

Bank raid in Carouge

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BANK RAID IN CAROUGE

An old brown stone building housing the "Caisse Hypothécaire" at the angle of a quaint tree-lined square in Carouge, a Geneva suburb south of the River Arve, was the scene on Monday, 20th May, of a failed hold-up followed by a prolonged siege with hostages. The main events of this long suspense were televised and were seen by British television viewers.

The bank waid was launched on the morning at ten o'clock. The three bandits who stormed in, all Frenchmen in their early thirties, had apparently little experience of the job because they were immediately disturbed by the alarm and before they had time to escape, let alone grab money, three gendarmes came storming towards the bank. One of the bandits jumped in the white Peugeot used by the three men. He fired at the gendarmes, one of whom received a bullet in the buttock. The police fired back and the fleeing man was hit more seriously in the back. His car was found with a blood-stained driving wheel less than an hour later parked alongside the Arve. The man was found in the evening lying inside a nearby flat which he had broken into. A fourth man, believed to have taken part on the raid, was also being searched for at the end of an unusually exciting day.

Back at the Rondeau de Carouge, a square reminiscent of Carouge's Italian past, crowds were arriving to witness the siege which was to last eleven hours. The bandits made a first attempt at breaking out by protecting themselves with two

employees, Mrs. Landolts, 60, and Miss Gallati, 21, caught in the bank during the raid, but retreated. They then locked their two hostages in the bank's toilets

and started to bargain with police to be allowed to escape unhindered.

A hundred armed police were called in. They were led by the local officer on



The two raiders leave the Carouge bank with their hostages to the getaway car.

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duty, Mr. Jean Grin, who undertook to settle this affair while avoiding bloodshed at all costs. Mr. Grin conducted negotiations with calm and patience. He approached the bank several times with his hands held in the air to talk to the bandits. He began to establish contact by bringing food to the occupants of the bank and didn't hesitate on their demand to prove he was unarmed by pulling down his trousers.

But showing his calves to television viewers around Europe was recompensed by the bloodless outcome of the siege. As protracted negotiations between the gunman wore on, Mrs. Landolt, who had just resumed work after recovering from shock she had suffered when another branch of the same bank in which she was working was raided a few months ago, felt unwell. A doctor was brought in but the bandits refused to let him in.

The bargaining was conducted mainly by telephone and the two men were most talkative with reporters, claiming that they meant no harm to anyone. One of them said that he was an honest man with a mother and a grandmother. But their hostages, who were eventually unlocked from the toilets, answered some of the calls weeping and almost hysterical.

The gunmen discussed their demands calmly with newsmen. Television viewers heard a recorded conversation with one raider and in a direct transmission watched them preparing to flee in a getaway car which had been brought to the bank on their demand. The raiders had asked for a BMW 2500 to be parked in front of the bank, its doors open and engine warmed. Each of these demands were met. The car stood in front of the bank for over an hour while the bandits dithered inside, fearing apparently that they would be the victims of a Munich-type shoot-out.

Sightseers, sipping beer and coffee, watched the drama unfold from tables at nearby cafes. Others hung out of flat windows trying to see what was happening. The whole area had been sealed off and tram No. 12 had been made to halt several stops before its Carouge terminal.

Bizarre incidents lightened the sombre tension.

At one point, a young man with long blond hair walked across the deserted square to the bank with his hands raised and was allowed in.

Police warned the gunmen he was coming but said he had nothing to do with them. The bandits locked him up in the bank lavatory where he was found unharmed after they made their getaway.

Then a 28-year-old Swiss, apparently drunk, stripped to his underpants and blue socks, arrived at the bank door and offered himself as a substitute hostage. But the gangsters spurned his suggestion, seemingly made as the result of a wager, and the long-haired man retraced his steps and got dressed again.

A report of another shooting incident involving a hostage in the French town of Annemasse only three miles away across the border caused a flurry among the police and the crowd. That incident, which had arisen from a disturbance in a bar, had nothing to do with the Geneva crime. A hostage was killed and the bandit managed to get away.

The police accepted a deal proposed by the bandits which would

allow them to escape unhindered and unfollowed in the BMW. Agreeing to a hide-and-seek formula, the police promised that they would not chase the men for fifteen minutes and the two raiders pledged to release their hostages.

As darkness settled, they bundled the terrified women into the getaway car, pistols at the ready and sped off into the night while armed police stood by without interfering as they promised.

The gangsters also honoured their share of the bargain, releasing the women unharmed less than half an hour later in the city centre, only about two kilometres away. They abandoned the getaway car leaving their pistols, ammunition and a bag of stolen money in the back. The police with tracker dogs traced them to a nearby building site and arrested them without a struggle less than two hours after their flight from the bank. They were found with the rest of their loot tied round their belts and taken to hospital for a medical check before being locked up in St. Antoine jail. Their wounded accomplice was found two hours later in a flat not far from the bank and two other men were arrested during the night in connection with the raid.

LETTER FROM SWITZERLAND

The system of direct democracy, as it is operated in Switzerland, may have its advantages if it is compared with the system of parliamentary democracy of the United Kingdom. But it undoubtedly also has its disadvantages. In Great Britain the voters usually go to the polls once every four to five years to elect a new parliament, in addition of course to being called upon to vote locally in Borough Council elections. But all the important material decisions are left to the men and women – in Westminster and Whitehall or in the Town Halls – in whom the power of decision-making is vested.

In Switzerland the people of voting age do not only elect those who represent them in the authorities, but they are also called upon to take part in decision-making – whether qualified for

this task or not. Thus in Switzerland one may be asked to vote for or against new bridges or underground railways (as not so long ago in Zurich), highly technical projects in other words, and on one and the same day the voters may be called upon to decide on federal, cantonal and local matters.

On June 30th next the people of voting age in the Canton of Zurich are asked to vote on no fewer than seven different problems. Some of these are certainly of considerable importance, such as for example, a socialist initiative about introducing a wealth-tax. Another one is – again the result of an initiative – about introducing a new law to combat juvenile crime. Yet another one concerns environment protection and “the maintenance of dwelling space in urban



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