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The Reasons For Switzerland's Stability

We live in an age of statistics. They often throw more light on a situation than columns of print. Gallup International and the Swiss Institute of Public Opinion have recently carried out a survey in seven countries to find out how satisfied people feel with their lot in life and with the institutions of their country.

In terms of positive responses three small countries top the poll: Switzerland, Denmark and Norway. Switzerland comes first with 79%. Among the Swiss 92% are satisfied with the work they do and 74% with the income they earn, 79% with the free time they have, and 88% with their standard of living.

The percentages recorded in the other six countries (Denmark, United States, Norway, Western Germany, Great Britain and France) are lower. To the question: Do you view the future with optimism? 80% of the Swiss replied yes, but only 54% of the English and 46% of the French. 79% of the Swiss are satisfied with their country's position in the world, but only 43% of the Americans, 42% of the French and 34% of the English. This gap no doubt reflects the total absence of political ambition stemming from Switzerland's resolve to stand aside from world embroilments, and also the difference between the international responsibilities falling to a small country and to a great one.

This does not mean, however, that Switzerland shirks responsibilities she is capable of assuming. In the humanitarian sphere she leaves no call unanswered: she lends her good offices in diplomatic matters; she joins in the activities of a vast number of international organisations in very different fields; she bears the entire costs of her military defence. Yet the satisfaction of the Swiss people implicit in these figures is not absolute.

It is not shared by a substantial minority. It is they who are the leavening necessary for making the dough into bread — who set in motion the changes which are necessary in Switzerland as everywhere else. Taken all round, however, these figures show that the Swiss believe their institutions, although in need of improvement, should not be discarded, lock, stock and barrel. They can see little sense in changing the shape of the instrument simply because of one or two discordant notes. All that is needed is a little more skill in the player. This philosophy helps to explain the stability of Switzerland revealed by these figures. And perhaps this stability will in turn play its part in the peaceful development of the world towards a greater happiness shared by all.

(S.N.T.O.)