

Topics

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TOPICS

SWISS AGRICULTURE

Ernst Laur was born 100 years ago

A century ago, at the end of March 1871 in fact, the first Swiss Farmers' Secretary Ernst Laur was born, destined to become the leader of Swiss agriculture. First as an agricultural teacher and then as a professor at the Department of Agronomy at the Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich, he made a name for himself and influenced the whole agricultural movement not only in Switzerland, but in the whole of Europe. He fought hard for fair pay for workers on the land as compared with other employees. He founded a number of regional dairy groups and the Central Federation of Swiss Milk Producers.

Between 1920 and 1951—he died in 1964—he was awarded six honorary doctorates in Switzerland and abroad. In 1948 he took an active part in the creation of the Federation of European Agriculture whose first president the “Father of Swiss agriculture” he became.

A few weeks ago, the Federal Statistical Office issued a report of almost 600 pages on Swiss agriculture based on a census in 1969. The lists are remarkably complete. Every one of the 3,000 Swiss Communes is tabled, every person employed on the land, every animal and every machine is registered. The census is as complete as the previous ones in 1955 and 1965, and the analysis shows clearly that there has been considerable change in the agricultural structure in Switzerland, especially since the war. In 1955, there were 148,600 farmsteads. By 1965 they had gone down to 100,450, and now there are no more than 88,600. These are real *Bauernhöfe* as opposed to general farming units including part time farming (*Landwirtschaftsbetriebe*). Figures in this category are not quite as bad—206,000 (1955) and 149,300 (1969). These establishments include research and experimental farms and the few gentlemen farmers' estates mostly owned by bankers and industrialists. There are only 114 farming estates in the whole of Switzerland, which have arable land of more than 100 hectares.

The decline has been even more marked regarding men and women engaged in agriculture full time. In 1955, these numbered 274,900 men and 46,000 women; but the last census showed these figures as 161,200 and 18,600 respectively. Even the 87,000 casual workers and 155,000 women helping their menfolk on the land, do not alter the total decline to any measurable degree. An interesting point is that out of 20,560 foreign agricultural workers registered in 1955,

only 6,040 have remained.

In spite of these drastic reductions in agricultural manpower, the farming area has declined relatively little, from 1,059,200 to 970,800 hectares, not counting Alpine pasture land. Generally speaking, the land cultivated by small farmers has decreased in area, that farmed by larger concerns has increased. These figures show that rationalisation must have made great strides.

If the general farming area has become smaller, this by no means applies to cereal production; there the total area has increased by 5,000 hectares to 175,400. Fewer potatoes are being grown, but more vegetables.

In this connection it should be mentioned that the Canton of Zurich has lost the largest area of arable land in the last 14 years; nearly 11,000 hectares, followed by the Ticino (10,500) and Vaud and Valais (9,300 and 5,900). On the other hand, the Grisons, Neuchâtel, Schwyz and Nidwalden show an increase.

As may well be imagined, consequently, the number of horses has gone down to a new minimum. Only 41,636 are left, 44% of these in Bernese stables. Apart from horses in agriculture, there may be a further 10,000 or 12,000 horses in Switzerland. Cattle figures have remained constant at 1,753,000, mainly for milk and breeding; as hitherto, cattle kept for slaughter is negligible in Switzerland. The number of pigs has gone up slightly since the last census and now stands at 1.66 million, mostly in large pig-breeding units. The same applies to poultry: 5.7 million.

Mechanisation has made more progress, and the number of tractors is more than fourfold that of horses. In 1969, there were no fewer than 38,200 self-loading trucks, 9,800 combine harvesters, 34,400 milking plants, 54,800 cattle watering plants, etc.

These figures have been taken from a report in the “*Tages-Anzeiger*”.

Its writer, Ernst Syfrig, ends by saying that the “*Wahlen Plan*” was still a well-known term amongst the older generations who remember that it was thanks to the ingenious plan worked out by the former Federal Councillor Wahlen, that Switzerland doubled its food production during the war. Today, even the best rationalised agriculture would no longer be in a position to feed the much increased population of Switzerland. The only exception is the Canton of Berne, that “*rocher de bronze*”, which could possibly be self-sufficient.

SWISSAIR TAKES OFF WITH “JUMBO” INTO ITS FIFTH DECADE

On 26th March, 1931, “*Ad Astra Aero*” (founded in 1919 in Zurich) and “*Balair*” (founded in 1925 in Basle) merged, and the “*Schweizerische Luftverkehr-Aktiengesellschaft “Swissair”*” was born. The name originally invented by the former President of “*Balair*”, Dr. A. Ehinger, has served well and stands for safety, service and progress today as much as it ever has during the four decades.

In 1931, the share capital was Fr. 800,000—and the company had a total fleet of 13 small units with 86 passenger seats. The cost of the planes was no more than 1.9 million francs for the total number. Ten pilots, seven wireless operators and eight flight mechanics made up the total flying personnel, and at the end of the first year, 10,282 passengers had made use of the new airline. The total staff stood at 64 people. The whole network covered 4,203 km., and altogether 724,476 km. had been flown. Revenue stood at 2.1 million francs.

What a changed picture in 1971! The share capital stands at practically 335 million francs. The fleet consists of 39 jet aircraft with a total of nearly 4,400 seats. There are 620 pilots, 136 flight mechanics, 58 navigators, 714 hostesses and 280 stewards in “*Swissair*”.

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air's" service. Last year, 3,927,864 passengers were transported throughout the world—the network now comprises 210,000 km. The total number of staff has reached 13,280.

It would be idle to pretend that the past four decades have been easy. The change over from one-engined piston aircraft to the jet plane of today has been difficult and needed much adaptability and foresight, not only in the type of aircraft to be used in the near future, but also with regard to planning ahead. "Swissair" was the first European airline which put American aircraft into service in 1932, and two years later the first to employ stewardesses.

In 1931, "Swissair" touched down in only 16 European towns. Today, the airline flies to all continents and runs 117 agencies of its own all over the world.

When we talk about difficulties, it may be as well to remember that whilst "Swissair" is the Swiss national airline, it is independent. Last year, the airline had to bear heavy losses, partly due to the crash at Wuerenlingen, partly due to the hi-jacking and destruction of the DC-8 in Jordan. Yet, it was possible to end the year with a profit of 189 million francs which was only three million less than in the previous year.

On 1st April, "Swissair" put its first regular "Boeing 747B", the "Jumbo Jet" into service—flight 110 to New York. It was not the first "Jumbo", because "Swissair" had already flown one of these giant birds occasionally in March. There is no need to describe in detail one of these new aircraft—it has been done in these columns before, and much has been said in the Press in general. The first of them landed in Switzerland on a snow-bound apron of Zurich-Kloten airport at the end of February. The 18 wheels whirled the snow into a huge drift, yet in spite of much larger engines, the noise is considerably less than with some of its predecessors.

The "Jumbo" is stationed at Zurich-Kloten. The electorate of the Canton of Zurich last year granted vast sums in order to enlarge the airport and enable it to deal with the ever-increasing traffic. The cost will be 254 million francs, but when completed, Kloten will be one of the most modern airports. It is already in 8th place in Western European air traffic, and it is determined to keep if not to improve this position. Plans by the Swiss Federal Railways to build a subterranean station at Kloten, will enable all passengers from Eastern Switzerland to reach Kloten without going into Zurich first.

The flying of the two "Jumbo Jets" which "Swissair" will have in service anon, meant that two dozen pilots, co-pilots and flight mechanics had to be retrained: 800 flights each during 18 days, with 30 landings and

15 starts. A total of 73 tyres were ruined during test landings, but there was not the slightest accident or mishap.

There will be difficulties, and it is expected the giants will run at a loss for the time being. But the additional safety and comfort should soon convince "Swissair" travellers to the USA that the "Jumbo" is a reliable friend.

Incidentally, at the Basle carnival, the "Jumbo" also had its place, or rather the huge hangars which had to be produced in order to accommodate it.

"Wo ane mit däm Dschumbo-Dschet

Wo me z'Klote drfir kai Hangar het?

*Lang go sueche wär fir d'Katz,
Dä hätt z'Ziri in jeder Schnuure Platz."*

HOW THE "HACKBRETT" CAME TO APPENZELL

There is no doubt that one of the most popular folklore bands in Switzerland is that of the Appenzell. Not only are the men's costumes amongst the finest in the country, but the bands include a special instrument, the "Hackbrett" or dulcimer. The dictionary will tell you that it is a "musical instrument with strings of graduated length over sounding board or box, struck with hammers; prototype of piano."

From cultural documents it is known that the earliest musical instruments of the Alpstein region were the primitive flute, the drum and the fife. Only rarely did foreign wandering players come, and then they were allowed to give concerts at specified inns after having received special permission. In 1418, some gypsies arrived in their caravans drawn by shaggy horses. They were part of some 14,000 strange immigrants from Egypt. The powers that be deliberated and finally allowed the strangers to settle in the unfriendly, marshy and uninhabited high-lying valley von Gunten, today called Gonten. For decades, there remained traces of these gypsy dwellers. Their nostalgic yet jubilant songs were taken over by the inhabitants of present Appenzell. But their violin and dulcimer, too, remained and were taken on by the local musicians. Especially the dulcimer is an integral part of a genuine Appenzell folklore band.

The dulcimer is still being made in Appenzell, and one of the last if not the last dulcimer maker lives on the sunny slopes of Meistersrueti between Gais and Appenzell. He is the joiner and cabinet maker Johann Fuchs. He is one of the short Appenzeller, but great in his craft, and he is also a musician of repute.

(Based on an article by A. E. Grubenmann in "Bodenseehefte")

HEIDI'S CREATOR DIED 70 YEARS AGO

On 7th July, it will be 70 years ago that Johanna Spyri died in Zurich. She came from a small farming village in the hilly country on the left bank of the Lake of Zurich, Hirzel, where her father was the village doctor, Jakob Heusser, a man of peasant stock. Her mother was the pastor's daughter, Meta Heusser-Schweizer, and she had quite a reputation as a pious writer of poetry. Some of her "Lieder einer Verborgenen" were translated into English and were published under "Songs of a Secluded Woman".

Johanna grew up at Hirzel together with three sisters and two brothers. After leaving school, she moved to Zurich and then to the French-speaking part of Switzerland, where she continued her education. In 1852, she married a lawyer who later became Town Clerk of Zurich, Bernhard Spyri.

Johanna and her husband took an active part in the cultural life of Zurich. She was a regular guest at Conrad Ferdinand Meyer's literary "Monday Salon". She remained a friend of the great writer.

The Splyris had one highly talented son, Bernhard, who died, aged only 29, after a long illness. His father died the same year (1884).

Johanna stayed in Zurich, living at the Zeltweg for 15 years and devoting herself to writing for the rest of her life. When she died, she left no direct descendants. Her relatives and their offspring live in Switzerland and USA.

Johanna Spyri wrote a number of stories for adults and two volumes of children's stories before her famous Heidi books were published. The first volume "Heidi's Lehr- und Wanderjahre" ("Heidi, her years of wandering and learning") was published in 1880, without the author's name. A year later, the second volume "Heidi kann brauchen was es gelernt hat" ("Heidi makes use of what she has learnt"), appeared, and nobody was more surprised than the writer herself at the tremendous response. The popularity of Heidi has not diminished, and the stories have been translated into many languages. The first film was made in the USA, with Shirley Temple in the title role in 1937, and several more have since been made.

The first English edition was published in 1884 in Boston, where a Braille edition appeared a year later. In England, Heidi was first published in 1909 by Dent in London. In Britain, too, Heidi has been one of the most popular children's books ever since.

Johanna Spyri is buried at the Zentralfriedhof in Zurich, next to her husband. Gottfried Keller and Henri Dunant are her famous contemporaries whose resting places are at the same cemetery.

The Johanna Spyri Archives are

in Zurich, Predigerplatz 18. They were founded in 1967, and her works and manuscripts and other mementoes are preserved there. The initiator and director of the Archives is the author and translator of youth books, Dr. Franz Caspar. H was also a founder of the Swiss Youth Book Institute (Johanna Spyri Foundation) in Zurich.

(MM)

THE BEAUTY OF YODELLING

Yodelling is one of the characteristic features of Switzerland known throughout the world. Whether it rings out in the silence of a remote Alpine valley or resounds repeatedly in the course of a rural festivity where the old popular customs are still alive, or whether it is heard in a simple, wainscotted inn or in the auditorium of one of the world's great theatres: it never fails to produce a remarkably spontaneous effect. It is as if a bit of unspoiled nature has become audible.

Yodelling is not confined to Switzerland. It is to be found in other Alpine regions: in the Tyrol—hence the term “Tyrolienne” has been coined for a certain type of yodelling—and also in Rumania, in the Caucasus or even in the mountainous regions of China. In Switzerland, however, a unique variety in the musical range of yodelling has been attained, quite apart from the fact that in a few cases its development can be traced back to prehistoric times.

Technically speaking, yodelling is based on repeated, rapid changes from the chest-voice to falsetto and back again. Its musical character is founded on these sudden changes of register. The vocalised melodies of yodelling consist in a kind of figuration on a simple harmonic basis. This figuration is generally attached to folksongs in stanzaic form as a sort of free refrain. Wide interval jumps are typical, the register change taking place at these points. Yodelling, however, also appears as independent of folksong. In such cases it is freer. In the case of Swiss yodelling there are also unusual basic musical structures which are built up on the pentatonic scale or on the sequences of tones found in early Christian liturgical modes instead of on the structure of the folksong.

The origin of yodelling shows that it goes back to a primeval musical tradition. Its early stages are found in the summons of the mountain herdsman to his animals, or in the outbreak of exultation of the lonely mountain dweller as he feels at one with the majesty of the mountains or in his signal call to distant neighbours. In early times, however, yodelling was also used to exorcise evil spirits and something of the aggressiveness and inflexibility of such a system of magic can still be traced in the yodelling of modern times. In the solemn Alpine evening prayer, which is still to be heard in some regions of Switzerland

to this day, something of this old exorcism lives on, for an emotion opposed in spirit to the words of the prayer breaks out in the pure vocalised yodel.

In early Christian times yodelling had contact with liturgical choral music, whence comes the psalmodic melismatic element. Along with the religious aspect, however, contact with old dance tunes introduced secular elements. It is in this way that the original yodel has changed in the course of centuries—even millennia—as is revealed by modern musicological and folklore research conducted in the Muotatal in the Canton of Schwyz and in Appenzell on the figuration connected with the folksong. Yodelling appears both in solo form and for several voices, and up to the present day has always retained elements of improvisation. The yodeller will sing free variations on several simple basic musical patterns.

The pronounced technique found in yodelling in all probability made it possible at an early date for those with especially endowed throats and powerful and controlled breathing to become true virtuosi of the yodel. Their effect is as remarkable today as ever. Typical is the story of the Swiss yodeller who effortlessly bested a world-famous tenor in the Paris Opera in the Thirties of the last century and sent his sophisticated audience into ecstasies.

The real effect of the yodel is more profound, however. Whoever has heard a yodel sung among the great mountains by an unspoiled mountain-dweller will always cherish the unforgettable memory of the unity of nature and man, of sound and space that he has experienced. The melodic line floats away over the peaks and sinks down into the valleys at the change of register. Here we are confronted by the contact of a highly developed musical art with the no less sensitive simplicity of the natural musical sounds. Likewise, out of the depths of the human spirit rises the many-voiced, improvised yodel song which is still to be heard on an Appenzell evening when a singer strikes up a tune in which the others join. Out of wordless, hummed harmonies the yodel soars forth until all the voices combine in an intricate pattern of musical lines. For the most part the singers sit motionless. A musical contemplation takes its rise from this immobility in which the artistic nature of mankind, also to be found among the simplest people, is kindled.

It is a rare and happy experience for a lover of nature and art to encounter the yodel when it is sung in such spontaneous and untarnished purity.

In effect, the yodel is fostered in Switzerland today by its own organisations, which are connected with those societies devoted to the preservation of local traditions. Yodelling festivals

are held annually, and at these festivals other old customs are kept alive. In the severely judged contests a knowledge of the origin and history of yodelling is crucial.

Yodelling is, however, exposed to abuse. When, as a consequence of deluded and false assumptions, it is deliberately used as a tourist bait, the same watering-down and falsification occurs as when traditional costumes are employed in revues or ballets. Cut off from its sources, this phenomenon of the artistic spirit of simple people loses its meaning, and therefore its life.

The true significance of yodelling lies in its very existence and in the fact that from time immemorial certain artistic impulses and modes of the human spirit have remained basic and that in times like our own, which have produced new forms thanks to the progressive developments of science and technology, we are able by means of yodelling to remain linked with the more simple and primeval epochs of the human race.

(Pro Helvetia)

HALF-FARE SEASON TICKET FOR THE “NOT SO YOUNG”

The Swiss Transport Undertakings issue half-fare season tickets valid one year for the very attractive price of Sfrs. 50.—(£5.10). In order to qualify, one must be aged 62 (ladies) or 65 (gents) at least. The Season Ticket can be purchased at any time and it entitles to the purchase of half-fare tickets first or second class during its validity. It is valid on the principal railway lines, on postal coaches, lake boats and many mountain railways and funiculars.

This half-fare season ticket can now be purchased at the Swiss National Tourist Office, Swiss Centre, 1 New Coventry Street, London, W1V 3HG. A recent passport photograph is required, and the passport should be produced.

These season tickets are particularly suitable for presents to parents, grand-parents, relatives and friends.

GREAT ST. BERNARD ROAD TUNNEL

During peak periods, traffic through the Great St. Bernard Road Tunnel is slowed down by motorists queuing for their tickets. In order to assist the motorists, the Lausanne Tourist Office at 60 Avenue d'Ouchy and 7 Avenue Benjamin Constant now sells vouchers of the Great St. Bernard Road Tunnel Co.

(SNT0)