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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.

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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