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# The Swiss Observer

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## THE SITUATION IN SWISS PUBLISHING

by Jean Hugli, Journalist, Lausanne

“Swiss publishing is doing fine” seems to be the general consensus of opinion, which is very reassuring and saves people from having to pay much attention to a sector of the economy frequently — and quite wrongly — considered as unimportant. Undoubtedly, Switzerland publishes a great deal and even, in proportion to the size of her French and German speaking populations, much more than France and Germany. But this intense activity possesses certain features which need to be pointed out in order to dispel the far too rosy picture it might give.

Attention should be called first of all to the fact that out of the mass of works published the number by Swiss authors (of yesterday and today) is comparatively small. French-Swiss or German-Swiss book-clubs and societies place much greater emphasis on foreign writers than on Swiss, in keeping actually with the taste of the public who show little interest in their own native authors . . . unless acclaimed first of all by Paris or Frankfurt. Then again, it is obvious that a sort of selection has been made, especially since the last war, in favour of two distinct sectors in which Swiss publishing has specialized — and also distinguished itself: the publication of art books and technical manuals, to the obvious detriment of works of imagination and what is commonly known as “literature”.

Consequently, in spite of the flourishing state of Swiss publishing, a young Swiss writer meets with more difficulty today in getting published than his predecessors did twenty-five of fifty years ago. The proportion of new works by Swiss authors is very small each year. The balance is slightly restored by the fact that the number of Swiss works published abroad is greater than before, that Parisian publishers, in particular, are more receptive than they used to be to young French-Swiss talents. But it is not sufficient to compensate the former. And even the awarding of literary prizes (“Prix Charles Veillon”, “Prix de la Guilde du Livre”, “Prix de l’Alliance culturelle romande”, “Prix du Terroir romand”, etc.) has unfortunately not appreciably altered the situation.

Having called attention to these shadows on an otherwise bright picture and mentioned that after the artificial boom in Swiss book production during the war and immediate post-war years, the number of publishers, which had more than doubled at the time, has now returned appreciably to what it was prior to 1939, let us note that in all fields of publishing considerable progress has been made from the point of view of technical and typographical presentation. It may be said that up until the thirties, Swiss publishing made practically no efforts to distinguish itself from its French, German or Italian models. Even the rich literary experience of the “Cahiers vaudois”,

which started in 1914 with Ramuz’ “Raison d’être” and lasted five years, cannot be considered an original undertaking from the publishing point of view.

That is why 1928 should be greeted as a landmark with the foundation of the publishing firm of Skira, specializing in art books and winning the admiration of other countries for its achievements in this field . . . and even earning it admittance to the “Larousse Encyclopédique” which says in particular:

“In this last speciality, the quality of the texts and colour reproductions has ensured world renown for its main series (“The Great Centuries of Painting”, “The Taste of Our Time”). If in naming Skira we have ignored our instructions not to mention any publishing firm by name — each of which contributes in its own way to the joint effort — it is because this firm opened up the way and showed the path to follow, stimulating a spirit of rivalry in technical perfection which was finally to give Swiss publishing its reputation for quality recognized throughout the world.

It is interesting to note that it was about the same date that the first book-clubs were founded in the country, contributing greatly to the popularity of Swiss books and their reputation. Furthermore the idea and the principle were taken up by other countries, and the fact that in this way Swiss book production became a model to be imitated represented a considerable change and the start of a new era.

The third strong feature of Swiss publishing on the international market where, in spite of countless handicaps (among others that of the lack of support provided by the public authorities), it has succeeded in winning a place in the sun for itself, is the publication of technical and scientific books of excellent quality. Obviously, in this field publishing has benefited from the good name acquired by Swiss industry and engineering as well as by the technical schools and institutes whose reputation each year attracts a large number of foreign students, especially from the developing countries. But the demands of professional and higher education have also led publishers continually to improve the presentation of their educational works, which have thus been able to flourish abroad where they are often found labelled under another style as a result of co-publishing contracts which naturalize them French, German or English while safeguarding the rights of authors and publishers.

These three achievements of Swiss publishing — art books, book-clubs and technical books — largely explain the very definite progress of exports in this field. The situation is therefore satisfactory, very encouraging even,

although it must not be forgotten that Swiss literature as such still does not enjoy its fair share of the market.

People in Switzerland pride themselves, and rightly too, on the spectacular achievements and successes of their main industries both at home and abroad, in the fields of watchmaking, engineering, textiles, and chemical and pharmaceutical products. Much less well known however is the prestige enjoyed by other national activities, less important perhaps but just as praiseworthy, especially as they do not possess the economic and financial power of the above, or of their foreign competitors. This is true of Swiss publishing.

Although the statistical comparison of the production of several countries calls for a certain reserve, the notion of books not being interpreted everywhere in the same way, the criterion of the number of works published does make it possible to gain an idea of the importance of a country's publishing industry. In the list of the main world producers, Switzerland is quite well placed (16th) with some 5,000 titles a year, i.e. a fifth or nearly a quarter of the number published in the United States, Germany, France or Great Britain. However when its book production is calculated per million inhabitants, the country comes second immediately after Israel.

In 1939, Switzerland published 1,802, in 1948 4,692 titles. The number decreased in 1950, and ten years later, it stood at 4,899 titles. In 1965, the number was 5,202.

The Swiss are said to read a great deal. To convince oneself, one has only to think of the vast number of books of all kinds on sale in bookshops or bookstalls. The great majority of these being of foreign origin, no one will be surprised at the size of book imports into Switzerland, which totalled a value of 81 million francs in 1964 (+7% compared with 1963). What is extraordinary, however, is to see how closely balanced are purchases and sales abroad, since the value of Swiss literature exported in 1964 amounted to nearly 67 million francs (+20% compared with 1963). From this point of view, the fact that sales of Swiss books in French-speaking countries (France and Belgium in particular) are only slightly less than purchases made in the same countries, gives to a certain extent an interesting idea of the contribution French-speaking Swiss publishers make to Swiss publishing as a whole. Publishing in German, which is on a far bigger scale, compares very favourably with competition from Germany and Austria, but it is only natural that Switzerland it a very big buyer of the book production of these two countries.

The Swiss book trade is distinguished in fact by very great specialization; it has gone in for a type of publishing corresponding to the particular nature of the country and has acquired in very special fields, such as art, science, religion, philosophy, history, law and economy to quote but the main ones, a reputation which is by no means exaggerated.

(*"Swiss Industry and Trade"*.)

### MILITARY APPOINTMENTS

Corps Commander Col. Jakob Annasohn retired at the end of the year, as did Corps Commander Col. Ernst Uhlmann (Army Corps IV), Divisional Commander Col. Max Waibel (*Waffenchef* of Infantry). Col. Uhlmann's successor is Divisional Commander Adolf Hanslin from Diessenhofen. The new Infantry Chief is Col. of General Staff Hans Roost, from Beringen (Schaffhausen). Col. Hans Wildbolz from Berne, has been promoted to Divisional Commander.

Brigadier Laurenz Zollikofer from St. Gall has been appointed Commander of *Felddivision VI*.

The new *Oberkriegskommissar* is Col. Hans Messmer, now Brigadier, from Thal (St. Gall).

[A.T.S.]

### FEDERAL MOSAIC

There used to be a time in Switzerland's governmental history when Federal Councillors hardly travelled while in office. Not so of late. There have been several important meetings outside Switzerland, at which the Confederation was represented by members of the Government. Federal Councillor Tschudi led the delegation to the Fourteenth General Conference of UNESCO in Paris. Federal Councillor Spuehler attended the meeting of EFTA Council in Lisbon at the end of October. A month later the Swiss delegation to the European Organisation for the Development of Trade (OECD) in Paris, was led by the then Federal President Schaffner who addressed the meeting on the policy of aid to developing countries.

Federal Councillor Gnaegi chaired the 24th meeting of European Ministers of Transport in Paris at the end of November. Early in December, Federal Councillors Schaffner and Spuehler led the Swiss EFTA delegation to a meeting in London. A few days later, *Bundesrat* Spuehler travelled to Paris to represent Switzerland on the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe. (Hardly back, he flew to Bangkok where he and his family spent a few days on an entirely private visit).

Federal Councillor von Moos went to Strasbourg on 25th January, in order to take part in a meeting on juridical questions.

Federal Councillor Schaffner will be the official representative of the Confederation at the World Fair in Montreal this summer.

Just before Christmas, the former Federal Councillor Dr. h.c. Philipp Etter celebrated his 75th birthday.

The Federal Council was invited to the traditional reception given by the Diplomatic Corps in Berne at the end of November. On 10th January, the Government received heads of diplomatic missions or their representatives accredited in Berne, for the usual ceremonious *Neujahrsempfang* at the "Federal Palace".

The spring session of Parliament will begin on 27th February. Thirty-six meetings of Parliamentary Commissions are taking place between the beginning of the year and the day of opening.

The General Elections for the National Council (Parliament) will take place on 29th October; the 200 members will be chosen for four years.

Last year, the Confederation received two unusual gifts:

In order to replace the carpets covering the stairs and corridors of the Federal Palace, the Swiss Association of the Wool Textile Industry offered the Confederation about 5,500 sq. ft. of carpeting, i.e. sufficient to cover stairs and corridors as well as to unroll on the pavement outside for the official visits of foreign sovereigns or heads of State.

The Florentine art collector Ugo Bardini bequeathed his considerable estate to Switzerland. A cultural centre will be created in Florence.

The federal civil servants have demanded a minimum annual holiday of three weeks.

(News received by courtesy of the  
*Agence Télégraphique Suisse*.)