

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: 1676

Rubrik: Home news

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The Swiss Observer

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Published Twice Monthly at
63/67 TABERNACLE STREET
LONDON E.C.2
Tel: 01-253 2321

Telegrams: Paperwyse London
PREPAID SUBSCRIPTION RATES
(POST FREE)

UNITED KINGDOM

24 issues	£2.40
12 issues	£1.25
6 issues	£0.65

SWITZERLAND and elsewhere

12 issues Frs. 13—	or £1.30
24 issues Frs. 25—	or £2.50

Swiss subscriptions may be paid into
Postcheck Konto Basle 40-5718

HOME NEWS

BANKRUPT BANKERS TRIED IN BASLE

A Basle court sentenced American ex-banker Paul Erdman and other former leading officials of the United California Bank (UCB) in Basle to prison terms ranging from two-and-a-quarter to nine years.

The bank, a Swiss subsidiary of the UCB in Los Angeles, collapsed in 1970 after losing about 200 million Swiss francs (about £17 million sterling at prevailing exchange rates).

The crash, biggest in Swiss history, was blamed on speculative dealings in cocoa and silver futures.

The Basle correctional court sentenced Mr. Erdman in his absence to nine years imprisonment, ordered him to pay a fine of 20,000 francs (about £2,500 sterling) and barred him from entering Switzerland for 15 years.

Mr. Erdman, who was vice-president of the bank, did not appear when the trial began last October, and lost his bail money of 400,000 francs (about £50,000 sterling).

The accused were found guilty of repeated fraud, forgery, fraudulent acquisition of falsified certificates, dishonest management and giving false information on commercial companies.

Sentences for the other directors and deputy directors, all of them Swiss, were as follows:

Mr. Alfred Kaltenbach — five years imprisonment and 20,000 franc fine.

Mr. Beat Schweizer — three years imprisonment and 10,000 franc (about £1,250 sterling) fine.

Mr. Bernhard Kummerli — five years and eight months imprisonment plus 20,000 franc fine.

Mr. Helmuth Brutschi — two years and three months imprisonment plus 15,000 franc (about £2,000 sterling) fine.

Huge explosion in Basle

A resounding explosion rocked the Schweizerhalle area of Basle when a steel tank containing a nitrobenzol-based chemical blew up in a Ciba-Geigy workshop, wounding 23 persons and shattering windows in the neighbourhood. The thrust of the explosion disintegrated the tank completely and projected parts of it through a concrete floor to the workshop below. Damages to the building were estimated at several hundred thousand francs.

COMMENT

1974 MAY BE THE YEAR OF THE JURA

The Jura may come to the forefront of Swiss news this year. A plebiscite is planned for late June which will give the people of the Jura an opportunity to state their position on the separation issue. But this operation seems doomed from the outset because the Separatists have asked their members to deprive it of all meaning by voting with the anti-separatists while the third force, known as *Mouvement pour l'Unité du Jura*, has asked its members either to vote against Separation or cast a blank vote.

The past three years have not seen the slightest progress towards a solution to the Jura problem. Three years ago the Commission of Four Wise Men chaired by Mr. Max Petitpierre, former President of the Confederation and Switzerland's leading post-war statesman, came out with proposals for the future of the Jura. Briefly, the people of the French-speaking areas of Canton Berne were offered the choice between the status quo, total independence from Berne and autonomy within the Canton. The three solutions are defended by as many movements.

The Separatists naturally want to create a new canton but reject the political steps recommended to achieve this by the Mediator Commission. The reasons for this also explain their planned attitude at the June plebiscite. They claim that people who have lived only three months in the Jura should not be allowed to vote on the future of the area, as provided for by a 1970 Amendment to the Bernese Constitution. Secondly, they claim that the thousands of citizens of Jurassian origin living across Switzerland should be allowed to vote on the Separation Issue. This is forbidden by the Federal Constitution which only allows one to vote on matters relating to one's canton or commune of residence.

The Separatists are therefore not prepared to take part in any form of vote or democratic procedure to determine the future of their province barring an amendment of the Bernese and Federal Constitutions, because they stand to lose at any plebiscite asking Jurassians to choose between separation and continued membership to Berne. They

lost in a similar vote during the middle fifties. Far from considering themselves a minority, the Separatists claimed that the outcome of that vote was due to a strong "imported" German-speaking element. The German-Swiss who have settled in the Jura — particularly in the areas above Biel — are naturally content to live under the aegis of Berne. Their French-speaking opponents deny them the right of "true Jurassians". Allowing them to vote on the Jura would be like bringing white colonists and black natives together to vote together on the issue of independence, they claim.

The Third Force, on which many hopes have been placed, has never had a serious impact on Jurassian opinion and has suffered severe defeat in the Cantonal Parliament in its efforts to increase Jurassian parliamentary representation in Berne. The Third Force believes that an independent Jura including both the Separatist and anti-Separatist areas would soon disintegrate and would be content with a special status within Berne. This demand is sneered at by the Separatists and ignored by the anti-Separatists, whose leadership, *l'Union des Patriotes Jurassiens*, is strongly committed to a continuance of the actual structure.

In its effort to respect the country's federal traditions, the Federal Government has steered clear of the Jura affair although it has had discussions with the parties concerned and members of the Mediator Commission. For the past 25 years, the Jura problem has been considered primarily as a Bernese affair. The Separatists and Third Force are now calling for federal intervention, though not for the same reasons. What such an intervention can hope to achieve is not clear since the attitude of the Separatists and the "Old Canton" have not changed. Berne has gone some way in allowing the Jura to determine its own future, but this is considered as insufficient by the *Rassemblement Jurassien*.

The great body of Swiss opinion has condemned the Separatists and their various demonstrations in the capital and elsewhere. It is difficult to say whether their position has gained ground in the Jura. It is more likely that the various regionally and religiously-rooted tendencies have not spread out from their geographical confines, but hardened and increased the danger of a split of the Jura.

P.M.B.

Surprise Election at the Federal Assembly

Defying party discipline, Swiss members of parliament have rejected the three official candidates for the vacancies on the Federal Council and chose to elect a trio of outsiders.

The Federal Assembly (joint session of the lower and upper house) chose Mr. Willy Ritschard, 55, a heating engineer, to succeed retiring Social Democrat Interior Minister Hans-Peter Tschudi.

The Government retains considerable economic power

The Swiss people showed overwhelming support for the Government by agreeing on December 3rd to extend for two years the enforcement of four federal decrees taken in December 1972 to combat inflation. These four decrees provide for credit restrictions, tax advantages on investment, supervision of the building industry and controls on prices, wages and dividends. The only cantons to reject this package were the Valais and the Grisons. The trade unions had declared their opposition to the idea of wage control, which has however hardly been put into application so far.

The deputies voted for Mr. Hans Huerlimann, 55, a lawyer, to take over from Transport minister Roger Bonvin, a Christian Democrat. They also named Mr. George-André Chevallaz, 58, former mayor of Lausanne, to replace outgoing Finance Minister Nello Celio, of the middle-of-the-road Radical Party.

The new Government members are all from the same parties as the men they succeed, but they were not officially nominated for office by their respective parties and won their seats in contests against the official party choices.

This caused a sensation in Switzerland. It was the first time in its history that *three* official nominees for the Federal Council were rejected by the Federal Assembly.

Mr. Ritschard defeated Socialist Party President Arthur Schmid by 123 votes to 77. Mr. Huerlimann was preferred to Mr. Enrico Franzoni, former Chairman of the National Council by 132 votes to 84, with the consequence that the Government will be without a member from Ticino for a while. Mr. Chevallaz beat Mr. Henri Schmitt, head of Geneva's Department of Commerce and Labour by 137 votes to 93. This caused a great upset among the Genevese, who had

hoped to be represented at the Federal Council for the first time in fifty years.

The new Government member will not automatically take over from their predecessors, who retired on 31st December. The Federal Council will allocate portfolios later.

Although a party's delegates are supposed to support the official candidate, there are various sub-groupings with special interests within parties and it is difficult for the leadership to enforce discipline in all votes. There were strong pressures for the election of Mr. Chevallaz, one of the leading figures in the Radical Movement, who was narrowly defeated by Mr. Celio in the 1966 parliamentary elections. As for Mr. Schmid, observers said that his nomination had only been a compromise solution and that his nomination had been rejected by the right of the Socialist Party. Mr. Ritschard's election brought a wave of joy in his native Zoug.

The Federal Assembly elected Economy Minister Ernst Brugger, 59, a Radical, to serve as Swiss President for 1974 in succession to Mr. Roger Bonvin. Socialist Foreign Minister Pierre Graber, 54, was named Vice-President.

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Swiss Gallery in Paris

A Swiss Art Gallery has been opened in Paris at No. 17 Rue Saint Sulpice. This project came into being with the help of donations from artists and local authorities in Switzerland. It will give an opportunity to artists from all countries to stage exhibitions for periods averaging three weeks for a sum of a thousand francs. The main promoter of this new "fifth Swiss" institution is Pierre Von Allmen, curator of the Arts Museum of Neuchatel, who felt that it was time to reverse the Paris-to-Switzerland direction of most artistic exchanges.

Many Swiss artists, particularly from the German-speaking parts, are powerfully attracted to the French capital and attach great importance to the opportunity of exhibiting there. It is unfortunately very difficult to exhibit as an outsider in Paris, since most galleries sign contracts with their regular exhibitors or charge exorbitant prices (over £3,000 for a fortnight) for the others. The Swiss Art Gallery should improve this situation.

Although it is likely to be welcomed by all Swiss artists remaining at home, Swiss artists living in Paris say that they will spurn the Gallery's services. Most of them have already made their own arrangements with local galleries.

AID TO SWISS PEOPLE ABROAD

The Federal Council has decided to implement the new federal law on assistance to the Swiss abroad on 1st January of this year. The new legislation will offer federal assistance to all Swiss having resided abroad for more than three months who fall into trouble. Duly notified to the consulates concerned, such cases will be given financial attention.

Old and young people who find it necessary to return to the Motherland but who cannot do so by their own means will be helped and asked to reimburse only when they are out of need. Young people aged under twenty will not be held liable for repayment unless they behave irresponsibly, or in any way which could hurt Switzerland's interests abroad. But Cantons will continue to pay for expenses asked of Switzerland by other States under certain bilateral assistance agreements. Such agreements exist with France and West Germany. The new law enhances the help of the Confederation to its nationals abroad and replaces the less secure and unequal help hitherto provided by the communes of origin.

The Confederation offers practically unlimited guarantees to the Solidarity Fund for the Swiss Abroad whose usefulness has been demonstrated in Chili. Twelve Swiss have had their property either occupied, expropriated or nationalised by the Allende regime. Nine of them have received support from the Solidarity Fund.

But more importantly, they do not wish to be associated with anything Swiss as their reason for living in Paris is to escape from their original environment. Many of them — a recurring attitude in Swiss culture — feel that art should not have a national etiquette. Added to this is the fact that Swiss artists in Paris try their best to integrate into their Parisian environment. This attitude is to some extent prompted by a kind of uneasiness, or inferiority complex, said to be shared by many Swiss over their country's artistic achievements with respect to those of the mighty French. But this attitude is likely to change with the tremendous success of Swiss films in Paris and the award of the prix Goncourt to a Swiss, Jacques Chessex, for the first time ever. Such a trend indicates that Paris, that Mecca of the arts, is opening up to the artistic world of the French provinces and other countries sharing the French language as the vehicle of their culture.

Sexual education backed by the Government

In answer to a question tabled by a national councillor from Zurich, Mr. Tanner, the Federal Council has expressed support to the idea of sexual education in the terminal classes of primary schools but stressed that the matter remained within the sole competence of the Cantons. Following the rejection by the people of new constitutional articles on obligatory schooling, the matter should be tackled by the conference of cantonal education chiefs, added the Government.

Sexual education is a topical subject in Switzerland and there is a growing current opinion in favour of an organised framework of sexual instruction, something which had traditionally been left to parents, and accessorially to non-public institutions such as the churches. Very few cantons have introduced sexual education at school, in others, this is left to the discretion of headmasters. One canton which is in advance in this field is Geneva, where five hours of sexual education are given in the terminal class of primary education (age 13 to 14 years). Three of these five hours are dealt with by doctors asked to lecture by the schools, and two others by the school's own staff. In Vaud, the educational authorities have asked a social organisation called Pro Familia to send specialists to talk to children about the problems of sex and marriage. In many cantons, where there are as yet no provisions for this type of education, teachers have often taken the initiative of delivering talks on sexual problems. Authorities in the Valais hold the view that the matter should be handled by parents at primary school level, and there are plans to educate parents to teach sexual education to their children.

Consequences of the petrol crisis

The petrol crisis has had the same results in Switzerland as elsewhere in Europe. It has resulted in a drastic fall in the sale of cars and considerable reduced mileage by Swiss motorists. Sunday driving ban was in force for three weeks with most unfavourable consequences for the hotel trade.

Transport companies are having a difficult time, and Swissair has drastically cut the number of its scheduled services with Great Britain. Thirteen return night flights from Zurich to London, four similar flights from Geneva and two from Basle have been cancelled. Other cancellations have been decided on transatlantic flights. The speed of aircraft has been reduced by about 30 kmh, adding 20 minutes on the Geneva-New York journey but reducing fuel consumption by over 1.5 tons in the case of a Jumbo jet.

Switzerland is even more dependent than Britain on Arab petrol but uses it mainly for motoring and domestic heating (this accounts for 80 per cent of total energy consumption). Industry runs on electricity, which in Switzerland is nearly entirely of hydraulic origin. There are very few factories, mainly in glass and plastics, which require imported fuel. There are no blast furnaces and other heavy industries using vast quantities of imported energy. This situation will surely then raise the problem of developing nuclear energy with renewed urgency.

The Government has called for the opening of three sites in 1974 at Leibstadt, Gösgen-Daeniken and Kaiseraugst. Communal planning permission has been obtained in the first of these two villages, while negotiations are drawing to an end at Kaiseraugst. The three planned nuclear power stations would generate 2700 MW, or nearly 50 per cent of peak consumption, by 1979.

The cost of a litre of petrol was raised at the end of November by five centimes. A litre of super now costs 84 cents, and a litre of ordinary petrol from 80 to 81 cents.

Swiss banks report continuing good business

Investments and capital movements by Swiss banks abroad have increased six-fold during the ten years from 1963 to 1972, according to figures recently published by the Swiss National Bank. Investments by these banks at home have only doubled during the same period. About 66 per cent of this business was carried out by the five main banks of the country. The balance sheet of Swiss-registered banks totalled 265.5 billions Swiss francs at the end of 1972. These banks had invested 96.7 billion francs abroad and 80.6 million francs at home, showing a surplus of 16.1 billion francs. These figures indicate the importance of Switzerland as a banking hub of the world. Total benefits of Swiss banks rose last year by 18.7 per cent to 1.18 billion francs. Real wages of bank employees rose by 6 per cent.

Vandalism

Those who lament that Britain is having to put up with increasing vandalism, football mobsters and a rising wave of muggings will be sadly relieved to know that the phenomenon is also rearing its head in Switzerland. One recent instance cost a hundred motorists the price of a set of new tyres in Geneva. About a hundred cars parked in several areas of the town were discovered by their owners with their tyres punctured and slashed. A week earlier, some thirty owners of cars with "CD" plates were the victims of similar senseless doings, but the person responsible for them, apparently a crank, was arrested.

OERLIKON-BUEHRLE SEEKS TO BUILD UP A NEW IMAGE

Oerlikon-Buehrle, Switzerland's main arms manufacturer and until recently its largest family concern, is about to achieve a major reorganisation launched in 1968, and aiming at a lesser reliance on the arms business.

This major face-lift began even before the trial of Mr. Dieter Buehrle and three senior executives for the illegal sale of about 60 million francs worth of arms to South Africa and other countries on the arms ban list. The move away from guns was made necessary because of the growing embargo on Swiss arms exports. Swiss policy in this respect has to some extent been influenced by the Buehrle trial of 1970. The group, which employs 16,000 people in Switzerland

and abroad and is expected to show sales of 1.2 billion francs this year, an increase of 10 per cent over the previous year, will therefore lay more emphasis on the production of machines and industrial processes, as attested by the recent purchase of a German machine-tool concern called Boehringer.

Last May, the group became public and allowed investors to have a 22 per cent stake in the company, still largely controlled by Mr. Dieter Buehrle, the President, and his sister, who belong to the third generation of the Buehrle dynasty. An issue of 50 million francs was an immediate success. The shares were snapped up for the total of a hundred million francs and there were rumours that the issue had been inequitably distributed.

The financial boss of Maschinenfabrik Oerlikon AG, the central pillar of the group, claimed that the share issue had not really been necessary because of Buehrle's excellent financial position. The money had been raised only as a security for the future. The successes of the shares issue more than demonstrated the public's confidence in the company, despite the restrictions on arms exports and growing public hostility towards the right-wing "evocation" of the Buehrle concern.

Apart from the Oerlikon machine factory (which in fact still relies far more on guns than on machines) other companies of the group include Hispano-Oerlikon, Geneva (anti-aircraft guns and machines); Pilatus, Stans (light aircraft); Contraves, Zurich and Rome

(radars, theodolites and high-technology products for defence and industry); two welding factories near Geneva and Zurich controlling 70 per cent of the Swiss market, Balsers, Liechtenstein; specialists in surface treatment. The group also controls hotels and insurance companies. It is the perfect example of a "horizontal concentration". The Buehrle family has further interests in banking, shipping, printing and real estate.

A HIJACKER DISRUPTS A SWISSAIR FLIGHT

A young idealist hijacked a Swissair plane bound for Abidjan shortly after its take-off from Zurich. The youth's full name was not disclosed, according to Swiss practice. He was an apprentice-cook aged only eighteen and had planned to hijack the DC 8 with its 160 passengers to New York for a ransom of 50 million dollars from the United Nations in favour of the hungry in Africa. He darted inside the pilots cabin on the Zurich-Geneva lap armed with an alarm pistol which he had hidden in his shoes through the control at Kloten Airport. None of the passengers noticed anything and they realised what had happened only when the airliner was made to wait for twenty minutes at the end of the runway at Cointin. During the flight the pilot had tactfully managed to soothe the hijacker and made him abandon his demands so that the police took over at Geneva without any incident. The young man, an apprentice cook from the Grisons was put in St.

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Antoine's prison and charged with causing a hindrance to traffic and seclusion of human beings. From the police examination it turned out that he was more of an idealist than an unbalanced person. He had been deeply troubled by famine in Africa and had devoted his savings to help alleviate it. Hijacking a Swissair plane was, he hoped, a more effective way of increasing aid to the hungry in the black continent.

Swiss budget almost balanced

The Federal Budget for 1974 shows a deficit of 195 million francs, compared with a 100 million franc deficit for the previous one. Mr. Nello Celio, Head of the Department of Finance, noted that enormous efforts had to be made to compress the budget to such an extent at a time when Swiss economy was continuing to expand. He stressed that unless taxes were increased, it would be more and more difficult to balance the federal budget. Federal expenses budgeted for 1974 amount to 12,851 million francs set against an income of only 12,656 million francs. Considerable cuts had to be made in the Motorway programme and in several other federal projects. The Confederation had to reduce its aid to the Cantons in several ventures. The total budget of the Confederation, which includes income and expenditure on federal property, shows a surplus of 651 million francs. In doing its utmost to keep expenditure low, the Confederation has aimed at setting an example of financial discipline to the cantons whose budgets have regularly been in deficit during the past few years. Excessive public spending stimulates business, but also increases inflation. In the present context, it was better for Switzerland to limit its economic pace in the interest of a stable currency.

Swiss ski factory resuscitated

Skis by the Swiss firm *Authier* will again appear in sports shops around the country. *Authier* was at one time a leading Swiss ski manufacturer in the

Bière region of Canton Vaud. A few years ago, the brothers who owned the installations sold them to an American firm, *Olin*, who invested heavily in modernising its facilities. Unsatisfied with the returns of these investments, the American company decided to close *Authier* and dismissed a hundred workers early last year. The regional authorities tried very hard to find a buyer for the plant eventually secured the participation of the Stans-based firm *Haldemann-*

Rossignol, which is 30 per cent controlled by the French firm *Rossignol*, one of the leading world manufacturers of skis with a production of 650,000 pairs a year. The premises and the trademark were brought for 750,000 francs. The factory had to be re-equipped with machines and will start with an annual production of 40,000 pairs, which, it is hoped, will increase to over 100,000 pairs a year when the shopfloor is completely equipped with machines.

SWISS PRESENCE IN INDIA

(Part Two)

In our last issue, we reported on the evidence of Swiss presence in India. Several important Swiss firms have either opened branches in this vast country or concluded technical cooperation agreements, and much of Switzerland's official aid to development is channelled to India. There are many projects under way, one of the most important being a plan to introduce Simmenthal cattle in the southern state of Kerala. There are other agricultural projects in the Punjab. While we were staying at Bangalore's West End Hotel, a glance at the guest book enabled us to note the presence of a Swiss development aid official on his way to Chandigarh to survey one of these projects.

I had hoped to learn more about Swiss aid to India from this specialist, whom I saw eating alone in the vast restaurant of this deserted hotel, but was prevented from doing so by a middle-aged American lady dressed in a sari on her way to see Sanchi Sai Baba, one of India's most celebrated Gurus. Instead of talking about development aid, I was committed to an exposé of oriental religion and thus deprived of facts relevant to this publication.

A model Embassy building

During a visit to the Swiss Embassy in Delhi, I was told of a few ageing Swiss who had chosen to retire in India. There is no longer a Swiss colony in India as nearly all former residents have returned home. 500 Swiss live in the country, about half of them in missionary and humanitarian work, the remainder in technical assistance and industry. But one Swiss still in India and drawing old age pension from Berne was once the hairdresser to the Vice-Queen of India and owned a salon in Old Delhi. Another, a fortune-teller, is apparently still in business. The disappearance of the Swiss of India has meant the closure of the consulate at Calcutta. The only remaining consulate in India (excluding the Chancery of the Embassy) is the one in Bombay.

The Swiss Embassy has been recently built among the silent alleys and gardens of the diplomatic enclave of Delhi. It is a beautifully designed building whose two storeys rest on concrete pillars. The atmosphere inside is quiet, cool, almost hushed, and a pool of limpid blue water in the courtyard absorbs the blistering heat and light of Delhi's mid-day sun. Two armed guards stand to attention beneath the pillars as the visitor, walking along the alleyway traversing the lawn between the gates and building, approaches the entrance. Despite the presence of these guards, the place would not be out of context as a secondary residential block for the rich in the pinewoods above Eden Rock or Beirut.

However nice it is to work in such congenial surroundings, I gathered from the Swiss diplomats I met there that life in Delhi was somewhat restricted from the social and cultural point of view. I was received by Mr. Monnier, the Chargé d'Affaire, who called two other colleagues in his office: Mr. Max Wegmuller, in charge of consular affairs (and due to be transferred to Manchester) and Mr. R. B. Rueff, in charge of Pakistani affairs.

There are understandably fewer Swiss gatherings in Delhi than in London. The only two that take place regularly under the auspices of the Embassy, are on 1st August and on 1st January. The nature of the work done by the Embassy is different, but problems with young people are strikingly similar. Many stranded and moneyless adventurers have to be repatriated. Some have to be visited in prison, where they have ended up for dealing in drugs (mainly hashish from Kashmir). I was told that young barefooted Swiss hippies could occasionally be seen begging in the heart of Delhi.

The most significant part of the Embassy's activities are related to the the December 1971 India-Pakistan conflict, which Swiss diplomacy has greatly

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