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are the "softer" parts of the budget which could be tampered with without coming under fire from economic interests.

Allowing the people to vote on technical issues like taxation supposes that voters are informed of these matters and know the consequences of their decisions. In the present case, their 8th December verdict might mean exchanging short-lived advantages — i.e. a freeze on taxes — for likely disadvantages in the future. Owing to the possible deterioration of business in Switzerland,

public contracts paid for by the tax-payer, might play an increasing role in keeping the economy going and in securing jobs. The majority of Swiss voters obviously seemed to be unaware of this possibility.

The same problem arises in cantonal and communal issues where the people are asked to vote on, say, fiscal or public works projects. How can the people of a large city knowledgably decide on whether to allocate two million francs to extending a secondary school, if they do not have a clear vision of the

city's planning policy and needs?

The technicalities of decisions have greatly increased since the Constitution was drafted and this may be one cause of abstention. The feeling is that there should be some delegation on technical issues. This falls short of the ideals of direct democracy, but may be preferable if the people are not prepared to accomplish the necessary "homework" to arrive at the right decision. In this case, some decisions might better be left to the specialists.

P.M.B.

## SWISS EVENTS

### SWITZERLAND CUTS SUPPORT TO UNESCO

Switzerland fell under heavy attack in the Arab Press for its attitude to Israel's virtual expulsion from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). Although other countries, like France, have reacted in a similar way, Switzerland appeared to bear the brunt of virulent articles in the Arab Press, some of which were reproduced in Swiss newspapers.

The Swiss delegation had abstained from voting on two controversial issues at the November general conference of UNESCO in Paris. One issue related to the admission of Israel to the European grouping of the organisation, a second resolution condemned Israel for carrying out excavations in the occupied part of Jerusalem. Eager to show that Switzerland could remain neutral on what should theoretically be a non-political platform, the Political Department had instructed the delegation not to take sides in any debate touching on the Israeli-Arab confrontation.

As a result, the Swiss delegation abstained, although it was generally in favour of Israel. Its leader, former Councillor of States Olivier Reverdin, an authority on ancient history, claimed afterwards that the excavations undertaken in the Arab sector of Jerusalem were both vital in the light of UNESCO's purpose, and of no harm to the residents in the areas concerned. The Arab press was angry at Switzerland's abstention, which was apparently considered as more damnable than taking sides with one or the other of the warring parties.

But its reactions took on an even more hostile turn when Parliament finally decided to cut Switzerland's contribution to UNESCO by 10 per cent to show its displeasure at the heavy-handed methods increasingly used by some members of the organisation. Algerian and other Arab attacks on Swiss "hypocrisy" and

"equivocation" moved the Federal Council in issuing a note stressing that neutrality had not been violated. It also stressed that Swiss institutions were free, so that both Parliament and the Press were entitled to hold to their opinion.

Parliament's vote on the UNESCO contribution issue, which arose during a routine National Council debate on government expenditure, reflected a growing current of hostile opinion towards some Middle-East countries. Switzerland's guiding political philosophy may well be called permanent neutrality, but the attitudes of the Swiss people are far from neutral in major international issues — such as the Middle-East. The Swiss would have to be robots for the situation to be different. Neutrality is a theoretical concept screening off the feelings of people said to be "neutral". It is undeniable that Swiss public opinions on the Middle-East shows in the Press, and this, too, is resented by the Arabs. Any explanation by the Federal Council would fall on deaf ears under the circumstances. Arab newspapers in fact reacted to the Federal Council's explanatory note by saying that they didn't require to be "lectured" by legalistic arguments.

Neutrality as exercised by Switzerland has not always been understood by other nations. It is a concept particular to the Swiss mind, so that for people used to political expediency or a state of permanent political mobilisation, it means nothing more than a legal gimmick. Certainly, the Arabs are the people who show the least patience with Swiss neutrality at the moment.

The fact that the Swiss delegation to the UNESCO conference was asked to abstain in a controversial vote was criticised by a member of the delegation, Professor Jeanne Hersch from Geneva. She said, during a public debate called to discuss the consequences of the Conference, that Switzerland was failing to contribute to the life of an important world body. She claimed that abstentionism and passivity were no better for the international community than taking sides politically. Referring to moves under way to get Switzerland inside the United Nations, she asked whether we were joining the world body "just to abstain".

### THE UBS REVEALS ITS APRIL LOSS

The Union Bank of Switzerland recently revealed the amount it had lost in foreign exchange dealings last April. The loss was at the time reported in a brief announcement. Mr. Philippe de Weck, the Bank's General Manager, at a Press conference, said that the total loss incurred on dealings in futures amounted to 142 million francs. This sum has been entirely covered by monetary and metallic reserves.

Mr. de Weck explained that it had been necessary to remain discreet on the exact amount as long as the balances involved in forward buying with one client had not been cleared. The Bank feared that any announcement on the actual loss figure at a time when its exchange position was still strong would have unleashed speculative pressures against the UBS.

The Bank had not recorded any further losses since then. In particular, it had no claims on the failed Herstatt and Bruxelles Bank, and none either on the International Credit Bank of Geneva, with which the UBS had cut relations "several years ago."

Mr. de Weck stressed that since the April mishap the Bank had strengthened its control on foreign exchange dealings and that the organisation of this department had been overhauled following the resignation of a senior executive.

Another executive, Mr. R. Holzach, referred to a contract which the UBS had recently rescinded with Control Data Corporation. He recalled that in 1971, UBS had asked the American computer firm to develop a new system that would encompass the operation of all the bank's branches and activities. But the systems gradually developed by Control Data produced unsatisfactory results, well below the Bank's expectation, so that the UBS decided to break the contract and to return the hardware for which it had already spent about fifty million francs. Instead, the Bank will continue to develop its present Univac system. The failed deal with Control Data Corporation has resulted in losses that can only be estimated and which are included in the Bank's profit and loss account. According to sources in the computer world, Control Data lost far more than the UBS. The American firm is believed to have



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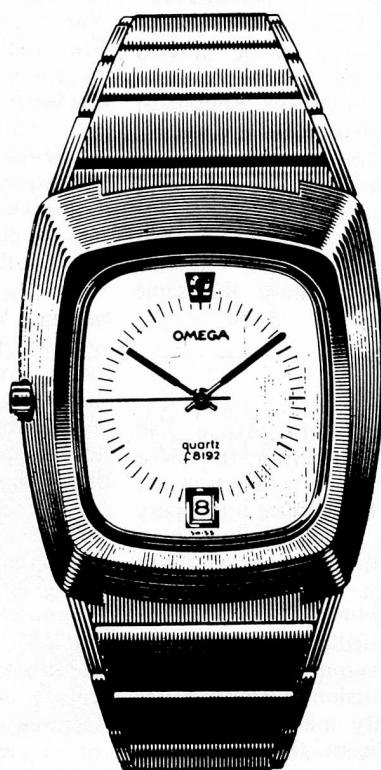
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invested £30m in developing the system and has been pushed to the brink of insolvency.

The Bank's balance sheet announced on 30th September totalled 39.99 thousand million francs, a 0.2 per cent increase on last year.

#### INTERNATIONAL WATCH MUSEUM

At the beginning of the century, a small museum of old watches was opened in the School of Watchmaking and Engineering at La Chaux-de-Fonds (Neuchâtel - Switzerland); by 1967, owing to its steady growth over the years, it had already been enlarged on three

occasions. A few years later, it became apparent that the premises available were no longer suited to a permanent and functional display of the rich collections; consequently it was decided to build in the capital of Swiss and world watchmaking a whole new complex of ultra-modern buildings to house the new international museum. Inaugurated in October 1974, the museum was designed to be a meeting place and focal point for international watchmaking circles, unique of its kind in the world from the scientific, technical and documentary points of view. The main feature of the museum, emphasised by its architecture, is its dynamism. Placed under the sign "Man and time", it is not limited to

displaying exhibits from the past, but is also wide open to the future. After admiring the collections of antique and hand-made items and watching various audio-visual shows, the visitor is shown a workshop where old watches are restored. He then enters an information area which introduces him into the heart of contemporary watchmaking. The section "Modern Times" shows all the production sectors in existence today and the latest technical achievements, while a documentation centre offers those interested in an opportunity to consult the specialised library. In this way, every visitor to the museum, whether amateur or professional, can relive the wonderful history of timekeeping.

# SOUTH AFRICAN JOURNEY

## by the Editor

For the past three years, I have been fortunate in being able to opt for rather ambitious holidays. I have given accounts of these holidays in past issues of the *Swiss Observer*, and some readers may remember my reports on the Swiss of North Africa in 1972, and some aspects of Swiss presence in India as seen during a stay in that country in October 1973.

Last year, I decided to have a look at a most controversial country, whose political system never fails to make people emotional in social conversation: South Africa. I took the decision to go there as early as June, since it was only possible to go there for a manageable expenditure by buying the ticket ninety days in advance. I was over there for five weeks during November and December - an ideal time because it is summer in that part of the world while the gloom of winter has fallen on the British Isles.

#### Swiss business in S.A.

During that trip, I naturally had my eyes open for signs of anything Swiss. Without going out of one's way, it was easy to see that there are strong links between Switzerland and the Republic of South Africa. British Airways have obvious commercial reasons in having their daily route between London and Johannesburg pass through Zurich. The Jumbo Jets used for the journey pick up a fair number of Swiss at Kloten. Some alight at Nairobi for a Safari holiday, but many others continue to Johannesburg, which has a large and active Swiss community. The Swiss can also take Swissair. Our national airline has a twice-weekly connection to Johannesburg via Kinshasa, and uses its new fleet of DC10 Trijets for this purpose.

I suppose that only a minority of the residents of Swiss origin in South Africa are South African citizens. It is

likely that most of those who live there have come within the last ten years, which have seen an unprecedented economic expansion in the country. Certainly, most of the major Swiss firms are represented in South Africa and many have manufacturing plants there. Those that we saw by driving in the Johannesburg area with factories are Sulzer and Sandoz. But companies like Brown Boveri, Kuhni, Nestlé, Schindler, Ciba-Geigy and the major banks have establishments in the country. Johannesburg has several Swiss jewellers. Swiss watches are advertised everywhere on luminous displays and it seems that these watches are more firmly established in the South African market than their Japanese competitors. Moreover, piles of "Hero" tins can be seen in supermarkets.

Johannesburg also has a chain of Swiss confectioneries and one or two Swiss restaurants. Cape Town has a Swiss restaurant. Even Windhoek, capital of South West Africa, has a "Swiss Cleaner" standing on the main street. A tall, glass and steel building above the M1 Motorway near Johannesburg, housing the offices of several companies, is called "Helvetia House". Several private residences in the city have the same name.

#### The work of missionaries

Long before South Africa had become a business attraction, the Swiss had come to the country as doctors and missionaries. One of the oldest missionary hospitals of South Africa was built by a Swiss at Elim, Northern Transvaal, about a hundred years ago. I spent several days in the area and met several Swiss members of its medical and technical staff. The oldest missionary post to be set up by the Swiss Mission in South Africa stands about twenty miles away and is still run by a Swiss, the Rev. Theo Schneider. Many South Africans of Swiss origin are in fact the children of missionaries. We met one of them, Dr.

Jean Francois Bill, at the Federal Seminar of Theology at Alice, Northern Cape province. At the nearby Fort Hare University, which is one of the three black universities of South Africa, a South African Swiss, Mr. Marco Brutsch, is helping students from the Ciskei Homeland to get better yields out of their maize fields.

I spent nearly half of my stay in South Africa in Johannesburg. This is a huge and expanding city. Most of it is a vast expanse of residential suburbs with jacaranda trees lining plush avenues with villas in the midst of green lawns with private swimming pools. Johannesburg is the business and industrial centre of the republic. It is at the heart of a region known as the Witwatersrand extending up to Pretoria, 30 miles to the north, and Vereeniging and Sasolburg to the south. This area is highly industrialised and can be compared to the British Midlands or the German Ruhr.

This is where the bulk of Swiss residents in South Africa live. There are over 5,000 of them in Johannesburg's Consular district. One is also surprised to see so many cars with a "CH" sign on them in the City.

The Swiss of Johannesburg like to see each other and to meet in a patriotic setting. This differs considerably from other countries and I would include Britain among them where Swiss expatriates have by now merged with the local population for most of their social life. That the Swiss of South Africa should have adopted a different pattern is due to the social set-up in the country. The situation is similar to America, where a great many different national communities both join in the "melting pot" and maintain their original identities. An American will always be keenly aware of his origins and join German, Swedish, Russian, Polish, Swiss or other groups. Likewise, the many national communities of South Africa do not see themselves as purely South African. They are German, Dutch, Italian,