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A young man's thoughts on Switzerland

Switzerland should be an example to the world

The reactions of a 17 year old Swiss to the international criticism of his country.

1998 is meant to be a jubilee year, but from the Swiss point of view there is not a great deal to celebrate. Ineluctably, the long, dark shadow of the past has caught up with Switzerland.

Search for a guilty party

Swiss diplomats have been coming under fire, and have to live with harsh criticism, not least in the United States.

Tim Kaeser

Newspaper reports make it sound, to me at least, as though Switzerland was the only country to be involved in affairs concerning the Third Reich. Can it really be that 53 years after Hitler's death a guilty party has been hunted down, and found in little Switzerland? And how about the past of those who have been opening their mouths widest?

Indians as villains

I ask myself: how for instance did the United States deal with ethnic problems? The Indians too were slaughtered, driven out and put into reservations. When is the United States

going to have to answer for its behaviour to the Indians? It seems to me that this dark chapter in American history has been put back on the shelf, like an unread book in a huge library. Instead, hundreds of wild-West films have been made showing the Indians as villains, stumbling blocks on the industrial revolution's road.

What gives the Americans the right to judge Switzerland? They should sort out their own mess, and solve their internal political problems before they set themselves up as a global police force and world court. It may well be that the Americans are trying to make use of a strong foreign policy to distract attention from the political problems which they have at home: for they have political problems enough there.

Can I as a young Swiss be made responsible for the behaviour of my grandparents? It seems to me that people are being held liable today who were in no way directly involved with Jewish gold. I can't help it if in the Second World War Switzerland hid behind its façade of neutrality, and yet as a future taxpayer I shall soon have to bear my share of the debt created by Jewish gold.

Outside help not required

I am clear in my own mind that Switzerland does not have a blameless past, but that is no reason for the whole world to

trample on Switzerland. Switzerland did indeed deserve criticism with its «boat is full» attitude. It is a good thing that the past should be thought through and discussed, but I think Switzerland can do this without help from abroad.

Accounting for our actions to third parties is one thing, acting ourselves and taking responsibility for what we do is another. To justify and excuse oneself first to oneself and then to others seems to me an unusual procedure.

Certain people in Switzerland, notably the National Bank, are guilty of having knowingly accepted Jewish gold. It is clear that even now Switzerland is looking after money deposited by foreign presidents who exploited their people, and that some of Marcos' millions are to be found in Swiss bank accounts.

Responsible for what is done today

I cannot take responsibility for murky business involving the Third Reich, but I shall oppose accepting and keeping money from Marcos, Mobutu and their friends. I hope that Switzerland will stop doing this and be an example to us ourselves, and to all other states, and show that our country has learned from the Jewish gold debacle.

Despite the darkness of this past I am not unhappy with my Swiss passport: no, I am perhaps even a little proud of my home country. Switzerland for me has in the truest sense still something special, namely the cohabitation of four different national languages. It is this which makes every expedition into a different part of Switzerland an adventure in understanding. Thanks to the four different national languages, mentality, culture and the young people's scene are everywhere a little different. At the moment in the young people's scene in which I go round, producing your own music is the in thing. To set something up independently is possible in Switzerland, and again and again there is a positive response. I find this fantastic. That is why I value Switzerland as a multicultural nation. ■

Ping-Pong between young people

How does a young person see Switzerland? We asked Tim Kaeser (17) to put down on paper his thoughts on Switzerland and his relationship to the home country. Tim lives in Hinterkappelen and goes to high school in Berne. He gave his ideas free rein. His opinion is not that of the editors. We shall ask a Swiss Abroad, a young man or young woman, to answer him.

