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Autor: Ernst, Richard R.
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A LOT TO BE SMUG ABOUT

TAKI [Spectator]

The Press has of late been full of stories about the angst in the Swiss Alps, but one wouldn't know it from this beautiful mountain village. That is if I discount the anxious look I got from a cow when I disturbed her peaceful grazing while climbing the Wispille yesterday. The weather and temperature are perfect, the atmosphere clear and the tourists well behaved. Oh yes, I almost forgot, and the rich towelheads that flooded the place last summer because of Saddam's southern excursion are back where they belong, in London, Paris and Geneva, among the hookers and the spivs and other such species.

The reason good old Helvetia has not been keeping her preferred low profile is the anniversary of 700 years of confederation. Typically, the press has been unkind, especially the Americans. Switzerland is being called too rich, too smug and far too mediocre, which is what the Liberal Fourth Estate always calls a country that has no crime to speak of, no ghettos and no poverty.

And it isn't only the press. The untalented Swiss-born cineaste Jean-Luc Godard recently suggested that Switzerland be dissolved into her three biggest neighbours France, Germany and Italy, which proves to me that a man's lack of talent is proportionate to the stupidities he utters.

Needless to say, envy has more than a lot to do with the negative publicity. The fact is that Switzerland is a model society, with tranquil rural areas and clean and peaceful cities. Unlike the United States, it is not a melting-pot, with all a melting-pot entails. Rather it is a patchwork stitched together for the common good, with each part retaining its individual culture and mores. None of that politically correct bulls-t here. Everyone is free to do as he likes, as long as he doesn't disturb his neighbour. The country works so well, it is driving the media and the Left crazy.

What I find amusing is that the Swiss, at least the ones I know, are not aware of the angst they are supposed to be suffering from. They think of their country as more peaceful, more prosperous and more democratic than any other, and to hell with the sociologists who say that the confederation is in trouble. In the immortal words of my friend Heidi Muellner, "When I smell a sociologist, I reach for the cow dunk".

When the greatest British Prime Minister was in office, she used to take her holidays in a Swiss canton. The ludicrous Kinnock used to visit the sweaty hellhole that is Nicaragua. Enough said. What Swiss detractors hate about God's country is the fact that the Swiss work longer hours, save more money and enjoy as a result the highest GDP per capita in Europe. Unemployment is virtually non-existent, while the citizens' army is powerful and morale sky-high. All these things are garlic and crosses to the Dracula of socialism and the welfare state.

No wonder the tenured radicals of the academy hope Switzerland fails. Perhaps in another 700 years they'll finally be able to say I told you so. But for the moment things are fine. The only problem is my right knee. Even Switzerland can't cure my limp, but I think it's about the only thing it can't do.

DER CHEMIKER RICHARD R. ERNST,
Nobel Prize for ETH - Professor.

