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About this issue

In 1998 modern Switzerland will celebrate its 150th birthday – reason enough for Swiss Review to devote an issue exclusively to the occasion. Switzerland when the federal state was created and Switzerland today are compared and illuminated from various points of view. Ten young people, citizens of tomorrow, make short statements about 'their' Switzerland. The issue is illustrated by photographer Jean-Jacques Ruchti, who has caught on his lens a number of original views of today's Switzerland.

I M P R E S S U M

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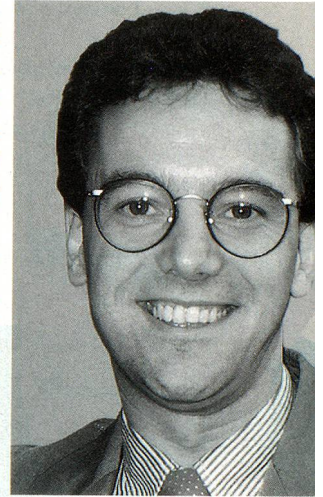
How does a country celebrate its 150th birthday when it does not feel in the least bit festive? With a mini-budget, four part-time posts at the Federal Office for Culture and a number of events at the federal, cantonal and local levels which can hardly be called sensational. And all this sealed by a parliamentary decision that only the founding of the federal state is to be celebrated officially and the delicate (because controversial) historical preliminaries are to be simply swept under the carpet and left to those cantons which can or want to do something about them.

Switzerland is a nation by expression of will. In 1998 it is in trouble with itself. The affair of the secret files, the unsuccessful diamond jubilee combined with the not exactly euphoric 700-year anniversary, the difficult search for a new position in the international community, the unusually long recession – all this has seriously damaged the self-confidence of our country. The loss of trust in itself over the last few years has recently been fuelled by the intense discussions about its conduct during and after the Second World War.

By Swiss standards the bitterness of this controversy has been unprecedented, and our self-assurance – which should be on the whole intact if in a critical state – now seems to have left us completely. We should stand together as a nation, and all the main political forces in the country should take similar attitudes. Instead of that we go for each other's throats. Abstruse accusations and declarations of purity with relation to nazism have come back with a vengeance in a debate in which objectivity and differentiation would have been indicated – a debate in which mistakes should not have had to be explained away and

in which distortion of the facts and one-sided descriptions of what happened should have been dealt with and rejected.

It is not surprising that a country which is so torn apart and unsure of itself is hardly in a position to give the right dignified tone to the round-figure birthday which is approaching. Dignity would suggest that we come to terms without prejudice with the years between 1798 and 1848. This would enable us to recognise that the foundation stones for much of what today is a modern and successful state were laid during that period. But it would also



mean accepting the fact that forces from outside were required to make the rotten hulk of the ancien régime collapse and to release the inner forces needed to build the new dwelling-house which Switzerland was to be. It should also demonstrate that in a time of rapid transformation it is not first and foremost conservative reflexes that are needed but readiness to open up to new horizons and accept reform.

In the last number of Swiss Review, it took a citizen of Germany to tell us that we had stopped seeing the positive side of things in Switzerland. Let us take what he said to heart and all together make 1998 the year of new departure – 200 years after the bell first sounded for modern Switzerland and 150 years after it actually came into being. In the present issue, the editorial staff of Swiss Review try to play a modest part in this process.

René Lenzin
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