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Autor: Farmer, Colin
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Railways on the wrong track?

SWITZERLAND'S Federal Railways justifiably enjoys an international reputation as one of the finest public transport systems in the world.

The standards of cleanliness and comfort are exceptional, the overall safety record is

outstanding, the 3,000-mile network extends to some of the most rural and remote corners of the country, and trains are so punctual that the Swiss are said to set their watches by them.

And it's fact rather than fantasy that second class rail travel in Switzerland is comparable, if not superior, to first class standards in many other countries.

But the maintenance of such a peak-performance operation is a costly business. The Federal Railways (SBB in German) has been running into the red for years, and has just announced, for 1982, a record deficit of almost Sfr 500 million – about £170 million.

Despite a number of excellent SBB schemes aimed at attracting more business, the recession here has been hitting passenger traffic hard and goods traffic even harder.

The railways are also facing growing competition from road conveyance operations, mounting costs for material, and increasing pressure from personnel demanding improved working conditions.

Unfortunately, there seems to be little light at the end of this troublesome tunnel.

Despite a 10 per cent increase in fares in April – the second such rise in only 13 months – the Federal Railways still predicts a further deficit of around Sfr 400 million this year. And that means that the SBB is currently losing at least Sfr 1 million per day

– or about £1,000 during the few minutes it takes you to read this brief item.

The Federal Railways' plight is made even more painful by the recent announcement that the number of motor vehicles on Swiss roads has reached an all-time peak of 2.9 million vehicles. That's an average of one vehicle per 2.6 inhabitants – man, woman and child. The vehicle density is one of the world's highest.

The most motorised canton is Geneva with 478 vehicles per 1,000 inhabitants, followed by Ticino (455) and Aargau (405). The least motorised canton is Basle City (297). Nationwide, the number of vehicles here has increased by a staggering 63 per cent over the last 10 years.

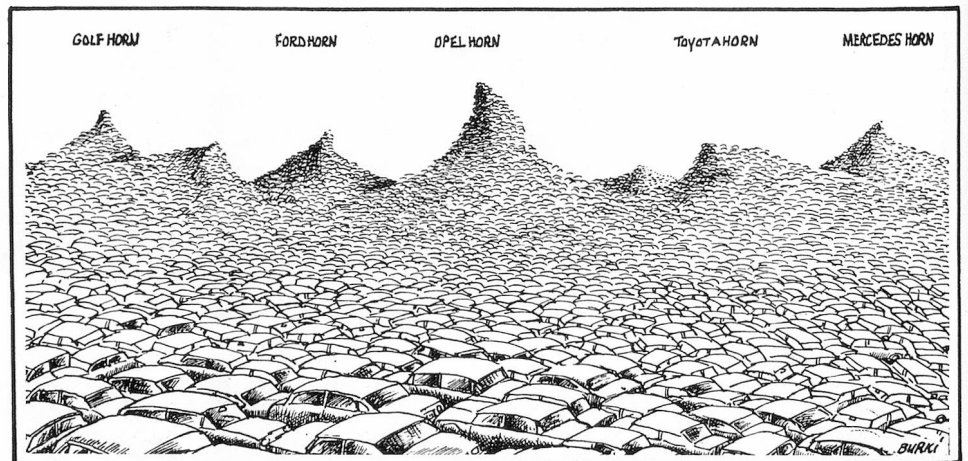
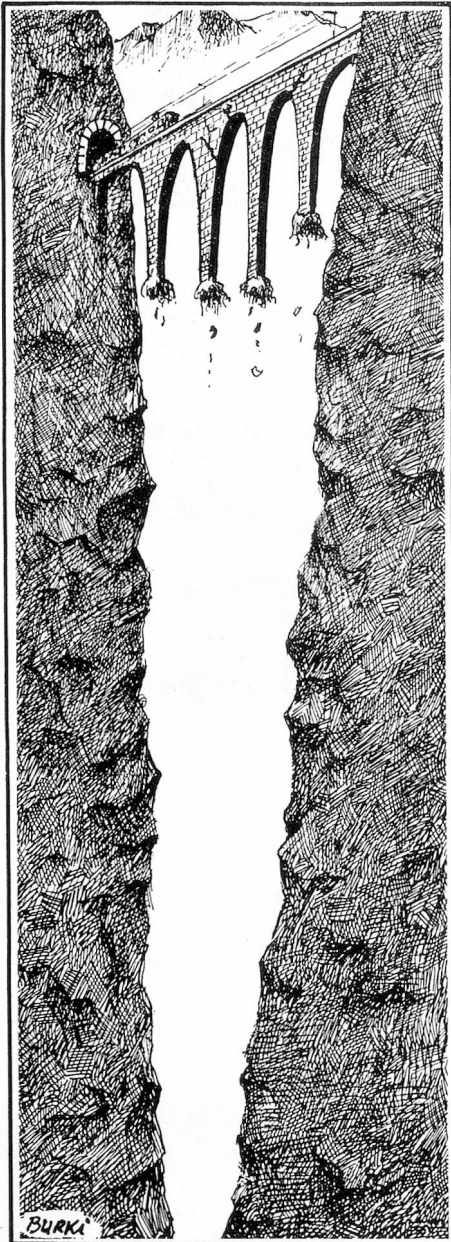
"That's just the trouble", complained an SBB spokesman. "Everyone in Switzerland has his own car – but they all expect a perfectly-run railway system, just in case the day arrives when they don't."

★ ★ ★

SWISS police are holding a 50-year-old British businessman suspected of complicity in a £12 million bank transfer swindle.

Police report that the man was detained after arriving here from Dublin and attempting to withdraw the money from a Geneva bank account that had been opened in his name.

It is alleged that the money should have



Swiss Federal Railways in trouble... while car totals reach new peaks. (Cartoons by courtesy of 24 heures, Lausanne)

.. reporting from Berne

been sent from London to New York, but was fraudulently transferred instead to Switzerland.

According to sources here, two people have already been arrested in London – one of them the telex operator at the British bank involved.

★ ★ ★

A MAJOR row rocked Swiss soccer on the eve of the national team's recent crucial European Championship game in Scotland.

Karl Oberholzer, president of Switzerland's defending league champions, Zurich Grasshoppers, was suspended for two years by the national league committee for "unsportsmanlike and unseemly behaviour."

Oberholzer was disciplined after making a scathing attack on league president Freddy Rumo, a candidate in the election for the new head of the Swiss Football Association – the highest post in Swiss soccer.

The ban so angered Grasshoppers' players – who make up half the national side – that they threatened to boycott the Scotland game. But the boycott was called off, and Switzerland drew 2-2 in Scotland to keep alive Swiss hopes of a place in next

year's European Championship finals in France.

At the Swiss Football Association election, Oberholzer accused Rumo of failing to keep promises and held him largely responsible for what he called "the miserable state" of Swiss soccer. Grasshoppers announced an appeal against the ban on Oberholzer, who

will remain in office until the appeal is heard at the end of the current season.

Rumo was eventually defeated by 57 votes to 43 by Heinrich Rötliberger, president of the minor clubs' league. Of the 28 first and second division clubs which make up the national league, Oberholzer was the only representative to support Rötliberger.



SWISS SOCCER

Football League tables up to and including April 8

'A' Division							'B' Division								
Pl	W	D	L	Gls	Pts		Pl	W	D	L	Gls	Pts			
Servette Geneva	19	15	2	2	42	11	32	Ch-de-Fonds	18	15	1	2	54	11	31
Grasshoppers Zurich	19	15	1	3	56	20	31	Chênois	19	12	4	3	39	23	28
Zürich	19	10	3	6	35	27	23	Chiasso	19	10	5	4	40	25	25
Xamax Neuchâtel	19	10	3	6	37	29	23	Biel	19	11	2	6	38	26	24
St. Gallen	19	10	2	7	36	21	22	Fribourg	19	8	7	4	35	25	23
Lausanne	19	9	4	6	32	21	22	Lugano	19	9	4	6	41	31	22
Young Boys Berne	19	8	6	5	24	24	22	Nordstern	19	7	8	4	30	24	22
Sion	19	7	7	5	31	23	21	Laufen	18	7	6	5	26	24	20
Lucerne	19	9	3	7	41	37	21	Mendrisio	19	7	5	7	29	35	19
Basle	19	9	2	8	34	26	20	Monthey	19	6	6	7	35	29	18
Vevey	19	7	2	0	28	38	16	Grenchen	19	5	8	6	18	22	18
Wettingen	19	5	5	9	27	31	15	Locarno	19	5	4	10	24	38	14
Belinzona	19	5	2	12	20	51	12	Berne	19	5	3	11	22	36	13
Aarau	19	4	2	13	15	36	10	Baden	19	2	7	10	15	37	11
Bulle	19	2	4	13	17	54	8	lbach	19	4	3	12	21	44	11
Winterthur	19	1	4	14	15	41	6	Rüti	19	1	1	17	20	57	3