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The Lorry Ban

by A.E.Hauser-Gubser

On 20 February 1994 the Swiss voters, by a narrow margin of 52% yes votes against 48% no, accepted the constitutional initiative which obliges the Government to transfer the transit traffic by lorries onto rail within ten years and to prohibit the construction of further Alpine transit highways. The yes vote has produced a minor shock in EU headquarters at Brussels and almost immediately several transport ministers and European commissioners (for example those of France, Spain, Italy and Greece) demanded retaliatory measures on the grounds that the existing transit treaty has been violated. In EU Media, all possible opinions were presented, ranging from hearty congratulations from the green parties and some ecology commissioners to irate comments from the lorry lobby. On the whole it is safe to say that most comments missed the real points:

- 1) The transit treaty postulates the possibility that adequate measures can be taken if the Huckepack system now being introduced at a cost of SFr.1.5 billion should not achieve the desired results. As a matter of fact the capacity of most trains is not being used, despite the fact that transit by train is cheaper than lorry if costs are correctly calculated.
- 2) The transit treaty obliges the EU to erect loading centres for goods and lorries to be forwarded by transit from the north to the south and vice versa. It is undeniable that the EU has done nothing so far. On the contrary, a few months after the ratification of the treaty, the EU began again to press for 40 tonne lorry access to Switzerland with the obvious goal of establishing a corridor.
- 3) There is no discrimination against EU lorry drivers. Both Swiss-owned and foreign firms rolling through Switzerland have to use the rail. On the other hand each foreign lorry travelling to a community in Switzerland and returning to its starting point is still allowed to use the road. Therefore, competition with Swiss lorry owners is still free.

From the comments it became evident that knowledge of both the transit treaty and the accepted initiative is very scarce. The peak of absurdity was reached when the deputy director of the Institute for European Political Studies at Brussels attacked on TV the transfer of money to Swiss Banks, despite the repeated requests of the interviewer to comment on the Swiss People's verdict regarding road transit. At first, no chance was given for the success of this initiative but the incessant pressure from the EU and the threats that were uttered, in particular those from Germany, the Netherlands, Italy and France, convinced Swiss voters that acceptance of the initiative was the only way to ensure the use of the Huckepack corridor and, further on, to use of the two base tunnels.

It is revealing that the three other votes accepted on the same Sunday were not considered worthy of a single comment, despite the fact that one of them may mean severe restrictions on long distance lorry traffic within Switzerland. The voters agreed to the introduction of a Federal tax on lorries dependant on mileage, engine power and load capacity. This tax will be a step in the direction of payment of the true costs incurred by lorry owners. It is quite certain that foreign lorry owners will have to pay the same tax. As a matter of fact, this vote is an even more important step towards the reduction of lorry traffic within Switzerland. For me it is revealing that the far more explosive power of this decision is apparently not recognised in Brussels.

Private Railways

At present orders for more than SFr.1.5 billion are being carried out for various projects on the private railways. Every possible aspect is involved from the purchase of modern rolling stock, realignment of tracks, new signalling systems, double track extensions and avalanche protection, etc. etc.

Rhätian Railway

Apart from the enormous sums being invested in the Vereina tunnel (estimated at SFr.900 million) and some SFr.700 million for the diversion of the Chur-Arosa line, the RhB is investing SFr.39 million on double track "islands" near Thusis and Preda and a new train control centre at Filisur, SFr.15 millions for a new 66 kV feeder line from Bever to Zernez, a further SFr.12.3 millions for the Ge4/4^{III} locomotives and SFr.15 millions for new passenger coaches.

January 1994 saw heavy snowfalls in the Alps. To handle the transport of cars to the Engadin, it was necessary on certain days to introduce a half-hourly service of car carrying trains from Thusis.

Europrinter Trials

From 11 to 17 February the latest DB locomotive, the *Europrinter* was in Switzerland for tests on the Gotthard, Lötschberg and Simplon lines as well as over the East-West axis. Siemens/Krauss Maffei and BLS and SBB were interested to compare the performance of this locomotive against the SBB class 460 and the BLS Re4/4 161-195, in particular on steep gradients and sharp curves. It was found that the *Europrinter* was able to start a 630 tonne train repeatedly on a 2.7% gradient with a curve radius as low as 285 m under the worst weather conditions and on dirty wet track. However, under these conditions the *Europrinter* failed to accelerate to the required 80 km/h, it stayed at speeds varying from 15-30 km/h, whereas the BLS engines of class 161-195 were able to haul the same weight under the same conditions at 80 km/h. However, the failure of the *Europrinter* is not to be seen as a basic fault of the design. The tractive force regulation on the *Europrinter* is controlled electronically on each axle, whereas the 30 year old BLS locomotives use a combination of mechanical and electro-mechanical axle load compensation. It is probably only a question of adjusting the electronic regulation of the *Europrinter*. Similar results were obtained on the SBB. Here the radially adjustable wheelsets of the class 460, which result in very low guiding forces on curves of sharp radii, give a distinct

advantage over the *Europrinter's* classic centre-pivot bogie design.

Emmenthal-Burgdorf-Thun Group (EBT)

A further SFr.55 million will be invested in new locomotives.

Industry

Sulzer Diesel AG has increased its output of diesel engines by 63% in 1993. A considerable share of this was obtained by the recently developed engines for diesel locomotives.

SLM and ABB will deliver the first of the BLS class 465 locomotives in the autumn of this year.

An order for 20 tri-current locomotives was obtained by ABB locomotive division Italia for use on the Brenner line. The electrical concept is similar to the class 460 with the difference that the introduction of direct current at 1.5 kV and 3 kV is made directly over the intermediate circuit.

The *Munico* tram is now undergoing a 20,000 km test. If the results of this prove satisfactory orders can be expected from Zürich, Basel, Bern and Genève tramways, and possibly some foreign systems as well.

Valedictory

At the AGM on 12 March, Alan Pike election to Vice-President was carried unanimously, a fitting acknowledgment of the stalwart work he has put into the Society. Alan has asked us to include these few words:

"I feel greatly honoured to have been elected Vice-President at the AGM in Bristol. I hope to be able actively to serve the Society and the membership both by promoting it through talks given to other societies and organisations and by carrying out any tasks with which the Committee may wish to entrust me.

"May I congratulate the new Chairman, John Jesson, on his appointment and wish him every success in the future. I am convinced that the new Committee, which has seen a number of changes recently because of pressures of work, is a strong one and that the Society is in good hands."