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Swiss Spotlight

By J. C. JOYE

FRANTIC speculation in real estate has for some time taken place in the canton of Ticino. Foreigners are buying land at very high prices in order to build holiday homes or houses in which they will live permanently. This phenomenon is causing anxiety by its increasingly frequent occurrence, threatening to do away with some of the characteristics of the canton of Ticino. There are certain communes situated on the banks of Lake Lugano and Lake Maggiore, where foreigners represent as much as 80 per cent of the inhabitants. Some of the finest sites are often disfigured by notice boards prohibiting bathing and walking on the grass.

An action committee has been set up in the Ticino with the object of opposing by all legal means the speculation in real estate. The problem is of importance for the whole of Switzerland. The population of the canton of Ticino represents a twentieth part of the country's population, it alone represents Italian culture in Switzerland. The Ticino possesses only modest natural resources, and for a long time past measures have been taken in order that the Ticino should not lose its originality. It has always been exposed to this danger, because of its natural beauties; both the landscape and the climate being Southern. Without exaggeration it may be said that for the other Swiss, especially those from the German-speaking regions, the Ticino is what the French Riviera is to the Parisians and California to the inhabitants of the Northern States of America, namely a land of sunshine with a mild climate. Consequently a great many German-speaking Swiss settled in the Ticino, and the danger of germanizing became acute. Measures were taken to preserve the Italian character of the Ticino, its language, customs and culture.

The remainder of Switzerland agree willingly to these measures, because there was no question of them being discriminatory measures, but simply an attempt to preserve for Switzerland one of her fundamental characteristics, that of being a diversified State in which the particularities of the cantons are safeguarded. A threat to this is the speculation in real estate in the Ticino, and this time it does not

come from the other Swiss, who understand the necessity of preserving the character of the Ticino, but from the foreigners.

The action committee set up to fight this speculation has suggested, among other means, that the communes should buy up all the land which has not yet been sold. This committee would also advocate that all sales of land to any great extent to foreigners should be prohibited giving the native population a chance to buy.

The following question, however, arises. Why do the Ticinese sell their land? The attachment of the Ticinese to their soil has always been proverbial. Countless numbers who had emigrated to all parts of the world used to return to end their days on their own property, which had meanwhile been entrusted to the care of relations. It would now appear that this attachment is no longer as strong today as in the past, and it is important that this attachment to the native soil should be fostered. But there is also an economic problem, the Ticino is poor, that is why a great many Ticinese farmers, whose land did not bring in enough to keep them, have preferred to sell it. What should be done therefore, is to intensify economic aid to the Ticino thus creating new possibilities for husbandry.

It is to be hoped that all these measures for the preservation of the true character of the canton of Ticino will achieve their aim; it is this question which affects the very structure of the Confederation. At the same time it is to be hoped that the Ticinese will themselves realise that the success of the measures envisaged depends to a large extent on their personal loyalty to their land and to their culture.

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