Swiss events

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SWISS EVENTS

The people reject a Government initiative

Taking part in the first Referendum of the year, on 2nd March, the Swiss people turned down an initiative sponsored by the Government with a view to increasing its hold on the economy. This rather technical article wasn't of the kind likely to arouse much emotional enthusiasm. It didn't. Only 28 per cent of the electorate took the trouble to vote and barely defeated the proposals put to them. For the first time since the Sonderbund War, the expressed support of a majority of voters in a Referendum was not reflected by the support of a majority of Cantons. In fact, the same number of Cantons voted "for" and "against". Since a Referendum must be approved by a majority of Cantons (a basic principle of federalism), the Initiative was defeated. It was turned down by a majority of 165 votes in Appenzell Inner Rhodes. The balance was thus held by 165 voters because the Initiative would have passed if they had supported it.

The proposed Article (31–5) was of considerable importance in principle, since it would have given the Federal State far-reaching control of the economy in times of economic crisis. In practice, however, it seems that the Federal Council will always be able to obtain the power it requires by temporary decrees. The main points of the defeated *Article Conjoncturel* were to give the Confederation the power to raise and reduce taxation, to adapt its subsidies to cantons and communes in such a way as to regulate the economy. The proposed article also allowed the Confederation to take temporary measures in the private sector, thus affecting the principles of economic liberalism.

For this reason, the Liberal (Freisinnig) party recommended a rejection of the Article, although several business organisations, agreeing with the Government's call for "economic realism", supported it.

THE USE OF SAFETY BELTS COMPULSORY

The Federal Council has decided on new safety belt regulations which constitute somewhat of a violation of personal freedom – carried out, however, in the name of individual safety and collective interest. As from 1st January of next year, safety belts will not only remain a mandatory equipment, but their use will be obligatory. Those who in future forget to wear them will be fined twenty francs. The future regulation will also apply to foreigners, as over fifty million motorists visit Switzerland every year and they account for a large number of accidents.

The Government's decision follows failed attempts by various campaigns at inducing motorists to use the belts which have been a compulsory attachment to their vehicles since 1st January, 1971. Despite fairly persuasive publicity over the benefits of the belt and the statistical chances that it will protect one's life in serious accidents, a great many motorists still appear to ignore their use. Strapping on a belt has not become part of their conditioned reflexes.

The regulations will not apply to children under twelve because belts are designed for adults and are therefore unsuited for small bodies. But the exempted children will not be allowed to sit next to the driver. Other exemptions will be allowed for those who can show medical evidence that wearing a belt is bad for them. Finally, the Federal Council has ruled that all safety belts installed in future will have three points of attachment to the car.

The Government has obviously opted for a business-like severity in the matter. The enforced use of this piece of equipment will probably appear as a breach of individual freedom and one more of life's many constraints. But the Government justified its action by the need to unburden Switzerland's over-loaded hospitals.

Federal Deficit in 1974

The Confederation has made a greater loss in 1974 than forecast by the Budget for that year. Expenditure totalled 13,052 million francs while the Confederation's income rose to only 12,012 million francs. The predicted deficit of 240 million francs thus rose to over 1,040 million francs and worsened the state of the Confederation's finances despite strenuous efforts to balance expenditure with income. The size of the deficit was in fact not due to a lack of restraint because the Confederation had remained within stringent limits placed on its expenditure. It was due to a 5.1 per cent shortfall in income from taxation. The federal taxes which failed to bring the planned income were turnover tax, tobacco tax, custom duties, petroleum tax and witholding tax. Following a book-keeping operation consisting in drawing from provisions for old age insurance, it was possible to convert the deficit into a 61-million franc surplus but the operation changed nothing to the fact that the Confederation had spent more than it had earned in 1974.

Four federal polls this year

The Swiss are to be called four times to the polls this year to vote on federal issues. The first occasion is already behind us. This was the 2nd March Referendum on the new Economic Article in the Constitution. The people will now be called on 8th June to approve the extension of a series of federal decrees adopted a year ago on economic issues. The people will furthermore be re-electing the National Council next October and be called to the polls again in December.

The National Action plans another Referendum

The National Action, the movement behind the 20th October, 1974 anti-foreign Referendum (which was turned down by the people by a fairly large majority), is planning another similar initiative. Its Executive Committee met recently in Zurich to examine recent figures on the foreign labour situation. In a statement after the meeting, it said that the number of resident's permits (65,000) given to foreigners last year was "in flagrant contradiction to the duties of the Federal Council and Parliament as laid down by the Constitution and the laws of the country". The National Action protested against the lay-offs and short-time introduced in many firms, and considered that these measures were aimed at preserving the jobs of foreigners. The statement accused Swiss trade unions of "betraying" Swiss workers by fighting for full employment to the benefit of foreign workers as well. "Given the situation", the Committee planned to meet again on 22nd March to work out the terms of a new initiative "for the protection of Swiss workers".

MEETING OF THE COMMISSION OF THE SWISS ABROAD

The Commission of the Swiss Abroad, which is sometimes likened to a Parliament for the expatriate Swiss population, held the first of its two annual sessions this March. Swiss delegates from all over the world sat under the chairmanship of Councillor of States Dr. Louis Guisan, a well-known figure to all those connected with the affairs of the Swiss Abroad.

The meeting examined, among other things, the problem of information. It was noted with satisfaction that the three-monthly publications sponsored by Berne were now reaching virtually every country of the world. The meeting noted with regret that financial considerations had compelled the Secretariat of the Swiss Abroad to stop publishing the *Weltschweizer,* a magazine for young Swiss abroad.

The meeting also examined the present laws on naturalisation, particularly in the case of foreign women marrying Swiss nationals.

NEW INITIATIVE ON THE EQUALITY OF WOMEN

While the House of Commons was debating a bill on women's rights with far-reaching consequences for business and industry, an "Initiative Committee" composed mainly of women drafted proposals, which, if endorsed by 50,000 signatories and supported in an ensuing Referendum, would be added to the

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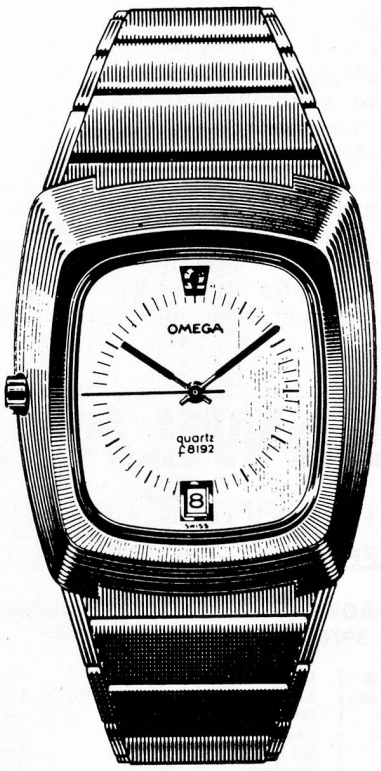

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Constitution as Article 4 bis. The proposals are as follows:

1. Men and women are equal before the law.

2. Men and women have equal rights and duties in the family.

3. Men and women have a right to equal pay for equal work.

4. Men and women must be given equal opportunities in respect of education, professional training and employment.

SUPPORTING SWISS EXPORTS

Despite drastic measures taken last January to stem the tide of dollars into Switzerland, the American currency is daily losing its value with respect to the Swiss franc, thus making life harder each day for the Swiss export industries.

The situation actually pushed the Government into sending Ambassador Klaus Jacobi, Delegate to Commercial Agreement, to Washington for talks with American monetary officials. He was told, however, that the constant rise in the value of the Swiss franc was the least of the United States' worries. This attitude was a plain reflection of Washington's lack of concern for the behaviour of the dollar abroad. The American currency is no longer convertible into gold. The United States has left other allied governments with the task of propping the dollar up from time to time as the non-convertibility of this currency was announced by President Nixon several years ago.

Switzerland's plight is made worse by the fact that the Swiss franc is not only appreciating in value with respect to the dollar, but also with respect to the currencies of her main competitors. The 40 per cent negative interest rates imposed last January on foreign deposits, and the clamp on short-term exchange dealings, have not reversed the movement. Berne is still strongly against the idea of a foreign exchange control. It is backed in this by the banks, who are obviously opposed to anything that might upset economic liberalism. Exchange controls would also be administratively cumbersome. There is some talk of a two-tier exchange system but, for various practical reasons, the financial authorities of the land are believed to be against this. The more likely step actually envisaged is to extend the present system of exchange-rate guarantee and to help exporting firms with liquidity troubles. In the first case, the Confederation would guarantee that firms receive, in Swiss francs, the sums they had tabled on when signing their export contracts. In the second case, firms suffering from an excess build-up of stock and delays in payments by their foreign customers would enjoy an easing-up of credit restrictions.

The most severely affected branch is watch-making. The Federation of Watch Industries reported a 28.9 per cent drop in the Industry's exports in January and claimed the situation was 80 per cent due to the monetary situation and only 20 per cent to the current world economic recession. Following urgent discussions with the Federal Council, the Industry's representatives have obtained concessions in the way of exchange rate guarantees and financial support. The Federation has come out strongly in support of a two-tier foreign exchange market – which had led to the coining of the term "horological franc".

The main problem lies of course in the financing of this aid. An idea which is gaining increasing support – although its implementation would appear to be rather complicated – is that the proceeds of the taxes on those who benefit by the rise of the Swiss franc go to those who suffer the most from it (i.e. the exporters).

There is also some talk of linking the Swiss franc to the major European currencies by moving within the European currency "snake". This would help Swiss exporters to hold their own against their West German competitors.

Student troubles in Zurich and Berne

Plain-clothes police made a swoop inside Zurich University in an attempt to catch students selling Marxist literature on the premises. They picked up eight students and detained them for some time. This immediately brought complaints from the Students Union to claim that several of their members completely unconnected with the sales had been arrested.

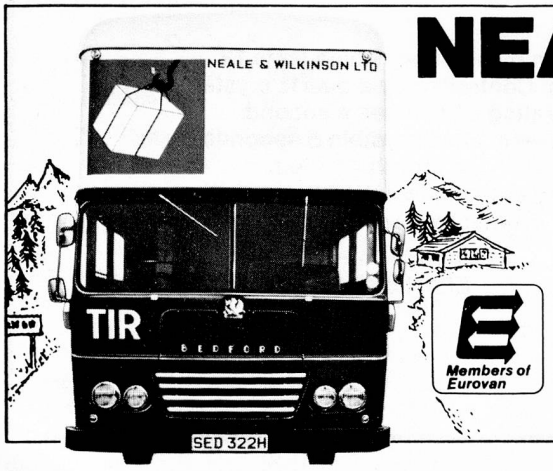
The real guilty ones were members of a group calling itself the "Marxist-Leninist Students". The Rectorate had been aware for some time that the group was selling extreme-left booklets on the University premises, in breach of existing bylaws. The Dean called on the help of the police. Twelve plain-clothes men armed with cameras took pictures of a number of students and laid their hands on eight of them.

Other student demonstrations were taking place at the same time in Berne, where some 300 took to the streets in protest against alleged injustice by the authorities against politically-motivated students. The demonstrators marched to the Cantonal Office of Education and handed a petition signed by 750 of their comrades demanding the immediate suspension of disciplinary actions currently under way against 42 left-wingers, and calling for the complete freedom to carry out political activities at Berne University.

Death of Mr. Charles Lutz

Mr. Charles Lutz, a former Swiss diplomat credited with saving the lives of tens of thousands of Hungarian-Jews during the war, died in Berne in the middle of February of a heart attack, aged 80.

Mr. Lutz, who was then Vice-Consul at the Swiss Mission in Budapest, managed to provide 50,000 to 60,000 Hungarians, most of them Jews, with exit visas. Switzerland was at the time representing the interests in Hungary of ten countries at war with Germany. The Nazi authorities had accepted to give visas to some 500 foreigners or



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double-nationals living in Hungary. But Mr. Lutz managed by stealth to obtain the necessary documents for over 5,000 families. He eventually obtained visas for up to 60,000 people.

These were saved from almost certain death as 250,000 Hungarian-Jews were deported to Auschwitz in the summer of 1944. They died within 46 days.

Mr. Lutz was named on several occasions as a candidate for the Nobel Peace Prize. He was awarded various special distinctions by Israel and West Germany. His last posting before retiring in 1961, was that of General-Consul in Austria.

The Swiss apparently satisfied with their government

An opinion research organisation called Scope has undertaken to carry out two opinion polls every year to determine the Government's popularity. The first poll carried out by the Lucerne-based organisation showed that only nine per cent of all Swiss considered themselves entirely satisfied with the work of the Federal Council. Fifty-seven per cent were "partially satisfied", 16 per cent were "moderately satisfied", four per cent were not satisfied "at all" and 14 per cent had no opinion.

German-speaking Swiss people are as a whole more satisfied than their French-speaking compatriots with the work of the Government. Not surprisingly, it is among the young and the poorly-paid (1500 francs or less a month) that dissatisfaction is the strongest. Thirty per cent of people in the 14–24 age group and 29 per cent of people in the 1500 franc or less category are "not satisfied".

Disappointing result at pipe-smoking championships

Switzerland's fourth pipe-smoking championships ended at Regensdorf on 9th March, with rather disappointing results. Mr. Heinz Scherz, from Uetikon (Zurich), a pipe-smoker of fifteen years' standing, was the first among 186 contestants with a continuous smoke of one hour and thirty-eight minutes.

This result was far inferior to the two hours and three minutes achieved by last year's winner. Experts attributed this discrepancy to the use of a different tobacco in this year's contest.

THE USE OF SOLAR ENERGY

Taking account of energy dissipation by the clouds, every square metre of Swiss soil receives a thousand killowat-hours of solar energy per year. The whole country receives a flux of energy totalling forty thousand billion kWh, or approximately two hundred times the country's present consumption of energy.

None of this vast flow of solar energy is at present tapped, a fact which is deplored by the newly-created Association for the Application of Solar Energy. This Association, already 380-strong, called journalists to a Press conference at the end of February to suggest ways of beginning to draw on the sun's boundless energy.

In a first stage, it should be possible to heat water for domestic consumption, and in a second stage, to heat houses.

The conversion of the sun's energy into water temperature can be achieved by means of a "solar collector". Such a device could heat seven thousand litres of water by 50 degrees centrigrade for every square metre of energy-collecting surface. The solar collector would cost from 350 to 450 francs, a price which could be reduced depending on the scale of production.

The Association suggests that solar collectors be installed on the roofs of every house and building in the land. Finance would be available through regular mortgage institutions. If one water collector were installed for every inhabitant, Switzerland would save over a million tons of imported fuel oil. The total cost of installing all these solar collectors would be 300 million francs, a small figure compared with the two billion which were spent last year on heating fuel alone.

The Association also pointed out the environmental advantages of a clean source of energy, as well as the work that such a national scheme would give to industry.

Despite its many hydro-electric power stations, Switzerland relies on imported fuel, petroleum, natural gas and coal for 88 per cent of its total energy requirements.

Loss of voice by teachers: A serious problem in the schools of Geneva

Aphonia – or loss of voice – is probably the most important single ill affecting the teachers of Geneva's secondary schools. A report highlighting this problem was published recently by the group for speech therapy and phonetics of the *Cycle d'Orientation.* It said that graphs established for 49 first-year candidates to a teacher-training course showed that only six of them had entirely satisfactory voices. Twenty-four of them had strong voices which weakened too quickly, while eight had both weak voices and easily-tired voices.

The trouble teachers have in keeping their voices at the levels required to overcome badly insulated classrooms, unruly pupils and a general drop in hearing perception among the young is a major one. Voice difficulties are a major cause of absence from work by teachers and also leads to many early retirements. The problem has psychological inplications since the voice of teachers under various pressures tends to loose its strength and aplomb. The report underlined the importance of a good voice for good teaching, i.e. for carrying the message over to the class.

This asset is only emerging as an essential requirement for would-be teachers. Training courses now include techniques to train the voice and keep the vocal chords rested during long days of teaching. These courses have not been compulsory so far, but the educational authorities now intend to make them a compulsory part of the curriculum.

The days of Obwald's Landsgemeinde could be numbered

The Great Council of Obwald recently supported a motion calling for an end to the Landsgemeinde by 38 to 17 votes. The motion had been tabled by the Christian-Social Party. The Cantonal Parliament also voted in favour of other proposals which, among various legal modifications, also recommended to abolish Obwald's Landsgemeinde. The citizens of the Half-Canton will be called on 8th May, the date planned for their next Landsgemeinde, to decide on the end of this age-old institution.

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Obligatory shooting to remain

The practice of a yearly and obligatory off-service shooting programme should be maintained. This was the conclusion immediately endorsed by the Political Department of a federal commission charged with examining the future of an institution which is a salient feature of every Swiss Sunday. The Commission suggested that the 300-metre shooting programme should be made more severe and that every serving man keeping a gun at home should be made to perform the annual shooting exercise until the age of 50.

The Commission said that every man still serving should register with a local rifle association. Rifle associations are still entrusted with organising the military shooting programmes carried out at the ranges they own in virtually every commune.

In another development, Geneva's Military Society, a sub-section grouping a thousand officers of every rank of the Swiss Society of Officers, is this year commemorating its 150th Anniversary by launching a treble-contest on the theme of National Defence.

The Society invited young people in two age groups (12–15 and 16–20) to write an essay on "Young People and National Defence". In a second competition, everyone, regardless of age, was invited to submit a drawing illustrating the role of Switzerland's military leaders during the past 150 years. Thirdly, amateur cineasts were invited to submit a film on the "Various aspects of our Army – its instruction and relations with the people". The participants were given rather short deadlines since pictures and essays had to be remitted within 45 days, and films within 30 days of the start of the competition. Works were to be examined by a jury chaired by Brigadier Jean-Jacques Chouet.

"Military law is too hard"

The prison sentences meted out to conscientious objectors are far too stiff. Such was the main contention of delegates of the "Swiss Council for Peace Associations" who held their Annual Assembly in Zurich last month. They claimed "with indignation" that military courts had recently shown themselves to be "particularly hard" in sentencing conscientious objectors to prison terms ranging from nine to 16 months. They noted that these sentences were much stiffer than those ranging from three to six months that had been served for similar offences.

The Assembly said in a communiqué that it was "incomprehensible and humiliating" that military courts should adopt such an attitude at a time when the procedure for the creation of a non-military national service was under way. The Assembly called for a general amnesty to all conscientious objectors and to a quashing of sentences for those that have already faced a military court.

TOURIST ITEMS

LITTLE KNOWN – THE SKI-ING REGION OF ENTLEBUCH AND EMMENTAL

No hustling and bustling and ideal conditions for downhill ski-ing and ski-hiking – these are some of the advantages of the pre-Alpine ski-ing region of Entlebuch and the Upper Emmental (accessible by train, postal coach or car from Lucerne). The region's centre is *Sorenberg* with its aerial cableway (built in 1971) leading to the Brienzer Rothorn, and 15 other cableways, ski-lifts and chair-lifts, a cross-country loipe, a natural ice rink and an indoor swimming pool. Besides ski-hiking, *Entlebuch* also boasts runs for downhill adepts. There are ski-lifts in Hasle for the Napf region and ski-runs and slopes at *Fluhli* which has a modern hotel and over 20 holiday flats. *Escholzmatt,* nearby, has some ideal practice slopes and also appeals to ski-hiking fans. *Marbach's* advantages include a cableway, four ski-lifts, a two-mile lit-up ski slope and a ski-hiking run. For the past few years, skiers have been attracted to *Bumbach* and the snow-clad northern face of the Hohgant. This region also offers another advantage – two new winter sports tickets valid on all 35 ski-lifts and mountain railways with a transport capacity of 2,400 persons per hour and approximately 30 miles of postal coach routes. A reduction of 25 per cent is granted by the purchase of a 100 franc ticket, and 20 per cent for a 50 franc ticket.

TRAVELLING ON THE SWISS POSTAL COACH SYSTEM IN THE VALAIS

After issuing a new "One-Week Ticket for the Upper Valais", the Swiss Postal Coach Administration has now introduced an all-inclusive ticket for the region of Sion. This ticket which is limited to individual use, is valid on all postal coach routes (regular services) in the Sion area in addition to the routes to Les Collons, Le Chargeur/Dixence and Ovronnaz. An adult's ticket costs Fr. 40 and children and owners of half-tax vouchers and holiday tickets pay Fr. 20.

WINTER SKI-ING ALSO IN THE TICINO

The Ticino is becoming just as popular for its sunny, snow-clad regions in winter as for its lush, tropical vegetation. The ski-ing areas of Airolo, Cari, Nara, Campo Blenio and Bosco Gurin (for day and weekend excursions) all lie at an altitude of over 3,000 feet. Moneto (Centovalli), Cardada (above Locarno), Alpe di Neggia (Gambarogno) and Monte Lema (Malcantone) are also ideal for ski-ing. Monte Tamaro, on the southern side of Monte Ceneri, with its aerial cableway, chair-lift, ski-lifts and mountain hotel, has snow until April. Day tickets in all resorts run from 10 to 15 francs. Package ski-ing weeks are available at the brand-new Hotel Origlio Country Club (near Monte Tamaro) up to 22nd March. One week costs Fr. 540 (for adults) and Fr. 370 (for children up to 16 years).

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PRIVATE SANATORIA IN SWITZERLAND

A newly-revised version of the brochure "Private Sanatoria in Switzerland" has recently been issued by the Swiss National Tourist Office. This brochure, which appears in three languages, contains information on a clinic's specialisation, possibilities of medical treatment and supplementary indications on Swiss health resorts. Copies are available free of charge from: Swiss National Tourist Office, Swiss Centre, 1 New Coventry Street, London W1V 3HG.

INTERLAKEN – ARCHERY WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS 25th–28th JUNE, 1975

Five or eight-day all-inclusive holidays to Interlaken are being organised by Swiss Travel Service, Ware, Herts., in conjunction with Swissair. Departure dates: 25th and 22nd June, 1975 respectively. Prices from London are from £83 per person.

LATE NEWS

The people of the three southern districts of the Jura voted against separation from Canton Berne during an important plebiscite which took place on the weekend of 15–16th March. On another subject, Switzerland has formally asked the five Common Market countries whose currencies are linked together in a common "snake", to participate in the arrangement. More details in our next issue.