

# A Hungarian looks at Switzerland

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*For a Brazilian visitor, Gideon Rosa, it is Europe's loveliest city: Zurich. (Photo Swissair)*

old-time colonists, conquerors of the oceans and of Brazil? Now, sought out in their homeland by representatives of little Switzer-

land, they are allowed in for nine months a year as what are called "saisonniers" (how cruel has been the vengeance of the Bra-

zilian gods!). Regardless of whether they sweep the streets or mend the roads or clean up in the restaurants, the Portuguese are always liked. One eloquent detail in the process of contemporary "slavery" in Switzerland is that the guest worker is always supervised by a Swiss superior.

One type of public service which functions admirably is that of transport. The Intercity trains and the municipal trams operate with amazing punctuality. If the railway timetable says 7.03, the train leaves at three minutes after seven. I don't exaggerate! And the trams which at frequent intervals – usually of from 5 to 12 minutes – swiftly transport tens of thousands of passengers across big towns every day! Even so, one reads and hears complaints about the service: greater frequency, more seats are needed, and if bus or tram is one minute late, this provokes cross looks at one's watch. Punctuality is still an essential feature of life in Switzerland (even if a big slice of its former near-monopoly of the watch industry has been taken by the Japanese competition).

*Gideon Rosa, Salvador de Bahia*

## A Hungarian looks at Switzerland

The visitor who had only been in Geneva now and then in connection with political happenings had on this present occasion an opportunity to convince himself that in this little country – little by Hungarian standards, with an area only half of that of Hungary – the citizens feel entirely at home and behave accordingly as the proud owners of the country. Among the saddest features of life in Eastern Europe today is the fact that the governmental systems which are called "Socialism" have weakened and sometimes even killed outright any feelings on the part of the population that they "own" their country, and also that these systems have in a few decades done immeasurable damage to traditional values, large and small, which have been sacrificed and allowed to decay. And a visitor from Hungary is puzzled to understand the basis for such feelings of the Swiss who are at home in a society of such varieties, where there is no uniformity in respect of language or religion.

The co-existence of several national languages in Switzerland is a startling experience for the visitor from the Eastern region of Central Europe, who knows all too well that in his country linguistic and ethnic discrimination, many forms of mild (or less

mild!) oppression, and overt or hidden genocide not only have a long tradition behind them but are still rife today.

### A nation better than its repute

From the standpoint of a visitor from Eastern Europe, the articles in provincial Swiss newspapers claiming to provide evidence of "everyday racism" seem grossly exaggerated. Some 20,000 refugees from Transylvania, most of them Hungarians, are at present living in Hungary and one hears the nervous question asked from time to time: "But what will happen if even greater numbers arrive here?" This question admittedly crops up mainly in connection with the economic crisis currently afflicting our country. But when I look at the official Swiss statistics I wonder what would happen in many other countries if they had a sixth of their populations consisting of foreigners. This high percentage of foreigners living in Switzerland is impressive, and is related to the "linguistic" peace reigning between the various language-speaking regions. I realise of course that this high proportion of foreigners is inseparable from the economic situation. Switzerland is one of the world's wealthiest countries, with a per capita share

of the GNP amounting to 25,000 US dollars a year, or about ten times as much as in Hungary. In view of the tolerance displayed in connection with the various languages spoken, and the Swiss willingness to accept foreigners I have not been thinking of material background, but rather have been asking myself if the Swiss reality is not a lot better than the opinion that the Swiss hold about themselves and whether the whole question of "Foreigners versus suspicious Swiss" is not just a fabrication?

### That famous "direct democracy"

The mentality of a Central European from the East has some difficulty in penetrating into the concept of what is perhaps the most important factor of Swiss solidarity, fellowship and "togetherness": direct democracy, an outstanding system of local autonomy. Only through learning about the democratic perception and defence of local interests which is evident in everyday life can one understand why the Swiss inhabitants of the Western and Southern cantons have no passionate regard for the French or Italian way of life, just as little as those from the German-speaking regions feel affinity with other countries that share the same lan-





guage. Political thinkers in Hungary have long ago come to recognise the values contained in the basic Swiss confederative concept. Oszkár Jászi, one of the most outstanding bourgeois (i.e., non-Communist) experts on the "nationalities" question, revived at the time of the end of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, plans formulated by Lajos Kossuth in the 19th century for the formation of a Danubian Confederation, and produced a vision – that never became a reality – of an Eastern-Central-European Switzerland. He wrote: "The history of every federal state with solid foundations and imbued with true democratic spirit has proved that the very existence of such a state exercises a powerful attraction on neighbouring states." According to the words of another prominent Hungarian thinker, István Bibó, it was the "misery of the little states of Eastern Europe" which prevented the replacement of the self-destructive nationalisms by an open, federative concept for state government. The reasons are manifold and Switzerland today can in this context only serve as a model for a very distant future.

Swiss democracy as applied in everyday life does however contain certain elements that could be of value to present-day Hungary. Attempts are currently being made by some segments of Hungarian society to fight their way up to the level of a constitutional European state, and to create the possibilities for a many-sided political representation of interests. A debate is going on in connection with the drafting of a new constitution and the introduction of popular polls and referendums. No wonder, therefore, that I, as a visitor to Switzerland, have been fascinated by the high degree of independence enjoyed by the cantons, and by the complicated procedure that has been worked out for organising a popular voting procedure. I have been told by several interlocutors – to my delight – that initiatives and referendums are

an excellent means of controlling the Executive, and that a sword of Damocles hangs over the heads of the Legislative assembly in the form of a possible popular vote. The result is on the one hand that power is limited, while on the other, an opportunity is provided for always "thinking over" every decision anew, so that extreme solutions can be avoided.

## Representing interests

To the countries to the East of the Elbe, the most desirable import would be the concept of Switzerland's "Everyday Democracy". Two recent popular votes in Switzerland seem to me to justify this assumption. The circumstances and arguments in connection with the rejection of the proposal to join the United Nations are well-known. As a token of conciliation however, wealthy Switzerland has recently been more willing than before to accept obligations for mediation or surveillance in other countries – this was the case for instance in Namibia. Foreign observers are inclined to believe that more voices are being raised to plead on moral grounds for an expansion of the traditional "good offices". Against the background of an economy that is striving to overcome its problems, the idea of Hungary undertaking to provide "good offices" is not at present "on the cards", of course. A policy based on ethical considerations could however be very helpful if there were a change of régime in Budapest.

The other popular poll that could be very instructive is the one in connection with an "initiative" for "A Switzerland without an Army", due to take place in the autumn of 1989. Practically everyone that I spoke to considered it certain that the electorate would reject the proposal out of hand. Depending on the number of votes supporting the initiative however, it might prove necessary to give more consideration to the situation of conscientious objectors who

refuse to undertake military service, and also to whether one should to any extent meet the wishes of left-wing and pacifist circles for a cut in defence expenditure. This manner of dealing with very complicated issues should convince the Eastern-Central-European observer that direct democracy can effectively help to ensure that very divergent interests will get a fair public hearing.

## A Europe of the Regions

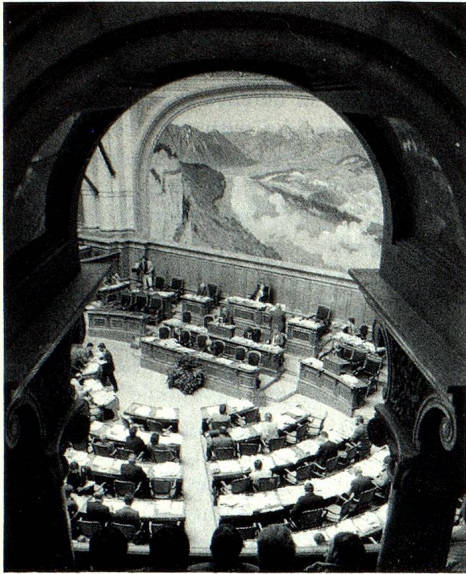
While we are talking about the nuances of European politics, one should remember that the local autonomy so indigenous to Switzerland is also matched by the systems in other Western countries. The inhabitants thereby feel, as I have learned in many locations, that they are firstly citizens of a municipality or other type of local community, then citizens of the canton, and only then citizens of the Confederation. This sort of self-government does not only lead to closer contact between the citizen and the various official authorities, but is also a factor conducive to stability – something that can be very revealing and instructive to observers from the East. Another, "middle-of-the-road" stage in respect of autonomy leads in a different direction, outside of the range of typical Swiss characteristics. What I have in mind are the international contacts of the cantons. In my conversations in Switzerland, there was some discussion about scientific collaboration in connection with protection of the environment, between Basle, the Alsace and Baden-Württemberg. In our territories, such types of cooperation over the national frontiers in Eastern Europe are rare and difficult, although they are bitterly necessary.

So now we have arrived from the way the Swiss feel that they own their country, via popular direct democracy and cantonal autonomy, to the questions of regional collaboration and of Europe itself. The systems prevailing in Switzerland give the Eastern observer a sort of "compass", the needle of which points *inside* the country in the direction of small communities which can freely organise themselves, but *outside* in the direction of a Europe that is striving to dismantle the "blocs" that now exist, and in which regions with greater autonomy than now will be able to collaborate with one another. Switzerland remains outside the EC but continues to expand and develop its economic contacts with "The Twelve" – something that is most instructive to a Hungarian observer: it shows that adhesion can be rejected on political grounds without disturbing relations in the sphere of commer-



*Dozens of proposals are voted on every year – on a communal, cantonal or Federal basis: direct democracy is a typically Swiss form of democracy for everyday use. (Photo: Keystone)*





Swiss domestic politics: to a Hungarian they sometimes seem rather boring – but they do not often result in too hasty or extreme solutions. (Our picture: National Council. Photo: Keystone)

cial and industrial collaboration. This is admittedly possible only when the economic potential of the supporting parties is similar to that in Switzerland. From the foundation to the peak: even on a relatively small scale and with adjustments to take Hungary's special circumstances into account, a transplantation of Swiss qualities could prove of great help to Hungary in that country's strivings to become a genuinely European country in the spirit of centuries of democratic and Christian traditions.

József Martin, Budapest

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## “Not really wise – but perhaps a bit shabby”

By renouncing the possibility of joining the European Community, Switzerland has missed the opportunity of having a say in the creation of the “new” Europe. Some damage to the Confederation's interests can perhaps result from this attitude, since even a merely associate membership will not enable Switzerland to shut itself off from the consequences of EEC policies. But the Swiss abstention could above all harm Europe, as its republican mentality and outlook, its liberal basic attitudes, and its successful handling of the problems of a multi-national and multi-lingual population could serve as a pattern for the EEC's future development. Like the Swedes and the Austrians, the Swiss see their neutrality as an irreplaceable asset, for which they are prepared to sacrifice the ideal of European unity. Personally, I cannot appreciate the value of this asset. To stay out of every conflict, as a matter of principle, is something that I do not regard as really wise – but perhaps as a bit shabby! And the only justification for such shabby behaviour – namely that one is spared the sufferings inevitable in all-out war – is in practice not valid: neutral Bel-

gium was overrun by Hitler's troops, and that he did not invade Switzerland was solely due to the Swiss combat strength, and had nothing whatsoever to do with respect for Switzerland's neutrality.

The united Europe of the future comprises far more than merely the sum total of benefits in terms of the economy and of security policies. The vision that we hope will come true is that of the final and definitive conquest of nationalism, of a future in which we shall be proud to be Europeans of Swiss, German or French origin, a vision of cultural unity born of diversity, of intellectual and physical freedom, a vision of the re-birth of the Occident as an economic, cultural, socially progressive and militarily potent great power.

For the realisation of this dream of a united Europe, comparable in its influence to the art of the baroque period and to the Age of Enlightenment, it will, I believe, be essential to overcome parochial narrow-mindedness among the various nations – and not least of all, the “Kantönligeist” in Switzerland.

Peter M. Lingens, Vienna

## “No special favours for the Swiss”

A dynamic force has been released by an age-old but constantly renewed desire, and a broadly conceived draft proposal: a momentous change by which Switzerland, as a small country, is too directly affected for it to be able to lay claim to recognition of its entitlement to a special role.

In its dilemma, between full membership of the EEC on the one hand and a policy of isolation on the other, Switzerland is trying to “make a virtue of necessity”: it wants to remain capable and acceptable as a true European state. It reminds one of the phrase used in official certificates in connection with possible pregnancy: in German, “Zeugungsfähigkeit”, in English “procreative capacity”. Or more crudely expressed: “I could if I wanted to, but I don't want to. Not yet!” And one must remember: the objectives and the scales of value in matters of the economy are virtually identical for Switzerland and the EEC.

Will the Swiss one day be seen as “second-class Europeans”? Will they no longer have to worry about “infiltration by foreign ele-

ments” because nobody will want a Swiss passport anymore? As I am not Swiss, but German, I would nevertheless like to see the “interior decoration” of the European house being influenced by Swiss “design” with its democratic pattern. A true conservative will not cling to yesterday's values – he will always contribute to the fashioning of the future, with due sense of proportion and mindful of tradition, of course. Thereby he will be very different from the reactionary, who only reacts to what others propose. Dear Swiss readers: make full use of your potential. Create, conceive and bring forth. Do not hope for any extra favours – be content with the best you can achieve. But I fear that I may be wasting my breath. In my own country a lot of people would like to see the frontiers of 1937 restored. Keep Europe sustained at the level of the Gotthard pass? Wouldn't Liechtenstein be quite nice too? The only snag is that it would not satisfy Switzerland's aspirations.

Jürgen Engert, West-Berlin