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The disco – the much decried and passionately loved leisure activity par excellence of young people between 14 and 20.
(Photo: Michael von Graffenried)

Editorial

The Youth of Today



Swiss and German surveys carried out in recent years have all shown that the youth of today is in general contented. The youngsters aim at getting a good job, social relations are important to them – though not so important as money – and they have little interest in politics and ecological problems (women somewhat more than men). Individualistic aims are well to the fore. They are optimistic and believe that they control the most important areas of their lives. The “post-materialist” era predicted 20 years ago does appear to be coming into being.

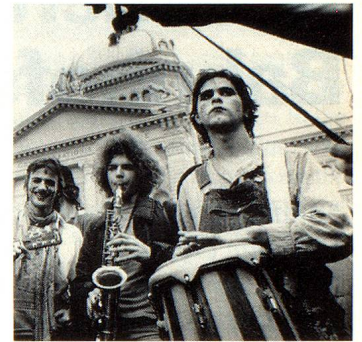
This means that young people have again become a good consumption potential for economic interests. Their desires and interests have been well catered for. Whether clothes, sport or cultural activities, offers – and even the dictates of fashion – are available in plenty and are taken up in order to be “with it”. In addition these norms are also being adopted by the older generations: to be youthful, to behave like young people, is a desire not confined to any specific age group.

There are also counter-movements to this consumer-oriented, contented, individualistic youth: dropouts who prefer a simple life-style with social and ecologically responsible activities to a materialistic one which uses up resources; young people looking for a meaning to life, no longer found in the present-day society which primarily strives for growth. There are young people seeking asylum, and there are others who strongly plead for a more humane Swiss policy towards these asylum-seekers. Finally the picture of a contented and satisfied youth is disturbed by young drug addicts and the growing number of youngsters committing suicide.

On the one hand young people are regarded as the initiators of a new society. Anyone who wants to help shape the future of our country will do well to take notice of all these pictures from the youth scene. On the other hand young people are also a mirror image of a society, moulded by its standards and values. The young people, who mostly react more spontaneously to environmental factors than adults, can be regarded as indicators of the positive and negative aspects of our political and social life. Whether intensively pursuing leisure-time activities, whether working unreservedly for their fellow men and women or whether sincerely seeking the meaning of our life – youth is a good pointer to the health of our country.

Dr. Ruth Lüthi, Institute of Psychology, University of Berne

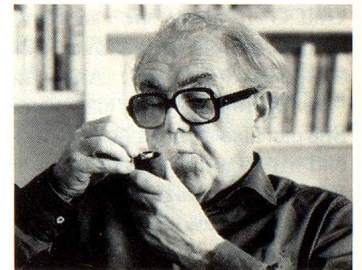
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