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COMMENT

THE SOCIOLOGY OF THE "SWISS OBSERVER"

In the preceding articles you have read encouraging words on the "Swiss Observer" and its meaning, written by most eminent personalities on this Golden Jubilee occasion. But none of these friendly messages, despite their kindness and encouragement, have tried to hide the very real difficulties which a publication like the "Swiss Observer" has to face in order to survive. Dr. Wahlen, for one, has enumerated the conditions which will have to be fulfilled if the paper is to be alive in 50 years' time and Dr. Egli has very appropriately encouraged its readers to canvas for it. But it is not so much the "Swiss Observer" as such, as the *service* which we try to make it be, which we should try to offer for as long as possible. The value of such a service will obviously depend on the existence of a public which may either require it or benefit from it. Much of the "Swiss Observer's" future will therefore depend on the correct determination of the service required of it from its readership. As Editor, I have had many opportunities to realise that the paper in its present form still means very much to an important fraction of its subscribers—and this is one of the many gratifications of the job. My only hope is that this will continue.

The "Swiss Observer" does not only stand out by its content and organisation from the 170 Swiss publications abroad, it is, as I discovered to my astonishment, a unique institution among the foreign communities in Great Britain.

A year ago, I made a survey of the "Colony Press" in this country, the

results of which were submitted to the Advisory Council's perusal. I began my enquiries by contacting Maître Picarda, a French lawyer responsible for the *Bulletin de la Colonie Française*, a glossy publication which appears twice a year and is handed out free at the French Consulate. He told me that the "Bulletin" was entirely financed by the 27 members of the *Fédération des Associations Françaises de Grande-Bretagne* and that its main purpose was to inform French visitors of the social and patriotic activities that lay open to them in England. He maintained that a regular news organ would find little support in the French colony and would stand little chance of surviving. This of course made me wonder at the resilience of the "Swiss Observer" knowing that there are 25,000 French in their London Consular District, as compared with 12,000 Swiss.

I turned to the Germans, the Dutch, the Swedes, the Poles, the Hungarians, the Russians and the Spaniards, ringing up embassies, ministers and social workers. In each of the first three cases—representative of the "western" communities—the story had similarities with the predicament of the Swiss Colony. Participation in regular activities was declining and new blood was difficult to find. There was, as in the Swiss case, an important circulation of tourists, students, apprentices and short-term executives, but very few people were actually interested in taking part in Colony activities. The Dutch, for example, had a regular supply of nationals through the Shell and Unilever companies, but hardly any organised activity. Their main association, "Neerlandia", however still manages to gather 600 ageing Dutchmen on the Anniversary of Queen Juliana. But none of these colonies possessed the luxury of a patriotic journal. Their only

channel of internal information were their church leaflets. A German Embassy secretary told me that there was no German colony to speak of. The war had practically destroyed it. There were nonetheless five German churches ministering mainly to a floating congregation of au pair girls. The German Institute attracted hardly 1 per cent of the estimated German or German-Jewish population of England.

The situation of the Poles and the Russians was quite different. There are 140,000 Poles in Great Britain and they have a Fleet Street daily, the "Polish Daily", with a circulation of 20,000. Perhaps the most remarkable instance of colony life in Great Britain are the Ukrainians and the Bielo-Russians. Most of these Ukrainians drifted here at the end of the war, having unhappily engaged in the German Army. They cannot return, and they know it, but rather than reacting by assimilating more promptly with the British way of life, they tend to strengthen their congeneric ties. They have no less than two weeklies with full-time staffs. They have their own schools and actually pay taxes. The Bielo-Russians are also closely organised and own four colony buildings.

One would expect the thousands of Hungarians in this country to behave in a similar way. But in fact they have nowhere near as much organised activity as the Poles. They do not form an homogenous population and are separated into three non-intermingling sections: the Jews who came in 1939, the 1945-1946 refugees and the 1956 arrivals. Although they wouldn't foster anything like a "colony life", Hungarians in Britain like to mix among themselves on an individual basis. But in the main they are well assimilated here and have no wish to return home. Those who would like to do so now

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enjoy a general amnesty at home. This contrasts with a majority of the Poles who, after 20 years of British life, still yearn to return to the homeland. Also, whereas the great majority of Hungarians in this country are now naturalised British, a significant proportion of the Slavs are still without any nationality. The Hungarians have no publication, save a Hungarian-Jewish organ.

Finally, the Spaniards are also without any colony organisation, although there are over 30,000 of them. This may be due to their different social extraction. They are mainly poor and working people—and one doesn't usually associate black-tie dinners or cultural society exposés with labourers earning £15 a week.

All these findings lead to a few simple conclusions. The first is that the viability of a colony paper such as the "Swiss Observer" is related in a direct way to the cohesion of this colony. The existence of an "expatriate colony" depends on three factors. They are: Awayness from home, national characteristics and social class. The second factor seems to be by far the most important in the present day. It is illustrated by the fact that the Slavs stick together, and not the Hungarians, for example. This factor could in fact be equalled to the *"tendency to hold to one's national and cultural identity multiplied by one's gregarious character and readiness to play a part in an organised group"*.

The success of a paper like the "Swiss Observer" depends on just how high this crazy factor is. Starting with the winner, I'll venture the following order: The Slavs, the French, the Jews, the Swiss, the Germans, the Spaniards, the Swedes and the Dutch. This may explain the "miracle" of the "Swiss Observer".

"Awayness from home" must also be considered as an important element, so that foreigners living very far from home will be more likely to seek their own mutual company than the others who know they can return home whenever they want. There is no reason—apart from cultural and nationalistic ones—why Parisians in London should be particularly keen to meet one another, because Paris is nearer to London than Newcastle. For the Swiss of Great Britain, "awayness from home" is measured directly by the physical and financial ability to return to their cantons and homes. We are all geographically separated from Switzerland by a few hundred miles, but for the disabled and the less fortunate Swiss of this country, this distance becomes vastly greater. For those who have lost all ties in Switzerland it becomes infinite and cannot even be measured in miles. I know that some faithful readers fall into this category. If the S.O. can bring Switzerland a little nearer to them, it will not have failed in its purpose.

SWISS NEWS

THE TRANSHELVETIC CANAL AGAIN IN THE NEWS

Three years ago, the Federal Council commissioned a group of experts to examine the profitability of harnessing the upper Rhine and the Aar for navigation. They came out with their report in January and estimated that the traffic through the port of Basle would increase four-fold during the next thirty years. This justified a development of the upper Rhine, which would service the industrial region of Winterthur and Zurich. However they saw no future in making the Aar navigable as the regions through which it flowed were not particularly industrialised and would not benefit appreciably by the addition of the Aar to the already existing means of communication.

The Federal Council consulted each individual canton following the publication of this report and asked them to make their respective positions on the issue of inland navigation known by the end of October.

Two cantons particularly concerned by navigation on the Rhine and Aar were Basle and Aargau. Basle supported the idea of stretching the navigability of the Rhine up to Klingnau, although cantonal experts disagreed with the findings of the federal report, which foresaw an inevitable saturation of the port facilities of Basle. Basle handles a fluvial traffic of 9 million tons a year at present and is prepared to invest the necessary funds to meet the needs of future traffic.

Aargau had no direct interest in fluvial navigation but supported the principle of developing the Aar for navigation in a spirit of solidarity with the cantons of western Switzerland, which are attached to the concept of a Transhelvetic Canal.

None of the cantons sounded and none of the borderers of the upper Rhine and the Aar would naturally like to be burdened with the cost of making these rivers navigable. Navigation, they say rightly, is a matter for the Confederation.

The issue of a Transhelvetic waterway never fails to raise controversy. The President of the Association for Swiss Waterways, Mr. Willy Rohner, who is also a councillor of State, urged the speedy creation of these additional means of transport, which will be appreciated as the volume of trade continues to expand. Speaking at the 59th Assembly of this Association, he expressed his hope that Lake Maggiore would one day be linked to the Po.

On the other hand, all ideas of shipping on our rivers raised the strongest opposition of Swiss conservationists. "Acqua Viva", a Swiss Society devoted to the protection of inland waters, claimed that allowing ships and barges to sail on the Aar would be

(PMB)