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Switzerland in transit

“How Switzerland has gone downhill!” In the last few years, this bitter remark must have been made by quite a few Swiss Abroad on returning to their homeland for a brief visit. What has happened to the country of order and harmony, of physical and moral purity? It does still exist to some extent, but for the most part Switzerland has adjusted to time and the world. This is shown by the data contained in the 1990 census and later surveys about the customs of the Swiss.

It may be that some Swiss Abroad have noticed the notorious Zurich drugs scene; that they have been upset by the rubbish on the floor of Berne railway station and the many graffiti on the walls; that their handbags have been snatched; that they have been horrified by the fact that in Switzerland

Giuseppe Rusconi

house doors nowadays have to be locked; that they are astonished by politicians seeking new meanings for neutrality and independence; and it may also be that they are amazed to hear so many foreign languages on the streets. These are things which strike people, get under their skin, destroy beautiful and beloved memories and arouse longings for the “good old days”. (But did the majority of the population of our country really live better in the “good old days”?)

The results of the 1990 census show that the changes which we all feel – and not only the Swiss Abroad – have actually taken place. But most of them were unavoidable in view of the fact that the world has become a sort of global village. This is very largely because nowadays everybody can see on television how the rest of the world lives. But this has not been only a matter of armchair travelling, for refugees fleeing from hunger and conflict the world over have indeed streamed into Europe.

One of the most important changes is connected with the subconscious: generally speaking, the Swiss do not feel as secure as they did even ten years ago. But this change in attitude is only partially justified, except in large cities and in frontier areas. Here it is true that the

small-scale criminality which some people feel threatened by really has increased.

Multicultural society

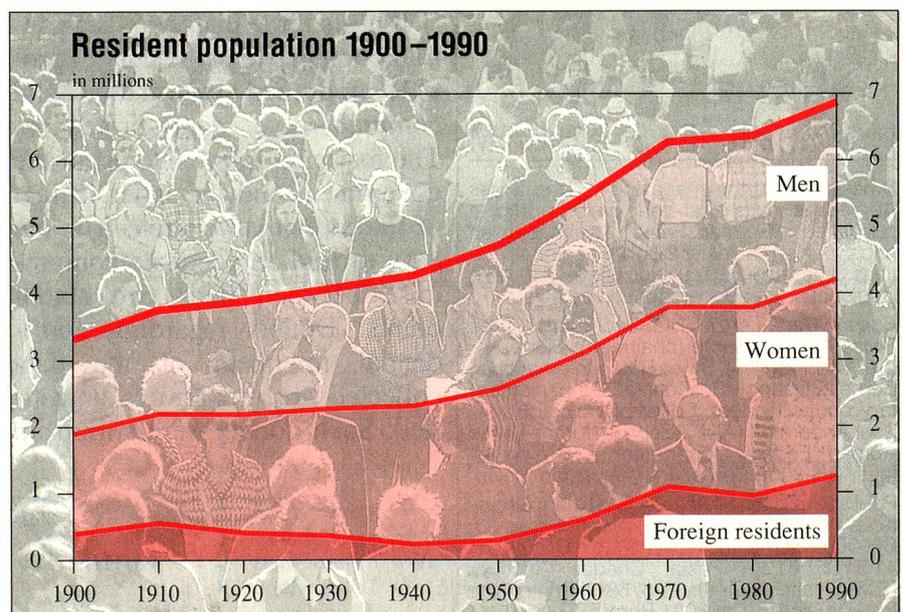
The 1990 census also provides a lot of other interesting information. Increased immigration is the main factor which has led to the substantial growth in the population. In some cases, immigrants come from countries with completely different cultures, which can lead to problems of living together. It also results in the creation and expansion of new minorities having languages and religions which were quite unknown in the country previously. This also brings about a new type of multi-cultural society (helped along by mixed marriages) which does not correspond to the old pluralistic reality of the four language regions. The cultural identity of

many Swiss also seems to be in a state of crisis (which is not necessarily to be seen as a negative point), because they may have to move to another part of the country and in this way lose contact with their accustomed environment.

The way in which people live has changed markedly. Amongst the reasons for this are the possibility which was already mentioned of having a closer look at other models of life and increased mobility (commuting, more women in paid employment). All this promotes individuality. In practical terms, it is reflected in the increase in one-person and two-person households and of more couples living together outside marriage, as well as in the trend away from traditional religion. Fewer children are being brought into the world, and there is a constant increase in the number of old people – developments which Switzerland has in common with most other western countries.

More and more waste

The growth in population and physical mobility also have their effects on the quality of life and on the environment. Both the proportion of the population living in urban centres and the number of private cars have increased, and more and more waste is being produced.



ormation

The standard of education has generally improved. But on the whole men are still better educated than women, even though the latter are catching up.

The service industry has grown in importance at the expense of manufac-

turing and agriculture. Today, only 4 out of every 100 people at work live off the land, while 30 out of every 100 are in manufacturing. Switzerland remains a country where the majority of people rent their homes (66.5%), which makes it an exception in Europe.

These are some of the trends which can help people to understand the Switzerland of today. One or two of them are explored in greater detail in the present forum. ■

Work, mobility, education

Towards the all-service society

An increase in the working population and a boom in commuting: these are the two main trends brought out by the 1990 federal census results in the fields of work, mobility and education. There were as yet few signs of unemployment at that time, although today this would certainly be prominent in the information contained in the statistics.

In ten years – from 1980 to 1990 – the number of people at work increased by 17.1%, which is twice the rate of the growth in population. For the first time,

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the proportion of those at work amongst the population as a whole (the work ratio) has now exceeded 50%. This trend is particularly marked amongst women. But statistics tell us that they tend to engage in part-time employment, in contrast to men, where this form of work still plays only a marginal role. There is also a significant difference in earnings: women receive on average a third less than men for comparable jobs.

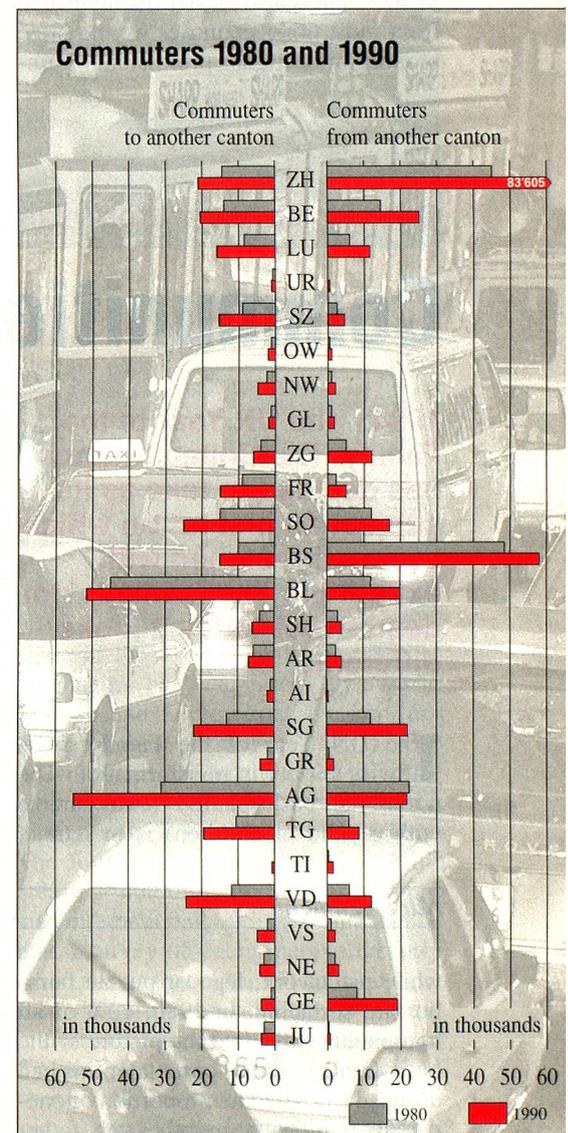
The structure of the Swiss economy continued to change during the 1980s: the agricultural and manufacturing sectors were in steady decline, while the service industry now employs 63.9% of Switzerland's working population.

The census figures contain only 2.1% of persons without work (registered and non-registered unemployed people), but the situation has changed substantially

since 1990 as the jobless rate has now reached the 8% mark (about 250,000 unemployed people) as a result of the recession which occurred in the early part of the decade. In spite of the economic recovery which apparently started in the middle of last year, we should not expect a major decrease in joblessness over the short term, since its main causes are structural.

Men in cars, women on foot

Mobility continued to increase. Today, commuter traffic is no longer restricted to the main urban centres. During the decade in question, the proportion of those working in a municipality other than the one in which they live (inter-municipal commuting) increased from 40% to 49.7%. Private cars are the form of transport most frequently used (55.8%), followed by trams and buses (20.5%). In 1990, 1.36 million people used private cars to go to work, school or their place of study, while 1.05 million travelled by public transport. Here too, there is a substantial difference between men and women: only 33% of working women go to work by car, as against 53% for men.



Source of data: Federal Statistics Office
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