

Zeitschrift:	The Swiss observer : the journal of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK
Herausgeber:	Federation of Swiss Societies in the United Kingdom
Band:	- (1975)
Heft:	1709
Rubrik:	Swiss events

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SWISS EVENTS

THE OBWALD LANDSGEMEINDE WILL STAY

A strong majority of Obwald citizens have voted to preserve their Landsgemeinde. Differing from their compatriots from Schwytz and Uri, who have recently abolished the Landsgemeinde in their Canton, they rejected an initiative launched following the confusion which marked the 1973 Landsgemeinde. That Landsgemeinde was troubled by disputed counting of votes and ended with the citizens voting a 10 franc credit in complete disarray.

The sponsors of the initiative claim that the Landsgemeinde, at which citizens elect officials or vote on issues submitted to them by the Great Council (Parliament) on a show of hands, should be replaced, as in the great majority of cantons, by the ordinary voting slip. The Great Council had in fact supported the initiative and the Half-Canton's State Council (Executive) had called for an adaptation of the Landsgemeinde to modern conditions. It was the fourth time that the people of Obwald had rejected calls for the disappearance of an institution which is still considered as one of the most picturesque traits of Swiss democracy. In the 18th century, there were over 80 Landsgemeinde in the country. The only cantons which still hold them are Obwald, Nidwald, Glaris and the two Appenzell Half-Cantons.

SWITZERLAND'S SHARE OF WATCH EXPORTS DECLINING

Switzerland's watch exports have declined by 32.1 per cent in volume and 19.4 per cent in value during the first five months of the year. The situation began to deteriorate last September, and this tendency has accelerated during the past three months while Switzerland's major competitors have increased their sales on the world market. This means that Switzerland's share of total watch exports, which declined from 68 per cent in 1970 to 62.9 per cent last year, will continue to fall. The Chamber of Watch Industry fears that Switzerland's share of exports will drop to between 50 and 55 per cent this year and her share of world production to 30 per cent, against 38.5 per cent last year with a production of 84.4 million watches out of a world total of 226 million.

The drop in exports is a direct consequence of the rise of the Swiss franc. A Swiss and Japanese watch of which last year had the equivalent worth of 50 francs would now sell respectively at 22 and 18 dollars in New York. However, Switzerland's leadership in the field is still far from being questioned since her nearest competitor only produced 18.5 million watches a year.

KAI SERAUGST: THE GOVERNMENT MEETS CONSERVATIONIST DELEGATES

Three members of the Federal Council, Mr Willi Ritschard, Mr Ernst Brugger and Mr Hans Huerlimann, met a delegation from the two movements who have staged a month long sit-in at the construction site of the nuclear power station at Kaiseraugst. The two movements are the "Kaiseraugst non-violent Action" (GAK) and the "North-Eastern Action Committee against Nuclear Power Stations". Their action at Kaiseraugst had been provisionally called off following assurances by the Government that their fears would be examined in detail. The two movements are particularly wary of the dangers of the high concentration of power stations in the area.

The two sides had a constructive discussion. The Federal Council said that it was entirely prepared to examine the conservationists' claims but stressed that it could not legally order a freeze on all work in Kaiseraugst. It said that it was nevertheless prepared to ask the contractors not to undertake any new development in the site as long as the technical claims of the two movements had not been examined in common with specialists.

LAY-OFFS AT CHARMILLES

Geneva: A leading Geneva industrial firm, Ateliers Des Charmilles, put its 1,315 employees on short-time working from the beginning of August because of the unfavourable development of the economic climate.

Instead of a five-day week, employees now work only four days or four-and-a-half days depending on the departments in which they work.

The firm, which produces heating burners, machine tools, engines and hydraulic equipment, will reduce its work-force by about 60, principally in the machine tool section, by next March. A total of 23 people had been dismissed in the heating equipment section in recent months.

Charmilles, which has a branch in nearby Annemasse, France, has a share capital of 18 million Swiss francs (about £3.3 million sterling). Turnover last year amounted to 193.4 million Swiss francs (about £36.5 million sterling), with a net profit of 3.99 million Swiss francs, about £740,000 sterling.

EASING-UP OF LAND PURCHASE REGULATIONS

The Government has decided to ease the regulations enforced at the beginning of last year to prevent foreigners from buying excessive amounts of property in Switzerland. Several cantons relying on tourism and foreign residents have found that the regulations had damaged their financial situation, and have asked the Federal Council for a reconsideration of the decree which was adopted on 21 December 1973 and implemented on the first day of the following year.

Its results were apparent in figures on land purchases showing that 2,774 permits for buying land totalling 197 hectares and valued at 560 million francs were delivered during the first six months of 1972, while only 942 permits covering 94 hectares valued at 334 million francs were delivered during the corresponding period last year.

According to the amended regulations, foreign interests will find it easier to invest in hotels and tourist installations in mountain resorts.

THE MUSEUM OF THE SWISS ABROAD LEAVES COPPET

The Museum of the Swiss Abroad, housed in Coppet Castle, on the shores of Lake Geneva, will have to leave these premises as a result of a long disagreement between the Castle's present owner, the Count of Haussomville, and the Museum's Foundation.

The difficulties have lasted for over two years and are essentially due to the fact that the Castle, Mme Germain de Staél's birthplace, is a private property. The interests of its owners, who descend from Mme de Staél, are apparently in conflict with those of the museum sponsors, and in particular of the Curator, Mr Jean-René Bory, thanks to whose efforts the number of visitors to the museum has grown over a few years from a few hundred to 35,000 a year. Recently, however, the museum was only open to groups of visitors announcing their visit to the owners.

The Count of Haussomville had made life difficult for the Museum Foundation, closing some areas to the public and claiming the totality of receipts in which the Commune and the Foundation had hitherto received a share. It appears that the Count has ideas of his own. He plans to redecorate Mme de Staél's apartments in order to house a great amount of original furniture stored in the Castle's loft. The Castle would, therefore, be converted from a museum devoted to the careers of the most distinguished Swiss abroad through the centuries to a Museum on Mme de Staél. This great feminine and literary figure, the daughter of Necker, banker to Louis XVI, was herself, to some extent, a Swiss abroad.

GENERAL MOTORS CLOSES ITS ASSEMBLY PLANT IN BIEL

General Motor's assembly plant in Biel, which has produced over 350,000 vehicles in 40 years of existence, will close by the end of August. Some 450 employees and workers from a work force of 1,000 will be laid off. The remainder of the staff will continue to handle the factories' servicing and distribution operations.

The reasons for the closure are that Switzerland's commercial agreements, in particular with the European Free Trade Association and the Common Market, have reduced the tariff advantages of spare parts over completed motor cars. These advantages were the main reasons for General Motors' assembly operation in Switzerland. The Biel plant supplied the Swiss market in GM cars and even produced some for export.

ANTONIUS HOECKELMANN AT THE KUNSTHALLE

An exhibition of the work of West German sculptor and artist Antonius Hoeckelmann is being presented at the Kunsthalle in Berne from 6 September to 9 October. Hoeckelmann was born in Oedle (Westphalia) in 1937 and now works in Cologne.

He is an artist very much aware of the fact that, in present day town planning and architecture, the possibilities for plastic art and sculpture are becoming increasingly limited to the mere decoration of rooms and public squares.

How Hoeckelmann overcomes this is shown in the Kunsthalle exhibition.

SWISS-AMERICAN CHEESE AGREEMENT

The United States has accepted not to impose a countervailing tax on imports of Emmenthal and Gruyère cheese following talks in Washington between a Swiss team lead by Ambassador Klaus Jacobi, Delegate to Commercial Agreements, and the Assistant Secretary to the Treasury, Mr David McDonald. The United States had threatened to impose such a compensatory tax because of the official subsidies given to Swiss cheese exports. The American authorities claimed that these subsidies were unfair towards home-made products. However, they accepted that Swiss cheese, whose sales have dropped by eight per cent last year on the American market, were not competitively priced and therefore not a threat to local products of the same kind. They have therefore lifted their threat until the beginning of 1979, when the situation will be reconsidered.

Swiss cheese exports to the US totalled 40 million francs last year, 28 million of which were for Emmenthal and Gruyère.

The fact that the cheese issue might influence Swiss Parliament's adoption of the Northrop F-5E "Tiger" as the Air Force's new combat plane was made clear to the American authorities, said Ambassador Jacobi on his return to Berne. The two countries have therefore concluded a "cheese against fighter plane" arrangement which seemed to satisfy both sides. It is more and more likely that the "Tiger" will be adopted as Switzerland's replacement fighter and the Federal Council has decided that parts of it will be manufactured at the Emmen aeronautical factory.

13 - 23 November - Biel: V IFERA - International Wine Exhibition.

13 - 23 November - Lausanne: Antique Dealers' Show, with International participation.

24 - 29 November - Zurich: SCHWEISSEN 75 - Exhibition for Welding and Cutting Techniques.

27 November - 1 December - Basle: Swiss Furniture Fair.

28 November - 7 December - Geneva: International Exhibition of Inventions and new Techniques.

Congress and Exhibition News from Berne

"MEAT AS A FOODSTUFF"

The 21st European Meeting of Meat Research Workers is being held at the Kursaal, Berne, from 31 August to 5 September, attended by some 400 participants from around the world. Attention will be focused on the meeting's scientific work, which will be devoted to the themes "Meat and Meat Products", "Animal Fat Sources", "Additives, Flavouring and Wastes" and "Packing, Storing and Transport".

An attractive social programme has also been organised, including a coach tour of the city, a visit to the Gurten, excursions on Lake Thun, to the medieval town of Gruyère, up the Rigi and through the Emmental, and a reception by the Berne Cantonal and City authorities.

CHRISTMAS IS COMING

The 22nd Swiss Trade Fair for Toys, Souvenirs, Boutique, Christmas and Winter Gifts (SPISO) is being held in Berne from 31 August to 3 September.

The fair - at the Guisanplatz exhibition centre - is expected to attract more than 100 Swiss and foreign exhibitors. SPISO is not a public event and is intended only for those in the trade.

12th NAME RESEARCH INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS

The 12th International Congress for Name Research is being held at Berne University from 25-29 August. Some 400 participants from throughout the world are expected to attend.

General theme of the event will be "Names of People and Places". The work of the congress will be divided into five sections. Official congress languages will be German, French, Italian, English, Spanish and Russian.