

Letter from Switzerland

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once traded on the Léman, transporting stone and gravel for the construction of Geneva and carrying Confederates to the Port Noir at the liberation of Geneva from the French in 1815, was bought some years ago by the City. The Municipality decided to save the boat and devoted some 500,000 francs of its Historical Monuments Fund to restore the timberwork of the two-masted craft. But the interior finish, the engine, and the fittings required for eventual touristic operations can only be completed with a further supply of money from the public. 300,000 francs are required for the preservation of a witness of the Léman's history.

Miscellaneous

A BANK IN TROUBLE

The International Credit Bank (BCI), which announced last month it was suspending operations pending a legal decision on its future, announced it had sacked 40 of its 135 employees.

"It is impossible to keep all our staff on while things are in an uncertain state. We have dismissed about 40 employees who have been with us for the shortest time", a bank spokesman said.

The spokesman said other redundancies were possible but that they would not be on a large scale.

The Geneva-based bank, which has been at the centre of a financial controversy involving the Israeli Government and prominent French banker, Edmond de Rothschild, said on 10th October that it had applied to Geneva's Civil Court for a temporary freeze on payments.

It said it had been forced to take this action because false press reports about its liquidity position had led customers to make considerable withdrawals.

The spokesman said that the bank was still waiting for the court's decision on a payments moratorium, which could be for a period of between six months and two years. "We are optimistic about the outcome", he commented.

The Israeli Government has ordered its Treasury Department to find out whether the Israel Corporation, a development and investment-seeking organisation which it sponsors, broke any laws by depositing funds in financial institutions associated with BCI main shareholder Tibor Rosenbaum.

Talks have been going on in several countries to aid the BCI. The Israel Corporation's Chairman, Baron de Rothschild, called an emergency meeting of the Corporation's Board of Directors two weeks ago to discuss how to support the bank in which it had placed large funds.

The Geneva Union of Bank Employees said in a statement that it was seriously worried about the fate of BCI personnel and called for further meetings with Management.

In London, it was discovered that

Prime Minister Harold Wilson had a current account of £50 and a deposit account of £1,450 with the bank. Both of the accounts were frozen because of the moratorium. The money had been supplied by a Labour supporter but Mr. Wilson had never used any of it.

RATION CARDS PRINTED

The Swiss Government confirmed that it had ordered the preparation of Food Ration Cards, but added that there was no supply crisis in sight.

A spokesman for the Economics Ministry said households are advised, as always, to keep sufficient stocks of some basic foodstuffs in reserve to last two months.



Among the recommended reserves are two kilograms of sugar per head, one kilo of rice, one kilo of spaghetti, one kilo of butter or other fat, a bottle of cooking oil and tins of vegetables, fruit, meat and fish.

The spokesman added that whereas it took several months to organise a rationing system in World War Two, the new arrangements would enable ration cards to be distributed to the country's six-million population in only a few days.

LETTER FROM SWITZERLAND

The weather-gods have behaved strangely this year. As if somebody had pulled a wrong switch summer has suddenly turned into an early winter. After some abnormally hot Indian-summer days the temperature fell dramatically, the radio announced heavy falls of snow in the higher regions and the first winter coats appeared in the streets. Hundreds of thousands of swallows who had not yet emigrated were caught by the cold snap and many were dying of hunger, as the insects, their natural food, had disappeared. An appeal was then made to rescue swallows and to hand them in, packed in strong cardboard boxes with air holes, to any Federal Railway Station, whence they would be sent to the warmer regions of the Ticino. Swissair then joined in this rescue-operation and flew some 200,000 birds to Nice and Barcelona. Not all of them have survived, unfortunately, but it was, nevertheless, most gratifying to see how everybody responded. Even the Zürich police — which is by no means noted for its courtesy — became human and opened collecting-stations, where cardboard boxes of live birds could be handed in for quick transport to the air terminal.

As from 1st October the "Neue Zürcher Zeitung" has started appearing once a day. Not so very long ago this quality newspaper came out three times daily, then twice and it has now been forced to adapt itself to the general trend of considerably reduced postal deliveries. The "N.Z.Z.", as it is known everywhere, is, I believe, one of the last, if not the last, Swiss daily newspaper which has been compelled by circumstances to concentrate all its contents into one issue per day. It has become considerably thicker and has lost none of its high quality, even if some of the topicality may have gone overboard. It still informs the reader about politics and economic problems abroad and at home, about

literature, cultural events, sport, the happenings in the courts, and overall the high level of its journalism, including its language, has not suffered. But it is, nevertheless, a noteworthy event that even the "N.Z.Z.", with its considerable resources, has, as it were, become a victim of the shrinking process of a state monopoly enterprise.

Switzerland has, as it now turns out, too many cablelifts, funiculars, tesièges and ski-lifts. There are more than 1,500 dispersed all over the country, 980 of which are members of an association. According to published figures, about half of the cablelift enterprises are in the red. They sprang up like mushrooms in the boom years of the 'sixties and some are even competing with one another. Thus one may well ask whether it is necessary to have two easy routes up the Rigi: one from Vitznau, the original one, and one from Weggis, a few miles away. Another two take people up to the Brienz Rothorn, the first one from Brienz on rails and a second one, built much later, from Sörenberg in the canton of Luzern. Yet another example concerns Zinal, once a small mountain village in the Valais. There a cablelift to Sorebois has been constructed, although Zinal is lacking the infrastructure to sleep and house sufficient guests to make such an enterprise pay its way. The access road is still narrow and fairly bad and the Club Méditerranée has now more or less taken over the village. They appear, as is well known, in masses, they pay badly, and, as is also well known, where they appear, other guests have a habit of disappearing. No fewer than three cablelifts now take people up to the Säntis massif and the region around St. Moritz — which I happen to know well — is a chapter in itself. If the present economic circumstances now put a stop to this exaggerated building craze, they can be said to be a blessing in disguise.

Gottfried Keller