

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

**Herausgeber:** Federation of Swiss Societies in the United Kingdom

**Band:** - (1974)

**Heft:** 1693

**Rubrik:** Comment

### **Nutzungsbedingungen**

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. [Siehe Rechtliche Hinweise.](#)

### **Conditions d'utilisation**

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. [Voir Informations légales.](#)

### **Terms of use**

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. [See Legal notice.](#)

**Download PDF:** 16.05.2025

**ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>**

with the most typical Swiss name, Doctor Schweizer, was Alsatian — like Mr. Nestlé. Among the most noble activities were those of the many private tutors, educators and governesses of Swiss origin who found employment among the aristocracy of the world. Czar Alexander I, probably the best Emperor Russia ever had, proudly declared: "All I am, I am through a Swiss." This Swiss was his tutor Cesar de la Harpe.

#### A will that should have been ignored

Innumerable anecdotes can be told of successful, or sometimes eccentric, Swiss abroad. One who combined both these characteristics was Henri Moser, from Schaffhausen, the son of the promoter of the Swiss watch industry in Russia. He received the title of Baron Moser Charlottenfels, made expensive trips to Turkey, Persia and Afghanistan; He collected stupendous art treasures, plenty of money and ended mysteriously as Ambassador of Hercegovina and Bosnia in Paris at the outbreak of the First World War. He spent the ensuing war years in a house built near Schaffhausen by a Russian architect looking like the casino of an international spa. When he drove in his carriage, a Turcoman in full livery preceded him and he himself wore all the ribbons of his decorations including the rosette of the Légion d'honneur. With all this, his wife, the daughter of a Swiss banker from Naples, complained to a friend that they had the feeling that, although respected, they were not really

liked in Schaffhausen!

Some Swiss abroad left some remarkable wills. This was the case of Pierre Thellusson, a wealthy Swiss banker of the City who died in 1797. His will complicated the lives of a great many people. He left a portion of his estate, estimated at £100,000 to his wife and six children. The remainder, worth £700,000, he assigned to trustees to accumulate at compound interest during the lives of his sons and sons' sons. On the death of the last survivor, the estate was to be divided among the oldest male descendants.

This will caused a sensation. It was calculated that by the time of its division, the estate might have grown to £35,000,000. A law was passed to prevent the drafting of similar wills again. For sixty-three years of law suits and appeals until the death of the last of his grandsons, the members of the family

contested the way the estate was being administered and litigated against each other. In 1859, the House of Lords delivered the final judgment and divided the estate, but years of litigation and mismanagement had left little of the original capital.

Now an anecdote about a lady! There was a Swiss lady who mingled with the high society of Buenos Aires at the beginning of the century. She thought it a must to be seen embroidering in her drawing room. But her fingers were too clumsy from the hard work on the cattle ranch which was at the source of her husband's millions, and she hired a French girl to undo her daily work at night and then bring it a little further. But her visitors were not fooled and said that she held the needle the wrong way and pulled the thread down as though she was still milking her cows!

## Comment

### PLANNING THE FUTURE

The energy crisis has been most efficient in making us aware of the limits to the natural resources of this planet and the fundamental precariousness of our supplies. Shortages in other commodities such as sugar, wheat and even toilet paper has brought home the fact that we, as a growing population, must share goods available in limited and sometimes

diminishing quantities. Recent events have also shown that our supplies can be upset by relatively minor upheavals. Paper was in short supply this year because of a strike in Canada. Sugar was unavailable because of price fluctuations which have caused exporters to sell it elsewhere than in Britain. Wheat has shot up in price because of bad harvests, and the same will happen to feed grains with delayed consequences on the price of meat — because of disastrous conditions in the United States.

The world's growing concern for its

# When you lunch out, lunch inn



Our beautiful Four Seasons Restaurant offers superb food, impeccable service and a relaxing view over the Park; which, like our Menu, reflects the changing attractions of each season.

On the other hand, if you prefer to lunch in a more traditional and intimate atmosphere — try the popular Vintage Room. It serves a full International menu, but is especially proud of its fine Scotch steaks and ribs of beef.

(After dark, our Vintage Room takes on a night-club atmosphere where you can dine from 8.30pm and dance from 9pm until 2am.)

## *Inn on the Park*

Hamilton Place, Park Lane, London, W 1 Tel. 01-499 0888

problems of supply, population growth and conservation was reflected this year by a number of very important conferences. The Law of the Sea Conference which has just adjourned in Caracas, Venezuela, was concerned with the exploitation of the sea's natural resources. In April, the United Nations held a special General Assembly to discuss the protection of the natural resources of developing countries. Last year, the United Nations sponsored the first world conference on the environment in Stockholm and last month, it organised the world's first population congress in Bucharest.

This concern is expressed with varying emphasis in individual countries. Switzerland is particularly concerned with environmental protection because of her small size, large population, high standards in respect of the quality of life, advanced economic development and great natural beauty. The coexistence of these factors carries a number of contradictions which have lent particular urgency to problems of the environment in our small country. The fact that the environment has now been discussed at world level indicates the need for a common approach and the necessity to do something about the problem. In Switzerland, the debate has been mainly held at parliamentary level and has led to new legislation on land planning, and to a referendum on the matter.

A great new idea of modern times is that the future can be controlled by creating, today, the right circumstances. So far, western countries have laid emphasis on their economic development and have gleefully expanded economically without too much consideration on the side-effects of this policy. But now, the West, and particularly Switzerland, has accepted that the future has to be *planned* and that the trend of the past two decades cannot be left uncorrected.

One of the things covered by planning is population. It is not envisaged at this stage to fix a national target for population growth and influence individual families in their fertility. In fact, Switzerland has a small demographic growth which is not expected to push population to much more than seven millions by the turn of the century. But even if the population only rises by a million during the next thirty years, it will still be necessary to organise the way these new inhabitants will live and work. Urban distribution and accommodation will have to be planned. There is some political uncertainty attached to the problem, since an initiative like the one heralding the 20th October Referendum on foreign presence can obviously affect population forecasts.

Planning also touches on economic development. Establishing growth rates, calculating curves in production, employment and traffic has a meaning for individual income. Planning in this respect really consists in deciding whether or not we should be more prosperous.

Deciding on our optimal individual wealth would obviously depend on outside factors, such as world supply of commodities and the buoyancy of world trade. It is therefore impossible to make long term forecasts which, incidentally would also be related to the problem of foreign labour. By keeping many foreigners in their country, the Swiss are preserving a precious aid to their prosperity. But this presence has its disadvantages and the choice facing the people is: Are we prepared to maintain our prosperity, or become even richer, with the help of a vast supply of outside manpower, or do we consider the economic benefits of so many foreigners as not worth the disadvantages. Not all the Swiss who will vote for the repatriation of a sizeable part of the foreign resident population see the problem in this light. They believe that their standards of living will not be affected by their decision.

Planning generally deals with figures and statistics. A federal commission chaired by Mr. Alois Huerlimann, a national councillor, is currently at work on finding the optimal road map of the country. It has recently produced data on commuting to and from work. It established that the Swiss on average take 15.2 minutes to go to

work, and that 44 per cent of them go by foot. The average distance covered by all those who do not work at home is 4.3 km. This distance is covered on average 2.9 times a day, with the result that the Swiss spend about three quarters of an hour a day in commuting. Students have been found to take far longer because of the much larger distances they have to travel.

One wonders whether this data has immediate relevance to planning road transport, or whether it was collected for the pleasure of pure knowledge. But the effort does remind us that working is only one part of our active life. Transportation also has a bearing on the quality of life, and it should be possible to establish an optimal time of journey, bearing in mind the physical and mental effects of commuting. The figures released by the Huerlimann commission indicate that every part of our lives, considered for a large sample of people, can be measured and quantified. These statistical results may not be particularly relevant to the solution of individual problems, but aim nevertheless at controlling the future of society as a whole. However, these studies must be guided by the principle that the welfare of man should be placed above everything else. P.M.B.

## SWISS EVENTS

### FEDERAL

#### Austro-Swiss contacts

The Austrian foreign affairs minister, Mr. Erich Bielka, paid an official 3-day visit to Switzerland at the beginning of the month during which he had talks with his Swiss counterpart, Mr. Pierre Graber. This visit was part of a regular exchange at this level by the two neighbouring countries which have many common interests and share the same points of view on many international matters. The topics discussed by the two men included the planned nuclear power station at Ruethi, in Canton St. Gall. The Austrians living across the border in the Vorarlberg area have voiced concern over the environmental risk of the future installations and a bilateral commission is currently studying this problem.

Mr. Graber also played host during the month to the Cuban foreign affairs minister, Mr. Raul Roa, who is on a tour of European countries. Mr. Graber entertained him to a working lunch at the "Lohn". The two men discussed international and bilateral affairs.

#### Beginning of "Operation Sahel"

The Swiss Rescue Corps set up to

help in disasters abroad has begun its first mission in the Lake Tchad area of the Sahelian zone of Africa. Work to raise this voluntary force began in 1971. Three years later, everything was ready for putting a generous idea into practice. The Tchad mission will serve as a test for future missions. Five million francs have been allocated for its work of aid and reconstruction in an area which has been particularly badly hit by famine. Eighty-five hand-picked young Swiss, chosen as much for their human qualities as for their professional qualifications, have been sent to the area. Fifteen are remaining in Switzerland to handle logistics. The teams on the field will have 12 Land-Rovers, 10 Unimog lorries, eight heavy trucks, two Pilatus Porter monoplanes and six radio transmitters at their disposal. Most of this material was supplied by the Swiss Army. The teams have been told to help the locals to be as active as possible in the reconstruction programme they have gone to Africa to promote; Mr. Pierre Graber, Head of the Political Department, launched the operation with a Press conference in which he said that the mission was in keeping with Swiss aid across the world: making the best possible use of limited development resources.

#### Increased telephone charges

To offset the increasing losses of the telephone system, the Government has increased telephone rates by 40 per cent. Subscriptions will increase, and so will the cost of inter-city conversations. These increases will bring about 390