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Autor: [s.n.]

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WHAT IS SWITZERLAND?

(This year Switzerland had the honour of organising the World Congress of Market Research and Public Opinion Surveys uniting the members of ESOMAR (European Society for Opinion Surveys and Market Research) and WAPOR (World Association of Public Opinion Research). During the course of the congress, Mr. Charles Schläpfer, head of the firm of Wander Co. Ltd. of Berne, a member of the Association for Market Research in Zurich and of the Western Switzerland Association for Market Research at Lausanne, made a short well-received speech introducing Switzerland to foreign members of the audience. We think that the following extracts from his speech will be of interest to our readers).

When tourists arrive in Switzerland, they generally compliment us about the cleanliness of our country, and they realize that people, houses, shops and everything else looks wealthy; they admire the quality of our railway and telephone systems. They see that the standard of living in this country is high, and they may easily believe that Switzerland is not only lovely, but also a naturally rich spot in the midst of Europe.

Unfortunately, this is not true at all. We have no coal, no oil, no minerals. We have only beautiful scenery, rocks, ice, snow and water. Even the soil is not naturally a rich one.

I shall give you a few figures: more than 20% of the country are snow, ice, rocks and lakes; 25% are woods, another 25% pastures for our cows, goats and sheep and only 28% of our whole land are meadows, fields and vine-yards. If you consider this, and if you compare these figures with our high standard of living, it is quite normal that tourists and even economics speak of a "Swiss Miracle". How is it possible that so many people live so well in such a small and poor land?

If there is no geographical explanation of the fact that this country exists and is even wealthy, may be there is a historical explanation.

Our grandfathers had to cope with one difficult economic problem: although the number of inhabitants was only about one million, it was impossible to feed them all on the products of our poor soil. There was no industry, they had nothing to sell and nothing to export. But they were good wariors; they exported men and boys, they sold themselves, they became soldiers. And as a matter of fact, for many centuries, there was hardly a battle fought on European soil without Swiss soldiers.

Fortunately, James Watt and many others, by their inventions, gave poor countries like Switzerland new possibilities. Our ancestors realized immediately the importance of these new inventions and introduced modern manufacturing methods. The raw material had and has still to be purchased, but never-theless, the export industry and export trade of our country have developed in an outstanding way during the past century. What we earn today and what more than 50% of our population lives on, is the difference in price between the imported raw material and the high-class finished goods which we export.

This means that we solely sell our work and craftsmanship. And this means that we have to be highly competitive. We therefore have to work very hard, have to start early in the morning, our factories must be well organised, our chemists, engineers and all the workers have to be highly efficient, so that all our export goods, such as cheese, chocolate, food products, engines, watches, chemicals, pharmaceuticals, textiles and so on, are of an outstanding quality and can be sold all over the world for a fair price. If such were not the case, nobody would buy our manufactured goods, we could close our factories and. . . you never can tell. . . maybe become soldiers again!

Let us be honest and let us be modest. If our country is wealthy, let us not forget that this is due to two very special reasons. The most important is that since the time of Napoleon — more than 100 years ago — our country has never been occupied — which is almost an exception in Europe. For more than one hundred years the Swiss have been able to build up their industry and powerful export trade without being disturbed in their task as their neighbours have been.

The second reason is that since 1918 up to the present time there have been no important strikes in Switzerland. This does not mean that we are better boys than other nations around us. But being allowed to live in peace during World War I and World War II, inflation has not been as important as elsewhere in Europe. So that tension between rising prices and salaries has never been as acute as in neighbouring countries. Then the political structure of Switzerland has avoided any serious misunderstanding between the various classes. Our small country is divided into a great number of small geographical and social units. In small firms human relations are no problem. In small units they are much easier to cope with than in large political and social units. In our country employers and employees frequently know each other personally: maybe they were in school together or met each other during their periods of military service.

What about our future?

The problem is terribly clear. A nation which has to be so highly export-minded, absolutely needs a climate of freedom and liberty.

(Swiss Industry and Trade Journal), January Issue.

SWISS WINTER SPORTS

The Sports Hotel Alpina, Flums Berg, St. Gallen, 1½ hours from Zurich, hitherto mostly known to the Swiss, is developing fast, and is becoming an international rendez-vous. Downhill from 2500 metres to 450 metres, easy training slopes quite close to the Hotel.

A Swiss Ski School which will teach you the technique of skiing by its first-class instructors. 4 Skilifts. A new Sports Railway is now in construction, and will carry the guests direct to the Hotel.

The Alpina can accommodate about 100 guests, is well-known for its first-class cuisine and is one of the most reasonable hotels in Switzerland.

Any further information you can obtain from our Hotel, Crown Hotel, Hay on Wye, near Hereford.

Prop: FAML. GULLER.