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Editorial

Not only curing symptoms



It is the same scene day after day. If it is not too cold, the drug addicts congregate at the same times on the "Kleine Schanze" in Berne, located right outside the portals of the Federal Government building, in order to forget themselves and the world as well.

The effect is similar to that when somebody throws a bag of paint all over a freshly renovated facade. The annoyance cannot be ignored, but the reactions vary. All stem from a deep-seated feeling of perplexity and helplessness. Two inter-related questions come at once to mind: how could such a crisis arise, and what must now be done about it?

Nowadays it is by means of narcotics that one can make most money (apart from the tourist industry – though perhaps that is a drug too?). Without doubt one solution – maybe the only one – is to smash the cynical activities of the narcotic barons, the wholesalers. But should the consumers – the fixers – also be punished by law, or would it be wiser to legalise the use of "soft" drugs or to supply addicts with "hard" drugs under strict control? The former solution has not proved successful anywhere so far, quite the contrary, but it would be a mistake to dismiss the latter one as equivalent to capitulation. That latter course could even be more helpful in preventing the worst development of all, namely the spread of criminality and the pauperization and degradation of the addicts (not to mention the problem of AIDS), and in the long run turn out to be the lesser of two evils. In the German-speaking regions of Switzerland there is evidence of a trend towards the adoption of a more liberal narcotics policy finding favour in all the political parties.

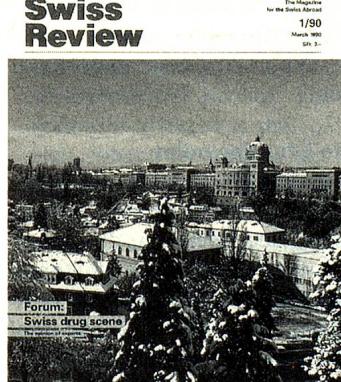
But, to get back to our question: how could it happen to such an extent? Critical experts as well as observers in the general public have no doubt about the cause. They see it in the rapid improvement in the technical means of communication (above all, television) over the past couple of decades. This has just as rapidly led to the destruction of the possibilities for communication within the family, which would be of vital interest to growing youngsters. It used to be called "family warmth". Its absence leads to a flight from feelings of hollow futility into depressions, alcohol, drugs and pointless but frenzied rushing around. Or perhaps it is the ever wider range of subtly sophisticated narcotics itself that in fact leads to what has been called the "atrophy of thought", and to a mentality with "painless living" as its motto. It is up to us now to restore the healthy capacity for suffering that we admire in other nations.

Finally, to turn to two changes in our own establishment. Mr. Walter Fetscherin, Minister, who has for three years headed the Service for the Swiss Abroad in the Department of Foreign Affairs with great ability, humour and charm, has been appointed Ambassador to South Korea with effect from January 1990. We congratulate Ambassador Fetscherin warmly on his new post, and wish him and his family happiness in their future sphere of activity.

May I in conclusion introduce myself to you as the successor of Mr. Marco Zaugg? I am very happy to follow in his footsteps as a member of the editorial team of "Swiss Review" and I look forward to the privilege of remaining in friendly contact with you.

H. A. Willumat

Heidi Willumat, Editress



The picture of an intact world. Behind this facade lies a problem that gives the Swiss more cause to worry than do problems of the environment and of refugees seeking asylum: namely the ever increasing number of drug addicts.

(Photo: Michael v. Graffenreid)

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