

Huge Blaze hits "Grand Passage"

Autor(en): [s.n.]

Objektyp: **Article**

Zeitschrift: **The Swiss observer : the journal of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK**

Band (Jahr): - (1975)

Heft 1701

PDF erstellt am: **21.09.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-687006>

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completely destroyed the "Bon Génie" on the night of 5th January, 1964. Four-fifths of the premises and their goods were destroyed and damages were in excess of ten million francs.

Euthanasia Scandal in Zurich

A scandal has exploded in Zurich over the summary treatment meted out to a distinguished medical authority, Professor Haemmerli, Director of the Triemli Hospital, who was charged with practising euthanasia following legal proceedings by Mrs. Regula Pestalozzi, Head of the City's public health department.

Prof. Haemmerli was known to deprive unconscious and terminal cases of food to speed up their death. When this came to the knowledge of Mrs. Pestalozzi, a personal friend of the Professor, she questioned her conscience and decided that Mr. Haemmerli was breaking a law which made him liable to five years' imprisonment. He was arrested and kept in a cell for twenty-four hours, and later suspended from his job. He then left Zurich for an unknown destination.

The way Professor Haemmerli was treated caused an uproar both from political and medical circles. Mrs. Pestalozzi came under fire from every quarter. The Republican Party of Zurich insisted on her resignation and doctors all over the Canton voiced their moral support to the ousted professor. Distinguished surgeons admitted that they too had performed passive euthanasia by not endeavouring to prolong the lives of patients without hope of recovery. A powerful chorus of voices was heard to protect a man's "right to die" and to stress that euthanasia was a problem of individual conscience which could not be solved by law.

Mrs. Pestalozzi's sharpest critics complained that she had not consulted other specialists before levelling very serious charges at a doctor of high repute. Whatever the outcome of this affair, it will doubtless cause some sleepless nights to Zurich's chief health officer.

SWISS EXPEDITION IN THE SAHEL

Reports have been coming in from the Sahel region of Africa where a team

of eighty Swiss volunteers with a fleet of 25 lorries and two Pilatus light carrier planes have been doing relief work since November.

This operation, which is drawing to an end, was the first to be undertaken by the newly-created Swiss relief corps for natural disasters. It operated in the Lake Tchad area in three countries: Cameroun, Tchad and Niger. A similar but much smaller operation was under way in an area of Ethiopia hard hit by drought.

The team that set out for the Sahel met with many surprises, and it turned out that the organisation carefully planned in Berne didn't resist conditions on the field without strain. Mistakes were inevitable in a "première" of this kind. One of them appeared to consist in choosing leaders according to their professional qualifications rather than their personality or natural authority. This resulted in various tensions and inadequate co-operation within the various teams.

Conditions appear to have been rather too frustrating for volunteers, for many of them opted to go back to Switzerland before the original termination of their mission. One major surprise was that the worst part of the famine in the area was already over when they arrived there. This probably cooled the enthusiasm of some volunteers, who found themselves in a far from virgin area of humanitarian relief. Indeed, the Swiss expedition found several other international agencies already at work in the area. Wisely, it endeavoured to co-operate with these agencies as well as with the African governments concerned in distributing food and medical help.

The volunteers had been psychologically prepared to work in African conditions — and that doesn't only mean physical conditions. As it turned out, the conditions of co-operation and the apparent lack of work proved a strain even to the most committed. The result was that after a running-in period marked by many departures, the first official Swiss relief mission in Africa was coming into its own towards the end and getting definite results. This historic effort at volunteer co-operation was a useful experience,

undertaken at the cost of six million francs to the Swiss tax-payer.

Swiss aid to developing countries remains stagnant

Switzerland's official aid to developing countries remained stagnant in 1973 and its share of the national product has fallen significantly.

According to figures released at the beginning of January by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the volume of aid supplied to the Third World from Swiss tax-payers' money amounted to 65.2 million dollars. In addition, there was a "special aid" of 5.5 million dollars. These figures were just slightly in excess of those of the previous year, but the aid effort fell from 0.22 to 0.16 per cent of the Gross National Product.

Most of this aid was channelled towards countries of Africa and Asia. Kenya, Cameroun, Rwanda, Upper Volta and India were among the most aided countries.

Investments by private industry registered an increase during the same year, rising to 208.4 million dollars. Nearly two-thirds of that total went to Latin American countries. The movement of private and public funds towards development countries amounted to 0.72 per cent of the Swiss GNP.

The OECD report adds that 112,300 people were employed in Swiss firms in developing countries, 20,100 of them in Europe, 8,800 in Africa, 59,700 in Latin America and 23,700 in Asia.

Another bank failure in Geneva

Three months after the closure of the International Credit Bank, Geneva, the Federal Banking Commission ordered the closure of the Banque de Financement (Finabank), because it had incurred losses "far in excess of its capital and reserves."

Finabank, which reported assets of nearly £40 million a year ago, was controlled by a fugitive Italian financier, Michele Sindona, whose £194 million business run through a Liechtenstein holding company, Fasco AG, fell in ruins last year.

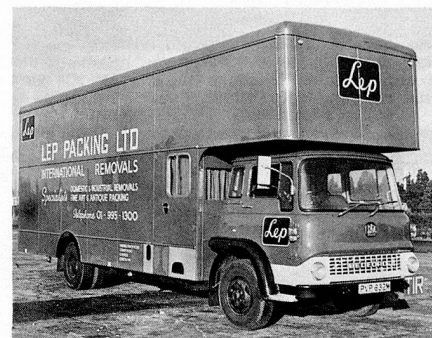
Finabank listed its capital and reserves at eight-and-a-half-million



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pounds. Its other major shareholder, with a 49 per cent interest, was the Vatican.

The Federal Banking Commission said that Finabank had been involved in unprofitable forward dealings in foreign exchange with Edilcentro International, of Nassau, Bahamas, a subsidiary of Societa Generale Immobiliare, an Italian real estate holding company.

Mr. Sindona, who has not been seen for several months, owned a 32 per cent interest in this undertaking and until recently controlled its operations.

But last summer, his shares in the company were pledged as collateral to the Bank of Rome in exchange for £129 million in emergency financing.

Mr. Sindona's name had then become known through the financial difficulties of the Franklin National Bank in the United States, which he also controlled.

Franklin National closed its doors and last October was declared insolvent. With assets of £2.15 billion, it was the twentieth-largest United States bank and achieved the distinction of becoming the largest bank failure in American history.

United States investigators discovered that it had been engaged in unauthorised foreign exchange dealings on a massive scale.

The Milan public prosecutor issued a warrant for Mr. Sindona's arrest in October in connection with a reported £86 million illegal foreign exchange dealing. Another major bank of the Sindona empire, Banca Privata Italiana, is now in liquidation.

Slight drop in the number of foreign workers

There were 860,996 foreigners employed in Switzerland at the end of August last year. This figure, which includes resident workers, yearly permit-holders, seasonals and foreign borderer workers, is 4.1 per cent down on the figure published at the same time in 1973.

The policy of stabilisation has evidently brought results. Official figures show a 12 per cent rise in resident foreign workers (who enjoy the same working rights as Swiss) compensated by a drop in yearly permit-holders and seasonals. This means that many yearly permit-holders have acquired residence status, and that several thousand seasonals (a great many of them "false seasonals" in that they remain in the country all year round) have been promoted to yearly resident status.

On the other hand, the number of foreigners crossing daily for work in Switzerland has increased by 6 per cent to 110,809.

The various categories of foreign workers in Switzerland are distributed as follows: residents 36 per cent; yearly permit-holders 33.5 per cent; seasonals 17.6 per cent; and borderers 12.9 per cent.

Sportsmanship award

The Association of Swiss

Sportswriters give an annual prize to a series of outstanding sportsmen who have excelled in their respective fields during the year. The prize isn't only intended to acknowledge results, but the sportsmanship and standards of sporting behaviour displayed by the laureates.

On 28th December last, the Association awarded prizes to the racing driver Clay Regazzoni, second in the last World Championship, the woman skier Lize-Marie Morerod, currently the leading proponent of the Swiss womens' ski team, with Marie Therese Hadig, the Duebendorf Curling Club, Bronze Medal winner at the World Curling Championship in Berne and close loser of the Gold, and Claude Ravonel, a Genevese karate fighter.

The best-known in the list are Clay Regazzoni and Lise-Marie Morerod. Regazzoni made a good start to the 1975 World Championship season by taking fourth place in the Argentine Grand Prix in a Ferrari. The race was won by Emerson Fittipaldi, the current champion. Lise-Marie Morerod won Switzerland's first victory of the year in a giant slalom race counting for the World Cup at Garmisch.

Military Press Chief ridiculed by Media

The Press Secretary of the Military Department was ridiculed recently by the whole of the Swiss-German Press, including the most Conservative papers. The "Weltwoche" even called for his resignation in a front-page editorial.

Mr. Ernst Moergeli had been told of a film for children screened on German-Swiss television in early January. The cartoon related the adventures of a soldier in the Middle Ages who, having been unjustly enrolled in the Army, was punished for having disobeyed orders but eventually forgiven by the Emperor.

Told by his military friends that the Cartoon was highly subversive as it flouted the authority of the Army and defied conscientious objection, Mr. Moergeli took his pen and immediately asked Television's General Director, Mr. Guido Frei, for the opportunity to give the Army's reply and demanded an assurance that such incidents would never happen again.

Plans were made for a special programme allowing representatives of the Military Department and Television to confront their views when the Press got hold of the story and took a good laugh at Mr. Moergeli. He was ridiculed for having taken such an action without even having seen the "incriminating" film.

But the incident offered the Press an opportunity to take a bash at the Military Press Chief, the subject of a lot of journalistic aggravation during the past few years. Mr. Moergeli was criticised for his excessive zeal in giving publicity to Soldier Committees, for his counter-blasts on all declarations critical to the Army, and for considering the Press as an agent of subversion.

But Mr. Gnaegi, Head of the

Military Department, came to the rescue of this "True Blue" and categorically brushed off all ideas of a forced resignation. He had a frank discussion with Mr. Moergeli and later told the Press that the affair was over. As for Mr. Moergeli, he preferred not to comment on his misadventure.

The Confederation shifts its burden to the Cantons

Having been deprived of new income by the Swiss people during the 8th December, 1974, Referendum, the Federal Council has reduced its expenditure for 1975 by placing more burden on the Cantons. Obedient to the public, who thought that the Federal State was spending too much and taking an undue weight in the economic affairs of the country, the Government will refrain from drawing income other than from a new surtax on alcohol. To balance its budget, it has decided to shed some of its commitments at the expense of the Cantons. As one commentator put it, it has "federalised its troubles".

The main steps that are to be taken to save 1,238 million francs are to reduce the Confederation's contribution to the Old Age and Invalidity Insurance Fund, to withdraw from the Cantons a fifth of their share of federal revenue, and to cut the Canton's share of the revenue derived from Anticipated Tax.

As Cantons are all heavily committed and financially hard-pressed, this shifting of the burden onto their shoulders is not likely to be well received. It has already incurred the displeasure of the Conference of Cantonal Finance Directors. One expected consequence is an increase in Old Age Insurance rates, so that the public will, in one way or another, have to make up for what they refused to pay in Income Tax.

To increase its revenue, the Confederation introduced a new petrol surcharge last year but this has already been opposed by an Initiative Committee who have obtained the necessary signatures for a Referendum. If the Government is refused this new surcharge, the Swiss public will sooner or later see a marked cut in the level of public service. The Motorway programme, already considerably behind schedule, might be the first victim of future and apparently inevitable cuts.

Sharp fall in road accidents

The Swiss drive more carefully, slower and less often these days. These are the main explanations to the significant fall in the number of accidents recorded on Swiss roads last year. For the first six months of 1974 (statistics haven't yet been compiled for the whole year) the number of road accidents fell by 2,900 to 31,800, the number of injured fell by 700 to 14,650, and the number of killed fell by 67 to 564.

Similar improvements were recorded elsewhere on the continent. In France, where the use of safety belts became compulsory, there have been

14,289 fewer accidents, 35,337 fewer injured and 3,100 fewer people killed. It is also estimated that the existence of motorways has saved some 120 lives a year in France.

The energy crisis has obviously helped to achieve these results. 5,000 lives have been saved in France, Germany, Belgium and Switzerland alone with the unwitting help of the oil-producing countries.

Money to enlarge a Brain Institute

The Great Council of Zurich has decided to spend 4.5 million francs on the enlargement of the "Brain Institute" of Zurich University. Founded by the neurologist Constantin von Monakow (1853-1930), at his own expense, this Institute used to be called "Institute for Cervical Anatomy" until 1960. It has won a high reputation and is considered as one of the most original points of research among Zurich's university.

ENVIRONMENT

Zermatt's two buses angers nature-lovers

The temporary introduction of two diesel buses inside Zermatt has caused various meetings during which friends of the resort have called on the Communal Council to abandon the experiment. Zermatt is traditionally the only resort of any importance entirely closed to motorised traffic. The decision by the Communal Council to introduce these buses for a limited period expiring next

April was taken in an effort to solve the resort's transport problems.

The Council has recently announced that after April it will be trying a new natural-gas powered bus with a non-polluting engine. If the bus proves suitable for Zermatt, and if its people accept it, then the traditionally car-less commune will, for the first time, hear the regular noise of an engine. The decision will be taken by the residents of the commune. They appear to be less emotional about the prospects of motorised transport than their weekend visitors from the towns.

The Government calls for a ratification of the Nuclear non-proliferation treaty

The Federal Council has asked Parliament to ratify the Nuclear non-proliferation treaty signed by Switzerland in November, 1968. But the Government announced that this ratification would be "suspended" until Switzerland was satisfied that the treaty was really respected. Switzerland is the only neutral European country to have ratified the Document.

BUSINESS NEWS

Lamborghini, the Italian specialist car-makers, have been bought by two Swiss industrialists, Mr. Georges Henry Rossetti and Mr. David Laitner. The two men have already appointed a new Board and will attempt to develop Lamborghini's sales to the United States.

Like other manufacturers of the same category, Lamborghini has faced difficult times and seen its sales slump by 83.4 per cent between February, 1973, and February of last year. Other similar Italian firms are in trouble. Iso Rivolta has closed down and Ferarri has sold twice fewer cars last year than in 1973.

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A Swiss company, Viking Offshore Pipeline Ltd., has won a contract with British Petroleum to lay a 100-mile pipeline on the sea-bed between the Ninian North Sea oil field and the Shetland Islands. Work will begin next summer. Viking Offshore will use a pipe-laying ship of a new design able to operate under heavier seas than the barges used so far.

* * * * *

Hoffman-La Roche has filed a suit in the United States against an American Company, Zenith Laboratories, which the Swiss firm has accused of marketing a tranquilliser identical to Librium in breach of the exclusive rights of Hoffman-La Roche to market this product in the US.

Hoffman-La Roche's patent on Librium will expire on 7th July. Several American pharmaceutical companies are already planning to introduce their own versions of Librium, which is the best selling tranquilliser in the US after Valium, another Roche product.



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