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Britain beating the Swiss in fight against inflation



THE unbelievable has happened. Consumer prices are now rising at a higher rate in Switzerland than they are in Britain.

According to latest figures, inflation in Switzerland is still running at the relatively high rate for this country of 5.7 per cent. In Britain the figure has fallen to 5.4 per cent, the lowest for nearly 13 years.

Among recent price increases in Switzer-

land, bread has just gone up by an average of seven per cent. As the popular Press here has not been slow to point out, that makes the 28th increase since end of the war.

A 1lb loaf now costs around Sfr 1.50 (the equivalent of 50 pence) – six times the price in 1945 and almost double the average inflation rate over the same period.

Another shock for the Swiss has been the

announcement that rail fares are to be increased next month by nearly 10 per cent – the second such rise in only 13 months.

The Swiss Federal Railways last year announced a deficit of Sfr 450 million (£150 million), and the new fares are expected to bring in about Sfr 75 million annually.

★ ★ ★

AT a time when many Swiss are campaigning for a shorter working week, longer hours are being requested by a group of women – the prostitutes of Zurich.

In a formal petition to the city authorities, 39 prostitutes are seeking a revision of local curfew laws so that they may walk the streets for three more hours per day "and adjust to market conditions".

Under the present curfew, streetwalking at Niederdorf, the red-light district of Switzerland's financial capital and most populous city, is forbidden between 3am and 8pm.

In their letter, which was also published in the local Press, the women said that advancing the start of their police-licensed hours from 8pm to 5pm would give them more time to spend with their children "and cultivate family life".

"Because of time factors and family reasons, many interested clients, and especially businessmen, would like to accept



Courtesy: 24 heures, Lausanne

the prostitutes' propositions in the late afternoon," the letter said.

The petitioners said police had recommended them to seek customers in bars during the earlier hours. This would force us to consume alcohol," they complained.

The women also rejected the argument that daylight activities would be a threat to morals, especially of children.

"The displays in the sex shops (sex photos and masochistic equipment) are much more dangerous for the children than prostitutes walking the streets in normal dress," the letter added.

The letter said one of the reasons for the frequent violation of present curfew rules was that many prostitutes have young children with whom they want to cultivate family life after 8pm.

"As their parents are normally divorced, these children require special care", claimed the prostitutes' petition.

★ ★ ★

ANGRY Swiss watchmakers have opened an enquiry into the origins of a cheap wrist-watch which flashes a portrait of Iranian leader Ayatollah Khomeini.

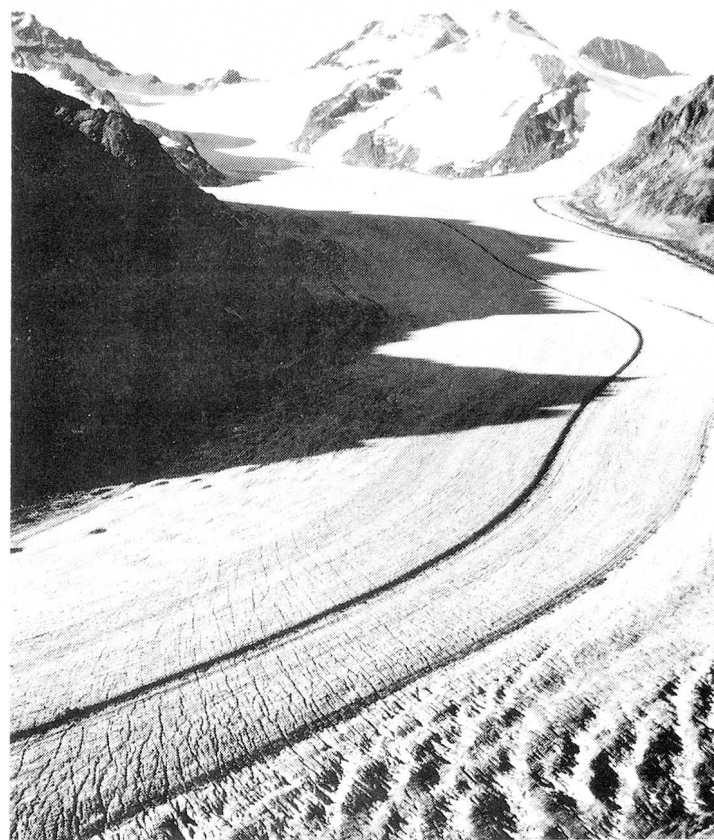
Said a spokesman for the Swiss Watchmakers' Federation: "This article is, at best, in doubtful taste. We are conducting a full investigation. It may claim to be Swiss-made but we are reasonably certain that it was not manufactured in this country."

The watch was brought back to Switzerland by a Swiss student who said he purchased it in Teheran for the equivalent of about SFr. 35.

The watch is slim and quartz-powered, and has a dial which lights up every 30 seconds with Khomeini's picture.

The Federation spokesman said Switzerland possessed the technology to make such watches "but so do some other countries as well. However, we are sure it was not made in Iran itself."

During the 1970s a wind-up watch



The Aletsch glacier – and the back-to-front stamp

appeared on the market with a non-flashing portrait of the late Shah of Iran.

"That watch also had a 'Swiss-made' stamp on the back," recalled the Federation spokesman. "But in fact it had been manufactured in Asia."

★ ★ ★

SWITZERLAND'S reputation for perfection and precision has been perforated with the embarrassed admission by postal officials here that a new Swiss stamp has a major design fault. The stamp is back to front.

The SFr. 2 stamp, which was issued last month, shows the massive Aletsch glacier sweeping down the Alps from left to right instead of the other way round.

Explained a Swiss Post Office spokesman: "The designer based the stamp on a colour photograph which had already been printed

in reverse, and nobody noticed the error."

The stamp is the latest in a "Zodiac" series and depicts a recumbent nude Virgo in the top right corner. Below is the wrong-way round Aletsch glacier, chosen because it starts from the Jungfrau (Virgin) Mountain.

The postal spokesman said the fault was discovered too late to halt the issue of the stamp, which is going on sale as normal. The stamp will therefore have no rarity value – and this will prevent speculation of the philatelic market.

★ ★ ★

Switzerland's football league programme resumed on February 27 (as this issue of the Swiss Observer was going to press) following the traditional winter break. Latest league tables were published in January's Swiss Observer.