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markets. Another device which Switzerland also refused to consider was to set up a two-tier money market. Money required for commercial transactions would be exchanged on a fixed Commercial Market, where the Central Bank could eventually intervene, while floating funds seeking asylum in the Confederation would be dealt with on a completely free Financial Market.

Switzerland has thought it best to penalise foreign depositors. The move could of course affect the business of banks dealing with financial rather than commercial transactions. It could reduce the volume of their business and the Association of Swiss Bankers have already warned of the dangers of seeing Switzerland lose its position as an international financial centre. According to Press reports, the move will be more harmful to the Geneva than to the Zurich banking establishment. This is because Geneva banks are both smaller and more concerned with financial dealings.

It is doubtful, however, that it will increase the rate of bank closures. Several banks have been told to close or suspend operations since last autumn. But most of them had fallen into trouble through misfired foreign exchange dealings.

Of greater concern to the Swiss authorities is the cost to the competitiveness of Swiss products of a constantly appreciating Swiss currency. As described in our cover story, the hotel industry has suffered badly because of the loss of buying power of its traditional customers. But Swiss products are already starting to price themselves out of foreign markets. The excessive up-valuation of the Swiss franc comes at a particularly bad moment, because it is compounded with the deterioration of the world economic climate. Some industries, such as the Basle chemical giants, have already reported fast-declining sales over the past three months. Many firms are laying off staff because of reduced orders and unemployment has risen by over 2000 per cent. Indeed, the number of

registered unemployed reached 1039 in January whereas the average for last year was about 55. Already there is talk of introducing legislation which would prevent employers from hiring foreign workers at jobs which could be taken by nationals. Most of these (foreign) unemployed are to be found in the building trade, which is going through a slump because of the government's anti-inflationary policy.

However worrying the long-term prospects may be, the situation is still very far from dramatic. Unemployment is infinitely worse in West Germany, for example. But the language often used in

Switzerland tends to be dramatic. An atmosphere of gloom has set in among the Swiss who, perhaps of their taste for order and their long experience of prosperity, tend to get alarmed at relatively minor economic upsets. The Gross National Product is expected to decline by 1.4 per cent this year. Investments will fall by 12 per cent. Household consumption will increase by only 0.5 per cent. This means that standards of living will remain at a standstill. This is something the Swiss are certainly not used to!

P.M.B.

## SWISS EVENTS

### EUROPEAN SECURITY CONFERENCE

The European Security Conference has resumed its work in Geneva after a Christmas break for what may be its final and most crucial sessions. The delegates of all the countries of Europe except Albania, and those of the U.S. and Canada have been working for nearly a year on an agreement that should permanently establish peace and coexistence on the European continent. The 36 participating countries are divided into roughly three groups: The members of NATO, Neutral Countries, and the Warsaw Pact Countries. Each have laid emphasis on different aspects of European Co-operation.

The Western countries of NATO have attached great importance to the things as radio broadcasts (Western countries would like to see them freed from jamming), marriages, between

Eastern and Western Europe. Freedom of personal movement and information touches on such things as radio broadcasts (western countries would like to see them freed from jamming), marriages, and the re-unification of families. Although many aspects of these have been settled, there is still a great resistance from the Soviet bloc towards complete liberalisation of human and cultural exchanges as this could, in these countries' view, be equated to "Interference in their internal affairs".

Neutral countries are particularly concerned by the ways of preventing war on the Continent. They have asked for a system of advance notice of large-scale military manoeuvres. The Soviets have created difficulties by setting limits to the importance and geographical locations of manoeuvres that could be announced in advance. The Eastern countries are particularly concerned with getting trade concessions from the West. Romania wants to be recognised as a developing country so as to enjoy special facilities. Russia was hoping that the conference would place the seal on Europe's present borders, thus finalising the division of Germany. The West is not prepared to go as far as this.

After months of arduous discussion, the delegates appear to be nearing an agreement and a special group is already at work on the drafting of an Accord which could be signed at a grand Continental Summit to take place at Helsinki this summer. But observers in Geneva stress that there are still hurdles to overcome and the holding of this summit is not yet a certainty. But they are in general agreement that the recent set-back to détente following the scrapping of the 1972 Soviet-US Trade Agreement by Moscow, and Leonid Brezhnev's illness, will not negatively affect the work of the conference whose main promoter was the Soviet Communist Party Chief in the first place.

### An anti-constitutional levy

The Greater London Council is considering the introduction of a £1 a day tax on motorists driving into London to work. It also wants to reduce by 40 per cent the 50,000 parking spaces

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currently contained in office blocks and diminish London's parking area by a further 8,000 spaces in not renewing the licences of a number of temporary parking lots. As there are at present 128,000 parking spaces in London's controlled zone, the GLC plan would cut the number of motorists by well over half, since many would be discouraged by the £1 tax.

Such a tax, or licence, would be against the Constitution in Switzerland. Reporting on the GLC's proposals, the "Tribune de Genève" said that the Swiss Constitution forbids any Canton from levying money on the use of public roads. Although parking-meters have been introduced in all Swiss cities, their purpose was not to raise money but to control the volume of traffic. To imitate the GLC, any local authority would first have to obtain an alteration of the Constitution and the necessary backing of the electorate. Such a backing seems unlikely to be forthcoming from the public who still depend heavily on their cars despite the cost. The Swiss Constitution therefore appears as an additional safeguard against offensive decisions by local authorities . . .

#### Movement for an Independent Southern Jura

A new movement called "Jura Sud Autonome" campaigning for an independent canton comprising the three southern districts of the Jura (Courtelary,

Moutier and La Neuveville) held their Constituent Meeting in a Tramelan Restaurant on 26th January.

The movement will launch a campaign in view of the 16th March elections in the Jura in which the people of the area will be asked to confirm the results of the 24th June, 1974, plebiscite. That plebiscite showed a narrow majority of Jurassians in favour of a new Canton separate from Berne. But an Anti-Separatist majority emerged in the three southern districts. As these districts are not to be linked to the three Separatist districts in the north without their consent, they are given a chance next March to make a final decision.

Most of their people apparently wish to remain in Berne. Others have Separatist feelings and may grow in number as the vote approaches. The third category, who hate the idea of linking up with the Northerners but who are equally afraid of being swamped in the vast Canton of Berne, where they would represent only 6 per cent of the population and carry little political weight, prefer to achieve their own cantonal independence.

#### NEW LAW ON THE FAMILY

The Department of Justice and Police is busy preparing a new law governing the nationality of married couples in which one of the spouses is Swiss and the other foreign. It is also working on provisions for the children of

such marriages and submitting them to a normal procedure of consultation among Cantons and professional organisations.

Among the various circles that have pressed for a change of the present law are the womens' organisations of Zurich. They want the law which automatically confers Swiss nationality to a foreign woman marrying a Swiss to be reciprocal. A foreigner who marries a Swiss woman can keep his own nationality. The law thus accentuates, in their view, the dependence of women on their husbands, since they not only take another name, but also another country. In the case of marriages between Swiss of different Cantons or Communes, the woman automatically becomes a citizen of her husband's Canton and Commune. The law is not reciprocal. Moreover, the children born of this marriage will be given their father's place of origin. One-way naturalisation also obtains in bi-national marriages. The children of a Swiss woman marrying a foreigner should also be allowed to opt for Swiss nationality.

To make the acquisition of the spouse's nationality a two-way process, it has been suggested that foreign women need not automatically be given the nationality of their Swiss husbands but be given the right to acquire it after five years of residence in Switzerland and three years of marriage. Identical conditions would apply to foreign men who marry Swiss women. They at present find it as difficult to become Swiss as



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other foreign nationals wanting to be naturalised.

Some of the proposals will complicate the work of the Civil Service and have been turned down by a special study commission. It would thus be impractical for parents to choose the place of origin of their children. The wife would stick to her former citizenship, the husband would do likewise, and they might have an argument of what to do with their children. Children are like their mothers. They are given their father's place of origin. It is administratively more convenient but of course, in slight contradiction to the ideals of a completely equal marriage.

## URI GELLER ATTRACTS CROWDS IN GENEVA

Uri Geller, the world's most famous psychic, whose key-bending abilities have put the scientific establishment upside down, performed on 15th January at the Vernets ice-rink before a huge crowd of Genevise and Frenchmen from neighbouring areas.

Geller, 26, an Israeli, who has resided for the past two-and-a-half-years in the United States, proved his qualities of showmanship, in addition to his psychic abilities, by holding the stage on his own for over two hours.

He performed his standard and well-known feats with a usual degree of success. These feats consist in telepathy, in bending keys by stroking them with his fingers, in repairing watches through the effect of his "magnetic fluid" and in setting back the hands of a watch. Uri also showed a film on his life.

At the watch-mending stage of his performance, he invited his audience to supply him with material. A large crowd of people surged to the stage and displayed innumerable time-pieces of all descriptions — there was even a cuckoo clock — which Geller set about repairing through his psychic powers. His success wasn't absolute. Some particularly rusted watches refused to be set in motion. Some, according to their owners, stopped again within a few hours.

Geller's recent record was also snapped up by Genevise. It is said that one can bend a spoon as magically as he can if one attempts the experiment while listening to the record. From an absolutely reliable source, we know of a case where television viewers in Geneva watching Geller perform in Paris, have had forks bending in their very hands. Quite baffling to scientists — and most aggravating to the rationalist!

Geller was interviewed by *La Tribune de Genève* who sponsored his show at Les Vernets. He told the paper that he held his powers from extraterrestrial beings. Anyone interested in knowing more about these beings should read his biography, by Andrija Puharich (Futura Publications, London). The book reads like science-fiction since it dwells on flying saucers as though they were as commonplace as jumbo jets.

## Women lovers create Men's Lib Club in Zurich

As a vast Women's Congress was opening in Berne, seven men from Zurich who had banded together formed a "Men's Lib Club" which was duly recorded in the Swiss Register of Commerce. The new Club, which meets regularly in a Zurich night spot, was formed to help the growing number of men downtrodden by increasingly domineering wives. At least, that is how the Club's President, Mr. Ulrich Schwendener, a Zurich lawyer, explained it.

"You should not think that we are against women. Quite the contrary, we like them very much. But women have a tendency these days, and particularly in left-wing circles, to take a hold of all the levers of power. Should they ever achieve this completely — we haven't reached that stage yet, but may well do in the next fifty years — then our present political system will have come to an end."

"Take the case of Mrs. Regula Pestalozzi, an emancipated woman with a seat in the Zurich Government. A man could never have acted as she did against Dr. Haemmerli, accused of practising Euthanasia. Male politicians are more

supple — more ready to compromise. They may have a row in Parliament but are still able to have a meal together afterwards. Not so with women, they are too hard-headed for that."

"What we are fighting for is *real* equality. We agree that women should vote, but they should then also be made to serve the country, as by accomplishing some form of civic service. We agree to equal pay for women, but then, women should also pay their bit when going out with men friends and share household expenses with their husbands. We want to support those men that feel stifled or diminished by their wives. A man should be able to see his friends at the stamntisch or go for a two-day outing with the bowling club without facing a row with his wife. A woman should naturally enjoy the same rights. Take a case of a divorce I've had to handle. The woman blamed her husband for having risen in rank in the Army. She blamed him for having served his country!"

Mr. Schwendener claimed that his Club had received innumerable applications for membership, but he stressed: "We really do like women, you know. The Minutes of our meetings are taken down by a woman and we wouldn't want her to become a man."

# HUGE BLAZE HITS "GRAND PASSAGE"

A huge blaze almost completely destroyed Geneva's most important department store, the "Grand Passage" during the night of 25th January. The fire sent out an automatic alarm at 24 minutes past midnight in the Houseware Department (second floor). Within five minutes, the first firemen arrived on the scene, but the blaze had already spread out with extraordinary speed because the shop's new automatic sprinkler system was not yet operational. More than three hundred firemen were called to fight the blazing inferno during the whole night. The whole of Molard Square and neighbouring rue du Marché were lit up by 60-ft. flames rising into the icy sky. Thick smoke was still billowing from the building five hours after the alarm, and firemen were pouring their final jets of water on smouldering heaps of débris.

The fire was one of the worst in Geneva's history. Preliminary estimates of damages and losses to stock were put as high as a hundred million francs. All the floors above the second were gutted by fire and goods on the lower floor were seriously damaged by water. An enquiry has been opened into the possibility of arson. Investigators are puzzled by the fact that a mysterious fire had been started in the same Department during a night in October 1972. Also unexplained

was the fact that a second fire was set alight near the escalators on the first floor shortly after the arrival of the fire brigades. Other suspicious fires had occurred during two previous days in Geneva.

Meanwhile, the Grand Passage's management are planning to continue their business in empty premises at the Acacias shopping area, where an 8,000 square metre space was recently vacated by a perfume store. The salvageable goods will be sorted out and moved to these new premises. The jobs of several hundred people are at stake. 400 French borderer employees have already set up a Committee to defend their jobs and find alternative employment. The disaster was more than just a fire. It was likely to have serious economic implications for the city in view of the deteriorating business situation.

One cause for relief was that the blaze broke out at night. Many people might have been killed had such a fire broken out during peak hours of business. Although the Grand Passage had a well trained evacuation team and was designed in such a way that all its customers could be evacuated within seven minutes, the speed of the blaze might have impaired this efficiency.

The last big shop fire in Geneva