

**Zeitschrift:** Helvetia : magazine of the Swiss Society of New Zealand  
**Herausgeber:** Swiss Society of New Zealand  
**Band:** 16 (1951)  
**Heft:** [7]  
  
**Artikel:** On common ground  
**Autor:** Chopard, Theo  
**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-942731>

### **Nutzungsbedingungen**

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

### **Conditions d'utilisation**

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

### **Terms of use**

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

**Download PDF:** 18.01.2026

**ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>**

In Greece, which has suffered so heavily the war and the civil war, and is a country with only seven million inhabitants, there are at present 700,000 refugees, that is to say, a tenth of the whole population. Most of these refugees are living under the worst possible conditions.

Figures for the fourth category of refugees, the emigres from the Cominform countries, are lacking, but they too are constantly increasing.

Altogether the present number of refugees in Europe is estimated at 14 million. A considerable proportion are still accommodated in camps: reception camps, transit camps, and permanent camps. Others are living in towns and villages, often in compulsory billets or lodging in some ruin. External living conditions often vary from place to place. Eye-witnesses describe them as being in some cases unfit for human beings. Sometimes families live together; frequently, however, they are separated. Many a refugee does not even know whether his or her closest relations are still alive or not. Opportunities for productive work are limited, and there is still less opportunity for employment in the learned professions. In Schleswig-Holstein, at the end of June, 1949, about 12 per cent. of the refugees were entirely unemployed. In Bavaria where conditions are much more favourable, the number of unemployed refugees during the same period was about half a million. Industry, trade and agriculture are already sated with labour. Also, there is a lack of land suitable for cultivation. Emigration further afield, overseas, encounters almost insuperable difficulties. Receiving countries today regard refugees as alien bodies among their own people, and the refugees themselves do not feel at home in them. They often lack the barest necessities of life, for the precautions for the protection of those affected by the expulsion measures were frequently disregarded. People were fetched from their homes or fields, packed into goods trains, taken to the frontier, and there left to their fate. With the actual refugees, things are just as bad. The worst thing for them all, though, is the fact that they can see no future ahead which might alleviate their lot. They have lost their homes, and their houses and villages are inhabited by others—in Silesia, for instance, by Eastern Poles, who have not the slightest intention of ever leaving the area again.

These refugees, for whom the IRO can do nothing, thus not only constitute an exceptionally heavy burden for the country which shelters them, but are a threat to the whole of Europe. Many of them are becoming anti-social and nihilists. There is a danger that a "cinquieme état" may arise, an international class of the disinherited. The only hope of many refugees is a new war. For that alone can change the political situation and bring about the necessary conditions for a return to their former homeland. They themselves have nothing more to lose, and whatever else may perish affects them very little.

To deal with this distress is, of course, primarily a task for the country concerned. Much is in fact being done in Germany, in Austria and in Greece for the refugees. Efforts are being made to protect them from hunger, cold and disease, to improve their situation, and as far as possible to provide them with work; but the means available bear no relationship to the immensity of the task. The German Minister for Refugees, Lukaschek, in an impressive statement, said that some 4 milliards of Reichsmarks and D-marks had already been raised by the Lander and communes of Western Germany for the direct care of refugees alone. In addition, there are the indirect expenses, resulting from the necessary increase in administration, facilities for education, and so on. An only partially satisfactory solution of the refugee problem in Western Germany would, in Lukaschek's estimation, require a further 28 milliards of D-marks; but how can this money be raised in time? As long as the flow continues from the East, the situation will get worse week by week.

## ON COMMON GROUND

By Theo Chopard.

The recent census of the population, taken by the Swiss Confederation, shows a further decline in the rural elements and a fresh increase in the urban and industrial population. In spite of the fact that from 1941 to 1950 the number of inhabitants in Switzerland has increased by nearly half a million, one rural locality out of three has registered a decline in the number of its inhabitants. Within the space of one century, the proportion of persons engaged in farming has fallen from 50 per cent. to 20 per cent. of the whole of the Swiss people. Is it really a fact, as so many would have it, that we are witnessing a flight from the land? Certainly not! Nowhere in Switzerland do we find abandoned farms, deserted villages and hamlets, and uncultivated land, as is the case, for example, in certain regions of France. On the contrary the tiniest plot of land is carefully cultivated. What is then the reason for this steady decrease in its population from which our countryside is suffering? It is self-evident that the attraction exercised by easier living conditions, higher earnings, and more varied possibilities for recreation, plays a considerable role. But this is not the only reason for this demographic movement. The simple reason is that in the agricultural regions the number of births is too high in relation to the possibilities of work and of living offered by the available land. The superficial area of this land is constantly declining. The progress of industrialisation and the progressive extension of towns and cities, is steadily "eating away" arable land. In other words, there is no longer sufficient land to provide work for all those who are born in the farming class. A great many families leave the country because the number of farms is diminishing. The cost of running a farm has become—for a number of various reasons—so high that agriculture is obliged to rationalise its methods of production. Small farms—which are not paying concerns and cannot provide a living for all the members of the family—tend to become eliminated in a pitiless manner. They are cut up and engulfed by larger farms. Only large farms are profitable. But, even they, are no longer important enough to be able to provide work for all; moreover, they cannot pay the wages which can be obtained in industrial undertakings. That is the reason why we find ourselves facing the following paradox: in spite of a birth-rate among the farming class which is too high for the amount of work available, agriculture lacks man-power and is obliged to have recourse to foreign labour. The migration of the rural population to the towns and the steady growth of the latter, is far from desirable. On the other hand, those rural regions which lie at a distance from the urban centres, are not in a position to provide everyone with sufficient earnings. At this point, I would like to specify that the depopulation in question is particularly marked in the outlying parts of the country. In those villages where certain industries have been established, there has been no decline in the population. Thus, it would appear as if the best way to stabilise, to a certain degree, the relations between the farming population and the semi-urban regions, is to decentralize to a still further extent an industrial production which is already proceeding along that road, and, in this way, open up new possibilities of employment to the village populations. Taken as a whole, however, this decline in the rural population which is being deplored, is not a social evil. In a small and highly-industrialised country like Switzerland—a large portion of whose superficial area is covered by mountains and glaciers—farming can offer possibilities of work to only a limited number of persons, of whom the proportion grows smaller concurrently with the growth of the population. In short: the possibilities of employment offered by agri-

culture are limited, whereas those offered by industry are not. And that is why the industrial population continues to increase in comparison with the farming population.

## LETTER FROM SWITZERLAND

### SWITZERLAND AND THE EVOLUTION OF PRICES.

Swiss economy is at the moment enjoying a period of real prosperity. The various branches of industry, the metallurgical industry, machinery, precision instruments, watchmaking, textiles and chemical products all have orders on their books for many months to come. Delivery dates in many cases have had to be extended. Unemployment is non-existent, firms are working to full capacity, and a call has had to be made on foreign labour to make up for the shortage in the number of workers and employees, which was taking on serious proportions in certain trades.

The causes of this great activity are not unknown. The intensive re-armament programme that has been going on in other countries for a year now and the considerable stockpiling are among the principal causes, but it would be wrong to consider only these factors. The liberalisation of trade that has taken place under the aegis of the European Payments Union, of which Switzerland is a member, has favoured Switzerland's commercial relations with certain European countries. The textile industry in particular has profited by this state of affairs, as has watchmaking, which has been able to increase its sale of finished watches. Mention should also be made of the heavy demands of the home market, the wages paid in Switzerland nowadays being such as to grant a high purchasing power. It is only fair, however, to mention that the retail trade is complaining of a certain falling off in business, the continued bad weather of the last few months having put a brake on the sale of clothing, travel articles, etc.

In spite of the favourable situation, industrialists and those at the head of Swiss industry are showing signs of a distinct anxiety with regard to the future. They point out, and rightly so, that the present state of prosperity is in part an artificial one, since it is dominated by political factors, and that a deterioration or an easing of the international situation could produce serious repercussions on foreign markets as regards prices.

Moreover, it is this question of prices that is commanding the most attention in economic circles at the present moment. In Switzerland it is particularly serious, for the poor soil of the country and a sub-soil barren of raw materials oblige her to seek beyond her frontiers the products in which she is lacking, and consequently to suffer the fluctuations of prices on international markets.

Up till the first quarter of this year, the cost of living index was only 4.6 points higher than the year before. In no other country had the cost of living risen so little. It should be emphasised here that it is not official measures—such as price controls, for example—which have put such a brake on the rising of prices, but, on the contrary, the free decisions of private enterprise. In point of fact, the economic groups of the country as a whole agreed that recourse to a system of official price controls was in no way justified, that the law of supply and demand worked as a sufficiently strong regulator and that it was advisable, in the present circumstances, to obey the appeal issued by the Federal Council in January of this year. This appeal pointed out clearly enough that the maintenance of industrial and agricultural exports is a vital necessity to Switzerland, and that a rise in the prices of products for export would have grave consequences for the export

industries. It is everybody's duty, therefore, to fight against rising prices, and to refrain from seeking exaggerated profits or increased wages.

Although the recommendations of the Federal Council were unanimously agreed upon and followed, the rise in wholesale prices and the cost of raw materials, which rose from 196 points in June, 1950, to 230 points at the beginning of 1951, affected the cost of living, which by the end of May had reached the figure of 166.1, thus exceeding the maximum recorded in November, 1948, which has been called the "danger figure."

This development of the situation led workers to demand increases in wages to which the employers were opposed, pointing out that a certain stabilisation would set in since the increase in wholesale prices appeared to have reached its highest peak, and that it would be dangerous to create an inflationary movement by increasing wages. In support of this theory, it must be pointed out that the real wages of Swiss workers have increased by about 20 per cent. on an average as compared with 1939.

Another cause for anxiety is the question of obtaining supplies of raw materials, Switzerland's particular position and its statute of neutrality being the cause of serious difficulties in this respect. Dependent on the markets of the world for all products of prime necessity, she feels keenly their present scarcity, which is due to the intensive re-armament programmes that are being carried out all over the world. Moreover, some countries producing raw materials have certain measures of control and applied a system of quotas which are a continuous source of anxiety to Switzerland. The Federal Council in its turn has had to issue certain decrees involving the control of imports and exports. It is obvious that the demands of a strict neutrality prevent Switzerland from acting exclusively according to the criteria of simple expediency or immediate interests. It is in the economic field that the carrying out of a policy of neutrality presents the greatest difficulties and demands the vigilance of the authorities, in so far as decisions of economic significance taken by foreign Governments pursue political ends. But over and above this vigilance and prudence there reigns in Switzerland the profound conviction that collaboration between countries and their Governments is the only path leading to a state of peace. For her own part, Switzerland is doing everything in her power to facilitate this collaboration.

## NOTICE

The Swiss Consulate informs the Swiss in New Zealand who are not members of the "Freiwillige Alters- und Hinterlassenenversicherung" (Voluntary Old-age Widows' and Orphans' Insurance) that they still have an opportunity to do so, as there has just been an extension of time limit for joining. They should apply to the Swiss Consulate before the end of this year. After the 31st of December, 1951, no applications will be taken into consideration.

MR. FRANK IMHOF,

42 Vogel Street,

HAWERA.

Is Agent of the

SOUTHERN CROSS ASSURANCE CO., LTD.

CORRESPONDENCE: Please address to the Secretary,

MR. E. MERZ,

P.O. Box 85, Auckland.

Printed by McKenzie, Thornton, Cooper Ltd., 126 Cuba St., Wellington, for the Swiss Benevolent Society in New Zealand (Inc.).