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Further Reductions in Foreign Labour

The evergrowing postwar expansion of the Swiss economy would not have been possible without a large foreign labour force. The economic boom was welcomed at first, and so were the foreign workers. Then, gradually, in more far-sighted quarters uneasiness was felt about the excessive economic boom, and at the same time awareness grew of the dangers of too many foreign elements within Switzerland. When the foreign labour force reached half a million, the warning voices were few, but once it reached 600,000, alarm was beginning to be felt, and the concern expressed in the new term *Ueberfremdung* ("overforeignization") was a real one.

In 1963, the Federal Council introduced stricter measures to reduce the number of foreign immigrants, but with little effect. The commission set up in 1961 to study the problem, published a 220-page report in October of 1964; the dangers of *Ueberfremdung* were brought home to the people.

In articles on the subject published in the "Swiss Observer" in January and July of last year, the matter was reported fully. It was stated then that new measures to curb the increased cost of living had been accepted by the Swiss electorate. They included restrictions on foreign labour: all undertakings employing over ten foreigners had to reduce the number by five per cent by June. These restrictions were considered with concern in many quarters, as it was feared production would suffer as a result and that productivity could not be stepped up by rationalization in so short a time. Industry was faced with a difficult task.

Many firms had already achieved good results over the last few years. The chocolate manufacturers Lindt and Spruengli at Kilchberg today has the same number of workers (1070) as in 1953, but has increased production by fifty per cent. In 1963, there were 760 foreigners in the factory, and today that number has been reduced to 680.

A second example is the Rafz works of the "Zuercher Ziegeleien", where fifty workers produce 55,000 tons of bricks per annum, as against 9000 tons with thirty workers previously. The textile industry, too, has managed exemplary rationalization; the cloth manufacturers of Pfunge-Turbenthal are a case in point—their productivity per hour has been doubled.

Naturally, it is firms such as these which have been hit hardest by the restrictive measures, whereas in badly run and over-staffed undertakings, there was more scope for improvement and the imposed reduction of five per cent was bearable.

The effects of the restrictive measures are not yet fully evident, though price increases may in many cases have been the result, for rationalization costs money which has also become more expensive. Fortunately, a strong decline in the fluctuation of foreign labour and a remarkable rise in the work discipline amongst foreign employees helped employers in their efforts. The frequency of changing jobs went down rapidly, and the percentage of personnel turnover which has gone down to a third of the previous figure, meant a considerable increase in productivity. The prohibition to change a job in the first year of employment has proved beneficial. Furthermore, the Swiss Society for the promotion of economy reports that there is an increased tendency amongst foreign workers to do good work, partly because the employer for obvious reasons dismisses the worst qualified and least satisfactory worker first. This has acted as an incentive, and the worker's average output has gone up.

In October, new figures were published which showed clearly that there has been a decline in the foreign working population for the first time. In 1960, there were 435,476 foreign workers including those living in neighbouring countries and commuting to work in Switzerland. In 1961, the increase was 25.9 per cent, the following year, 17.6 per cent. In 1963, the total went up by 7 and in 1964 by 4.5 per cent to the record figure of 720,901. Last year, for the first time, the figure went down by 6.2 per cent to 676,328. Of this figure, well over one quarter were seasonal workers, two-thirds in regular employment and 6.7 per cent commuters (Grenzgaenger). As before, the building trade (25 per cent) and the metal industry (19.3 per cent), have the strongest contingents of foreign workers; catering and textiles have around 11 per cent each. There is not one group where there has not been a reduction as compared with twelve months before. The share of the various regions is much the same as in the previous year: Midlands around 41 per cent of the total. Western Switzerland 21 per cent, Eastern Switzerland 14 per cent, Northern Switzerland $10\frac{1}{2}$ per cent, Ticino nearly 8 per cent and not quite six per cent in Central Switzerland. Except in Uri, Lucerne and Obwalden, a reduction has occurred in all Cantons, in some of them even below the 1963 level, especially in Baselland.

It must be remembered that the figures do not include foreigners permanently resident or employees of international organizations. From August 1964 to 1965, 10,666 foreign nationals received their permit of residence, and these are NOT included.

In 1965, 375,222 permits to foreign workers were issued, over 80,000 fewer than in the previous year. As to nationalities, the largest reduction was registered with the Italians: by 49,712 to 257,146. Permits to Germans were reduced by 10,619 to 31,060 and

to Spaniards by a similar figure to 38,824. A further decrease in the number of permits in February has just been announced.

The discussion goes on as to the advisability or otherwise of more restrictive measures. Strong voices have been heard that they should be more elastic. It has also been frequently stated that the inland labour potential has not yet been fully tapped. How far should the married woman whose children are at school or have grown up go back to work, at least part-time? Tax relief and special considerations by employers are urged.

On June 30th last year, a People's Initiative with 58,320 signatures was handed in at the Federal Chancery, demanding that foreign residents and workers should not be more than 10 per cent of the population. With 5½ million inhabitants, the present figure is still roughly one-sixth. A petition by the "Nationale Aktion gegen die Ueberfremdung von Volk und Heimat", which asked for a reduction of 30 per cent and other drastic measures to curtail the foreign labour force, was not accepted by the Federal Council.

In February, the Government had a discussion with the top organizations of employers and employees, the so-called Sozialpartner, and on March 1st, the Federal Council decided that the foreign labour force would have to be reduced by a further 5 per cent by the end of next January, 3 per cent of which are to be reduced already by the end of July. Various conditions were eased for commuting foreign workers and for certain seasonal workers. Undertakings will be allowed to increase their total staff by 4 per cent (employment of Swiss nationals, foreign workers with permits and commuters). A modest extra increase has been granted to the PTT services because of their special problems.

The Federation of Employees' Associations welcomed the further restrictions, though it maintained that foreign capital is as much of a danger as foreign labour. Swiss industry and trade, however, protested strongly, and the Central Federation of Swiss Employers' Organizations directed a letter of protest to the Federal Council. Many firms had got into difficulties, and the new measures would affect the same undertakings and many more in an adverse way. Some excellent and indispensable foreign workers would have to be dismissed, and production would suffer, costs would rise, affecting competition in foreign markets. The extra allowance for the PTT Services is criticized, and from many quarters censure has been passed on the Federal Council for agreeing at such a difficult time to a reduction in working hours (from 46 to 44 hours per week) for the federal administrative staff. This proposal has caused a great deal of dissatisfaction, and no doubt, more will be heard about it later; the relative message to Parliament was published on March 8th.

Those in favour of reducing the number of foreign workers further, include sociologists. Figures are quoted, for instance of

Winterthur's births: in 1950, 13 foreign children were born in the first six months of the year and 520 Swiss babies; in 1965, 259 foreign children were born as against 562 of Swiss parents; figures which speak for themselves. More assimilation is urged, and special school classes are organized so that the foreign children can join their Swiss friends as soon as possible and are not kept in isolation. Housing, too, is a problem. Often, the homes of the foreign workers are of a higher standard than they would have in their own countries, but in some instances, accommodation is not satisfactory.

In December, a book was published "Siamo Italiani". It is based on the talks and discussions which were had with Italian workers in 1963 when the firm of the same name was prepared. Max Frisch wrote the preface. "Man hat Arbeitskraefte gerufen, und es kommen Menschen", he says, and that paints the true picture in a nutshell. The problem is a difficult one: it will require economists and sociologists to solve it and much goodwill and unselfish effort on all sides.

Based on information received by
Agence Telegraphique Suisse and
"Basler Nachrichten"

Distinguished Visitors in Switzerland

After the end of the year had seen Emperor Haile Selassie as a private visitor in Switzerland, January began well with the American scientist Dr R. B. Woodward, the latest Nobel Prize winner for Physics, and his family spending a holiday at Zermatt. An American study group of sixteen lectures and students from Illinois spent a fortnight in Switzerland, and three Ministers paid visits to the federal authorities, the Norwegian and Canadian Ministers of Trade and the Venezuelan Foreign Minister.

A Russian Trade Union delegation made a fortnight's study tour; they were members of the Russian Union of trade and commerce employees. The King of Burundi went for a holiday at Crans, and the Shah of Persia spent a few days privately in Zurich. The Swedish Minister of Trade visited Berne for talks on EFTA and European Integration, and Princess Grace of Monaco arrived in Geneva to take part in filming for Canadian Tv. on the work of the International Red Cross. The Prime Minister of British Guiana stayed with a friend of his at Unteraegeri, the Rabbi of Rumania was in Zurich where he gave a number of talks to the Jewish community, and at the end of the month, an Austrian military delegation visited Switzerland.

The Mayor of Montreal was the guest of the Swiss Watch Industry, and Germany's Foreign Minister spent his holidays at Pontresina and paid a courtesy visit to Berne. A group of young diplomats from developing countries of three continents have been