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Contents

Commentary on cultural promotion	3
Taboo break in transport policy	4
Dürrenmatt in Ins	6
Swiss Cultural Centre in Paris	7
Swiss emigration in the 19th century	8
Official communications:	
– Training in Switzerland	9
– Service of the Swiss Abroad: new Chief	10
Local news	11–15
Communications from the Secretariat for the Swiss Abroad	16
Environmental disasters ignore frontiers	18
Portrait: Anna Felder	20
Mosaic	21
Sport: The Murten Run	22

Title page

Friedrich Dürrenmatt and Voli Geiler
(Photo: Dominique Uldry)

Smoking chimney stacks in northern Germany
(Photo: Keystone)

Intercity train of the SBB (Photo: Swiss Federal Railways)

Murten Run, 1986 (Photo: Andreas Blatter)

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Commentary

After the vote on cultural policy

There are such marvellous adverts. Two photographs: «Before», «After». It would be fine if cultural policy could also be symbolized with the same system.

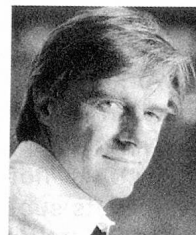
Is it even possible, at all, to write about how it was before? Was there a red Ariadne thread there, or at least a guiding idea? Did anyone in Berne ever once say, quite clearly, what he or she understands by culture and how seriously it is being taken? Has anyone, at any time, ever posed the question as to how Swiss culture, as a *Gesamtkunstwerk* or «complete art-work», could be stimulated – and how futuristically...?

One could think Switzerland is as big as China. And for that reason so unclear and full of difficulties of communication. Every thirty miles or so, another culture, another mentality, another language. It is apparently impossible, in our country, to get everyone to agree on even two or three cultural bull's-eyes. Even the cultural institutions cannot join forces on a common front.

Yet, time after time, there are proofs that we in Switzerland are not so uncreative at all. Indeed, we are a relatively creative people. We produce achievements which are quite secretly observed by foreign countries. In the industrial field, of course, this is all appreciatively credited to our account, for figures are available. But in the cultural sphere we will not admit our prowess. We constantly compare what comes from abroad and inevitably find it better. We have no cultural and creative self-confidence. And by no means is it always only a question of money; often it is only the moral support from above which is lacking.

During many encounters, I have

already personally discovered that people have confessed, after reading the book by Swiss author X or having seen the Swiss film Y, to seeing Switzerland in quite a different light. I would not like to be misunderstood: we want Swiss culture, but not just to be



Emil Steinberger

able to scintillate outwardly. Yet there are people who need such a carrot.

Swiss cultural policy – and by policy I always have in mind strategy – must now (after the vote) have an image which arouses enthusiasm. The meaning and purpose of our existence shall thereby be clarified, the quality of life improved, mind and tolerance refreshed, independence and courage supported. Creative activities with a perspective sustained by a convinced yes. We now still actually benefit from the spirit of a Henri Dunant. But, slowly, we will also be regarded as scrimshankers. The vote is over. Now we are all tense: what do they now want in Berne? There a little bit? Here a little bit? Is there now a green light for courageous decisions or is it again just a matter of distribution of funds à la Swiss Winter Aid? You officials in charge in Berne: you are usually invested with a fairly high rank in the armed forces. There, one has learned what it means to make a decision. The culture creators, the entire people, are standing to attention, to take «good» orders. ●

*Emil Steinberger,
cabaret artiste, Lucerne*