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NON-VOTERS MAY BE HAPPY PEOPLE!

A report commissioned by the Federal Department of Justice and Police says that abstentionism is not only a bad thing. It is a fact that Swiss voters, who are said to enjoy the most democratic system in the world, increasingly fail to show their appreciation of this privilege by massively deserting the polls.

But a survey carried out on a number of citizens concludes that absenteeism, if it does show a lack of civic responsibility and participation in national life, does at least indicate that the consensus which enables the conflicting energies, cultures and interests of the Confederates to make for a free and prosperous society is still strong.

The fact that people do not bother to vote can be said to show that they are content with things as they stand. A heavy turn-out would mean strong political concern and hence, a possible break of this consensus. A heavy turn-out might infuse more vitality into national

life but could also reflect a fall in national contentment.

The reasons for not going to vote are fairly straightforward. According to the survey, 33 people questioned said they were disinterested in politics, 27 per cent claimed they had no political power anyway, 26 per cent explained that they didn't understand what was going on, 14 per cent said they didn't care, 13 per cent said their only concern was their private life and 13 per cent spoke of their total mistrust for the authorities.

Lack of interest and of understanding was more frequent among women than among men. Seventy-six per cent of working people do not usually go and vote while the average is about 60 per cent. Moreover, seventy-six per cent of those questioned said they had a favourable attitude towards political parties. This could give some food for thought to Switzerland's many parties.

A NEXT?—A SWISS TRAVELLER IN SPACE?

Switzerland has participated in a twofold capacity in the European Space Agency's GEOS satellite programme, the first vessel of which was launched at the Kennedy Space Centre, in the USA, on 20th April 1977. It is in fact Contraves Co. Ltd., Zürich, a firm belonging to the Swiss Oerlikon-Buehrle group, that designed and built the structure for this first European earth station research satellite which will go into operation for a period of two years.

The use of advanced techniques has made it possible to reduce the weight of the vessel to a minimum; thus the total structure, including the armature for the solar cells, the flight equipment, etc., weighs only 48 kg.

The development and building of the structure took 40,000 hours of work. Switzerland will also be participating in the research carried out by means of the satellite; of the seven experiments it is scheduled to make, one has been proposed and planned by the Institute of Physics at Berne University; the mass

spectrometer required for this experiment has been designed by the university institute in question and developed by Contraves in cooperation with Balzers Co. Ltd. (Liechtenstein) and Dornier System (Germany).

Who says he's a slippery character?

Sylvain Saudan, a Swiss living in Chamonix known as "le skieur de l'impossible", has performed another feat. He has managed to ski down a 7,135 m peak in the Himalayas. The 2,500 m descent on gradients that sometimes reached 60 degrees took him four hours and required about 2,500 turns.

Saudan has already used his skis to descend some of the world's most famous mountains, including Mt. McKinsey in Alaska, the Kilimanjaro and the Eiger.

SWISS EVENTS

VAT rejection has serious consequences

Following the refusal of the Swiss people to institute VAT on the 12th June referendum, the Federal Council has been compelled to compensate a shortfall in expected income.

Federal expenditure for 1978 was fixed at 16.7 billion francs last January. Owing to the 12th June vote, the federal revenue will receive 800 million francs less than planned. Expenditure has therefore been brought down to 15.9 billion, a figure which is at the same level as in 1977 and 1976 and which will still involve a deficit of 1.2 billion francs.

The Federal Council had therefore to find ways of saving 800 million francs on the planned budget. This will be done by a reduction, to the tune of 150 million francs, of subsidies on bread and butter, which will go up, by cancelling several projects and thus saving 40 million francs, by spreading out 400 million francs in savings among the various areas of the budget while leaving Defence, Social Insurance and Investments virtually intact, and by increasing Turnover Tax by an average of two and a half per cent.

In other words, the Government is using another route to recoup the extra money denied to it by the electorate last June.

FORMULA 1 SWISS WATCHES

In order to call attention to its participation in Formula 1 World Championships, as sponsor of the new Stanley-BRM racing car, Rotary SA at La Chaux-de-Fonds launched a whole new range of watches, the "F. 1" series, at the recent European Watchmaking and Jewellery Fair.

The five models in this new series, ranging from the sturdy but inexpensive model for the younger man to the highly perfected quartz chronometer, are all marked on the clasp or on the bracelet itself with the "F. 1" symbol and the starting flag, thus emphasizing the firm's close link with Grand Prix racing.



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Is marriage slowly going out of fashion?

If separations caused by death are taken into account, more marriages were dissolved than were contracted in Switzerland last year. There were 32,058 marriages (3131 fewer than the previous year) against 9,582 divorces (664 more than in 1975). Added to this, 25,000 couples were separated by death. The number of legal separations was also on the increase and reached 457.

Owing to the return home of many

foreigners because of the recession, there has been a drop in the number of marriages between Swiss nationals and foreigners.

There has also been a drop in marriages between foreigners living in Switzerland, so that marriages between Swiss have grown from 74 to 76 per cent of the total. The number of marriages has diminished since 1969, when 46,886 couples vowed fidelity for life. But more and more people share their lives without thinking it necessary to institutionalise this bond through marriage.

Still the best policy

In spite of the recession occurring in different branches of the Swiss economy, the deterioration in the economic situation as a whole and the big fluctuations in exchange rates affecting all currencies used in direct business with other countries, the gross revenue from premiums of Swiss insurance and reinsurance companies increased by 7.3 per cent, in 1975 (1974 : 1.3 per cent) to total, on the world level, 16.44 billion Swiss francs. Revenue was divided up as follows: accident and damage insurance: 8.20 billion francs (+ 5.3 per cent), life assurance: 4.50 billion (+ 9.7 per cent), reinsurance: 3.74 billion (+ 9.1 per cent). With reference to accident and damage

insurance it should be noted that 4.1 billion (+ 6.9 per cent) came from direct business at home.

Of the total revenue for the previous year, which had amounted to 15.3 billion, 43 per cent had been earned as a result of direct business within the country, 26 per cent came from direct business concluded with other countries and 31 per cent from reinsurance. Swiss private insurance, which by its activities outside the frontiers of the country contributes on an average some 360 million francs a year to the balance of revenues, remains one of the leading sectors of the Swiss economy.

Still not ready for U.N.

As a result of a study which had taken several years, a Federal commission has come out in favour of joining the United Nations. But, with typical Swiss circumspection, it stresses that the time is not quite ripe and that the Swiss people, who have the final say, are not yet ready to make the plunge.

The Federal Council has decided to distribute a brochure explaining the issues involved to every household in the land. The conservative Republican Party, which is led by Mr. James Schwarzenbach, initiator of efforts to repatriate some 300,000 foreigners living in Switzerland, has complained that the brochure will be biased in favour of joining.

The Republicans condemned a "propaganda exercise which goes against the wishes of the Swiss people to have thrift practised at the government level".

MOSQUE NEARS COMPLETION

A large Mosque financed by Saudi Arabia is nearing completion in Geneva. Thirty Moroccan artists are presently carving frescoes on the walls of this large sanctuary which has been erected at Le Grand Saconnex to meet the needs of a growing Arab community.



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STUDENTS DON'T WANT CARS ON SUNDAY

A group of technical school students have obtained the necessary 50,000 signatures to hold a referendum on their suggestion of banning Sunday motoring once a month to save petrol. The ban would also apply on powered flying and boating.

The Government has strongly turned down these proposals on the grounds that they would only mean a marginal saving in energy, but also hurt foreign motorists touring the country.

On a normal Sunday, over a hundred thousand motorists cross the border. The Government feels there is no reason to make them suffer by regulations which would be of little effect, and cause hardship to the Swiss themselves.

But the students who drafted these rather extreme proposals reject the Government's stand and insist that the issue be put quickly before the Swiss people.

SALON CULINAIRE MONDIAL 1977 – A GASTRONOMICAL CULINARY PRESENTATION OF THE HIGHEST ORDER

There is still very great interest in the Salon Culinaire Mondial (World Culinary Exhibition), which will be held in conjunction with the 7th International Exhibition for Industrial and Institutional Catering, Hotels, Restaurants, IGEHO 77, in the halls of the Swiss Industries Fair in Basle from November 17 to 23, 1977.

Every day competition documentation is requested – and definite registrations have already been received from a large number of national teams, Swiss and foreign regional teams, groups and individual exhibitors. The lively participation from all fields of industrial and institutional catering in the various competitions announced for them is also very gratifying.

Together with the various attractive accompanying events, the Salon Culinaire Mondial will occupy a total gross area of more than 6,000 m²: a gastronomic, culinary presentation such as will not be seen again in Switzerland for a long time.

The competition regulations are demanding: the value of an award will therefore be correspondingly high – awards that have only been presented three times this century at international culinary exhibitions in Switzerland. For this reason alone, it is worth taking part in the Salon Culinaire Mondial 1977 and showing one's abilities.

WATCHMAKING: A SWISS WORLD FIRST

The Longines Watch Company at St. Imier, Berne, which this year celebrates the 110th anniversary of its foundation, has launched the flattest calibre of mechanical self-winding watch in the world. This new calibre is only 2.95 mm high in all. It has been developed entirely in the firm's own laboratories and represents an elegant solution to the problem of reliability of the movement not only in its design and the optimization of each function but also in the choice of materials.

In addition, modules owing to its extremely advantageous price-performance-reliability ratio. The design of this

new model guarantees a timing precision very close to that set in the works, and over a very long period.

The use of two barrels, whose power and speed are combined, contributes to a decrease in wear in the transmission and an appreciable increase in efficiency.

PEACE MAKING MISSION

Mr. Ernst Brugger, Head of the Economy Department, went to Iran on an official visit at the beginning of July. During his discussions with the Iranian prime minister and the Shah, it was decided to intensify the two countries' economic cooperation.

A major joint petroleum programme has been agreed. Switzerland will also participate in Iran's touristic and hotel development. Trade between the two countries will be enhanced and Switzerland has agreed to buy more of Iran's traditional goods, such as textiles and wood.

The Secretary-General of the Political Department, Dr. Albert Weitinuer, also visited Teheran in an effort to improve the diplomatic relations of the two countries which had been strained as a result of allegations in Switzerland that Iranian secret police officials were operating against Iranian students in Switzerland.

ANTI NUCLEAR CLASHES

The site of the nuclear power station at Goesgen, in north-eastern Switzerland, was the scene of violent clashes between environmental demonstrators and the police on two consecutive weekends at the end of June and in early July.

About six thousand people took part in the second demonstration which was dispersed with a heavy use of tear gas, something which is not very often seen in Switzerland. The demonstrators blocked all the roads to the site. One of their leaders, a left-winger called André Froidevaux, was later arrested on a warrant issued by the Olten investigating magistrate. The Swiss German press was virulently critical of the leaders of the demonstrations.

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