

# Comment

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# COMMENT

## WHO AND WHERE ARE MY READERS?

This is a question which I have been asked far more often than one would think, and even I was surprised to find that so many people seem to be genuinely interested in know just who reads the "Swiss Observer" and just how far the paper travels every fortnight. But as soon as I tried to enumerate the many places and give an idea of who reads the S.O. I found that it was not as easy, for it can be said that I have readers in every continent and from every walk of life. I can, therefore, give no more than a brief outline.

The bulk of the readers are, not unnaturally, in the United Kingdom, divided about equally between London and the rest of the British Isles. A large number of copies are sent to Switzerland every time.

The S.O. travels to France and the Netherlands, to Belgium and Germany. I have readers in Sweden, Denmark and Norway. Several numbers are sent to France, Spain and Italy, also to Liechtenstein, some to Yugoslavia and Greece, to Turkey and until recently also to Iran and Israel. In Moscow, too, I have always had one or two readers. Further East, the S.O. journeys to Djakarta, Karachi, New Delhi and even to Kyoto in Japan. A few readers in Sydney and Auckland are on the mailing list, and on the African Continent, I have subscribers from Algiers, Morocco and Tunisia in the North to Kenya (no fewer than 3!) in the East and Ghana in the West, right to Rhodesia and Johannesburg in the South, and in Madagascar, too.

Westwards from London, the paper travels to Eire and on to USA. Quite a few readers there: Connecticut, California, Massachusetts and, of course, New York; in Ontario and Ottawa in Canada and just one subscriber in South America at the moment.

So you see, it travels the world, that little paper. And obviously, it may turn up in unexpected spots — a friend of mine discovered it in a workmen's café in Camden Town, in a hotel reading room in Newcastle and in a lounge in Helsinki of all places!

Like any publication in the U.K., a copy must go to the British Museum in London. Equally we send one to the British Office of Information. We mail it to the National Library in Berne, the Central Library of the Federal Department of the Interior and the Federal Political Department in Switzerland's capital. "Pro Helvetia" and the Secretariat of the Swiss Abroad get copies, and the Home for the Swiss Abroad at Duerrenaeschesch subscribe. The Swiss Office for Development of Trade (OSEC), Swiss National Tourist Office, Swiss Fair, and a number of banks subscribe in Switzerland, whilst the same applies to their London offices, to which Swissair should be added.

This brings me to the many Swiss companies of world repute in this country, who not only receive voucher copies if they advertise, but where as many as six copies are subscribed to.

I have manufacturers and merchants reading the S.O., engineers, quite a few scientists, stockbrokers and insurance experts, bankers of every grade, lawyers and journalists, (many nationalities and again in various countries). Members of the teaching profession read it (University professors, at least two headmasters and other teachers of various ranks.) Among the medical men and women readers I have surgeons of distinction, including one of the very few women FRCS, as well as an outstanding Swiss woman ophthalmic surgeon in South Africa. There are nurses who have risen to the very top of their profession, and a good many Ministers of the Church, mostly Swiss. Several R.C. nuns are amongst my subscribers, and welfare officers, too, as well as farmers.

Then there are many subscribers in the catering trade, from modest waiters upwards to managing directors of luxury hotels, owners of renowned family hotels and *restaurateurs* who have made a name for themselves.

Amongst the subscribers are well-known artists — musicians, painters and actors — yes, I really may put each of these in the plural! And there are authors of repute and one or two broadcasters.

Of course, I don't know the occupation of every reader, nor do I know why subscriptions are taken out.

I do know that a few keen philatelists among them Britishers, subscribe because of the occasional interest shown by the S.O. in stamps; a few model railway enthusiasts, British friends of Switzerland, who like to read about the country. And this brings me to the former British Ambassadors to the Swiss Confederation, who are subscribers. Yes, my diplomats — they are largely responsible for the wide geographic reach of the S.O. I have over a dozen Swiss Ambassadors, two Ministers, a great many Counsellors and near enough a score of Consuls and Vice-Consuls on my list of subscribers. And here and in Switzerland quite a few politicians, National Councillors and even a famous former Federal Councillor. Then I count a few high military personages among my readers, (including in the Army of the Rhine), the most senior in Switzerland is a Brigadier, the highest I know of in this country are Colonels — imagine, I have a British Lieut. Colonel who gives a gift subscription to a friend of his, a Swiss Protestant Minister in Basle!

But let me just finish with some unusual occupations: a masseur of great skill, a former plastic surgeon of repute, a furrier craftswoman, a dress designer, hairdressing experts, authorities on diamonds, and of course, on numismatics, on figure skating and mountaineering, on boat construction, and on many other subjects which they follow not as a hobby, but as an occupation.

To be complete, I should also mention that many of my readers are titled, from an Earl to several baronets, from a French-speaking *baronesse* to holders of Queen's Honours, a KSG (until a recent death, two of my readers held this coveted honour awarded by His Holiness the Pope).

Nationalities? Naturally, most of them are Swiss and British, but there are quite a few other nationals. Incidentally, I have a few English readers in Switzerland and elsewhere abroad.

Some of my subscribers have only recently joined, others have read the "Swiss Observer" for nearly half a century. I don't quite know who is the actual doyen amongst the readers, as I am not always aware of their ages. From the birthday book — not by any means complete — I know that several are in the late 'eighties and early 'nineties. My oldest reader lived to nearly 100. My youngest I don't know. But I am told again and again that whole families read the paper one way or another, and that probably includes quite young school children. I know of at least one family where three generations subscribe. Odd things happen, a Swiss woman somewhere in Sussex heard of the S.O. for the first time after she had been in this country for 40 years; for the last three years now, she has been a keen reader and shown her appreciation by extra financial support. Of the latter I get a

lot, and some of the readers are extremely generous. By that I don't necessarily mean large sums, but I am thinking of the old-age pensioners, the widows, the handicapped, who send 1/6 or 2/6 extra, apologising that they can't afford more. That is more than generosity, that is making a sacrifice. I have always respected the man who, though wealthy, has sent no more than the bare subscription for reasons of principle, but more often than not has induced others to join or has made it almost compulsory for his Swiss staff to subscribe. When I cannot help feeling a little contempt, is when the obviously affluent man adds a bare 5/- or 7/-, possibly just enough to get his name in the paper. And there is the Managing Director whose firm subscribes, who reads it at the office, but is too close-fisted to take out a subscription of his own. If every reader became a subscriber, I might be able to add an even more interesting list of who and where they are!

Some of my readers are impatient and critical and a very minute number of opinion that the paper should be written only to suit them. The big majority are understanding and forbearing, tolerant and not even upset if a bloomer is made concerning them personally. Some read the paper from cover to cover and notice the slightest printing error; others only read what interests them and often don't even notice occasional inaccuracies. Some pay their subscriptions on the dot and others keep the Editor waiting for literally months, but complain bitterly if they are taken off or if they get another reminder already a couple of months after their last payment because they had been so much in arrears previous to that. Some send in changes of addresses and personal data promptly, others complain if I don't "smell" the various changes without being notified.

If I have shown off a little with some of my distinguished readers, it does not mean that they are the only ones that are appreciated. Certainly not. The bulk of them are ordinary, hard-working and appreciative subscribers, some still earning a living, some enjoying well-deserved retirement. Many prefer to live in seclusion, others are in the lime-light for one reason or another. Many are the men and women who serve their countries in a laudable way, but just as many are my readers who serve their neighbours in a modest, but commendable spirit of good fellowship.

A lot of my readers remember the past and look back nostalgically, others are impatient and want change. For some of them, the "Swiss Observer" is a link with the homeland, often the only one they have, or with the Swiss community in G.B. for those who used to live here. For many it is just a source of information. And I know, a few subscribers have the paper simply to know what the forthcoming

events are and to read the Colony gossip — if there is such a thing!

Whatever my readers do, whoever they are and wherever they live, it is they who make the paper tick. Without them, even the best of editors would fail. I realise that I have left out quite a few interesting details, and if I have left unmentioned an outstanding achievement or attainment, it is because I did not know about it. Readers will inevitably be dropping out, new ones will join, and one day, my successor will write another story. I wonder whether it will change substantially?

MM

## THE LARGEST UNDERTAKINGS The World

The Union Bank of Switzerland has just published an interesting list of the leading industrial companies, banks and trading concerns in order of size and turnover. The 100 largest industrial undertakings of the world reached a combined turnover of 1,310 milliard francs in 1968 (1,125 in 1967). By far the largest is the American General Motors Corporation, whose turnover of 97.9 milliard francs surpassed the whole gross national product of Switzerland by 25 milliard. The Standard Oil Company of New Jersey was second and Ford Motor Company third. The Netherlands/British company, Royal Dutch Shell, is in fourth place with a 57.3 milliard turnover last year. Among the other 96 undertakings, most of them are American or British. The largest German company is in 26th place (Volkswagen Works), the largest Japanese in 42nd (Hitachi). The biggest turnover in Switzerland was achieved by Nestlé, which is in 55th place with 8.5 milliard. Last year, 16 industrial firms reached net profits of over one milliard, and of the 100 companies in question, the only one with a loss was the British Steel Company.

The combined balance of the 100 largest Banks of the world totalled 2,220 milliard, and as the only bank in the world, the Bank of America, had a balance of over 100 milliard. francs. The second and third on the list are also American (First National City and Chase Manhattan), with Barclays Bank (G.B.) in fourth place. On the European Continent, the Banca Nazionale del Lavoro in Italy showed 41.8 milliard francs in its balance sheet, followed by the French Banque Nationale de Paris (34.7), the Crédit Lyonnais (32.1) and the German Westdeutsche Landesbank-Girozentrale (31.3).

The largest Swiss bank, the Union Bank of Switzerland (Schweizerische Bankgesellschaft) had a balance of 18.5 milliard francs and stood in 47th place on the list of 100.

### Switzerland

The largest Swiss industrial undertaking is the Nestlé Company which had a turnover last year of 8.5 milliard

francs and a consolidated net profit of 405 million francs. It is followed by Hoffmann-La Roche (chemical) with an estimated turnover of 4,000, Brown Boveri, Geigy, Ciba Sandoz (these three also in the chemical industry). Next comes Alusuisse (aluminium), Sulzer (including Escher-Wyss), Ursina (food), Oerlikon-Buehrle, Pars-Finanz and Suchard. In 13th place is Georg Fischer, followed by Bally shoes, von Roll, Interfranck, Bell A.G., Landis and Gyr, Heberlein and Gebrueder Buehler.

The Union Bank of Switzerland is followed by the Swiss Bank Corporation with a balance of 16.8 milliard and the Swiss Credit Bank with 15.5. The Zurich Cantonal Bank, the Schweizerische Volksbank and the Berne Cantonal Bank come next, with Crédit Foncier Vaudois and Banque Cantonale Vaudoise in 7th and 8th places. The St. Gall Cantonal Bank and the Hypothekarkasse of the Canton of Berne bring up the rear in this row of ten.

As far as trading companies are concerned, Migros comes first, followed closely by Co-Op, both showing a turnover in francs next to Brown Boveri on the industrial list. Usgo, Jelmoli and Globus come next with much lower turnovers.

(A.T.S.)

## SWISS TRAVEL SAVINGS BANK Holiday Village above Lugano

During the years 1955/1964, the Swiss Travel Savings Bank has built a holiday village of the 22 Cantons at Albonago above Lugano. Due to its magnificent location on the southern slope of the Monte Bre — with a splendid view over Lugano, the lake and the picturesque scenery of the Malcantone Valley — it has since grown to a representative centre with nearly 100 holiday flats, some additional apartments having been rented in the vicinity. Youngsters and grownups are delighted not only with the quality of the functional interior decoration of the individual apartments, but first of all with the community centre at the Casa Elvezia (Switzerland House) used in the daytime as a kindergarten and in the evening as a meeting place for adults, as well as the different sport facilities such as minigolf, table tennis, boccia and the large heated swimming pool. During the school vacation period in the summer and in the autumn, the holiday village's little houses, the larger of which can accommodate up to eleven persons, are reserved exclusively for the free-of-charge vacation organisation which takes care of families with lots of children. At that time there are often as many as 300 children playing in the community facilities under the supervision of a kindergarten teacher and leisure counsellor. This means a welcome and well deserved relief for the parents and particularly for the mothers.

(S.N.T.O.)