

The price we pay

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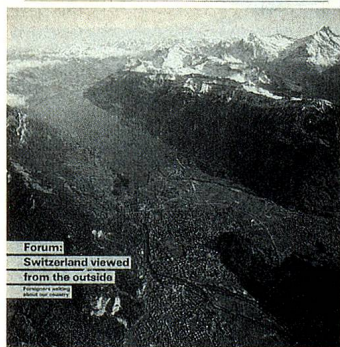
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It is not only the contributors to the Forum in this issue who have been expressing their views about Switzerland: the photographers of Swissair have been "looking at" Switzerland too. This aerial photograph shows Interlaken and the Lake of Brienz and - in the top right hand corner - the Schreckhorn mountain. (Photoswissair)

Editorial

The Price we pay



The Swiss passport is to be given a face-lift, but in spite of its new look, the citizens of our country will carry it with even less pride than they did before. Moreover, its attraction for a good many foreigners will diminish as well. The simple truth is that this little red passport does not represent the magic key which opens the doors of the European Community (EEC), which is almost certainly the effect of our position as the "outsiders of Europe".

All of a sudden, our white cross on its red background has become less dazzling than the twelve yellow stars on the blue background. The time is perhaps right, then, in the "Forum" of this edition to question ourselves about the image of Switzerland, an image which, in spite of everything, does not really seem to change much. Old clichés die hard. Take the Matterhorn, for example; a veritable myth in granite which for many quite simply sums up Switzerland.

Switzerland lives in the middle of "its" Alps or, more precisely, behind them, sheltered from the storms of the rest of the world. Geographically speaking, it lies at the heart of Europe, but in other respects it is far away. It is able to lay down the law to the rest of Europe as far as the use of its roads for heavy lorries is concerned, for example. And yet it remains aloof, especially when one remembers that its population voted against membership of the UN.

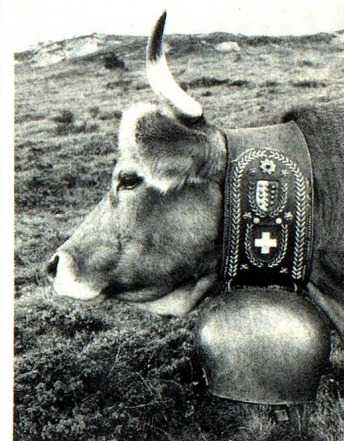
We do, however, have other reasons for questioning ourselves: Have some of the recent happenings which took Switzerland by storm tarnished the reputation of our country abroad? Is it now true to say that Switzerland has finally reached a stage where it is no longer above all suspicion? One might certainly think so at the mention of such names as Chaumet, Gelli or Kopp. Or if we think of the role of Swiss banks in the laundering of dirty money or of the ever increasing severity of our asylum policy. All this, however, is merely a small ripple on the surface of Switzerland's calm waters, or almost that. Perhaps this is because Switzerland, just to add to the clichés, is considered abroad more as a place where international conferences are held than as a country. Switzerland's image has been established more by the city of Geneva and its United Nations Building than by Berne and its national Parliament Building.

This "Forum" should, however, make us examine some home truths ourselves. Does the sometimes blatant wealth of our cities not prevent us from really enjoying our lives?, one of the points stressed in the contribution from the Brazilian journalist. And then there is our position as the "outsiders of Europe". Does it not, by its very nature, threaten to undermine the foundations of our prosperity?

We have so many questions to ask ourselves, so many issues to think about, and so many incentives to spur us on to a new dynamism. All of these are the price of Switzerland's image in the future.

Marc Savary, journalist

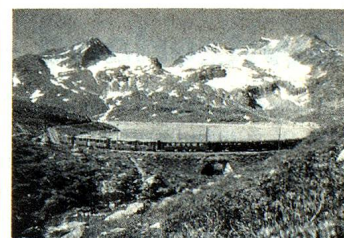
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