

# Letter from Switzerland

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half of the population of the Jura. The festivities began on Saturday, September 7th, with a show in the Summer Palace of the old bishopric by the French singer Guy Béart. Crowds swarmed in the city during the whole of the following Sunday and thousands of patriotic Jurrassians waved flags of their future Canton. Never had so many people been present at these annual rallies which are by far the most important popular events in Switzerland.

The crowd's eagerness for biting, hard-hitting words was amply satisfied by Mr. Roland Béguelin, General Secretary of the Rassemblement Jurrassien, who in his speech said that: "The Jura owes nothing to Switzerland." Earlier, Mr. Béguelin had stressed at a Press conference that the results of the June 23rd Plebiscite in the Jura, which showed an overall majority in favour of a new Canton, were final. The provisions of the Bernese Constitution allowing for a second vote to satisfy voters in the three southern districts (who were in their majority against separation) were "outdated and contrary to the right of self-determination". The fiery Separatist leader said that if the three northern districts were condemned to form a new Canton by themselves following a second plebiscite, the Separatist Movement would set up a Secretariat in the southern districts to continue its campaign for a united Jura.

"There will be no peace in Switzerland if the Jura's unity is tampered with," he said.

Mr. Béguelin's second-in-command, Mr. Roger Schaffter, Vice-President of the Mouvement Jurrassien, said at the same Press conference that the Jura's unity was an "historical evidence" and added that reconciliation between the different tendencies of the Jura was indispensable to achieve this unity.

Meanwhile, the representatives of the three southern districts of La Neuveville, Courtelary and Moutier presented the Bernese Cantonal Chancery with signatures in support of an initiative backing the maintenance of these three districts in Canton Berne.

## LETTER FROM SWITZERLAND

### FIGHTING INFLATION WITH HIGHER CHARGES . . .

If one reads or listens to the speeches made by our highest magistrates, one gets the impression that fighting inflation and aiming at a policy of economic stabilisation have top priority in Berne. But there is, frankly, a wide gap between theory and practice and some of the measures either decided on or sanctioned by the Federal Council itself or its official delegate for watching prices are very difficult to understand.

Thus the Federal Council has decided to massively increase the import duties on petrol as well as on light and heavy heating oil. On petrol the increase amounts to 10 centimes per litre, which, if my calculation is right, corresponds to an increase of approximately 7 new pence per gallon. This decision has been justified by the need to reduce the expected deficit in the Confederation's budget for the current year from well above 2,000 million francs to well below this figure. The surcharge is, in other words, expected to bring in about 500 million francs. But it will, naturally provide additional fuel to heat up inflation and, of course, this attempt at reducing the heavy load on the federal finances by increasing the accounts for heating will be anything but popular. Compared with the level of just before the beginning of the oil crisis, the average heating bill has anyway already been increased by about 100 per cent. The answer given in Berne to all this is simply that the present federal Finance Minister, the newly elected Mr. Chevallaz, has inherited heavy deficits and that no Finance Minister has been elected in order to court popularity. But even so moderate a newspaper as the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* speaks of "uneasiness", about such surcharges being imposed at a moment when, after a period of upheaval, the market for heating oil seems to quieten down.

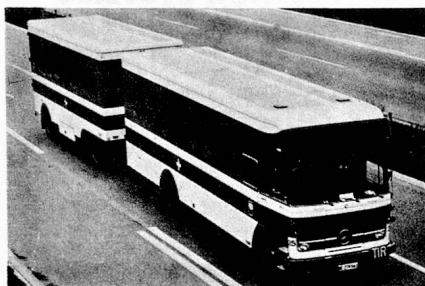
So far so bad. In order to wipe out a 300 million francs deficit of the PTT — a state monopoly — the cost of telephoning will go up by 40% (!) as from 2nd December and the subscription rate for having a telephone will follow early in the new year. On July first the charge for sending mail abroad — letters, postcards, parcels — went up considerably, letters by 50% (!), i.e. from formerly 40 centimes to at present 60 centimes. At the same time the efficiency of the postal services and the work done is being constantly reduced all over the country. Most postal districts around Zürich — and some in the town itself also — only have one mail delivery per day now, whereas on Saturdays only newspapers "with political content" are delivered.

So much for the PTT. Their example is being followed by yet another enterprise of the State: The Federal Railways. (And they in turn have been followed not long ago by the municipal tramways and trolley-buses in Zürich.) The Railways have not only increased their charges for tickets and season tickets, but they are — not without a few crocodile tears aimed at the travelling public — also abolishing the "Sonntagsbillete" or cheaper Sunday fares.

Switzerland is fast becoming an extremely expensive country to live in. So expensive that some American friends of mine who have recently spent five weeks in Switzerland with a keen eye on comparing prices have told me that Switzerland nowadays is much more expensive than the USA.

The price inflation is, according to official figures — on a so-called split index which excludes the prices for heating oil — running at around 8% per annum. But it is to be feared that — split index or not — the measures sanctioned and adopted by "Berne" will bring it up much higher. And not one of the beautiful speeches about fighting the inflation can alter this unhealthy trend.

Gottfried Keller



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