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DEMOCRACY IN ACTION- A real voting spree!

The Swiss went on a democratic spree at the end of May. They were called to vote on no fewer than six federal issues, and some fifty local issues overall. None of the themes put to them would have given rise to national elections in other countries. But this is the distinguishing feature of Swiss democracy. The people are called to have a say on what elsewhere belongs to ordinary legislation.

The most unusual proposition on which they were called to vote, and which they rejected by a majority of about two to one provided for the prohibition of Sunday motoring 12 weekends a year. The proposal was naturally intended to protect the environment and save energy. Appenzell Outer Rhodes, with only 55 per cent of "no" votes, was the one that appeared to be the least unfavourable to the Initiative.

The Swiss also turned down proposals to increase the price of bread by ten centimes a kilo. The Confederation would have saved 200 million francs in subsidies and the average household's bread bill would have

increased by about ten francs a year. Obviously careful with their money, the Swiss people also rejected, by a considerable majority, a bill that would have increased federal expenditure on universities and research.

Very surprisingly, even if the whole of Europe switches to a summer and then a winter time, Switzerland will continue to have a single time all the year round because the Swiss rejected, by a nine to eight majority, the idea of putting their watches forward as the summer comes. Some cantons were favourable to the two-time system, in particular those near the border. Their people are more aware of the nuisance of a change of time at the border.

Finally, the Swiss were called for the second time in less than a year to vote on a controversial abortion bill which, like the previous one, was rejected. This means that after years of debate in Parliament, the old law still applies and that the problem of making abortion more easy will probably be solved separately by each Canton. The outcome of that vote could be a boost for federalism.

SWISS RETAIL TRADE SHOWS A POSITIVE EVOLUTIONARY TREND

In 1977, turnover in the retail trade showed a sharp recovery. Whereas, in 1976, there had been a drop in most items compared with the figures for the previous year, the trend was sharply reversed in 1977. The overall turnover increased by 3.3 per cent. Higher than average growth rates were recorded, in particular, in the sectors of foodstuffs, beverages and tobacco (+4.4 per cent), footwear (+3.9 per cent), automobiles (+13.5 per cent), office machinery (+19

per cent), books and periodicals (+5.4 per cent).

Only four branches recorded figures lower than the level for the previous year; these were sports articles, hosiery and knitwear, earthenware and glass articles and, finally haberdashery. The rise in the cost of living index having been lower in 1977 than 1976, the growth of the retail trade shows a return of confidence on the part of consumers in the progress of the economy.

SWITZERLAND'S FOREIGN TRADE DURING THE 1st QUARTER 1978

	Values in millions of francs	Variations in % compared with the 1st quarter 1977
IMPORTS		
Agricultural and forestry products	1,334.2	- 1.8
Energy	870.2	4.5
Textiles and clothing	1,138.4	- 0.6
Paper and its articles	336.0	- 4.6
Leathers, rubber, plastic	352.4	1.6
Chemical products	1,077.0	- 7.8
Materials for the construction, ceramic, glass	176.2	4.0
Metals and metal work	996.0	2.2
Machinery	1,654.4	18.8
Vehicles	1,075.6	9.7
Instruments, watches	1,181.1	- 13.3
Other various products	337.3	- 6.9
TOTAL OF IMPORTS	10,528.9	0.8

SWISS EVENTS

THE FLOW OF CAPITAL FROM SWITZERLAND TO THE DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

In 1976, the flow of net capital from Switzerland to the developing countries totalled 3,375 million francs, i.e. 2.28 per cent of the gross national product. In 1975, the figure was 1,809 million. Of this total, 281 million of 9.3 per cent (previous year 267 million) represents payments on preferential terms. This part of the net flow of capital, usually referred to as "development aid", amounted to 0.19 per cent of the gross national product (1974: 0.14).

In addition, private aid organizations supplied 86 million francs in 1976 (83 million in 1975) to the developing countries. However it is the private economy that played the biggest role quantitatively in this financial flow of capital (direct investment, export credits, loans on the capital market, etc.), since the total of 3,014 million francs (previous year 1,471 million) amounts to almost 90 per cent of the net flow of capital from Switzerland to the developing countries.

With regard to these three categories, public loans on market terms represented six million francs' worth of net capital flow (previous year: 12 million).

SWISS CONSUMPTION OF PERFUMES AND COSMETICS

The annual expenditure of Swiss consumers on perfumes and cosmetics is put at between 700 million and one billion Swiss francs. The part played by beauty products represents a little over a third of the total, while hair products and perfumes represent a quarter. The remainder (40 per cent) is shared, in order, by soaps, toothpastes, bath products, deodorants, etc. Swiss production covers about 60 per cent of the market in value (a little more in quantity, owing to imports of luxury products).

The main manufacturer and retailer is the Migros Consumers Cooperative, with a share of the market amounting to between 20 per cent and 30 per cent in quantity depending on the products, but far less in value since Migros products are often only half the price of brand goods. An annual rate of growth of some three per cent to five per cent is expected for this sector during the next few years.