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# The Swiss Observer

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HON. PRESIDENT: Robert J. Keller  
EDITOR: Pierre-Michel Beguin

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# COMMENT

## SWISS MANAGING DIRECTORS GET MORE SLEEP

One of the plagues of Britain, and a theme on which we've heard more than enough in recent years, is the disastrous tendency of the British worker to walk out on strike. Of course, such generalisations are dangerous. There are more days lost in strikes in America and Italy for example, and umpteen British plants work smoothly and efficiently without a hitch in their labour relations. But there can't be void behind the reputation that British Industry has been building for itself lately. The Londoner, for example, has in a year, experienced an underground strike, a railway strike, a national newspaper strike, a dock strike, a dustmen's strike, a major strike in the car factories of Dagenham, only to mention the most publicised. When the workers don't go on strike, they sometimes hinder the most favourable running of their plant by all sorts of practices, such as work-to-rule, prolonged breaks, casual walkouts, slapdash work, union meetings, excessive bonus work, blackings, demarcation disputes and poaching squabbles. They often do their best to knock down weekly hours, only to catch up on better paid overtime work. Apprentices, who are there to learn and cannot be fully productive, are also getting greedy and setting conditions to their employers.

This situation has fortunately been spared to the Swiss manager in the prosperous post-war era. The only strikes which I remember having happened during the last year, were a week-long stoppage by Spanish builders in Geneva, and a walk-out by 80 workers in a shoe factory in Ticino. Strikes like these are not even worth mentioning in England!

The most important single reason for this curious situation lies in the different kinds of industries in England and Switzerland. In England, great factories with a mass of destitute workers were created in the 19th century, whereas factories remained small in Switzerland and the direct contact with the boss and owner was never lost. However autocratic the rule of the Swiss boss may have been, there was a human relationship with his men which somehow prevented the birth of an acute working class consciousness and a pernicious desire to serve a vengeance on the master of industry. This is what is effectively happening in Great Britain.

There is also the element that the work carried out in the Swiss industry bears, in the main, less drudgery than elsewhere owing to the specialised and finely finished nature of its output. This means that the Swiss worker has more chance of enjoying his job.

This is not to say that there has never been any labour unrest in Switzerland. There were plenty of strikes before the war, when socialism was a more militant ideology than today. There was a general strike in 1918. But these differences have been settled by mutual efforts from both sides of industry. The first landmark was the famed "Peace of Labour" pact signed within the metal working industries in 1937. Similar agreements have followed in practically every branch of industry, with the result that strikes have been effectively prevented by an established framework of procedures and contracts binding management and labour. The industrial peace which the Swiss economy now enjoys is due in great part to these agreements and the positive spirit which they have instilled in all those whom they concern. The present British government would dearly like to reach such a satisfactory *modus vivendi* within British industry, but it is doubtful whether British conditions will allow a lasting "Peace of Labour" to be contracted and abided by. Some "bloody-mindedness" can perhaps be sensed in some of the very large and less specialised workshops of Swiss Industry. But it would be virtually impossible for any worker to stage a wildcat strike—and none would dream of doing so. The most dissatisfied workers are the lesser paid and lesser qualified foreign and seasonal labourers. They are, of course, not in a position to be too demanding as they can all too easily be replaced by others of their kin.

During a very short spell in a medium-sized Swiss company, I have observed that most workers were proud of the achievements of their firm. They accepted to work 45 hours a week and to come on one Saturday in two. There was very little relaxation and slackening at the work bench. The constant pressure of the British Unions may have earned better working condi-

tions for the British worker. It is possible that an English worker would refuse to work like a Swiss worker (this must be especially true in the watch industry) and would require longer breaks and shorter hours—while of course demanding the same wages.

The Swiss Unions are as powerful as British Unions and command the same membership. It seems that they make better use of their power. Their guiding philosophy is very pragmatic: It is not to overhaul the system and chuck out the bosses, but only to assure a fair share of the wealth and a peaceful life to all. They make sure that there are no victims in the Swiss system and act as silent watchdogs. That's enough to keep industry running smoothly.

(PMB)

# SWISS NEWS

## POLITICAL LIFE

The Swiss President for 1970, Mr. Hans Peter Tschudi, gave a grand welcome to the General Secretary of the United Nations, U Thant, before the U.N. Centre in Geneva, which was decorated with the flags of the 126 member states. The ceremony was to mark the 125th birthday of the United Nations. U Thant pronounced a characteristically pessimistic speech. He presented his listeners with the gloomy picture of a planet with four billion inhabitants by 1975 and six billion by the turn of the century. He recalled that the nations of the world had spent 200 billion dollars on armaments last year and that 10 per cent of this sum would have been enough for the needs of developing countries. U Thant underlined the necessity for a radical change of mind and behaviour in international affairs.

Mr. Bruno Kreisky, the Austrian Chancellor, paid an official visit to Berne. As head of state of a country with great similarities with Switzerland, he had plenty of matters for discussion with Mr. Tschudi and the Federal Council. In the main, these exchanges of views were concerned with the problem of European integration. In the course of a press conference in Berne, Mr. Kreisky said that, although Austria's practice of neutrality differed in some respects from Switzerland's own neutral policy, there were many points of agreement in the attitude adopted by the respective countries towards the European Common Market. Speaking of the economic situation of his country, Chancellor Kreisky said that Austrians had never had it so good. There were, however, a few less developed areas left and he welcomed Swiss investments. Flattering the patriotism of his audience, he said that the neutrality of his country had at the start



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been inspired by Switzerland's own age-old neutrality.

The Federal Council has decided to open Swiss consular agencies in the American towns of Cincinnati, Dallas, Denver, Pittsburg, Salt Lake City, Spartanburg, Honolulu and San Juan (Porto Rico). The consular agents have already been designated. They are all first or second generation Swiss residents of the United States. The strongly increased commercial ties between the U.S. and Switzerland have made this move desirable. This will also help to strengthen the ties between the motherland and the Swiss Colony of the U.S.

### ANGLO-SWISS

A ceremony organised in a Zurich hotel marked the 50th anniversary of the Anglo-Swiss Chamber of Commerce. Ambassador Paul R. Jolles underlined the importance of Swiss investments in Great Britain, which exceeded a billion francs. The British Ambassador in Berne, Mr. E. A. Midgley, spoke of the encouraging commercial links between his country and Switzerland. These exchanges were in Great Britain's favour. Last year, the British bought 1.4 billion francs worth of Swiss goods, but the Swiss bought 150.6 million francs more of British goods. (ATS)

The "Swiss Travel Service" organised a tourist propaganda competition in Manchester. The winner of the ladies contest, Mrs. Dewhurst, secretary in a travel agency in Stockport, won the first prize and was offered a free week in Switzerland. In order to earn such a treat, she had to produce the best and loudest imitation of the alpine horn! (ATS)

### CULTURE

The Belgian Ambassador to Switzerland awarded a commemorative medal to the Mayor of Zurich, Dr. M. S. Widmer, the new Director of the Schauspielhaus, Mr. Harry Buckwitz and to Prof. Wildi, as a sign of Belgian gratitude towards the town and its theatre for the performances which the Bruxelles troupe "Royal du Parc" was allowed to give during Zurich's June Festival.

Swiss-German dialect and "good German" should enjoy the same consideration. This was the conclusion of a congress of linguists and "dialectologists" held in Lenzburg. The Assembly has agreed on a merger of the two linguistic associations "Deutschschweizerischer Sprachverein" and "Bund Schwyzterdütsch" and a pooling of their means. The creation of a Swiss "Institute of the German Language" was equally envisaged. The aim of all these bodies is to preserve and help to develop Swiss-German.

An important conference spon-

sored by the World Council of Churches on the "future of man and society" took place in Geneva. One hundred and fifty scientists and theologians from all over the world met to debate on this searching theme. In his opening address, the General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, the Rev. Eugene Carson Blake, said that the conflict between religion and science now was a thing of the past. The point on which men of science and theologians should now have a dialogue, was the future use of the power and technical means which modern man has forged for himself.

An international and unique museum of watchmaking is to be built at La Chaux-de-Fonds by 1973. It will exhibit the history and the science of watchmaking and a vast collection of time-measuring instruments of all kinds. This project will be partly financed by the Maurice Favre Foundation.

(ATS)

### THE UNIVERSITY

A new Swiss student group called the "liberal-democratic" movement has taken shape at Zurich University. Composed mainly of law students, its aims are to stand for the "silent majority". The first step was to send an open letter to the Rector criticising his weakness towards left-wing students and his inability to keep them under control. The letter condemned the occupation by demonstrators of the main auditorium in June and the ease with which a minority of radical students could perturb the life of the University.

### THE STATUS OF THE SWISS WOMAN

The National Commission for UNESCO has asked the Institute of Sociology of the University of Zurich to produce a complete dossier on the condition of women in Switzerland. It has allocated 200,000 francs to this end, but, as this enquiry is budgeted at 300,000 francs, a campaign to fill the gap will be launched towards private industry. The enquiry is not only inspired by a sense of justice, but also by the economic motivation of finding the ways of making the best use of Switzerland's female potential. Such research has already been undertaken in Scandinavia and the U.S. The researchers will begin by synthesising the available statistical data. They will then question 4,200 people at random. The results of this simple interview will be refined by more detailed personal questioning and the emerging picture will be compared with the portrait of women currently presented in Swiss school books and past studies.

### SUNDRY

The Simplon railway was invaded by a vast flock of sheep between

Rarogne and Gampel, one afternoon in June. The engine driver had no hope of halting in time and crushed 50 sheep to death.

The Buergerspital in Basle has found a way of easing the acute shortage of labour striking hospitals in Switzerland. The old peoples' homes under its control will be equipped with automatic coffee and cold drink machines.

A study by the Union Bank of Switzerland shows that the Swiss assets abroad are the highest per capita in the world. Each Swiss controls 23,000 fr. of assets abroad—nine times more than what the average German controls and seven times that of the American's foreign fortune. The Swiss fortune abroad was 143.5 billion francs at the end of last year (an increase of almost 20 billion over the previous year) and the total of foreign assets in Switzerland was 69.4 billion francs (an increase of 12 billion over the previous year). The net financial position of Switzerland therefore totalled 74.1 billion francs. The revenue of all Swiss assets abroad was estimated at 4 to 4.5 billion francs last year. These "invisible earnings" did not include revenue from tourism.

### ENVIRONMENT

The association of anglers and the association of trail-net fishers of Lake Neuchâtel, grouping altogether 6,000 fishermen, have given a stern warning to the authorities of the cantons bordering on the lake. They say that present unbridled fishing of perch during the spawning period will endanger the future population of the lake. The pike is also in danger of disappearance. Thousands of female fish filled with eggs have perished and as many of the drop-nets commonly used are not lifted every day, the trapped fish are dead when they are picked and have to be thrown back to the water in great numbers. The catch of this year was so abundant that it could not be absorbed by the market and fish were being thoughtlessly squandered.

A deputy in the Great Council of Fribourg has raised the question of whether the unknown person who had covered six dead animals with leaves and let them rot near the brook of Montrevaz had acted against new anti-pollution laws.

When the British Isles were having an unprecedented heat wave, rain was pouring all over the Continent. The disaster in Rumania was one consequence. Switzerland also suffered from appalling weather, but the level of rivers and lakes was kept low by the dams which have been built upstream. They had to be filled first. From their empty winter level, the dams of the Valais have accumulated 250 million cu. metres of water in the month to June 29th.

(ATS)