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Farmer

JUSTICE Minister Kurt Furgler is the President of Switzerland for 1981, and Economics Minister Fritz Honegger Vice President.

A joint meeting of the two Houses of Parliament elected Mr Furgler by 191 out of 219 votes cast and Mr Honegger by 203 out of 230 votes. Mr Furgler was also President in 1977.

★ ★ ★ ★

THE Swiss Government has complied with a request by Hungary that Swiss Consul André Grelin leave Budapest by the end of December.

The government has protested against the Hungarian action, which is believed to have been in retaliation against a Swiss request earlier in the year for the departure from Bern of a Hungarian diplomat allegedly involved in a spy case in Switzerland.

★ ★ ★ ★

A nationwide vote on Switzerland's entry to the United Nations is likely to be held before the end of 1983, according to a Swiss Government statement.

★ ★ ★ ★

POPE John Paul is expected to visit Switzerland this June – but it will not be a state visit. He has been invited to attend a meeting of the International Labour Organisation in Geneva, and is also expected to confer with Swiss bishops.

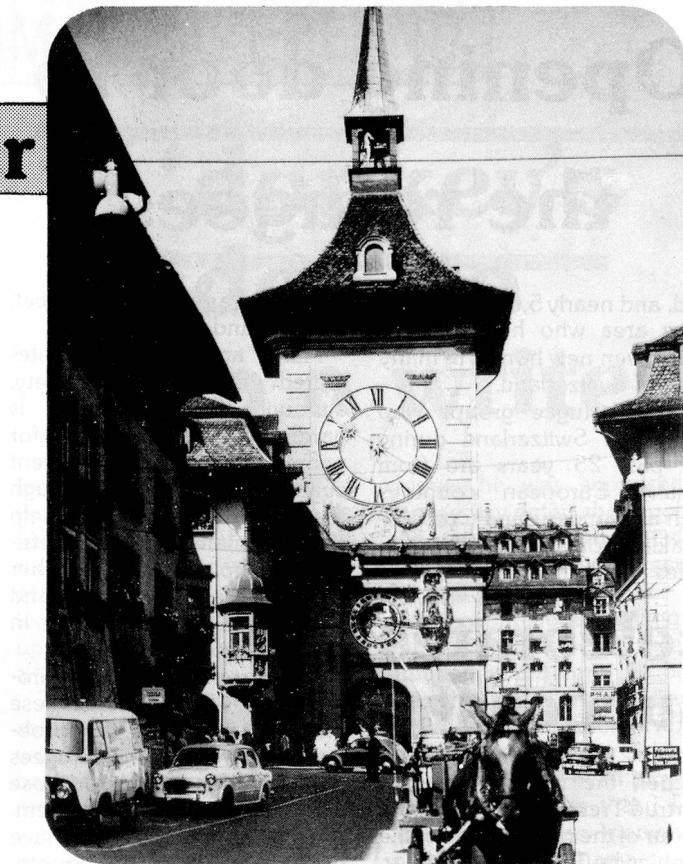
★ ★ ★ ★

BODIES representing Armenians living in Switzerland have condemned a recent series of attacks against Swiss property for which other Armenian movements have claimed responsibility.

The Swiss-based groups praised Switzerland for its great assistance to Armenians. There have been attacks in Switzerland and against Swiss property in London, Paris and Rome.

★ ★ ★ ★

UNIONS and employers in the Swiss watchmaking industry have agreed on a new five-year collective contract. Provisions include the introduction of a 41-hour working week and at least



four weeks holiday a year plus a 13th month's salary for all personnel.

★ ★ ★ ★

ITALIAN authorities have closed down Radio 24, the commercial radio station broadcasting to Switzerland from an alpine peak close to the Italian-Swiss border.

Swiss journalist Roger Schwanski – who launched the pop station in 1979 – denied Swiss claims that the station was illegal, and alleged that the Swiss authorities had put political pressure on Italy.

★ ★ ★ ★

SWISS motorists will have to belt up from this year – whether they like it or not. In a nationwide vote in November

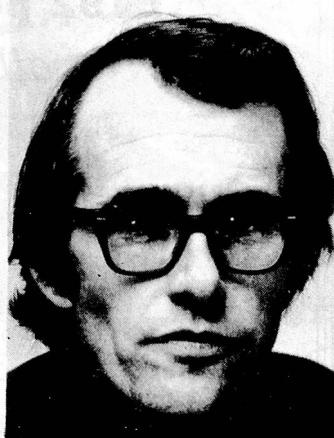
the electorate approved by a narrow majority a controversial new law compelling drivers and front seat passengers to wear safety belts.

The vote was 51.6 per cent in favour and 48.4 per cent against, with Italian-speaking Canton Ticino and all the French-speaking opposing the new law. The new legislation is expected to enter into force in April.

★ ★ ★ ★

A census was held in Switzerland last month. Questionnaires were distributed in German, French, Italian, Romansch, Spanish, Portuguese, Turkish, Greek and Serbo-Croat.

The questionnaire was similar to that distributed for the last census in 1970, but contained



Introducing Colin Farmer, whose regular column from Berne will report in brief the latest happenings in Switzerland.

in Berne

several new questions – including one on working hours.

★ ★ ★ ★

PETROL prices in Switzerland increased in December for the third time in less than two months, reaching their highest level since 1943. "Super" now costs Sfr 1.24 per liter.

★ ★ ★ ★

SWISS regulations governing property sales to non-resident foreigners are to be tightened from this month. Property sale permits are being reduced by 15 per cent.

Most cantons – in particular the Valais – will be allocated fewer permits, but Ticino will receive more.

★ ★ ★ ★

CANTON Ticino is to receive an annual Sfr 1.5 million government subsidy to promote its culture and language. Twelve per cent of the Swiss population is Italian-speaking.

★ ★ ★ ★

PRINCE Philip has been re-elected president of the Swiss-based International Equestrian Federation for a further four-year term. The Prince – who has been president since 1964 – was re-elected at a meeting of federation delegates in Berne.

★ ★ ★ ★

THE Geneva-based International Committee of the Red Cross – which comprises only Swiss nationals – has increased its membership to 22. The two new members are Olivier Long, until recently Director General of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, and Dietrich Schindler, Professor of International Law at Zurich University.

★ ★ ★ ★

THE Swiss divorce rate has doubled over the past 10 years, reveals a government report. Most divorces occur during the first five years of marriage, and more women than men initiate divorce proceedings. Divorce can also result in earlier death – particularly among men – and the suicide rate is also higher.