

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

Herausgeber: Federation of Swiss Societies in the United Kingdom

Band: - (1970)

Heft: 1593

Rubrik: Comment

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

Download PDF: 27.12.2025

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

COMMENT

THE SCHWARZENBACH INITIATIVE: THE MAIN ATTITUDES WHICH WILL BE EXPRESSED AT THE POLLS

On 7th June, the male population of Switzerland will be called to the polls to vote on one of the most serious issues facing the country—the problem of alien workers and immigrants. They will be asked whether they agree or not with Herr Schwarzenbach, who would like to see the foreign population of every canton except Geneva slashed down to 10 per cent.

The problem is now a good ten years old and most of the arguments for and against keeping such a bulky foreign presence within Switzerland's limited territory are well worn. Still, it is worthwhile to review the problem on the eve of such an important national vote and the simplest way to do this is by surveying what the possible attitude of our live voters will be.

Many of the men, then, who will go to the polls on that ominous Sunday actually have to live and work with Italians, Spaniards, Turks, Greeks and all the other nationals who have found a haven in Switzerland's prosperity. They will be strongly tempted to vote out of their heart, and indeed, vote in favour of the Schwarzenbach initiative. Being in daily contact with these foreigners, they are more liable to feel the differences of their characters and ways of life. "They are noisy and depreciate our neighbourhood, they touch our women, they occupy our flats, they have no notion of what work is, they cheat and they're sly, they commit most of the crimes, offences and misdemeanours perpetrated in this country, there are too many of them and Herr Schwarzenbach is quite right in wanting to see them go".

Then there is the other class of voters who perhaps do not have any particular liking for the foreign labourer but who direly need them. They will say: "We're desperately short of labour as it is. We can't expand, we get into all sorts of trouble each time we hire a new man. Nobody will do manual work any more and this humorist Schwarzenbach wants us to dismiss them. If the labour situation gets any worse than it already is then we might as well pack up!"

Although this may be difficult in Switzerland, where almost a sixth of the overall population is foreign, we can consider a third class of voter living and working at a sufficient distance from the aliens to be in a position to vote with their heads, or with feelings which do not relate to personal xenophobia or self-interest.

This category can be sub-divided into four further classes. The first and most important would reflect the economic common sense of the Govern-

ment. The position would consist in acknowledging the social and economic dangers of an unchecked inflow of immigrants and foreign labour but consider that it is not possible to come back on what has been acquired. Thanks to the presence of abundant and cheap labour Switzerland has enjoyed an unprecedented rate of economic growth. By forcing over 40 per cent of the foreign population out of the country (which is the direct implication of the Schwarzenbach initiative) the economy would be dealt such a blow that all the benefits of the past ten years would be lost. The situation is bad, but not as bad as to warrant the economic suicide Herr Schwarzenbach is irresponsibly advocating. The only way to provide for the future is by instituting stringent immigration regulations.

The second class of voters in a position to vote with some psychological distance are the humanitarians. For them, the economic hardships which the repatriated population would have to undergo would be plainly disgraceful. The Swiss have a moral duty towards the human persons she is in the fortunate position of using at her profit. It is morally repulsive to import hundreds of thousands of workers, consider them solely for their utility and get rid of them once they have outlived their useful life. The liberals, the humanitarians and the churches consider that foreigners should never be considered as second class citizens, especially when they have been of such benefit to our general prosperity, and therefore strongly reject all ideas of repatriation.

Then there are the realists. They may or may not be involved in personal commerce with the foreign element but all share a turn of mind disbelieving any lasting and peaceful international community within Switzerland. Their premises are that, men being what they are, natures as irreconcilable as, say, Calabrian and the Emmenthaler will never be able to live side by side peacefully. The Calabrian will remain Calabrian and the Emmenthaler remain an Emmenthaler. It is futile to expect the two to fuse into a common and renewed personality. There will always be tensions between them and it is best to prevent them by taking the necessary steps right now. The realistic attitude could command both a favourable or unfavourable vote towards the Schwarzenbach initiative since there is scope for a debate on the means once it is understood that it is better to keep a society as homogeneous as possible for the social good.

The last class of voters which we would list in our rough inventory would be the patriots. They are recruited foremost in the Conservative parties and the Army. Their position is that the Swiss entity is something to be taken seriously and protected from a foreign infusion which would put it in grave peril. Swiss entity covers all the

cherished inheritance which has made Switzerland what it is such as her unique democratic system, her traditions of industrial craftsmanship, commercial probity, and civic responsibility. How can these values be possibly perpetuated if the country is to be swarmed by a population which completely disrespects them and refuses to be assimilated? If Switzerland is to remain what she has always been, then she may not accept such vast and irrational numbers. There again, positions concerning the means of keeping Switzerland Swiss may vary. If this is an ideal strong enough to defy the severe economic disruption which a Schwarzenbach victory would imply, then the vote will go in favour of the initiative. This is the case of the extreme-right Vigilant party in Geneva.

We have omitted to count the indifferents—those who will stay away from the polls or hand in blank ballots. There are of course other motivations involved, such as positive friendship with individual foreigners, or the opposite of the realism we have just described—an idealism that seeks to set up a multi-national and multi-cultural Switzerland. But on the whole the main elements which will induce voters to decide in one way or the other are the six which we have enumerated. Social incompatibility, social realism and patriotism will militate more or less in favour of the initiative, business interest, general economic welfare and humanitarianism will, when they are the prime concern of the voters, encourage them to reject the proposals of Herr Schwarzenbach.

WHO IS SCHWARZENBACH?

James Schwarzenbach, a quiet, soft spoken man, was born in 1911 in Thalwil, near Zurich, of a family of textile manufacturers. He was brought up in a Protestant and markedly liberal atmosphere. As he was not interested in taking up the family business and having gone to a school in Zuog where he was the only Swiss in his class, all his mates being French, Dutch and German, he studied history at Fribourg University. There he greatly admired the lectures of the late Gonzague de Reynold and made a doctorate on Fidel von Thurn, a wandering prelate who was a kind of foreign minister to the Bishop of St. Gall.

At the age of 22 he became strongly attracted to Roman Catholicism after reading Dostoevsky (in particular, the "Brothers Karamazov" and the chapter on the Great Inquisitor in the "Possessed"). Religion, he says, plays a very important part in his life. Although his parents were so liberal that they would never have dreamt of talking about religion at table, there was a religious strain in his family, which counted a buddhist and many theosophists. James Schwarzenbach made a methodical study of Christianity. He never got as far as the Reformation be-



More branches in Continental Europe than any other British bank

Lloyds Bank Europe provides directly or through its wholly owned subsidiaries, a comprehensive domestic and international banking service in Belgium, Holland, France and Switzerland.

Some of the services of Lloyds Bank Europe

Accepting deposits in Sterling, Eurodollars or other foreign currencies at fully competitive rates.

Issuing Negotiable Certificates of Deposit in Sterling and U.S. Dollars.

Short or medium term loans in London or on the Continent to finance expansion outside the U.K.

Discounting Foreign Currency Bills.

International Portfolio Management in Switzerland.

HEAD OFFICE: 100 Pall Mall, London, S.W.1.

AMSTERDAM • ROTTERDAM
THE HAGUE • GENEVA • ZÜRICH
ANTWERP • BRUSSELS • PARIS
BIARRITZ • BORDEAUX
CALAIS • CANNES • LE HAVRE
LILLE • NICE • ROUBAIX • ST.
JEAN DE LUZ • MONTE CARLO

cause he found what he needed in Catholicism, to which he became converted. He became a very conservative Catholic at that. He regrets that Latin is being abandoned at Mass and that priests now face their congregation. He finds himself becoming an immigrant among his own kind for continuing to support the Pope. He is one of the founders of the Catholic "Una Voce Helvetica" movement, but has of late taken some distance in order not to compromise it by his political activities. This, he likes to recall, clears a misunderstanding among many Protestants who mistake him for a staunch Protestant intent on de-Catholicising Switzerland.

By profession he is a journalist. He has been chief Editor of the *Zürcher Woche* and the *Republikaner*. He started writing on a problem which was troubling him increasingly—the over-industrialisation of the country and the related excessive inflow of foreigners—in 1963. He maintained then as he does now that our businessmen have a fetish for the growth rate which will eventually doom the country. Although he is now head of a newly-formed Zurich Democratic Party, he entered the National Council and Politics at the demand of the "Nationale Aktion gegen die Ueberfremdung", and this many years after having first brought attention on the immigration problem.

He claims a varied following spreading over the middle and working classes as well as the peasantry. In the course of recent interviews with Swiss papers he has said that he was not a racist and that he couldn't understand the expression, there being no Swiss race to speak of. He has chosen the figure of 10 per cent because this had been considered the maximum proportion of foreigners in a report by the Federal Council in 1965. His initiative contains a proposal on freezing the present regulations on the naturalisation of foreigners as they are now. He admits that 330,000 foreign residents of Switzerland will still have to be allowed to stay. But more could not be integrated. James Schwarzenbach has been aiming primarily at the excessive number of residents and semi-residents; seasonal workers, who may not enter into Switzerland with their families and may only stay for limited periods can continue to flock in. One of the reproaches made against his initiative is that there are now going to be more seasonal workers than ever before and more people living in unfair conditions in Switzerland. But Mr. Schwarzenbach claims that there is now an increasing opposition to the principle of working seasonally in Italy and elsewhere and that his proposals will not involve an overflow of seasonal workers and of all the problems which they bring with them.

A DIFFERENT APPROACH

The Swiss abroad and the outsider are privileged to see the Swiss immigration problem from a different angle. Thanks to the geographical distance of their vantage point they can view this problem as a natural consequence of the economic imbalance in Europe.

As an illustration, we can take the Rhonda Valley in Wales, which has become a depressed area with the closure of the coal pits, and London, which is the hub of England's economic activity. The Rhonda Valley can be compared to a poor and jobless part of Europe. London can be taken to play the role, for the sake of argument, of Switzerland. If the situation obtaining between Switzerland and her poorer European neighbours were valid in Great Britain, then we would have all the men of the Rhonda Valley flocking for a livelihood to London. London is the thriving centre where businessmen prefer to invest because all facilities, the infrastructure and a ready market are already there. The inflow of Welsh workers would allow London's industry to grow and prosper. This growth would follow its own dynamics until the city became so big as to become unlivable. There would be too many factories, too much smoke, too little accommodation, too many cars and the metropolis would have mushroomed into a gigantic conglomeration and become a hypertrophied limb of the country, no longer playing the equitable and constructive role that it should. At this point, every firm in London will yearn to settle elsewhere and forsake the advantages of economic concentration for a less extravagant environment.

Many will say that London has reached this stage already. The situation has however not been allowed to run out of hand. If this had been the case and if the sole laws of the market had ruled the country, then the Rhonda Valley would be already deserted of its productive population.

The government has fortunately seen to it that industries were encouraged to settle in less favoured areas. This they have done, with the result that many areas which appeared to be condemned by the decline of older industries have now found a new lease of life. There is no doubt that spreading out industry against the laws of immediate expediency costs money. The taxpayer has to pay for the public investments which will serve as an incentive to the businessman to move to a depressed area. The wealthier taxpayers, coming from the more prosperous regions, will necessarily contribute more. This means that London and other highly developed areas of Great Britain pay for the welfare of the Rhonda valleys and similar depressed regions. The citizens of one part of the country sacrifice a fraction of their immediate

standard of living for the welfare of the whole community.

This picture cannot fairly be applied to the case of Switzerland and the depressed areas of Europe for the good reason that national and customs barriers come into the picture. But the situation that has been developing on that front is similar to a Great Britain deprived of any economic planning whatever, where the richer centres would drain the poorer areas of their substance and eventually become hypertrophied. The workers who are forced to leave their families travel hundreds or thousands of miles to seek work in Switzerland send the money they earn back home. It can therefore be said that Swiss industry is contributing to the livelihood and prosperity of places as far away as Andalusia and Turkey. But it can be easily shown that the wealth generated in Switzerland by the availability of cheap foreign workers is far greater than the positive effects of their wage packets back in their own provinces. Switzerland gets more out of her foreign workers than they and their respective countries get from her.

The natural consequence of this picture is that Switzerland will continue to expand at a far greater rate than her poorer neighbours and be helped in so doing by their very poverty. The profitable export industries and the services will absorb Swiss personnel, whose homes and roads will have to be built and kept clean by an army of imported labourers. Considered with the theoretical objectivity of the observer in his ivory tower, the situation which has developed and in which Switzerland now has far too many factories and banks for her indigenous population is fundamentally unhealthy from the social and environmental point of view in Switzerland, and from the human point of view in a Europe which is still very much *une Europe des patries*.

The effect of the Schwarzenbach proposals would undoubtedly be to create a severe slump in Switzerland's economy. A slump which may take such wide proportions as to cripple Switzerland for many years and to induce a recession in Europe's and even the world's economy. But there will be another consequence in that the scope left for the expansion of Swiss economy will be found abroad. Swiss firms will only be able to increase their home activities within the bounds of an improvement in technology. The real increase of business will take place in their foreign offshoots unhampered by an inexistent manpower. Swiss industry will then be forced to contribute more actively to the economic development of other countries.

(PMB)

THE ACTUAL CONTENT OF THE INITIATIVE

The text of the second initiative against the over-foreignisation of Switzerland, on which the voting population will have to voice its opinion, runs as follows in my loose translation:

(a) *The Confederation must undertake to check the growing demographic and economic influence of an exaggerated foreign presence within the country.*

(b) *The Federal Council will be responsible for seeing that the number of foreigners in each canton does not exceed 10 per cent of the Swiss population as recorded in the 1968 census. Geneva may have a foreign element of up to 25 per cent.*

(c) *The foreigners not taken into consideration in the previous article are the seasonal workers (who come without their families and stay no longer than nine months), the borderers who come into Switzerland for daily work, university students, tourists, international officials, diplomats, scientists and other persons with special qualifications, retired people, sick and convalescing persons, hospital personnel and the staff of international charity and ecclesiastical organisations.*

(d) *No Swiss citizen shall be laid off as a result of economic restriction or industrial rationalisation as long as there are foreigners having the same jobs.*

(e) *The Federal Council may not use naturalisation as a remedy to over-foreignisation. Only those with mothers of Swiss origin and whose parents are domiciled in Switzerland when they are born will be entitled to Swiss naturalisation.*

The four preceding articles will be added to the 69th article of the Federal Constitution.

The initiative contains the following two points concerning their implementation:

(a) *Article 64-4 (that is, the above resolutions) will take effect as soon as they are accepted by the people and validated by the Federal Assembly.*

(b) *The reduction in the foreign population indicated in article (b) will have to be performed within four years of the validation by the Federal Assembly.*

The repatriation will then be stretched over four years. Approximately 300,000 foreign residents, 190,000 of whom are working, will have to leave within that delay. About 50,000 will then have to leave every year. This would mean a 1.6 per cent annual reduction in the overall active population. As the supply of labour of Swiss origin runs at about 20,000 new applicants a year, the economy would be deprived of 30,000 workers every year. A negative difference of 70,000 with the foreign labour regulations introduced last March. From 1950 to 1965 the gross national product has increased by 4.7 per cent annually, 1.9 per cent being due to an increased labour force

(0.7 per cent Swiss, 1.2 per cent foreign) and 2.8 per cent being due to increased productivity. Four years after a hypothetical ratification of the new Constitutional articles, the labour force will again climb at its native rate of 0.7 per cent annually. Assuming that the growth in productivity remains unchanged, the national product will continue to increase at only 3.5 per cent—and this only in the happy case where the four-year storm has been weathered without too much damage.

SWISS NEWS

The first prize of the Golden Rose of Montreux, an international variety show competition, was given to Czechoslovakia, and the second prize to the U.S. The British BBC entry, the "Morecambe and Wise Show" did not reap any. There were processions in the major towns on May 1st. A former Greek Minister, exiled in Switzerland, was refused the authorisation of making a speech on that day, on the grounds that refugees are not entitled to speak publicly on political subjects. Jean Möri, who was the main Swiss representative at the International Labour Organisation and the president of the organisation's jubilee session in 1969 died after a short illness. Eric Von Daeniken, the science-fiction author and hotel owner sentenced in Chur to three and a half years of jail for fraud has appealed to the court of appeal of the Federal Tribunal for a retrial. The first festival of pop music was staged in the Wankdorf Stadium in Berne. It was also the noisiest. Its six winners were the cream of the 200 amateur pop groups which had entered the competition. Switzerland has beaten France 2—1 in a football match which took place at Basle in front of 25,000 spectators. Various parties have officially expressed their strong disapproval of the Schwarzenbach Initiative. The liberal parties and the radicals are at one to condemn it. The liberals termed it "mad bloodletting". The elections to the Great Council of Berne have left the power balance unchanged: the chamber is still well in the control of the Alliance Party of Berne. The radicals have gained a few seats. The Federal Council has decided to close the Swiss Consulate in Rhodesia. This met with the objections of a national councillor who claimed that such a decision went against the principle of integral neutrality. Indeed, he maintained that neutrality forbade Switzerland to take part in any collective gesture. The Federal Council has redefined the increasingly adopted procedure of calling on the cantons for their advice on new legislation. The time when the cantons are to be consulted in the law-making process has now been agreed. The people of Vaud have confirmed the decision of the Great Council, made two months ago, of giving equal statutes to the Catholic Church of Vaud.