

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: - (1981)

Heft: 1779

Rubrik: Farmer in Berne

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Farmer

in Berne



CAN Switzerland continue producing and selling weapons of war – and still remain neutral? Argentinian pacifist and 1980 Nobel Peace Prizewinner Perez Esquivel put the question when he addressed a Roman Catholic aid conference in Einsiedeln.

“In Latin America,” he said, “40 per cent of the population are living in poverty, 20 per cent are starving, and children are dying daily. These injustices are leading to organised terrorism – and some of the responsibility lies with the Swiss people.”

“In a world of violence, the arms race is extremely profitable for those who produce and sell weapons. Everyone speaks of world peace, but no one wants to take the first step. The nation which makes such a first move will be the most intelligent – and I have always considered the Swiss to be intelligent people. They could set the example.”

★★★★★

THE Swiss have often been accused of not showing enough consideration for their migrant workers. Now no less a person than President of Italy, Sandro Pertini, had added his voice to the chorus of criticism.

In a Weltwoche interview on the eve of his recent four-day state visit to Switzerland, President Pertini said: “The 600,000 Italians living in Switzerland are contributing to the wealth and welfare of the nation. If they were to leave suddenly, the Swiss economy would be in trouble.

“Of course, Italian workers must respect the laws of their host country. But show some consideration for them. Italian workers who take their employment seriously should enjoy the same salaries and social benefits as the Swiss.”

★★★★★

SWISS novelist and playwright Max Frisch – who lives in New York – has paid a brief return visit to his native Zurich to attend low-key celebrations of his 70th birthday. But he said he was anxious

to return to Manhattan as soon as possible – “because it is good to work there.”

Frisch has been an admirer of New York since he first went to the city 30 years ago on a Rockefeller Foundation scholarship, and has now purchased a spacious \$160,000 fifth-floor apartment there. He says he needs the space for walking up and down when working.

He is currently busy on a new novel, but says he prefers to reveal no details. “I am not yet fascinated by it,” he told an interviewer. “I just continue writing. Perhaps it will captivate me – perhaps I will just throw it away.”

★★★★★

ANOTHER prominent Swiss writer, Lorenz Stucki – author of several books on Japan, Latin America and his native country – has died in Lugano of a heart attack. He was 58.

Mr Stucki, a former journalist, travelled widely in the United States, South America and in Japan, where he became fluent in Japanese. A local government authority in Japan once engaged him to advise on the development of environmental planning programmes.

Probably his best-known book was his *Das heimliche Imperium (The Secret Empire)*, the story of Switzerland’s rise from a back-

ward, rural country to one of the world’s wealthiest nations. And he had just completed a book on Swissair – “the portrait of an astonishing airline” – marking this year’s 50th anniversary of the company. German, French and Italian editions are already available, and an English edition is to be published later this year.

★★★★★

A DRASTIC reduction in televised football may be the answer to falling match attendances, suggests general secretary Hans Bangerter of the Berne-based European Football Union (UEFA).

Writing in the UEFA Bulletin, Mr Bangerter says the alarming decline in spectator figures and the financial problems facing many clubs represent “a negative trend that has even reached such classical bastions of the game as England.”

He adds: “There is a danger of the sport reaching the point where it interests only TV viewers and people who fill out pools coupons. The fans must be enticed back into the stadiums. If necessary we must cut down drastically the amount of televised football, whether live or highlights on sports programmes. It is inevitable that measures of this kind would not be to the liking of those television

spectators and would also hit the true fans to some extent. And yet we may one day be obliged to think about it very carefully.”

★★★★★

SWISS radio and television staff – including British journalists working for Swiss Radio International – have approved by an overwhelming majority a revision of their collective contract.

The contract – which was approved by 94 per cent of the personnel in a secret ballot – includes an additional week’s holiday from the age of 60. It also gives employees the right once every three years to convert their 13th month’s salary into an additional month’s holiday. Revision of the document follows 18 months of negotiations between Swiss Broadcasting Corporation management and the two staff unions.

★★★★★

AN IRISH stamp auctioneer living in Switzerland has sold a stamp for one million dollars – the highest price ever paid anywhere in the world for a single philatelic item.

Dubliner David Feldman, who has been operating from Geneva for the past seven years, sold the item by tender for a “private continental collector to a very well known European philatelist.” The million-dollar item is a United States five cent “Blue Alexandria” stamp on the cover of a love letter mailed to a Virginia girl in 1847. The previous owner – who also purchased the item through the Feldman auction house – paid “only” \$200,000 for it six years ago.

The cover was first sold soon after its discovery in 1907 for \$3,000 and has since changed hands only five times. Mr Feldman said he had received nearly 50 bids for the item, most of them from Americans trying to repatriate the cover, now kept in the vaults of a Geneva bank.

Colin Farmer