

# The swiss press today

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# THE SWISS PRESS TODAY

Lord Thompson of Fleet, the Press Magnate who owns the "Times" and the "Sunday Times" and a number of provincial newspapers has said recently that there were too many national dailies in Great Britain and that, out of the nine currently in circulation (excluding the evening papers) four would survive under stress. These four papers were named as the "Telegraph", the "Express", the "Mirror", and the "Times". The "Times" loses over £1 million a year, but Lord Thomson, highly attached to this quality daily, is prepared to absorb an even greater loss. These nine dailies share a readership of approximately 20 million and are practically the only morning dailies read in England and Wales. Furthermore, Great Britain is listed as a prime newspaper-reading nation with 440 dailies published per 1,000 inhabitants. What is surprising is that, under such seemingly favourable circumstances, the British Press should be facing financial difficulties.

The conditions in which the British national Press has to live apparently preclude the existence of small units with small circulations. The "Financial Times" is a glaring exception whose financial success is solely due to a specialised and select readership. The very quality of the Financial Times' readership permits the paper to get more from advertisements. The "Guardian" which, with 300,000 has the next smallest circulation makes a loss of approximately £800,000 a year which is written off by the "Manchester Evening News", the profitable owner of the paper. Otherwise, only the papers with multi-million circulations appear to make sound profits. The former "Sun" had a circulation of about a million, not so much less than the 1.3 million of "France Soir", France's No. 1 daily, and even that was not enough for it to survive. Three dailies were apparently too many for the 15 million inhabitants of New York and the "Herald Tribune" had to go! The conditions prevailing in America and Great Britain, particularly the greater distances and consequently higher cost of distribution, the work-to-rule and restrictive practices of printing unions obviously do not apply in the Swiss Press.

Although many of the traditional Swiss quality dailies have been getting into financial difficulties, and although there is a lot of talk about concentration in the Press, Switzerland still had, in 1960, 120 dailies sharing a paltry readership of 1,486,000. The number of dailies still stood at 118 eight years later. According to a brochure on the "Swiss Press" by Karl Weber, there are about 400 political papers in Switzerland, 263 of which are published in

communes of up to 10,000 inhabitants. Eight towns with more than 50,000 inhabitants issue 60 papers. 138 papers are published in communes with less than 4,000 inhabitants. This gives an idea of the *decentralisation* of the Swiss Press. 93.5 per cent of these 400 papers have a circulation of less than 20,000. There are only 11 Swiss papers (dailies and weeklies) with circulations exceeding 50,000.

The fact that the Swiss Press is so decentralised does not mean that it is only a "local" Press. Take Geneva, a town of 300,000 which has no less than five daily papers. They are, in order of decreasing circulation, "La Suisse", "La Tribune de Genève" (the town's evening paper, with three editions), "Le Journal de Genève", "La Voix Ouvrière" (a Communist daily) and "Le Courrier" (a Catholic organ). Each of these papers, except the "Voix Ouvrière", has a correspondent in London! The "Journal de Genève", with a diminutive circulation of 17,000, has correspondents in London, Paris, Bonn, Brussels, Vienna, Prague, Berne, Zurich, Lausanne, Basle and the United Nations. "La Suisse" which sells at about 70,000, managed to send two reporters to Cape Kennedy to witness a moon-launching. The "Tribune de Genève", which has a circulation of about 60,000, has correspondents as far away as Moscow and Washington.

Forty miles up the Lake, at Lausanne, with a population of 150,000 and about 200,000 for the rest of the Canton, we have the "Feuille d'Avis de Lausanne", the best-selling Swiss paper published in French, the "Tribune de Lausanne", the "Gazette de Lausanne" and the "Nouvelle Revue de Lausanne". All these papers except the "Gazette" have regular correspondents in London and elsewhere and try, whenever they can, to get the news from their men on the spot rather than from news agencies. It's a matter of prestige.

The list could continue. Neuchâtel, Fribourg, La Chaux-de-Fonds and towns of equivalent size in German-Switzerland have one or more daily papers which not only present local news but also news from abroad, using the services of foreign correspondents in a surprising number of cases.

These correspondents cannot, obviously, be "exclusive" correspondents. They usually work for a retainer and contribute to several other papers. The only papers rich enough to pay full-time and exclusive journalists in London are the "Neue Zürcher Zeitung", the "Tages Anzeiger", a new group comprising the "Tribune de Genève", the "Tribune de Lausanne" and the "Feuille d'Avis de Lausanne" (who pool their resources and share a correspondent) and the "Ringier" Group. There is a French-Swiss paper, which we shan't name for obvious reasons, which has a supposedly full-time and exclusive correspondent. The man in question supplements to his meagre pay by working in a big news agency,

a job which has the advantage of getting him closer to the sources of the news but which was not part of his contract.

The "Neue Zürcher Zeitung" is assuredly a remarkable paper. With a circulation of only 90,000 it manages to support 20 highly qualified, well paid and exclusive correspondents all over the world. This is without counting other non-exclusive contributors. It has an office in Fleet Street and two full-time men in London, not counting Dr. H. W. Egli, who has retired but who nonetheless still signs articles from London. The financial success of the paper can probably be explained on the same lines as that of the "Financial Times" and be attributed to the quality of its management and readership. The "Tages Anzeiger" is certainly Switzerland's most go-ahead paper and has now reached second place in Switzerland with a circulation of 200,000. The paper also has two men in London, one of them being employed exclusively. The most powerful Press group in Switzerland, the Ringier Group, and the only one which shares some common characteristics with publishing empires such as IPC, has a full-time correspondent and offices in Fleet Street. The group owns, among other magazines, the "Schweizerische Illustrierte" and "Blick", Switzerland's only really popular daily, half-way between the "Mirror" and "News of the World" in content and positively the most widely read. Its circulation tops the 200,000 mark.

The other London correspondents of Swiss newspapers work for other papers as well. The Embassy's list, compiled in 1965, enumerates 41 names. On the other hand, only 23 are listed in the Foreign Press Association register. As this association only accepts professional journalists one may gather that a good number of the correspondents left out are non-professional journalists and occasional contributors. The number of professional journalists (many of whom are German and a few British) working here for the Swiss Press ought therefore to lie somewhere between 41 and 23. Even if there were only 23, the figure would be remarkably high. Keeping to the same scale, it would mean that the French Press should be represented by 200 journalists in London. Actually, there are only 27 French journalists registered at the Foreign Press Association.

There is an obvious relationship between the size and the wealth of the material published in a paper and its financial prosperity. The hard-up "Sun" only had twelve pages, whereas the well-to-do "Telegraph" had, and still has, an average of 36 pages. The richer Swiss papers also have more pages, a lot of them filled with advertisements, than their poorer brethren. One also finds papers with surprisingly rich contents for their small means. The "Journal de Genève" for example, has fewer pages but as much to read as "La

Suisse", whose turnover is at least three times larger. This is due in part to the private local support which such a well established paper will always find, to other non-editorial sources of income and, mostly, to the financial sacrifice of its staff. Some quality opinion papers have had the painful dilemma of losing their better and recognised contributors by not paying them sufficiently. These top-ranking journalists have used their talents more lucratively in wealthier and more popular newspapers, to be often succeeded by young and inexperienced staff prepared to work for less, with the corresponding loss in the paper's quality. Papers such as the "Gazette de Lausanne" have distinctively lost in quality by losing distinguished editors (such as Charles Henri Favrod and Henri Dumur) and being replaced by far younger men, who, although talented, are nonetheless young, a fact which is stylistically reflected. Owing to the great number of Swiss papers, there are far more opportunities to be found in journalism in Switzerland than elsewhere. The Swiss Union of Journalists has about 1,100 members, but the editorial staff of some papers have no more than one in five who are actually union-members. This means that papers are sufficiently short of staff to take on young and non-qualified candidates, train them, and give them the best editorial posts which the Swiss Press can afford fairly rapidly, provided they are good. This contrasts acutely with the scramble by "Oxbridge" graduates to get into Fleet

Street. It also means there is less editorial proficiency and it is not infrequent to find stylistic or syntactical bloomers by the green and hurried editors of the papers who relax their standards. One of them, which is printed very early in the morning in order to be distributed to a whole Canton, has a type-setting error in every paragraph—a long way from the ruling practice of the "Times" of yore, where a type-setter got the sack when he had made a mistake twice. I have it on the authority of a French-Swiss journalist in London that one of the local editors of a Geneva paper is positively incapable of aligning a sentence in correct French! We must assume that he has some other valued quality which ensures his continued employment.

Owing to their limited circulation and small means, Swiss papers have generally less to read than English national dailies. This does not hold for the Tages Anzeiger, which is a very complete and thick paper, and especially of the "Neue Zurcher Zeitung," whose weekend editions are quite voluminous. In this case, many of the features of the later pages are not written by members of the editorial staff, but by citizens qualified to write on a particular subject. Whereas a paper like the "Times" may have twenty editors, starting with racing and ending with gardening, the N.Z.Z. is more liable to ask for the contributions of specialists in a given field. In this way, the technical and scientific features which one

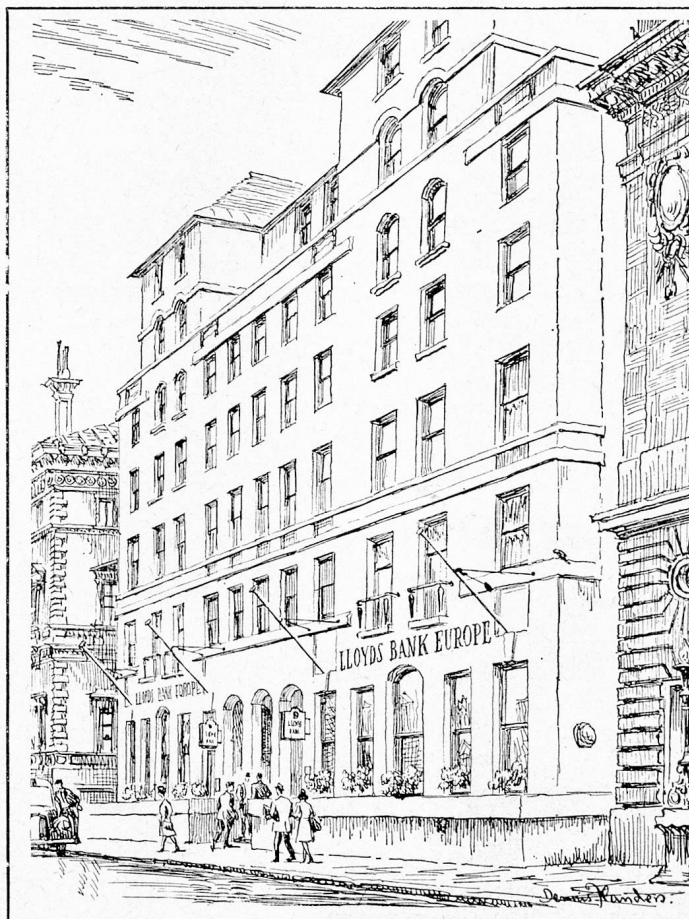
often reads in the N.Z.Z. are written by E.T.H. professors rather than the paper's science correspondent.

The local "intelligentsia" has therefore far more opportunities to say something in the Press. The British ruling class is entitled to send letters to the "Times"; almost any Swiss with something sensible to say can say it in the "Neue Zurcher Zeitung".

The Sunday press is almost non-existent in Switzerland. I believe there is a "Sunday" published in Berne, and "La Suisse" also has a Sunday edition. There isn't, however, a Sunday paper of the scope of, say, the "Observer" and the "Sunday Times", capable of keeping one busy and quiet for a long week-end. There is a quality weekly which, although not quite as voluminous, compares honourably with these two papers. It is the "Weltwoche", certainly one of the most readable and serious papers in Switzerland. It made history this year by issuing a colour-supplement, thus emulating the British Sunday press.

As a conclusion to these considerations, we can say that the Swiss press, like almost everything else, bears the federalistic mark. It is only thanks to the existence of circumscribed and isolated cantonal and communal markets that 120 daily papers can continue to live, relatively unhampered by the emerging giants, and give satisfaction to a readership as attached to them as it is to the plot of land visible from the bell-tower of the parish church.

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