

Letter from Switzerland

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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 Countrin 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 As this principle conflicted with established Dogma, the Vatican asked for his professorship to be withdrawn.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. Schekter, 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

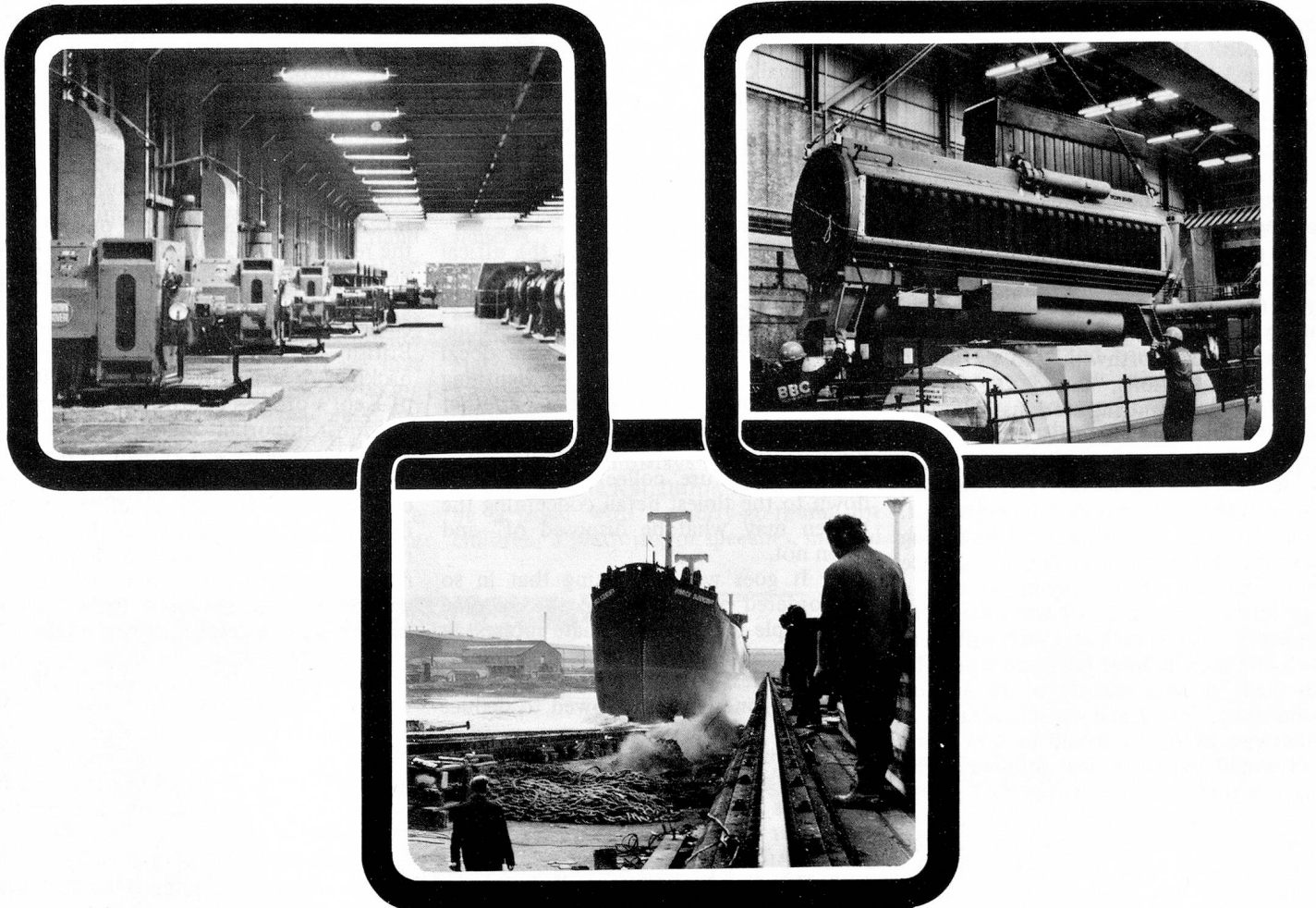
A few days before I left England to retire in Switzerland two years ago, a prominent Swiss friend of mine who lives in London warned me that Switzerland was in many ways a Police State compared with Britain. Was my friend right or was his statement an exaggeration?

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 Küssnacht we immediately had to register with the local authorities,

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which meant depositing the Certificate of Origin (Heimatschein)—this had to be got beforehand from the authorities of the place of birth, costing some 32 francs—in order to get a “Certificate of Settlement” (Niederlassungsschein). Armed with this document and within 3 days my wife and I then proceeded to the Zürich Customs Office where in the meantime the van containing our furniture and chattels had also arrived. The official in charge wore a pince-nez, but turned out nevertheless to be quite human. Gottfried Keller, he said, looking through heaps of accumulated paper, was this my name? And then he added—and this was his attempt at showing a sense of humour—that on the banknote Gottfried Keller wore glasses, why didn't I wear any? To clear the contents of the van took a few minutes, but to clear the car, a new one—it had to be put on the scales, as one pays duty per kilo—took about an hour and much writing. After this we were able to proceed to our new home and to start settling in.

Not very long did the peace last. One day a letter—without a “Dear Sir”—from the Cantonal Road Traffic Office (Strassenverkehrsamt) arrived. In it I was asked “forthwith” to answer a number of questions, “in order to prevent me from committing serious offences against the Swiss Road Traffic Regulations, which could have grave consequences”. How old was the car, where was it bought, what model was it, what h.p. had the engine and how long was the British Road Traffic Licence valid? Shortly after replying to this, a new letter came. In this I was ordered to present the car at such and such a place at such and such an hour for inspection. The car had, it was added, to be in top condition, “inside and outside clean”, as otherwise its owner would be sent home and would receive a new summons. The car was first given the works by a garage and a CH-sticker was attached and it finally passed the inspection. Zürich number plates were then issued and the Swiss Road Tax—assessed according to the cubic capacity of the engine—was duly paid.

Having passed the age of 65, I then had to have medical fitness examinations in order to obtain a Swiss driving licence. All in all I was examined by two eye specialists, by an official doctor of the Cantonal Road Traffic Office and by my own doctor. I had several electro-cardiograms, one after 22 knee-bends, my blood went to a laboratory in Basle, I was X-rayed, I had hearing and balance tests, I had to stand still on one leg and to walk blindfolded on a straight line. All this lasted several months, during which time I was allowed to drive, armed with a provisional kind of certificate.

So far so good. As I do not drive a great deal at night, the “Great Check-ups” (Grosskontrollen) which the Police—nowadays with the aid of the military police—are carrying out frequently, have not affected me at all.

When this happens some 200 to 250 men seal off whole areas at about ten o'clock at night, casting a control-net several miles wide. Any driver running into this area then has to show his driving licence, his road traffic certificate (Fahrzeugschein) and his accident triangles, which must under no circumstances be carried in the luggage boot. If there is any suspicion of alcohol he has to blow into a bag and a police doctor is on the spot to take blood samples. Thereafter follows a minute inspection of the car: tyres, brakes, lights, exhaust fumes, steering and God knows what else are tested. If the car is found not to be in roadworthy condition, its number plates are taken off and confiscated on the spot and the driver can either walk or see how he gets home. Some thousands of drivers and vehicles are thus tested during these operations which usually last to about 2 or 3 in the morning. And should any driver try to escape—the exit roads are barred by huge contraptions spiked with nails.

All this is, according to the official formula, done in the interest of increased road traffic safety.

A chimney sweep comes along twice a year, ordered by the local authorities to do so. A lightning conductor inspector calls and yet another official comes along to inspect the burners of the central heating. The rubbish or refuse collection is ordered down to the tiniest detail concerning the “when may what be disposed of” and when not.

It goes without saying that in so well-ordered a community the Income Tax people take an immediate interest in any newcomers. Their tone, however, is somewhat less curt and if one pays them forthwith one is even allowed to deduct 2% of the sum due.

Some of the Swiss Customs Officials seem to be amongst the worst offenders against the rules of courtesy. In a letter to the editor of the “Tages-Anzeiger” a reader complains bitterly about “dictatorial methods, offensive language, arrogance, conceit” on the part of Swiss Immigration and Customs Officers. Bad experiences with little tin-pot Hitlers at the frontier seem to occur fairly frequently, not so much to Swiss people who re-enter their country, but to many of the foreign workers whom they like to show up for “the nuisances they are”.

ANGLO-SWISS

**Lord Mayor of Geneva
invited at Mansion House**

Mr. Pierre Raisin, Mayor of Geneva, and his wife were for three days the guests at the Mansion House of the former Lord Mayor of London, Lord Hugh Wontner, just before the end of his

term of office last September. Mr. Raisin was invited to sit at a normal session of the City Council in the presence of 25 Aldermen and 159 Councillors. He was invited to address them and conveyed the warm greetings of the people of Geneva. He said that Geneva wished to keep good relations with every city in the world and was particularly proud and happy of its long-standing relations with the City of London.

BRITISH WORKERS FOR SWISS SOLUTION

The great majority of the 7,000 employees of the George Kent Group, whose process control interests had attracted the interest of Brown Boveri, have voiced support for a deal which would place their company under the wings of the Baden-based Swiss industrial giant. This consultation, which was probably the first attempt of its kind conducted on a large scale in a takeover-bid situation, was organised at the request of Mr. Tony Wedgwood Benn, Secretary for Industry, who wanted to know the workforce's position on a choice involving either a takeover by the British firm GEC with Government backing, or a takeover by Brown Boveri of Kent's process control division, by far the most important sector of the Group. The Government was known to back the “British” solution although it would have cost at least £6 million of tax-payer's money, but the majority of the workers realised, following the opinion of the majority of specialists, that their future would be more secure if Brown Boveri took over. The great majority of the 600 workers of Cambridge Instruments, a part of George Kent which Brown Boveri would hive off, were in favour of the GEC and Government alternative, but 84 per cent of those employed in the factories which Brown Boveri is seeking to take over were in favour of this eventuality.

Brown Boveri's original intention was to have a controlling stake in George Kent's process control division, whose production would be complementary to its own. The new company would be called Brown Boveri Kent. But it now seems that the Swiss firm would settle for less than a controlling stake in order to overcome Government opposition.

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