

Portrait of a year

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PORTRAIT OF A YEAR

1970 has been an eventful year for Switzerland. A year in which the spiralling developments of our times seemed to have increased their pace.

Has it been a good year? For the masters of our industry and a majority of Swiss housewives, yes. The Swiss standard of living has grown relentlessly and Switzerland has become an Eldorado for who ever has the requisite qualifications and the possibility of working there. But behind the glow of these material blessings and contentment lurk the inevitable dangers of a growing tension between the indigenous population and an overwhelming foreign settlement.

The outlook of the backbone of the country, the ideals of the masses and the grass roots have evolved more rapidly than our institutions and their heralds. Like everywhere else the young are questioning parental values and being increasingly attracted by the exhilaration of high living and the fascination of freedom, while the cry of their elders for the return to the old standards is carried away in the wind of change. The century-old tenets of our foreign policy harden against the growing pressure of those who wish Switzerland to become an active member of the United Nations and of the many who would like to see more being done in aid of the poorer nations of the world.

This year has also been generally marked by more soul-searching speeches, books and editorials than ever before. Much of this interrogation has revolved around the failing vitality of our present democracy and the reality of these problems was highlighted by the paradoxical results of the Wahlen Questionnaire on the Reform of the Federal Constitution. The innumerable proposals which drew forth demonstrated on the one hand that changes **were** needed and required, but the universal response equally brought to light that the Constitution was good enough as it reflected a widespread disbelief in the relevance of the matter. The democratic principles which are at the origin of the quality of life of the Swiss are no longer near to their hearts and their concern.

Much of the present-day history is plain economic history. This applies particularly to Switzerland. The country has not been spared by inflation, an ailment which appears to affect the whole of the industrial world. The booming business of our export industries have not prevented a price explosion primarily ascribable to an incessant shortage of labour and a severe lack of available funds for housing. Firm in the belief that the excessive growth rate of our principal enterprises were responsible for inflation, the Federal Council attempted to introduce a 5 per cent export deposit scheme early in the year. This was strongly

rejected by watchmaking and other interests, and was finally sent back for redrafting by Parliament. The question of revaluation also arose intermittently and Parliament agreed on the principle that the Federal Council could dispense with the verdict of the National Bank in the event of a change of parity of the franc.

Swiss-American banking discussions trudged on for a good part of the year. Certain concessions on criminally-earned accounts were offered by the Swiss side. But no real compromise on the principles of the 1934 banking law.

The highlight of business life in 1970 was the decision by the chemical giants Geigy and Ciba to merge into a new mammoth company. There were other important company reorganisations, such as the merger of Suchard and Tobler and the takeover of Hispano-Suiza by German-Swiss interests. The latest (and still undisclosed) bustle of the business world was the crash of the United Bank of California in Basle last September.

Closely related to the economic situation of the country was the problem of foreign labour. The Swiss people rejected by a bare majority of 54 per cent the proposals of National Councillor James Schwarzenbach in an ominous referendum on June 7th. Those proposals were to limit the proportion of foreign residents to 10 per cent in every canton except Geneva and would have entailed the enforced repatriation of hundreds of thousands of the foreigners who sustain our national prosperity. Mr Schwarzenbach came back unrelenting two months later with modified proposals aiming at making industry pay for its foreign payroll. They will be submitted to the people in a renewed referendum next year.

Another field of life universally linked to our economic activities was conservation. The Swiss took the International Conservation Year very seriously and the outcry of Swiss conservationists and nature lovers against the pollution of lakes and rivers grew in pitch throughout the year. The Swiss people voted strongly in favour of Federal environment planning responsibilities. An initiative against the enlargement of Zurich airport also gathered the necessary signatures but was finally rejected in a cantonal referendum. Another initiative to ban supersonic flights over Switzerland has been launched and will be submitted to the people next year. The cantons have presented their position on fluvial navigation to the Government in Berne. A number of official reports, foremost among them the Kneschaurek report, have produced solemn findings on the economic and environmental future of our country. The Socialists, concerned by the growing difficulties of being cheaply and fairly accommodated, launched an initiative claiming for more federal housing control, but were declined support by the people, but another initiative on the promotion of gymnastics and sports found popular support on the same voting weekend.

1970 saw an important institutional development with the signing of an intercantonal agreement on education. Swiss women have made a leap towards political equality, and Parliament was unanimous in adopting the principle of female right of vote in federal matters. Many cantons, starting with Zurich, Schaffhausen and Solothurn, gave their women either the communal or cantonal rights of vote.

Switzerland's main regional problem, the Jura, was highlighted by an equivocal vote on March 1st, in which the people of the Jura accepted the principle of self-determination for the Jura and the conflicting principle of limiting participation in the future plebiscit to the residents of the six French-speaking districts of the Jura. The Separatists have considered these as two contradictory propositions and intend to wage a fierce campaign against the "8th article". Meanwhile Berne is continuing to limit its involvement in the Jura to its neutral delegation of "five wise men".

Although her international policy remains as isolated in principle as has always been, Switzerland has signed the United Nations nuclear non-aggression treaty and has now begun negotiating with the Six in Brussels.

Those events which are not political or economic, but which belong to the fabric of daily life were as numerous in Switzerland as elsewhere. The main headlines which deserved to be mentioned were the publication of the Bonjour Report, the sentences passed on the Tram Demonstrators of Basle, and more recently, on the Globus demonstration of Zurich. The University has remained relatively quiet this year, and apart from the revolt of the Kunstbewerbe Schule and the propagation of the student little red book, our higher educational establishments have pursued their march towards increased student responsibility and liberalisation of studies without affray. The President of the Confederation for 1970 was Mr Hans Peter Tschudi. The new year saw two new Federal Councillors come into office. They were Mr Ernst Brugger, new head of the Public Economy Department, and Mr Pierre Graber, new leader of our diplomacy. Mr Hans Schaffner, a man who had accomplished a gigantic task in 30 years of management of our economy, refused a position which had been offered to him on the Board of Brown Boveri in a reaction to jealous criticism. Mr Von Moos was the object of invidious attacks for his alleged for-war antisemitism by green radical journalists at the beginning of the year. Swiss letters mourned the death of Gonzagne de Reynold.

The Catholic Church in Switzerland felt the restlessness of the Roman world and 140 priests countered Monseigneur Charriere's pro-celibatrian exhortations in a signed statement which appeared in two important dailies. The idea of an intercantonal police force has gained little ground during the year and it now seems that

the project will be shelved. The scare of a renewed May revolution has been temporarily allayed. The year has not been without its savoury spying incidents. The storm raised by the Florida scandal and the tapping of National Councillor Hubacher's telephone conversations had hardly died down when a senior engineer at Sulzer's was charged with having sold blueprints of the Swiss-built "Mirage" to Israel for the handsome sum of over 800,000 francs. But the peak legal case of the year was the trial brought against the arms magnate Dr Dieter Bührle. Switzerland was hit by two major disasters in February. The first was an avalanche at Reckingen which killed 30 national servicemen. It was the worst of a series in a particularly snowy and unsettled winter. The second was the sabotage of a Swissair airliner which crashed at Würenlingen with the loss of 43 lives.

The Palestinians struck a Swiss airliner again in September. A hundred passengers to New York saw their machine blown up in the desert and spent a harassed fortnight with other British and American passengers in war-torn Jordan. The Federal Council initially "weakened" under Palestinian pressure, and the International Red Cross in Geneva was told to send a fumbling delegation to Amman. Fountains of ink have since been used in criticisms and comments on the shortcomings of these decisions. But Berne became for a while the hub in international diplomacy as the envoys of Great Britain, Germany, Israel and America sought to concert their efforts in the negotiations with the Palestinian Popular Liberation Front.

The Red Cross may not have acted impeccably, this certainly didn't lessen the concern of the Swiss Government and the Swiss people for its immense humanitarian importance and the idea of creating a special voluntary corps of a thousand young men to be engaged in national disasters across the world is now firmly grounded. Pacifists and conscientious objectors have continued to press for a humane utilisation of the Army and an initiative to that effect has just been launched by a group of teachers in Basle Land.

All the main and perennial problems of Switzerland reappeared this year. The tension between federalism and centralism, the conflicting demands of integral neutrality and integration in a shrinking world, the aspirations of the Jura, the political claims of women, conservation and the protection of our natural heritage, the plight of an exploited foreign population, the fever of an explosive economy, all these problems seem to have emerged with an increasing intensity this year than ever before. They will emerge again next year, and so will new ones. These are the problems of our times and the necessary catalyst to make history move.

(P.M.B.—The Swiss Observer)