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COMMENT

FIRST SIGNS OF UNEMPLOYMENT

Switzerland has known many periods of unemployment and recession in its history, but these are sufficiently distant in the past to be remembered by only a minority of workers close to their retirement. There has been no employment problem since the end of the war — and 30 years of prosperity is enough for full employment to be considered today as the normal state of things.

Having been used for so long to a life of growing comfort and apparent security, the Swiss are all the more sensitive to signs that the situation might change. There were a little over 1,000 registered unemployed in Switzerland in January and 300 of them were in Canton Geneva.

For a workforce of 160,000 this only represented two per thousand of the active population. Many national economies are considered to be operating satisfactorily when this rate reaches 4 or 5%. Unemployment in Geneva is still 30 times less important than in Britain as a whole. Yet these 300 out of work represent a massive increase on last year's figure. No more was needed to push the Canton's Socialists and Communists into tabling a motion calling on the Canton's State Council (Executive) to work out regulations that would guarantee the earnings of redundant workers. The cantonal unemployment fund which until

now contained a derisory seven million francs was to be fed with new money taken from the rich by means of a new tax on higher incomes. This egalitarian solution, also put forward by the Socialists and Communists, was supported by a vast majority of the Great Council. The unemployment "crisis" has also re-activated the "Office Cantonal du Placement" which will virtually have the role of a labour exchange.

Although the scale of redundancies has been small, with most companies laying off small groups of workers progressively, there have been a few cases where the disappearance of jobs has taken a larger dimension. Thus the Roamer watches, near Solothurn, have laid off 230 employees and Bally's factory in the Valais have laid off 100. Both incidents have caused great concern among labour circles, particularly in the Valais.

Actually, it is very difficult to establish the real number of unemployed as very few of them register. The Swiss trade unions claim that there are ten times more unemployed than officially revealed. If their claim is correct there now could be ten thousand out of work. There is however no way of verifying this. The same is true of lay-offs or redundancies. Those that have been reported in the Press, mainly in the watch industry, only account for part of them since factories do not always report minor redundancies involving small groups of workers.

P.M.B.

SWISS EVENTS

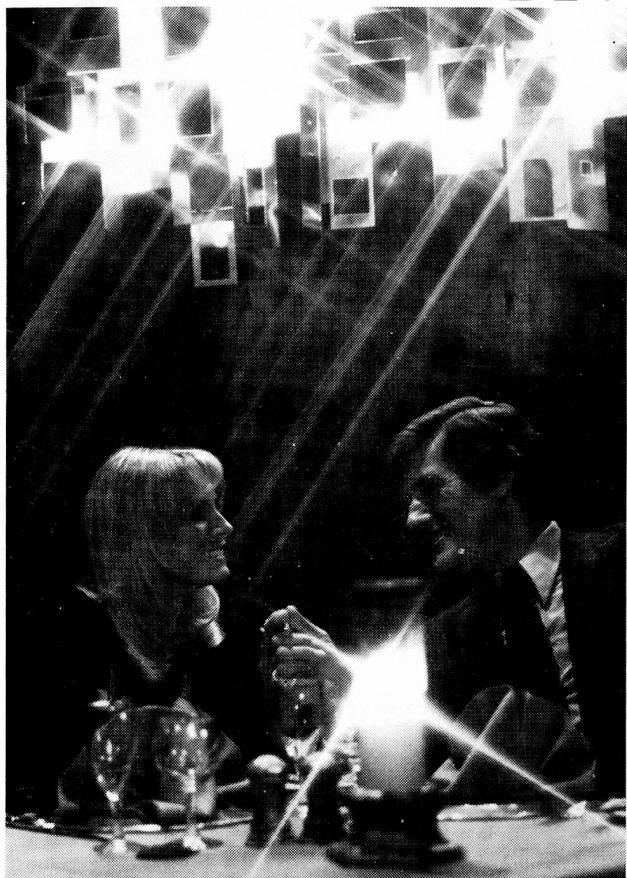
SPORT

With skiing, ice-hockey and other winter sports, the Swiss sports calendar is as full in the cold season as it is in the summer, when football and tennis are the major attractions for sports enthusiasts.

While the Swiss have never restored their position in world skiing since the Sapporo Winter Olympics in 1972, they have nevertheless maintained themselves at an honourable distance behind the Austrians. Last year, the best performers were to be found among the men. Bernard Russi and Roger Collombin were the leading proponents of the Swiss team. This year, the women have scored better points and as a team are second to their Austrian competitors on the World Cup circuit. Bernadette Zurbiggen has brought many surprises and placed in fourth position in the World Cup behind Annemarie Moser-Proell (Austria), Rosi Mittermaier (West Germany) and Hanni Wenzel (Liechtenstein). She is followed by Marie-Thérèse Nadig who has beaten her arch-rival Annemarie Proell at least once. Lise-Marie Morerod is in tenth position.

Among the men, the first placed are Bernhard Russi, 12th, and Walter Vesti,

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39th. Roger Colombe is not taking part in this year's championship. Although the men are well behind the Austrians, the Italians and the Scandinavians, they are sure to improve their standing now that the Austrian wonder-boy Franz Klammer has interrupted his record spell of six consecutive victories with a fall at the Arlberg-Kandahar at Megève. The first three positions in that descent fell in Swiss hands. Walter Vesti, René Berthod and Philippe Roux were the surprise winners of a treacherous race on an icy surface which incidentally saw the leader of the British team, Bartelski, fall and suffer severe concussion and several fractures.

Another field where the Swiss are doing comparatively well at the moment is boxing. Four compatriots are at present challengers for the European titles in the following categories: featherweight, lightweight, welter and middleweight. They are respectively, Fritz Chervet, Walter Blaser, Max Hebeisen and Eric Nussbaum. The first three will shortly be fighting the current champions. As for Eric Nussbaum, he is not yet the official challenger and his case will be settled shortly by the European Boxing Union. But all Swiss experts are confident that he will be admitted as official challenger for the European Middleweight title. Although the odds are not all that large, there is a theoretical possibility that four of the eleven titles at stake may be in Swiss possession by the summer.

Another sporting discipline in which the Swiss usually hold their own is Nordic (cross-country) skiing. Switzerland's top man at present is Alfred Kaelin (not to be confused with the former Olympic Champion Alois Kaelin). He came fourth in the 15 kilometre event at the pre-Olympic week at Seefeld and contributed greatly to Switzerland's fifth position in the relay. However, this field is still dominated by the Scandinavians and the Russians.

Rugby makes a discreet début in Switzerland

Switzerland is hardly a rugby-playing nation. Although the game has been played for years by a few isolated clubs, it has not yet made any serious popular in-road and is of course overshadowed by football and ice-hockey, the two major team games played in Switzerland.

Despite the lack of interest in rugby, a national federation was formed in 1971, and there are today 28 rugby teams organised in four regions (Geneva, Lausanne, Tessin and German-speaking Switzerland). A championship is already in existence and Switzerland's rugger clubs claim a thousand registered members.

Switzerland's first international rugby match was played last year against Belgium. The Swiss lost, but with honour, to the score of 10 to 18. A return match is planned for March, and a match against Sweden may take place next April.

Switzerland's opponents are obviously not of the Five-Nations Tournament class. Rugby is still a minority sport in all the countries of Europe except Great Britain and France. But some national teams, like the Italians, are growing in stature. It is against such

teams that the adolescent Swiss formation will test its strength before facing the established rugby nations of the world. This may take a long time because the introduction of a new sport like rugby is a lengthy process that must begin on the school pitch.

THE RIGHT TO DIE

From the Press, we learn that the Catholic Church has no objections to "passive" euthanasia, which consists in not contriving to use every possible and expensive means to artificially prolong life when it has come to its natural end. But the Catholic Church condemns any attempt to speed-up the dying process even when a patient, weary of suffering, asks to be allowed to die. The Protestant Church has no official position and allows everyone to act according to his own conscience. But there is a consensus among ministers of the church against any steps that might actively accelerate death. The position is that the life of another person is to be respected. No man, group or society is to be given the right to decide on a person's death as this right, in the view of the Churches, does not belong to man.

The person whose reputation has been hit the worst over the Triemli Hospital incident is not Dr. Haemmerli, but Mrs. Pestalozzi. The Republican Party of the city, which generally defends right-wing ideas, has been collecting signatures in a petition to oust her from her job. The local Press has taken a more indulgent attitude and wonders why she should take the blame when at least three senior city officials, including the Mayor

or Zurich, were aware of Dr. Haemmerli's procedures well before Mrs. Pestalozzi decided to take action.

The chief consultant of Triemli Hospital in Zurich, Dr. W. Haemmerli, who is under investigation for alleged "active" euthanasia, has returned to his job after a two-week disappearance. Dr. Haemmerli is accused of feeding terminal cases with nothing but water to precipitate their death and reduce their suffering. The charges were laid against him by the Head of Zurich's health services, Mrs. Regula Pestalozzi, and an investigation is under way into all the deaths that were recorded in Triemli Hospital since Dr. Haemmerli took charge of its medical staff. For this reason, the accused has reduced his activities to a few private patients.

Meanwhile, the debate on the rights and wrongs of euthanasia continues in the media. There is no newspaper that hasn't published a report or an interview on the subject with a high authority. The Triemli incident has openly revealed the fact that the wilful speeding-up of a dying patient's death is a frequent practice among many reputable Swiss doctors. Dr. Haemmerli has received over 2,000 letters of support from all over Europe. Most of these letters apparently came from old people.

Tuberculosis is far from eradicated

The number of reported deaths from tuberculosis in Switzerland has dropped from 5,056 in 1930 to 364 in 1973. This result is impressive and is due to the introduction of the BCG vaccine and the widespread use of antibiotics. But it still shows that the disease remains more important than commonly believed and accounts for six deaths in a hundred thousand. The number of "active" cases is also on the increase, and about 2,500 Swiss today are sick with tuberculosis.

The general decrease in what was once an important disease has led to the closing down or transformation of many sanatoriums. There were 41 of them in 1959 and only 28 in 1973. The number of sanatoriums for children has dropped from 18 in 1959 to five in 1973.

Controversy over the layout of the N5 Motorway

The future path of any motorway is likely to give rise to controversy in a cramped and environment-conscious coun-

try like Switzerland. One of the most fought-out cases is concerned with the layout of the future N5 Motorway, which will link Lausanne to Zurich via the N4 and N1 Motorways, as it crosses Neuchâtel. The Town Council has opted in favour of a plan to guide the Motorway through a tunnel beneath the centre of the town. The idea has run into strong opposition from various interested circles, which include civil engineers and developers, who want the Motorway to follow the waterfront of the town. These circles have been fighting against the tunnel proposal for fourteen years. The final decision will belong to the Federal Council and it is expected to be known in March.

Survey of Swiss breweries

A study recently conducted into Switzerland's beer industry showed that the number of breweries declined from 60 to 51 in the 10 years to 1973. But a series of mergers has further reduced the number of independent beer companies

to 37. With various co-operation agreements, there are now only 27 independent groups of breweries. There is hardly any vertical integration in this trade. This means that breweries in Switzerland do not control outlet or even distribution chains as they do in several other countries. There also appears to be very little competition among breweries and this is considered as undesirable by the report. In a liberal economy, competition has a positive effect on the quality and cost of products.

Feldschlossen remains the most important beer company and controls about 26% of the Swiss market.

Sandoz has a 4-billion franc turnover

The chemical and pharmaceutical firm, Sandoz AG, of Basle, made a 4,001-million franc turnover in 1974. This represents an increase of 10.6% over 1973. The growth of the group's sales should have reached 18% had not parity changes cost about 280 million francs in lost revenue.

ACCIDENTS

Accidents sustained by the Swiss in their spare time has cost between 750 and 850 million francs in direct medical and other expenses last year. When indirect costs and loss of production are taken into account, accidents occurring outside work cost the country from four to five billion francs a year, or about 5% of the Gross Domestic Product. "Forum Helveticum", the journal of statistics which

supplied these figures, says that for every twenty-franc note earned through work, one franc is ultimately lost through an accident. The number of non-professional accidents has increased by nearly half in the seven years to 1973, and this increase is double that of new insurance policy-holders. The most costly spare-time occupation is skiing. 176 skiers who take on a policy out of ten-thousand get injured every year. But ski injuries remain far less serious than traffic injuries.

A mechanical monster to clean Geneva harbour

A machine appropriately called "L'algophage" will be set to work shortly to rid Geneva harbour of its reeds and its silt. It will be the first cleansing operation of this kind in over sixty years. The "Algophage" will be scraping the lake-bed for three years, not counting the holiday seasons, where its presence in the harbour would impede the movement of the Lake's steamers. The mud scooped from the harbour-bed will be pumped to the third bridge along the Rhone called "Pont la Machine" where it will be gently mixed with the river's fast current. It has been estimated that the hundred-thousand cubic metres of mud which are expected to be moved down-stream will not pile up at the dam at Verbois. This amount of mud is in fact negligible compared to what is carried by the river Arve, the Rhone's first effluent after leaving the Léman.

End of the tenth Solothurn film festival

The tenth annual festival of Swiss films was held for a week at Solothurn at the beginning of the month. Several thousand persons attended the festival during which eighty works were shown. The majority of these films were shorts of a documentary nature, but there were a few long films. Among them were Alain Tanner's "Milieu du Monde" and Michel Soutter's "L'escapade" already on the commercial circuit in Geneva. Two other long film, "Le troisième cri" by Igala Niddam and "Divorcés" by Louis Gros-pierre, came from French-speaking Switzerland.

Four long films, aside from a multitude of short films of varying quality, came from east of the river Sarine. These were "La Paloma" by Daniel Schmid; "Mulungu" by Beat Kuert; "Tag der Affen" by Uli Meier and "Kronfrontation" by Rolf Lyssy. None of these films won a prize. The critics' choice went to a documentary by Fritz Kappeler, "Mude Kehrt ein Wanderer Zurück" which won a prize of 55,000 francs.

A critic who attended the festival wondered whether the "euphoria" over Swiss cinema was not over. He noted that although some works by Tanner, Soutter and Claude Goretta had obtained success abroad, Swiss cinema was far from becoming an industry. It was still the preserve of the individual cineaste because of the difficulties of financing large-scale work. Surprisingly, Switzerland appears

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to be one of the countries where it is the hardest to introduce Swiss films to the general public.

Diplomatic Conference on Humanitarian Rights

The Diplomatic Conference on Humanitarian Rights which was opened last year to revise the Geneva Conventions resumed its work at the Palais des Nations at the beginning of February under the chairmanship of Mr. Pierre Gruber, Head of the Political Department.

This second session is expected to last until April 18th. It may be adjourned at Easter to allow a final session of the UN Conference on Sea Law, in which case it could hold a third session in 1976.

The Conference is to add two new protocols, one on international conflicts, another on non-international conflicts, to the Geneva Conventions on prisoners of war. The 126-participant countries have already adopted 330 amendments to the two drafts of the protocols. But most of the debate-time last year was spent in arguments over the participation of the Vietcong, the Independence Movement of Guinea-Bissau and the Palestinian Liberation Front. The political situation has changed considerably in the past months and Guinea-Bissau is now an independent country. The Vietcong Delegation is still absent from the talks, thanks to strong representations from Washington and Saigon, but North Vietnam is taking part. The Vietcong's absence was deplored in a letter to Mr. Gruber by Mrs. Nguen Thi Binh, foreign minister in the provisional revolutionary government (GRP) of South Vietnam.

Another theme which took up much of the delegates time last year was that of defining what a "just war" might be. Now that these problems have apparently been sorted out, delegates will have more freedom to handle the groundwork during the current session.

BANK FAILURES IN ZURICH PROMPT MOVES FOR NEW LEGISLATION

A series of bank failures and major fraud cases in Zurich have moved two Swiss-German politicians to demand new legislation and tougher banking regulations. The two men are Mr. Hans Schmid, Socialist National Councillor, from St. Gallen, and Mr. Hans Oester, member of the Great Council of Canton Zurich. The case that has triggered their action is a scandal involving the disappearance of 26 million francs in Zurich. The case, already known as the "Dietmann Affair", is under investigation and has led to six arrests, including that of a well-known Zurich lawyer and former member of the Great Council.

But there have been previous cases, such as the failures of "Metrobank" and "Profinanz". Mr. Oester in fact claims that Zurich is the national centre for financial crimes. In a recent motion at the Great Council, he asked the cantonal government what was being done to

repress illicit banking deals. He claimed that a good half-dozen cases were lying dormant in the files of the Zurich judiciary. It was disgraceful that unscrupulous businessmen should get away with frauds involving millions with the help of lawyers smart enough to allow their case to drag on and become extinct, he said. Mr. Oester called for a central office that would deal with financial crimes and call on the services of economic experts.

As for Mr. Schmid, he has just tabled a motion at the National Council calling for an amendment of the Bank Law, which was last revised in 1971. He wants the Federal Banking Commission

to be given more powers so that it can prevent the opening of banks or branches that are not really necessary. He wants banks to be submitted to tougher regulations concerning their liquidities, and wants preferential treatment to be offered not only to small savings booklet-holders, but to depositors as well.

The Director of the Union Bank of Switzerland, Mr. de Weck, agrees that the bank law should be improved, particularly in respect of the Banking Commission's activities. He noted that the Head of the Financial Department, Mr. Chevallaz, had already set up a commission to this end.

LETTER FROM SWITZERLAND

by
Gottfried
Keller

A little more than two years have now passed since I started contributing my Letters from Switzerland to the *Swiss Observer* in London. All in all these contributions have, so far, resulted in 14 reactions from *Swiss Observer* some others via the publishers, and several by telephone or in conversation when meeting people. Of the 14, 12 have been positive, friendly and in one or two cases even flattering. And of the remaining two, one has been critical, but very courteous and factual in tone, disagreeing with what I had written about police methods in Switzerland and specially praising the courtesy of Swiss customs officials. Only one out of the 14 has been aggressive, not to say rude, and accompanied by some quite insulting personal asides. But, of course, he who writes for publication can never expect to please everybody and I have long since learnt to take such things in my stride. On the whole I think I can say that the reactions to my little effort have been very gratifying and at the very least they prove that the *Swiss Observer* is being read.

Some politicians admit quite frankly that they prefer being criticised to not being mentioned at all in the mass media. Perhaps the parallel is far-fetched, but I can nevertheless say that in journalism I have never taken amiss disagreeing views from readers — always provided they are expressed in a civilised way and free from unwarranted insults. For the, fortunately extremely rare, insulting letter, written in full temper and intended to wound, I have a large wastepaper basket. Having said all this, I would like to thank those of my *SO* readers who have taken the trouble either to write or to telephone in order to tell me of their interest in my contributions. To write these gives me, incidentally, quite some pleasure. To begin with it keeps me in touch with an organ for which I have worked during so many years, partly by writing for it and partly as an active member of its advisory

council. It also enables me to keep my hand in, as it were, and forces me to follow events, developments and happenings in Switzerland pretty closely. And last, but not least, writing these letters also frees me from writing quite a number of private letters, because I know some of the *SO* readers personally and well, for example in Maresfield Gardens, Hampstead, where I used to live.

* * * *

Not long ago a lady town-councillor of Zürich had created a sensation. She is in charge of the town's health authority and consequently one of the city's most important hospitals, the "Triemli", is under her medical jurisdiction. The "Triemli's" chief medical officer, who is also a titular professor at the university and an authority in diseases of the stomach and the intestines, had mentioned in a conversation with the lady town-councillor that in absolutely hopeless cases, i.e. when the brain of a patient was damaged beyond repair and the patient was unconscious and artificially fed, it was sometimes decided not to feed him actively any further. Nothing was, of course, ever done, actively to bring the passing away of such a patient about — this would be a breach of the medical oath. But nothing was, on the other hand, done to prolong endlessly a life which could, perhaps be prolonged further, but which could never be normal or anywhere near normal again. The town councillor, by training a qualified lawyer and looking at this from the purely legal point of view, notified the District Attorney. He in turn had the professor arrested — by two policemen — and the town council as such has, by unanimous decision, suspended the "Triemli's" chief medical officer until his case has been decided in court. All this has not only caused a sensation, but has provoked a storm of indignation against the lady who