

Home news

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Editor's telephone: 01-602 1378

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HOME NEWS

Dismal support for a "strong army"

A petition launched all over Switzerland in favour of a "Strong Army" was backed by only 245,338 signatures. The army officers who organised this demonstration said that its results had not come up to their expectation. Two previous petitions of a similar kind had won far greater support. A petition to preserve the Cavalry and the use of the horse in the Army was supported by 430,000 Swiss, including Socialists opposed to military service. Another petition staged to defend — of all things — the use of chiropractic (healing of diseases by manipulation of the spine) found no less than 400,000 signatures of support. These results show that the concept of military service is losing its popularity among the Swiss people. The promoters of the petition expressed surprise when they discovered that the name of Mr. Rudolf Gnaegi, Head of the Military Department had not been seen on the lists, whereas other former members of the Government, such as Messrs Weber, Schaffner and Wahlen had signed the petition.

Cleaning the Alps

Faced with a growing garbage-disposal problem, the Swiss Alpine Club has announced a determined drive to equip its 160 mountain huts with adequate facilities. The larger huts will in addition be equipped with small incinerators whereas the others will be relieved of their disposal problems by helicopters. The announcement has been welcomed by the many mountaineers who viewed with growing alarm ice crevices, gaps between boulders and torrents being used for the disposal of tins and biscuit boxes. It is estimated that about 150 tons of waste are thus thrown away every year in the neighbourhood of mountain huts. This will in future be destroyed on the spot, or evacuated to the valleys by helicopter.

Steady stream of applications for political asylum

361 applications for political asylum have been submitted to the federal authorities during the first six months of this year. Nearly all these requests come from people having left the countries of eastern Europe, mainly Hungary (130 applications), Czechoslovakia (59), Poland (39) and Romania (34). Applications were received from 44 countries. There were fewer of them than during the same period last year (405). A total of 1,053 applications were registered in 1972, 967 of which were accepted.

COMMENT

AU PAIRS — NOT A SUBSTITUTE FOR THE HOUSEMAID

The fast growth of the au-pair institution has been brought about during the sixties by several converging factors such as the loosening of family ties, growing individual independence, easier travel facilities and the importance of the English language. These and other factors have made the journey from Switzerland to Britain both easier and tempting.

An au pair is essentially a guest receiving board and lodging, pocket-money currently averaging £5 a week in exchange for household help. All that is required to have a girl come over from the Continent is a letter certifying that they are to live as au pairs in a family. No stamps, no contributions have to be paid for this particularly adaptable type of labour. On the other hand, one must pay taxes for a char-woman called to dust the floor twice a week.

Most girls who take up "employment" as au pairs are without professional qualifications. They come from simple backgrounds and more often than not from rural areas. This fact alone makes them more vulnerable to the possible dangers of living far from home in a city like London. Although the population of Swiss au pair girls in London has remained more or less stationary (at about 4,000) during the past years, more and more of them actually come to the capital because their average stay has dropped considerably. While au pairs used to remain for a year or more with their British host families, now the duration of their stay sometimes doesn't exceed a couple of months. There are more arrivals and departures, and therefore more work for au pair agencies and consulates.

An au pair is a cheap substitute for a housemaid. Since the days of housemaids are over, there is a strong temptation to keep alive the illusion that au pair girls are housemaids, which they are not, and make them do the work expected of maids, nannies and cooks.

The treatment given to au pair girls used to vary so much that it was impossible to describe au pair work. Some girls were allowed to go to a school

of English after an easy morning's work and offered holidays with their host families, while others were compelled to do permanent overtime with washing-up, cleaning-up and handling unruly children. Au pairs have occasionally been driven to irresponsible behaviour, such as dishonesty or ill-treatment of the children in their care. Tactless "employers" combined with the enormity of London — and the many problems for which the less stable girls were not prepared — have occasionally led to dealings with mental homes and the law. The au pair institution has brought many hardships to guest teenagers (although, to be fair, the families that invite them usually offer them a lot). Although the status of au pairs is not defined by law, Home Office directives specify that they must not work for more than 30 hours a week. It is also specified in a booklet which is readily available at immigration departments that boys can't be employed as au pairs. Any young Swiss entering Britain without a working permit may not obtain remunerated work in this country. Non Common Market au pair boys are therefore forbidden. Although it is easy enough for a student or apprentice to find a loop-hole, he will be told to leave Britain at very short notice should he be found in the employ of a family.

According to a recent article in the *Guardian*, there is a growing fashion for au pair boys. The Swedes, closely followed by the Swiss, the Italians and the Portuguese are supposed to be the most apprized. By allowing a free movement of labour, the Common Market could give a further impetus to this trend, which is after all in keeping with the growing equality and likeness of the two sexes.

Au pair boys present many advantages over girls: they are prepared to perform manual work such as gardening, they can drive, offer protection, show fewer personal problems and will not be exposed to unwanted pregnancies. It remains to be seen whether they are as good at swathing babies. It appears that only experienced fathers — and by no means all — are prepared to undertake this rather clinical task. Some boy au pairs have misgivings about pushing a pram as this is a trifle too offensive to their male self-image.

P.M.B.

THE "BELIERS" OCCUPY EMBASSIES

Two groups of young militants for the independence of the Jura from Canton Berne staged identical demonstrations on the same day in Brussels and Berne. On Friday, 3rd August, 34 young people

The Swiss of Gex build a chalet

Although they are only three miles from the Swiss border, the Swiss residents of Gex (France) have a strong sense of their national origin. Without such feelings they would never have undertaken to build a large Club Chalet, which was opened at the end of July after three years of efforts. This building was entirely financed by contributions by the Swiss Club of Gex, of which many members personally took part in the erection of the chalet. The Swiss of Gex have the opportunity of motoring into the heart of the Motherland every weekend. They all the same organise yearly outings by coach to selected sites in Switzerland, and their yearly First August celebrations are major events usually attended by important figures from "back home". Being so near to home has certainly not diminished the sense of identity of the Swiss from across the border.

including nine girls occupied the Belgian Embassy in Berne. The demonstrators belonged to the "Belier" Separatist organisation with the exception of five Belgians belonging to a French-speaking movement in their country. They told police that they were demonstrating to show solidarity with "fellow victims of linguistic and cultural oppression".

At the same time, 29 young boys and girls took possession of the Swiss Embassy in Brussels. All of them were in their teens and members of the "Belier" Group.

Whereas the Berne demonstrators were promptly evicted by the police and detained, those in Brussels managed to hold the Embassy for 22 hours. Both demonstrations were carried out peacefully and there were no incidents.

The five Belgians involved in the Berne demonstrations were detained for two days by the police. To protect against this, "Belier" militants occupied the Delemont Police Headquarters for about three hours before effecting a strategic retreat upon the arrival of police reinforcements. The Belgians had in fact been released.

These demonstrations were in support of a speedier progress of the Jura towards independence from Berne. "Belier" militants say they are "loosing

patience" at the sluggishness of both cantonal and federal authorities and plan to resort to more and more active demonstrations to achieve their aims.

The "tip included" controversy

The three associations representing the Swiss hotel and catering trades plan to sign a national convention definitely instituting the "tip included" principle. They plan to have talks with the Office for Industry and Commerce (a division of the Economics Department) to have the proposed convention enforced throughout the country. The disappearance of tips was started about three years ago in the main German-Swiss towns. Its generalisation has been slow in French-speaking Switzerland. Although the relevant trade organisations have now agreed to include service charges everywhere, many individual restaurants in large French-speaking towns, mainly Geneva, object to the change and still maintain tips. They are said to object to the resulting increases in dinner bills. Employees also claim that they will stand to lose in the towns where patrons are "more generous" - with a fixed service charge. This issue has been highly topical in Switzerland since the first restaurants put an end to tipping. One important chain of restaurants banned tips to re-introduce them later. The public has welcomed the change but complained that tip-inclusion has been used as a pretext for excessive bill increases.

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ROCHE UNDER FIRE

The Swiss pharmaceutical group Hoffman-La Roche is passing through a difficult patch. Following the recent decision by the Court of Appeal not to allow the company to challenge the DTI's order to reduce the prices of the drugs Valium and Librium by respectively 75 and 60 per cent of their 1970 levels, the West German Government has now been taking a closer look at the pricing policy of the firm in West Germany. Moreover, the Common Market's Commission had announced that it, too, will examine possible monopoly situations in the European pharmaceutical market. It said that the Roche pricing situation is now abnormal with the cost of the two drugs being far lower in Britain than elsewhere in the Community.

But the danger for the firm's turnover certainly comes from Germany, where Valium is sold at two-and-a-half times the price applied in Britain before the 12th April Order by the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI). The West German Cartel Office has started legal proceedings against the manufacturers of about 13 different pharmaceutical products. It announced that it had started legal action against Hoffman-La Roche concerning Valium and Librium. Its case was largely based on documentation

received from the British Monopolies Commission, whose report was behind the British price-slashing Order. The Cartel Office hopes that success in its investigations will cause many pharmaceutical producers voluntarily to reduce their prices for fear of legal action.

The Cartel Office is believed to be pursuing Hoffmann-La Roche with special zeal. A major court action may be inevitable. Roche will not accept price reductions in West Germany without a legal fight as it might otherwise be forced to make similar reductions in other countries.

The group's legal fight in Britain will now be brought before the House of Lords. On 30th July, the Appeal Court quashed a previous decision by the High Court, which stated that the Government was not entitled to compel Roche to reduce its prices without pledging to compensate the losses incurred should the company win its suit against the price-slashing order equally brought before the High Court. In effect, Roche Products Ltd. would have been allowed to increase its prices to their previous levels and place the extra income in a separate account until the outcome of the first suit against the DTI, expected to last for about two years would be known.

The Appeal Court accepted the Government's refusal to commit itself to

compensate Roche Products and ordered the firm to obey the 12th April Order. Roche Products were nevertheless allowed to appeal to the House of Lords, and eventually to claim damages from Parliament.

Despite this set-back, the mother-firm in Basle has announced that a £5-10 million investment programme spread over three years in its British subsidiaries would be carried out as planned. The company has initially said that this programme would be cut in reaction to the price-reduction Order. The green light has nevertheless been given following a visit to London by Dr. Adolf Jann, the group's Swiss president, and Dr. Alfred Hartmann, his deputy and senior policy-maker. Finance will be found from other subsidiaries since the British branches will lose £3.5 m a year as a result of the price-cutting Order. Before 12th April, the Group was believed to have an annual turnover of £11 m in Britain, or 4 per cent of world sales.

THE PRESIDENT CALLS FOR A MORE DEVELOPED SENSE OF CIVIC DUTIES

In his traditional National Day speech to his compatriots, the Swiss President laid emphasis on the need for less indifference and more active participation in the political life of the community. Mr. Roger Bonvin, Head of the Department for Transports and Communications, and President of the Confederation for 1973, deplored the growing absence of voters at the polls. He stressed that the Confederation, the Cantons and the Communes were institutions everyone had a duty to serve and defend. He called for a growing awareness of the benefits the Swiss, whose material blessings deserved the envy of the world, derived from the traditional institutions of their country. He accepted that these institutions had to change to adapt to constantly changing circumstances, but insisted that every citizen was called upon to participate in this renewal in a spirit of loyalty, and not to reject responsibility in the country's political future with disdain. He said that the 1st August should be a day of reflection on the country's problems. It was more than ever necessary to reject the growing scepticism attaching to the purposes of voting and to availing oneself of the most developed democratic institutions in the world. The State should not be considered as something distant and estranged from the people.

The President said that the nation was faced with many tasks which called on the complete co-operation of its citizens. Among those problems, he named the fight to control the economy from overheating, the protection of the environment and the country's energy requirements. He ended his address by calling once again on his fellow citizens "to take an active part in our political life so as to help us to solve together the difficult problems which confront us".



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Survival of the Old Morals

Living together non-maritally is still considered illegal in some cantons of eastern Switzerland. In Zurich, the law was abrogated last year, but St. Gall and its neighbours have laws making persons of the opposite sex living together outside the bonds of marriage liable to imprisonment or fines. Police are nowadays called only on denunciation and rarely inflict fines above 80 francs. About 10 cases brought yearly to the knowledge of the authorities.

These laws, which have no counterpart in the Federal Code and which have never existed in the French-speaking cantons, were originally devised to defend marriage as the only form of community between man and woman. Nowadays, these relate only to public order and decency. It is generally recognised, even in the remote areas of St. Gall, that times have changed. Living together outside marriage is therefore no longer as shocking

Painter 'crucified' on one of his works

A gypsy painter with a well established reputation in the Saint Etienne area (France) was found crucified on one of his paintings entitled "crucifixion of a clown". This strange case has interested the French-speaking public not least because the artist, Pierre Strap, made his debut on Geneva and is known in France as *le Genevois*. He had a hand nailed to the frame of his canvas with a screwdriver and the other tied with a leather strap. He was unconscious when found by tourists in this unusual posture in the rear of his estate car not far from the river Loire.

as it used to be. But the law remains the law until it disappears and it hurts the law-abiding character of many Swiss to see it breached. In Thurgau, the authorities occasionally refuse unmarried couples to settle down in a commune at the demand of its more virtuous residents. The law is somewhat more supple in Appenzell. Concubinage is banned only if it causes a "real" scandal. Respect for the law in St. Gall occasionally goes quite far: An 80-year old couple had to marry because the warden of an old age pension home refused to let them live in the same room.

SWISS SCHOOLS ABROAD

The study group set up to make recommendations for a new organisation of Swiss schools abroad has recommended a limitation of non-Swiss enrolment and an increase of about a third of Federal aid.

There are at present nineteen Swiss schools abroad. All were created privately, but are at present subsidised by the Swiss Government. The enrolment to these schools, which have children in the primary and secondary levels has reached 5,351 in 1972, about a third of them Swiss. Eight schools are in Italy, six in South America, two in Spain, one in Ghana, Thailand and Singapore. The most recent one was founded in Madrid in 1971. Of their 269 teachers, 173 are Swiss. These schools rely on fees ranging from 600 to 1,200 francs a year at primary level, and donations from local colonies. Their constant growth and increased overheads have made Federal aid indispensable. This aid amounted to 4.2 million francs out of an 11-million franc global budget. Berne contributed a further 2.8 million for building costs and half a million for sundry expenses. The curriculum of these schools is such that young Swiss abroad can continue their studies in the Motherland. The group agreed that the schools were of great use not only to Swiss residents abroad but also to the country as a platform of Swiss culture. Their work should therefore be continued and fostered within a solid framework. The group recommends that the schools should meet certain standards in order to be recognized by the Confederation. Their teaching should follow the spirit of our national traditions; no less than 30 per cent of their enrolment should be Swiss; and their Board, directors and the majority of their teaching staff should also be Swiss. These schools should furthermore comply to certain requirements in respect of minimum size and number of classes. It is recommended to pay teachers directly from Berne. These teachers should be Swiss unless there are no national candidates for the job. A fixed subsidy should be allocated to Swiss parents, or Swiss mothers for each child attending these schools. Subsidies would thus rise to about 7.5 million francs a year.

PORTUGAL'S PARTICIPATION AT THE COMPTOIR SUISSE CAUSES COMPLAINTS

Following the alleged massacres by Portuguese troops in Mozambique, the participation of Portugal as guest of honour (with Bulgaria and Tunisia) at the forthcoming *Comptoir Suisse* in Lausanne has produced ripples among Swiss public opinion. In the belief that Portugal's presence at the annual fair would "affront many Swiss citizens", a socialist national councillor from Geneva, Mr. Jean Ziegler, has called on the Federal Council not to co-operate with the Comptoir and not to be represented at its Official Day.

Afraid of possible demonstrations on the eve of the coming local elections, the Radical Mayor and M.P. for Lausanne has asked the Government to suggest to the Portuguese authorities that they should reconsider the problem of their participation at the forthcoming fair "in their own interest and not to uselessly provoke public opinion".

In answer to these representations, the Government has underlined that Portugal's participation at the Comptoir did not pertain to its competence but to that of the organisers. According to an official communique, "The Swiss maintain normal relations with Portugal and believe that these should not be changed as positive information regarding the behaviour of Portuguese troops in Mozambique are lacking". As for the organisers of the Comptoir, they have announced that their invitation to Portugal would be maintained.

Pacifist minister cancels sermon

A minister who had planned to preach on a passage from Isaiah (ch 2 v. 4-5) implicitly calling for a refusal to serve in the Army instead called on his parishioners to read these verses at home and cancelled his sermon. This was Pastor F. Ludwig's way of protesting against the recent confirmation by the Federal Court of sentences passed on a magazine for quoting the German pacifist Wolfgang von Bochert. Minister Ludwig told his congregation at Weinfeld (TG) that he could not make his sermon as planned as he would probably be thrown in jail. "I wish to accuse no one. But once again a fraction of our freedom has been taken from us. It is becoming increasingly dangerous to be a Christian in Christian Switzerland".

Pastor Ludwig then asked his congregation to understand him and to pray for him.

A Swiss refused job of p.a. to an African chief

A young Swiss woman hailing from Chur was refused a visa for South Africa. Miss K. Hartmann, 27, just come back from a stay in Britain, had the unusual ambition of becoming the secretary of Chief Gatsha Buthelezi, head of the Kwazulu Homeland and one of the most influential non-white personalities in South Africa. Miss Hartmann was told by the South African Embassy in London that

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“after careful consideration”, it was not possible to accept her request. But Chief Buthezezi complained in an open letter that this incident showed how South Africa’s “homeland” policy was nothing more than a manoeuvre to gain time. “We will never be really independent and the freedom promised to us is not for tomorrow”, he wrote.

A new agreement to protect investments in Egypt

Switzerland and Egypt have signed an agreement protecting and encouraging Swiss investments in Egypt. The agreement, which had been negotiated for over a year, also touches on the remaining unsettled cases of expropriation by Swiss nationals. Of 700 litigations filed when King Farouk was ousted from power eighteen years ago, 30 have still not been solved. The others have found a settlement with Egypt disbursing over 20 million francs in compensation.

The agreement also called on both parties to settle their commercial debts quickly in the interest of mutual trade. This referred to the Egyptian side, which has suffered from constant foreign reserves shortages.

A communique by the Commercial Division of the Department of Public Economy stressed that the agreement was the first of its kind ever to be signed by Egypt. Twenty-four such agreements had already been signed, mainly with developing countries, and twenty were in the course of negotiation with countries in Africa, South America and Asia. The first compensation and investment guarantee agreement was signed with Tunisia in 1964.

The problem of Church Tax

In some cantons the official church enjoys the returns of an obligatory local tax, in some this tax is voluntary, and in others there are no such taxes at all. A group chaired by an Independent M.P. from Zurich, Dr. Fritz Tanner, has launched a new initiative calling for an end to all forms of Church taxation and to a complete separation between the Church and the State. The signature-collectors gathered over a thousand in the first three hours of work in the streets of Berne. They require 50,000 signatures before they can have their proposals submitted to the people in a popular referendum.

Dr. Tanner said that he wanted the Constitution to state explicitly that the State and Church are separate, and allow Cantons two years during which to comply to this principle. Cantons should no longer be allowed to levy Church taxes on the incomes of individuals. Dr. Tanner explained that the actual system favoured only the official church. It was not equitable since the other churches received nothing. In practise, protestant churches have an advantage over the Catholic Church. Dr. Tanner added that Switzerland was a lay country. “In the name of God”, the invocation appearing in the preamble of our Constitution, had no legal significance. It was therefore unjust

that the Churches should be financed by the whole population and not solely by those who belonged to the Church. He recalled that even limited companies had to pay Church Tax in Zurich. One

consequence of this situation is that churches with State support are very well off financially and can offer their ministers salaries which would make their colleagues dream throughout the rest of the world.

The case of the Libyan Pilots

An agreement between a Swiss firm, the authorities of the airfield at Magadino, Ticino, and the Libyan Government for the training of 19 Libyan air force pilots in the handling of helicopters caused a stir in the Canton. The cantonal government held an emergency debate but came to no positive conclusions though rueing the fact that it had never been consulted in the negotiations. It turned a deaf ear to the political implications of the matter (e.g. possible violation of Swiss neutrality) but concentrated on the amount of extra noise to which local people would be submitted.

The Swiss firm, *Heliswiss* claims that the training programme is purely civilian. But a number of politicians said that the deal was politically unwise and called for a debate in Berne. The Cabinet eventually examined the issue but ended its session with a statement saying that the Government did not have the power to rule on the matter, which was a cantonal issue. Meanwhile, the cantonal government has threatened to cancel the deal between the Swiss company and the Libyan air force although it was not clear at the time of writing whether the training programme was to be allowed to go ahead.

The affair has again focused attention on the ability of a neutral country to sell arms and provide military assistance to countries in political foment. It follows hard on the heels of a number of revelations about Swiss arms turning up in crisis areas.

In July, for example, a working party against arms exports appealed to the Government to ban the export of weapons to Chile. The group claimed that arms worth four million francs had been sold to Chile in February and March this year and used in the recent attempted coup against President Allende. The Government declined to comment on the allegations but in June it was forced to answer parliamentary questions about the export of armoured cars to Bolivia. It admitted having authorised the export of a final series of armoured cars to that country because of the “business commitments” of the company involved.

A new law came into effect in February. Adopted by the people as a counter-proposal to a complete ban on arms exports which was rejected by a small majority, it tightens existing regulations and bans exports of arms to crisis areas. Among the countries on the arms-ban list where Swiss exports of arms have allegedly taken place with a resulting official enquiry

are Nigeria, the Philippines, Laos, South Africa and South Vietnam.

The Magadino incident has led to a strong letter of protest to the Government by the “Swiss-Israel” Association.

Swiss aid to the Third World

Public and private resources spent in aid to developing countries totalled 670 million francs in 1972 against 1,009 million the previous year. The proportion of the Gross National Product represented by this amount fell from approximately 1 per cent to 0.58 per cent. Public aid more than doubled (rising from 111 million to 248 million francs) but the outlay (investment) of private industry has fallen from 837 millions to 344 million francs last year. Export credits, both secured and unsecured, have fallen from 362 million to 77 million. This takes account of the reimbursement of previous credits. Loans on the Swiss capital market have also decreased by 30 per cent, reaching only 140 million francs. Aid given by charities and private sources increased from 58 million francs in 1971 to 69 million.

Swiss firm involved in French bankruptcy

The Swiss watch-component firm “Ebauches S.A.” is keeping a low profile as the turmoil over the bankruptcy of France’s no. 1 watch company, *Lip*, continues to be one of the most controversial issues in France. Ebauches S.A. is the French firm’s principal shareholder. After having staged for two months the first work-in of French industrial history the 1,300 workers of Lip received the first wage packets ever raised in defiance of management. The French Government announced a plan to break Lip into three new firms. A watch-making concern would be set up by Ebauches S.A. and the French Institute for horological development. The armaments and machine-tool interests of the defunct company would be taken over by potential French candidates. The scheme would involve the loss of 300 jobs and was rejected by militant unions representing the workers. The French Government also sent a “lame-duck specialist” to help put the plants back on their feet. Meanwhile, Ebauches S.A. published in a laconic communique recording its “satisfaction” at the French initiative. It added that it would be prepared to continue investing in Lip as long as the burden was shared by another partner.