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COMMENT

AN INITIATIVE IN FAVOUR OF WORKERS IN MANAGEMENT

The three most important trade union organisations of Switzerland sponsored an initiative to include an article on employee participation in the Federal Constitution. The Confederation would thereby be entrusted with legislation in this field.

This step by the Swiss trade union movement must be praised and welcomed, although one may have doubts as to the real practicality of workers participating in management. But it is to be welcomed because it is constructive and *co-operative*. The general image of trade unionism is that of a force diagonally opposed to the interests and aims of both capital and management. Trade unionism was born, after all, out of the exploitation of 19th century capitalism and its "raison d'être" lies in a struggle against the forces which gave rise to its birth.

Although this image may be simplified, there can be little doubt that the line of thought of a British trade unionist is precisely to pit the interests of the working man against those of the boss. The idea of co-operation with management is anathema to a militant unionist. For him, the working man will always be underpaid and exploited by the "few" who control the means of production.

There is, of course, a wide range of attitudes within the trade union movement. The liberals would seek no more than a fair day's pay (although the interpretation of what that is can conflict with the welfare of the employing firm or the national interest) whereas the hard-core militant would want to destroy the present structure of

society, to replace it with something of which he has no clear idea.

In a speech to the students of the South Bank Polytechnic, Mr. Briginshaw, General Secretary of the printing union SOGAT, said that the trade union movement had a lot to bring to the country. Trade unionism was a force with human ideals that had to be developed for the welfare of society. But these assertions never inhibited Mr. Briginshaw from demanding and winning a 35 per cent increase for his highly paid men in the newspaper industry last year, bringing the national papers to the verge of bankruptcy.

The trade union movement's main problem today is to find a reason of existence. It certainly remains a force and one must recognise that it has ideals. But these ideals have long been shared by management and the Victorian era which many trade unionists find so hard to forget has been over for 50 years. The trade union movement should be a force militating for the welfare of the working man, but the historic tradition of the movement is that this force should be used *against*, or in opposition to the men who have the competence to manage industry and commerce, and this will probably continue until Great Britain becomes the lame duck of Europe.

It is generally not in the present mentality of the British working class to envisage an entirely new avenue, namely to consider co-operating on equal footing *with* their fellow men who handle fountain pens rather than spanners. After all, their welfare is irrevocably linked together and the source of future prosperity lies in a common understanding between management and labour. The only other way would be to undo the present system altogether, which would perhaps soothe the envy of the militant, but hardly improve his standard of living.

The need for reasserting their aims has troubled the Swiss trade unions increasingly during the past years. The movement had become a bit sleepy after 35 years of blessed "Peace of Labour" during which regular and honourable adjustments were negotiated in a spirit of mutual interest and co-operation with the employer organisations. These agreements were taken for granted and accepted by a reasonably contented working class, unwilling to go on strike and loyal to their employers. But the situation has tended to change.

On the one hand, there is a mass of workers who have accepted the order of things and trust everything to their unions. In fact, with the increasing prosperity and material satisfaction of the Swiss, trade unions have lost in membership and audience. Nothing particular could be expected of them and the phraseology of the "Voix Ouvrière", the organ of the Labour Party, always sounded a little unreal

when it referred to "union struggle".

On the other hand, there is a massive influx of foreign workers whose industrial traditions are totally different and who are becoming increasingly aware of the difference in wages between themselves and the bulk of the Swiss employed outside the shop floor. Furthermore, there is the restlessness of the young and the higher exigencies of apprentices.

The rising wave of prosperity has helped to increase industrial discontent because of the unrealistic and unfair disparities in pay. A highly qualified mechanic with many years of apprenticeship behind him cannot hope to earn more than 2,000 francs a month in Geneva. But the shortage of labour has favoured typists, with 12 lessons at Pitman's behind them, in earning up to 1,800 francs a month!

A situation had thus developed where the trade unions had to take a resounding initiative, if only to make it known that they were still a live force to be reckoned with. They could have acted in a sense of greater militancy, but this went against 35 years of tradition. Instead, they decided that the apathy of the bulk of their members and the incipient militancy of younger or foreign workers could best be remedied by the proposal of involving them actively in the management of the firms employing them. This was indeed a most important decision because nearly all the proposals tending to give workers a say in management have sprung hitherto "from above"—either from managers themselves or from governments.

Ideally, the participation of workers in management should have the effect of increasing their acceptance of economic realities and of developing their sense of responsibilities. It will help them to feel no longer as the "instruments" of management, but partners in an enterprise. The success of participation will depend on just how

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the Swiss trade union movement will bring this idea home to its members.

It involves on their part a degree of openness and goodwill going against a rising trend of militancy. If the workers designated by the unions to sit on the board are considered as "bosses' men" and "traitors" by their workmate then the scheme cannot bring a positive contribution to the "Peace of Labour". However, it is in the Swiss context that it is the most likely to succeed and one must hope that the present initiative will one day become law.

(PMB)

SWISS NEWS

THE PILOT OF THE "FRAIDIEU" ON TRIAL

In August 1969, the pleasure boat "Sainte Odile" foundered off the French coast of Lake Geneva with the loss of 24 children. A year later at almost exactly the same spot, a similar craft, the "Fraidieu", sank in a freak storm and caused the death of seven passengers.

The pilot of the boat was on trial at Thonon. He was charged with neglecting the warning signals which had been flashing on the Swiss coast for most of the fateful day and deciding to set sail from the small village of Yvoire towards Thonon despite the worsening conditions on the lake.

A few hundred yards after having left the protection of the port of Yvoire the "Fraidieu" met with very high waves striking her stern and the pilot then decided to turn back. As he was accomplishing the veering manoeuvre, an exceptionally high wave lashed by a sudden burst of the Joran wind crashed on the boat's windscreen and smashed it. The craft was filled with water in seconds and the small diesel motor came to a stop.

The boat very quickly sank and before there was any time to distribute lifebelts, all its passengers were swimming for their lives in a mountainous lake. Fortunately, there were many witnesses to the scene on shore. They immediately set out with a small armada of pleasure boats to save the shipwrecked passengers. But seven of them could not be saved.

It turned out at the trial that the accused pilot was not in the habit of following the storm warning signals flashing on the Swiss side. He maintained that they were good for sailing boats only and that the Swiss themselves took no heed of them. He had thirty years of experience on the lake and claimed to have the reputation of being very cautious. He could not have known, when he left for Thonon on that day, that such a wave could ever have appeared. He had never seen anything like it on the lake.

However, the owner of the "Fraidieu", realising what the conditions

were on the lake, had phoned to Yvoire to prevent the boat from setting sail. That call came too late and the "Fraidieu" had already left.

These two successive disasters will have the result that the French will take more precautions on the lake. The "Sainte Odile" had sunk because it wasn't ship-shape. The "Fraidieu" was in good order but not designed to withstand the storms of the L eman.

According to an expert called to testify at the trial, the "Fraidieu" was safe only on the canals of Venice. These boats will no longer be allowed to sail in risky conditions. Furthermore, the French have installed five warning beacons similar to the one already in existence on the Swiss side.

A SEPARATIST INCIDENT AT THE WORLD ICE HOCKEY CHAMPIONSHIPS

Six young Jurassian Separatists penetrated the ice rink during the last "change of camp" of a tense Sweden-Czechoslovakia match at the Allmend Stadium in Berne. The 11,000 spectators of this important world ice-hockey championship didn't appreciate this Separatist antic and greeted the demonstrators with prolonged booing.

The incident, however, only lasted for a few minutes. When the initial stupefaction had been overcome, the ice-hockeysmen themselves anticipated the movement of the police. The Czechoslovak full-back Horesovsky caught a demonstrator with a direct cross and flattened him on the ice. The Swiss referee grabbed the "Free Jura" streamer carried by another demonstrator and threw it away. The Swedish captain took yet another man and threw him over the railing. By this time the police were on the spot and cleared the rink of the last demonstrators. It then had to be swept clean of the various objects thrown at the young Separatists by the spectators.

This "coup" had been prepared by the militant Groupe B elier. From the point of view of timing it was well planned because an estimated 200 million spectators from 18 countries were watching the match. The Groupe B elier explained in a communiqu e that: "Young Jurassians had waved the Jurassian flag before 200 million television viewers. The match was not disrupted but the good name of Switzerland had been marred in the eyes of the world. It had been shown to the world how the Swiss authorities refuse to grant the Jurassian people the right of self determination in accordance with international public law".

The view expressed in the communiqu e issued by the anti-Separatist UPJ movement was somewhat different. "We have to admit once again, it said, that the minority and retrograde Separatist movement has chosen to use unconvincing and showy methods. The majority of the Jurassian people regret this expression of outdated fanaticism.

The Geneva daily "La Suisse" made an enquiry to see what effect the Groupe B elier's demonstration could have had among the millions of viewers who saw them abroad. The paper contacted the press agencies of five of the 18 countries taking part in the world championships. In Russia, the Tass agency gave only brief information: "The match was interrupted by a few young people who are demanding the autonomy of the Jura". The Russians, who were passionately watching the championship, were thus given an answer. But did they know what the Jura was? Tass answered that the Russians naturally knew about the Jura problem and that it had been mentioned in Russia on many occasions. In Prague, the daily sports journal "Cekoslovensky Sport" only briefly mentioned the intrusion by the Groupe B elier, with this short explanation: "The demonstrators are French-speaking Swiss protesting in this way against their belonging to the German part of the country". As for the official Communist organ "Rude Pravo", it actually rendered the demonstrators responsible for Czechoslovakia's defeat against Sweden!

For its correspondent, the 10 minutes of interruption had broken the rhythm of the game. "It wasn't good for our players". He followed with a few explanations saying the demonstration was about a canton demanding its freedom. Only one Belgian paper mentioned the incident. The Belgians have hardly given any publicity at all to the Jurassian problem and the various acts of the Groupe B elier, which seems rather surprising for a country which has similar problems of its own. The whole of the Swedish people were in front of their television sets to watch this match. The Scandinavians, like the Czechs, are keen ice-hockey enthusiasts. But when Groupe B elier broke out on the ice, nobody understood anything, and the Swedish commentator was unable to give any explanation whatever.

In the excited humdrum of the Allmend stadium he speculated that the demonstrators could either be over-excited supporters, or very drunk young men! However, the press on the following day gave quite a large coverage to the incident. "It is thanks to these demonstrators," wrote many commentators, "that Sweden managed to win. They gave our team the time to breath and helped to break the rhythm of the Czechs".

The Scandinavian press took the trouble of explaining the Jura problem and spoke of the Vienna Congress of 1815, of the linguistic differences and of the capital demand by the Jurassians Biel! . . . As for Moroccan TV viewers, they saw nothing of the incident because it had been cut. However they realised at the point where the film had been resumed that an incident had occurred.