

# Switzerland a testing ground for consumer goods

Autor(en): [s.n.]

Objektyp: **Article**

Zeitschrift: **The Swiss observer : the journal of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK**

Band (Jahr): - (1966)

Heft 1498

PDF erstellt am: **21.09.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-693196>

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## SWITZERLAND A TESTING GROUND FOR CONSUMER GOODS

The English Group of the "International Advertising Association United Kingdom" organises international luncheons periodically. On 1st February, it was Switzerland's turn. Prof. Paul Stocker, an economist and Professor at Berne University, gave the main address; he is also President of the Swiss Group of International Advertising Association United Kingdom". Dr. Farner, President of the "International Advertising Association", gave a talk on his experience in advertising. The Embassy was represented at the Luncheon by the Councillor for Economic Affairs Monsieur Feller.

Here are some of the points from Prof. Stocker's speech.

"I shall endeavour to describe my country and its economic characteristics to you. Of course, I realize that not long ago you were favoured with the opportunity of hearing a few poignant details about Switzerland and its inhabitants presented by the Earl of Arran who writes a column in one of your London newspapers. I must add, however, that a good number of these traits were new to us too! Lord Byron found a much more poetic and friendly mode of expression 150 years ago.

"As you know, Switzerland is one of the smallest countries in Europe — her entire population of 6 million does not nearly approach the number of inhabitants in London alone. Merely one-fourth of her total surface area is cultivated farm land. The remaining three-quarters is equally divided among pasture, forest and agriculturally unproductive areas. We also have no mineral resources whatsoever. One is almost tempted to infer that this scenic wealth denotes economic poverty.

"The fact that we have, however, in spite of these natural disadvantages, an economy in obvious full bloom, can be traced back to various factors:

"First of all, the Swiss are industrious. This is evident in many ways:

"For instance, the large percentage of the working force in relation to the entire population. The structure of the working force is about as follows: 10% in agriculture, 50% in the manufacturing industries and the remaining 40% in the sectors of producing services. This breakdown destroys *a priori* the romantic conception of the Swiss, which one repeatedly meets in England, that, primarily, we are a people of peasants and shepherds who use their spare time yodelling and blowing alphorns! There are only a few hornblowers left.

"This industriousness is also the reason behind the relatively long working week, extremely few hours lost on account of strikes, the high proportion of people holding side jobs, and the large quota of women in our labour force. In general, the Swiss fight for shorter working hours only because they desperately need more time for their side jobs.

"A second explanation of the economic development my country has achieved is the thrift of the Swiss people which provided the capital needed for industrialisation. For years the Swiss had a larger volume of savings than necessary to cover local investment needs, which made Switzerland an international creditor and a centre of world finance.

"No wonder we have an unusually large number of outlets for the accumulation of personal savings. Saving accounts outnumber the population by far.

"Also corporate savings are extremely high: in some cases the annual volume of internal financing through

depreciation and retained profits almost equals the capital stock.

"Further factors that our welfare rests upon are the liberal economic and foreign trade policies and the unusual stability in domestic and foreign politics. There are very few "floating voters" in our country, in part because women have no voting rights — a fact that I am personally ashamed of. If in a general election for Parliament more than four seats change hands we consider this a political landslide.

"No wonder that "hot money" likes the place!

"Just like all other nations we are thoroughly convinced of our worldwide economic importance. Most of this is wishful thinking, of course. But in a few selected areas we are a world power. 40% of all watches worn in the world — and I might add 100% of all really good watches — come from our country. And then, the World President of the I.A.A. is Swiss, although he now lives abroad most of the time.

"As our ground yields no other natural resources but water — and even that is becoming more and more polluted — we have to depend on highly specialized industries that refine goods and render services rather than produce materials. This fact necessitates an intensive international exchange.

"We have close trade connections with our big brother in EFTA, Great Britain. Our main export items are machines, chemicals and watches. Swiss cheese and chocolate we only export to the U.K. so that we may buy your whisky and gin with the proceeds. We might as well return to barter in these goods.

"On the import side, automobiles are the major item. Apparently we buy them not to solve any transportation problem but to create parking problems. That's one thing our ancestors didn't have to worry about!

"But then, they had other problems: in the Middle Ages they conquered so much land that they had to stockpile it. And that's where our mountains came from.

"These now serve as the appropriate background for our highly developed tourist industry. Excellence in this field, however, has proven self-defeating: our hotel personnel is so much in demand abroad, that Swiss hotels are mostly staffed with foreigners!

"As we have seen Switzerland is nothing special. But the Swiss consumer is something very special indeed: he — I would say even a typical one — not only speaks one, two or three of our national languages, but he also is conservative, a perfect example of an individualist, demanding perfection in a product more than anything else. In this respect Swiss market is some kind of a test market. As a result, our production is split up into numerous small and expensive series. We do not thrive on high volume and low prices but on quality and specialization. Swiss perfectionism is especially evident in its militia army of about 600,000 men. That weapons imported from war-experienced countries could be suitable to defend our still unattacked Swiss neutrality usually turns out to be a mirage. They have to be beefed up somewhere — even if it's only in the price!

"My quality-controlled and world-renowned watch tells me time has run out. But I can't close without one very important last message — through a lucky stroke of fortune Switzerland has qualified for the football world championship games this year in England. Our primary goal will be to deliver to the opposing teams all the points they need. We don't want to win, we just want to be spoken about! That also goes for this occasion today!"