for the handyman at the last International Salon of Inventions in Geneva. The first consists of a universal wrench fitting any shape or size of nut and bolt. In the handyman's tool kit, it will take the place therefore of a whole series of standard spanners; it also offers the advantage of being round and articulated, enabling bolts located even in the most inaccessible places to be reached. The other tool is a ratchet-spanner which can also be used as a screwdriver, box-spanner, etc., by merely inserting the desired accessory into the tool's driving rod. A simple push with the thumb is sufficient to lock the system, making it possible to screw in either direction. All operations are quickly and easily done for the leverage exerted by the dovetail handle increases the force. For screwdrivers, milling

machines, drills and other mechanical tools, a special clutch system has been provided, making it possible to fit the accessory or remove it simply by pressing.

SWISS NOVELTY IN ELECTRONICS

About 1950, cold cathode tubes attained their technical maturity. For many years, they were considered as advanced electronic components; but the appearance of semi-conductors gradually ousted them from their position of supremacy. Recently, however, there has been a veritable rebirth of cold cathode tubes. Their great stability, insensitivity to overloading and peak voltages, wide range of temperatures, reliability and long life make them ideal for many uses in simple automatic controls and regulating circuits. It is above all miniature welding diodes for printed circuits that triggered the present demand for these components. A specialized Swiss factory at Mannedorf (Zurich) presented a number of high-power switching diodes



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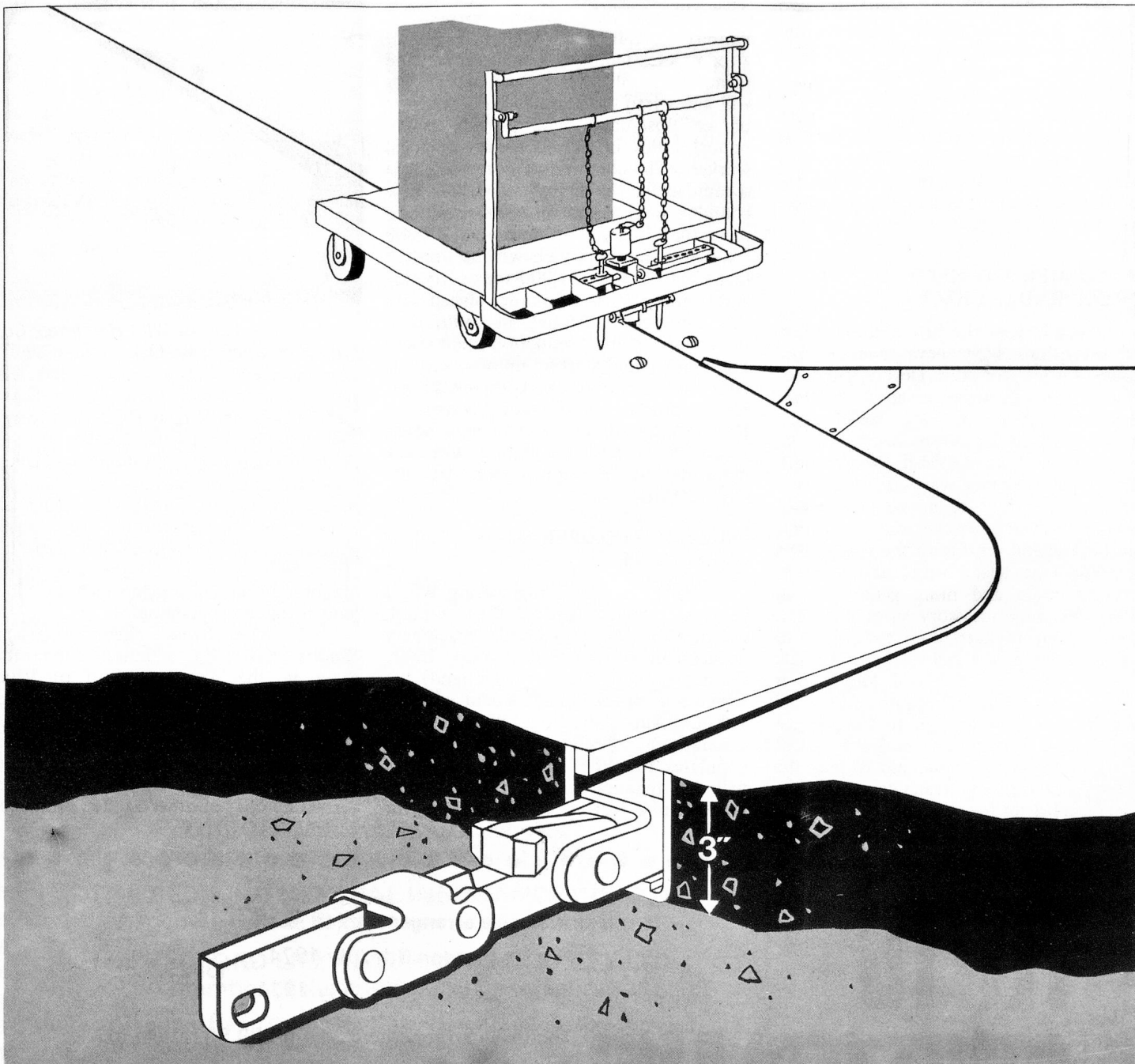
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for welding in printed circuits at the recent Electronic Components Exhibition in Paris. These diodes come in two versions (striking voltage of 200 and 400 V respectively); they make it possible to produce impulse generating sweep circuits of very simple design and are both reliable and economical. Their main fields of use are appliances for lighting natural gas, starters for sodium vapour lamps and other high pressure lamps for lighting roads and sports fields, appliances for electric fencing, etc.

NO LONGER ANY NEED TO DREAD RADAR CHECKS

The jury of the International Salon of Inventions in Geneva awarded the Swiss Office for the Development of Trade Prize, an award given to the best Swiss invention, to the speed limit warning device for automobiles produced by a firm at Renens (Vaud, Switzerland). This small appliance warns the driver of a vehicle by means of an acoustic signal every time he approaches the speed limit set beforehand on one of the keys on the instrument; as speed limits are tending to become more and more general in all countries, this accessory saves motorists from having to keep their eyes glued to their speedometers instead of being able to concentrate on the road. Mounting is very quickly done and requires no special installation; it is enough to fix a probe near the tachometer, without direct connection to the cable, and to plug the instrument into any available socket, the cigarette lighter for example.

BIG ORDER FOR SULZER

The Iraqi Ministry of Industry has commissioned the Sulzer Group at Winterthur (Zurich, Switzerland) to build a complete factory at Basrah for the manufacture of cellulose and paper. This will allow Iraq to cut down on its imports of cellulose and will provide many opportunities of employment for local workers. The completion of the works is scheduled for the end of 1976. This new complex will make it possible to process reeds for an annual production of 36,000 tons of cellulose, which will be used to manufacture some 25,000 tons of typing and printing paper. The order placed with this Swiss firm includes, in addition to the supply of the production plant itself, the delivery and starting up of an electric feed pump, with two gas turbines, a plant for the purification of waste waters up to European standards, as well as a refuse incinerating plant complying with the demands of the protection of the environment.

INDO-SWISS CO-OPERATION AGREEMENT

Ruti Co. Ltd., Engineering Works (Zurich, Switzerland), the summit organization of the textile machinery department of the G.F. Group, Georg Fischer (Schaffhausen, Switzerland) has signed a co-operation agreement with the Lakshmi Automatic Loom Works Ltd., at Coimbatore (India). This contract stipulates that the Ruti type "C" loom will be manufactured for the Indian market in a factory to be built in the

south of India. Ruti is to supply the technical know-how and also participate financially in the new concern. The training of Indian specialists has already started at Ruti's. The Indian textile industry will thus, in the near future, have a universal high-speed loom made in India. Thanks to this co-operation, the Ruti textile machinery group, which already has manufacturing centres and licensees in Europe, North America and Japan, has been able to establish itself on the Indian sub-continent.

NEWS IN BRIEF

1. The firm of *Wild Heerbrugg Co. Ltd.*, Heerbrugg (St. Gall, Switzerland), manufacturers of optical instruments, has acquired a majority share in the Ernst Leitz works at Wetzlar (West Germany) well known for its production in the fields of microscopy, photography (Leica cameras) and measuring technique. In co-operation with Leitz, Wild plans to revise the manufacturing and sales programmes of the German firm; a special effort will be made in the sectors of microscopy and measuring technique by joint research programmes.

2. The Swiss chemical group *Sandoz* (Basle) has acquired a majority share in the American firm of *Vital Assists* (Salt Lake City), specializing in haemodialysis equipment. The latter will continue its work in the field of renal therapeutics, but will also be responsible for the sale in the United States of a certain number of other Sandoz products.

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