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Postal coach on the Gothard Pass

Painting by Rudolf Koller

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SWISS EVENTS

FEDERAL

The problems of the Socialists

The Swiss Socialist Party has lost five seats at the Federal Elections. As the Conservative parties (Freisingning Christian Democrats and Agrarian) enjoy the absolute majority with 114 seats, the Socialists are reduced to the role of an opposition party, although they traditionally have their two members in Government. The problem for the Swiss Socialist Party is to make its stand quite clear. It is presently fragmented into many tendencies ranging from the complacency of the compromising and bourgeois Bernese Socialist Party, to the aggressivity of the Geneva Socialist Party, which has joined forces with the Labour (or Communist) Party during the elections. Before the Elections, there was a fleeting project of coalition between the Socialists and the Christian Democrats. This idea fell through but didn't indicate that the Swiss Socialist Party had very firm left-wing principles. The Party must now choose between a continuing attitude of compromise with the middle-class, or show more aggressivity. Whatever it decides, it will not have much influence on the decisions of Parliament, which is overwhelmingly Conservative. However, if there is to be a worthwhile opposition, it is necessary for the Socialists to distinguish themselves from their opponents. But some feel that the Swiss system of government is averse to the notion of opposition.

ARMED FORCES

Planning Air Defence

The days when a "Hunter" jet fighter could be purchased for about three million francs, although hardly more than ten years past, are definitely over and so are the days when Switzerland's national defence budget ran at about a billion francs. The 1972 defence budget adds up to 2.3 billion francs and will rise by an extra 400 million francs during the succeeding two years.

It is not only the relentless rise of the cost of living that has been responsible for this budgetary expansion. It is also the increasing complexity of a military equipment requiring more development work and more advanced technology. But first and foremost, one should ask the question: Are we going to maintain an Army which can be taken seriously?

If yes, then are we ready to pay the price? If the answer is yes again, then the armed forces inevitably have to embark on a never-ending path of technical development. At a time when the choice of a new combat aircraft for which an expenditure of 1.3 billion francs has been earmarked has not yet been made, it is necessary to foresee the expenditure of a few additional billion francs in modernising the country's air defence system.

Switzerland's anti-aircraft defence relies presently on 450 AA guns of 34mm calibre and about 2,500 light 20mm guns. According to military circles, this could produce the flack density of North Vietnam and compares well with the anti-aircraft defences of western European countries. To this must be added the electronic hardware which has come into service lately and whose three pillars are the *Mirage* interceptor fighters, the *Florida* early-warning system and batteries of *Bloodhound* guided missiles.

This, however, is not sufficient for Switzerland's defence experts. The new gadgetry will force an eventual aggressor to medium-high altitudes insufficiently covered by present AA defences and will induce him to paralyse our radio communications by jamming them. Secondly, our ground forces, which are equally necessary to frustrate any airborne aggression, will be completely exposed to enemy aircraft once our weak air force is put out of action. The reason is that the bulk of the anti-aircraft equipment of which Switzerland dispose is designed to protect fixed targets and is inadequate for the effective protection of mobile troops. There is therefore a serious capability gap between our relatively dense but immobile 20mm and 35mm armaments (whose ranges are respectively 1,500m and 4,000m) and the long-range anti-aircraft Bloodhound missiles. What is needed therefore is a system ensuring protection in the 5 to 8 kilometre range and this would require upgrading the present anti-aircraft material. Its range should be extended and units made both more mobile and attack proof.

The Military Department has been examining these requirements since the middle sixties. This led to the development of the anti-aircraft tank and to the perfecting of ground-to-air missiles. In 1970 the Commander of the Air and Air Defence Forces, Colonel Eugen Studer, was formally entrusted by the General Staff to undertake the planning of a complete overhaul of the Swiss anti-aircraft defence system. He was

SWISS WRITERS UNITE

There are more writers than can be kept alive by a dwindling market for novels. The novel is no longer in favour and an author (when he is not called Alistair Maclean) can be happy if 2,000 copies of his book are sold, half of which go to public libraries and earn a few hundred pounds. Most new books are ephemeral works giving the reviewers of the "Sundays" something to write about and then left to fossilize in the library of the British Museum. This is the unfortunate fate of even the writers with literary ambitions. Success comes sooner from biographies, art books and specialised works than from literature.

Pro Helvetia has published a list of 48 major German-Swiss writers, each of whom have produced an average of six books. No doubt that the majority of the public they cater for would be incapable of naming even ten of them. It is reckoned that in the western world people read two books a year. With a market of barely three million German-speaking people, none of these 48 prominent writers can possibly have a large audience. It is true that they can look to a growing weekend press and television for their survival. The high state of the economy and the resulting advertising keeps a flood of publications going. But this is no longer literature.

It is against this background that the Society of Swiss Writers held its annual meeting in Biel and decided to give financial support to the members on its professional writers register not able to sustain themselves by their writing. The Society will also be less selective to new members in respect of quantity and quality of output and voted to admit young amateur writers. The writing profession has to organise itself against rough times it is facing.