

Swiss events

Objektyp: **Group**

Zeitschrift: **The Swiss observer : the journal of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK**

Band (Jahr): - **(1974)**

Heft 1695

PDF erstellt am: **12.05.2024**

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SWISS EVENTS

FEDERAL

SWISS-AMERICAN AGREEMENT

The two Houses of Parliament have approved the Swiss-American agreement on judicial co-operation initialled on 25th May, 1973. The Federal Council has been authorised to ratify an agreement which will greatly help to improve relations between Switzerland and the United States. The accord was worked out during several years of difficult legal negotiations and effects a compromise between the Swiss and American laws. The United States were the first to instigate the agreement because they required some means to prevent organised crime from thriving on the Swiss banking system. The Swiss, on the other hand, were not prepared to endanger the principle of banking secrecy on which their success as international bankers rest. But they proved willing to compromise on the key-issue: organised crime. It has been agreed, in a 41-clause agreement, that the Swiss authorities would co-operate in the gathering of information in enquiries relating to the conviction of organised gangs. The agreement provides that in

those cases, banking secrets will be lifted. Although the agreement specifically leaves out political, military, anti-trust, and exclusively fiscal offences, fiscal cases will warrant an opening of banking secrecy provided that, as in the case of Al Capone, the only way to pin down a member of the Maffia is to charge him with tax evasion. The Swiss side has also accepted that American officials could personally investigate in Switzerland when their presence is necessary to establish the proof of a given crime. But the Swiss have insisted that any evidence gathered within the Agreement should not be used as evidence in enquiries or trials not connected with the case at issue.

Federal Commission on the Jura

Three members of the Federal Council, Mr. Furgler (Justice and Police), Ritschard (Transports) and Chevallaz (Finance) have formed a government commission which will examine the constitutional consequences of the creation of a 23rd Canton. Although the shape of the future Canton of the Jura is as yet unknown and will be determined through another plebiscite, the 23rd June Plebiscite in the area has at least cleared all doubts on the prospects of a new Canton. As this will require an amendment to the Federal Constitution, the Government intends to take the necessary steps to clear possible constitutional obstacles by the time the political fate of the Jura is decided.

Bill on abortion

Mr. Ernst Brugger, President of the Confederation, announced a Government bill on abortion that would give pregnant women almost complete discretion to submit to an abortion during the first three months of pregnancy. This bill, which will be debated in Parliament, is the answer to a popular initiative launched in favour of a complete legalisation of abortion. The government bill provides for increased material and moral support to pregnant women. The authorities would bring all the possible encouragement to bear for them to keep their child. Abortion will be authorised for medical reasons and "social" reasons, namely, when it is established that continued pregnancy would inevitably lead to "great distress". To obtain an abortion, a woman would require the assent of her doctor and of a social worker officially instated by the Canton. Observers note that this last provision would make abortion more difficult in some Cantons than in others. The operation would, for example be more difficult in the Valais than in Geneva. The proposed law is not expected to lead to an increase of the rate of abortion. Abortions are already carried out anyway by those who are determined not to have an unwanted child. But the new provisions would make these abortions legal and thus help to foster more respect for the law, as well as answer to the general feelings of the public today.

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The "Tiger" passes its test

Air Force test pilots have given full marks to the Northrop "Tiger F-5E", a ground assault fighter which they have submitted to 55 hours of flying tests as a prelude to its possible purchase. The tests, which were carried out on two aeroplanes based at Emmen, proved that the "Tiger" was well suited to Switzerland's particular requirements. The aircraft proved more manoeuvrable than the "Mirage" and "Hunters" already in service with the Swiss Air Force and had considerably faster acceleration than both. Handling very easily, the aircraft appeared to be well suited to the skills of a corps of part-time militia pilots. Its performance in descent and steep approach was better than specified by the makers, and the aircraft behaved well in bad weather. As a result of these tests, which with technical evaluation work have cost about fifteen million francs, the Army's expert will be in a position to recommend the aircraft's purchase to the Government. Some "Swiss" adaptations will be necessary. In particular, the landing gear will be adapted to snowy conditions and the aircraft will be fitted with a Swiss enemy-identification radar.

Federal subsidy for the defence of Romansch

Parliament approved a federal contribution totalling 640,000 francs for the defence of the Romansch language. The government proposals on the matter were adopted unanimously. 450,000 francs will go to the "Ligia romontscha/Lia rumontscha" and a further 190,000 francs to the "Pro Grigioni italiano". These subsidies are conditional on Canton Graubünden (where the language is spoken) contributing 260,000 francs of its own. The subsidies reflect the official policy to save a language which is still spoken by an estimated 50,000 people but which, without some kind of protection, is in growing threat of disappearance. One reason why it is getting harder to save Romansch is that the knowledge of German is compulsory. The burden of learning two languages borne by the people of the Grisons is necessarily detrimental to the survival of Romansch.

Human rights Convention ratified

After the Council of States, the National Council has ratified the European Human Rights Convention. Switzerland was one of the last countries to ratify this international document as the latter could not be signed as long as the political equality of women had not been properly established. The National Council rejected a proposal by Mr. James Schwarzenbach to have the issue referred to the people in a referendum.

Parliament votes for restricted participation

By a slender 90 to 86 majority, the

National Council voted for the Government's counter-Initiative on workers' participation in Industry. The proposals had been previously accepted by the Council of States. They are far less ambitious than the Initiative launched by the Trade Unions which calls for fully-fledged membership of company boards by workers' delegates. The counter-Initiative, which will eventually be offered as an alternative to the people, does not provide for labour representation at the company's board and would not allow employees to be represented by union officials. Participation would only concern the lower echelons of management and, in fact, hardly go beyond what is already in practice in several progressive firms. This explains the lack of parliamentary support for the project—which was strongly criticised by Socialist and other left-wing national councillors considering it as a useless duplication of existing provisions. But the conservative majority called for "realism". It claimed that it was better to start by enforcing a "minimal participation" and go on from there on the strength of experience.

MODERN LIFE

Swiss mushroom pickers too "greedy"

A small Franco-Swiss war is brewing in the forests of the Doubs Department, France, bordering on the Swiss Jura, over the picking of wild mushrooms. The inhabitants of the area are becoming increasingly concerned about the "invasion" of weekend mushroom gatherers from Switzerland who, they claim, are depleting their forests. Their complaint is that their southern neighbours, true to their tradition of thoroughness, are not content with picking according to their family requirements but take whole bucketfuls of precious mushrooms. Some Frenchmen claim that these visitors supply a packed-soup factory with their harvest. Moreover, hunters in the area complain that the mushroom pickers disturb game from their hunting lots. As a result, some twenty families who had come for the weekend in their cars found their tyres slashed. They lodged a complaint with the local police but this has doubled the furore of the French. This incident, the culmination of several individual confrontations, could trigger a small conflict in an area which not so long ago was the scene of a similar "snail war".

A circus tent wrenched down by the wind

A circus which had pitched its tent on the main square of Bassecourt (Jura) had its tent completely torn down by strong gusts of wind. The "Olympia"

circus, Switzerland's second after "Knie", estimated damages at 1.5 million francs. Its tent could contain 3,000 spectators. There was to have been a show the same evening but the organisers had fortunately cancelled it because of the weather. Olympia employs about sixty persons, including artists.

Bringing Switzerland's literary heritage to all

It is doubtful that educated French-speaking Swiss know much about Swiss-German literature (with the exception of such giants as Frisch and Durrenmatt) and likewise, few people in the western part of the country could readily name a modern French-Swiss writer. A new institution called *Fondation pour la collaboration confédérale* has set about altering this situation by launching a collection of translated works by Swiss writers. The "CH Collection" has been started with five works by four authors. Thus French-speaking readers will for the first time enjoy the works of Hugo Loetscher and Beat Brechbühl in their own language, while the works of the Goncourt Prize-winner Jacques Chessex and the Tessin writer Giovanni Orelli will for the first time be available in German.

Such an undertaking can hardly succeed without some kind of sponsorship. The markets that are aimed at are too small to warrant a commercial operation and it has been necessary to rely on the support of Cantons and several foundations, including the Oertli, Ex-Libris and Pro Helvetia foundations. The latter has undertaken to translate the works that are to be included in the new collection.

Switzerland builds road in Ivory Coast

Swiss engineers are to build Ivory Coast's first motorway. It will link Abidjan, the capital, to an outlying city 120 kilometres away and is provisionally budgeted at 120 billion CFA Francs. Mr. Paul Chaudet, former President of the Swiss Confederation, carried out negotiations for the Swiss side.

Obwald's Landsgemeinde at risk

A popular initiative was launched some weeks ago in Obwalden to scrap the Landsgemeinde in that Canton. But the Government of Obwald reasserted its faith in this age-old political institution and said that there were no pertinent reasons for doing away with it. The Government claimed that the meetings of citizens on the Landenberg still served its purpose, and that the inclusion of women had conferred new life to the Landsgemeinde. The Government plans to submit counter-proposals to the people of Obwald in order to save its Landsgemeinde.



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Kloten railway approved

The Council of States has approved federal expenditure of 95 million francs towards the cost of linking Kloten International Airport to the Swiss railway network. Total works are expected to last seven years and have been budgeted at 285 million francs, 172 million to be supported by the Railways, and 11 million by Canton Zurich. The works will involve the construction of a 6 km-long, two-way line which will be mainly underground. The National Council had already approved the expenditure. A similar railway link is planned with Ctrin airport, Geneva.

Miscellaneous

Massive rescue operation to save swallows

About a hundred thousand swallows were transported by air to the South of France, Tunisia and Spain after having been stranded by the cold in Switzerland. The birds were caught by a wave of cold just as they were about to set out for Africa on their annual return migration. The cold killed off the insects on which they feed and wore the birds out. They were to be seen huddled together on window ledges, in parks, on roofs and buildings.

The Press made an urgent call to the public to save these birds. The public were asked to feed them with diluted egg yolk and grain and bring the half-inanimate birds to the authorities. On the first day of the rescue operation, some 9,000 birds were shipped off in crates by Swissair, Air France and Iberian Airlines to the Mediterranean, where they could continue their homeward-bound journey.

Professor Pfuertner marries

Professor Stephanus Pfuertner, the Catholic theologian whose teaching on sexual morals at the University of Fribourg brought him a condemnation from the Vatican, has married. It was learnt at the end of last month that he had secretly married a German woman doctor, Dr. Irmgard Bloos, 36, during August. He had left the Benedictine Order some four months before but stressed that his ties to the Church would remain "very close".

Professor Pfuertner, 51, was Professor of Ethics at Fribourg's Catholic University in 1971 when he professed his twelve theses on sexual morals. He claimed, above all, that a fulfilled sex life was part of the "fundamental right of every human to happiness". As this principle conflicted with established Dogma, the Vatican asked for his professorship to be withdrawn. He was put on a Sabbatical leave while the controversy raged within the Church and in the Swiss Press, which generally

supported him. He resigned from Fribourg University last year and went to carry out sociological research at Bielefeld University, West Germany.

Geneva's prostitutes have family commitments

The prostitutes of Geneva have appealed to the Federal Court against a Cantonal decree forbidding them to exercise their profession during the day. The appeal was filed in the name of twenty of the call girls, who claimed that the new ruling had severely cut their earnings. They explained that they could not easily operate at night as they had "family commitments" to tend to and added that it was more dangerous to work late hours.

The decree had been passed to protect Geneva schoolboys from undesirable influences. But the women had a point when they argued that children had ample opportunity to see things that might be offensive to morals at the cinema or on TV.

A judge is absent in Dreamland

A lawyer has appealed to the Federal Court against a sentence passed by the Valais High Court because one of the judges had fallen asleep during the hearing. Backed by witnesses who testified that the magistrate had well and truly fallen asleep, he asked for a quashing of the sentence on the grounds that the Court had not been entitled to sit, since one of its magistrates had been absent . . . in dreamland.

A blackbird plays at station-masters

Employees at the Berne-Stöckacker railway station have been instructed to

abide strictly by regulations when signalling to the engine driver to start off. According to the last monthly review of the Federal Railways, station personnel must make sure they make the required forward movement with their hand, or lamp, when whistling for a start because a large African blackbird kept in a cage in the window of a nearby flat has caused confusion. For several months, the bird has taken to whistling whenever a train arrives on a platform, thus signalling its departure even when operations on the platform aren't completed.

SPORT

Regazzoni fails to win world title

The Swiss Formula I driver Clay Regazzoni has failed to win the 1974 World Drivers' Championship which went to Emerson Fittipaldi, the Brazilian ace who had already won the title in 1972. Regazzoni, 35, Fittipaldi, and the young South African Jody Scheckter were all three ahead of the Championship for the final Grand Prix of the season: the American Grand Prix at Watkins Glen. The race was won by the Argentinian Carlos Reutemann. Fittipaldi finished fourth and Regazzoni, whose Ferrari apparently let him down, finished eleventh. Scheckter, whose McLaren Ford had overheated, finished sixteenth. But the Tessin driver, who announced that he would continue to drive in world championships, emerged second in the world championship with 52 points, behind Fittipaldi, 55.

Letter from Switzerland

IS SWITZERLAND A POLICE STATE?

by Gottfried Keller

A few days before I left England to retire in Switzerland two years ago, a prominent Swiss friend of mine who lives in London warned me that Switzerland was in many ways a Police State compared with Britain. Was my friend right or was his statement an exaggeration?

It is, I am afraid, a fact that the climate, as far as relations between officialdom and the citizen are concerned, is much harsher in Switzerland than in England. Whereas official letters in the United Kingdom begin with a polite "Dear Sir" and end with the formula "Your obedient servant", in Switzerland the recipient of such letters is usually not addressed at all

and if in the end he gets a curt "Yours truly", he is lucky. This may be considered a banality, but it is nevertheless a banality which sets the tone and, as I have said already "c'est le ton qui fait la musique".

On arriving in Switzerland for the purpose of re-patriation one is, as it were, immediately thrown between the cogwheels of officialdom's machinery. I arrived in Basle, with a motor car, for which the Customs issued a provisional 3-day permit, coupled with the injunction that the vehicle had to be shown to the Customs Office in Zürich at such and such an address within this period. On arrival in Küsnacht we immediately had to register with the local authorities,