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MANAGERS AGAINST PARTICIPATION

The Vorort—an association of Swiss businessmen acting as a spokesman for industry—has firmly rejected recent government proposals on a new law giving workers a share in the management of private companies and public services.

Two years ago, Switzerland's main trade union organisation launched an initiative with the same aim. Having obtained the required number of signatures, this initiative should lead to a referendum giving an opportunity to the Swiss people to say whether they want the principle of worker-participation written in the Constitution. In the meanwhile, the Government has drafted counter proposals which will be submitted to the people on the same day.

The Vorort, which has already turned down the Trade Union project, was equally reticent to accept the new Government proposals claiming that they only differed from the Trade Union ideas in wording. In a message to the Government, the Vorort claimed that both sets of proposals left unions and workers free to share in the decision-making process at all levels of management, be it financial policy, investment, research and development. The businessmen represented by the Vorort firmly advocated a separation of responsibilities between management and labour. Worker-participation in management would only bring ideology

into decision-making and prevent private enterprises from operating and fulfilling their role within the framework of a free economy. But the Vorort accepts all forms of participation liable to bring more work satisfaction, personality development, stronger bonds between staff and management and a protection of Switzerland's peace of labour.

While this attitude might be rejected scornfully by the average militant for its paternalism, it is accepted by the great majority of Swiss workers, who do not mind paternalism as long as they get a decent reward for a good day's work. Labour-management relations have been excellent in Switzerland for the past forty years and the condition of working people steadily improved. For this reason,

very few of them are inspired by revolutionary fervour and trade-union membership is small. In fact, the participation issue was thrown in the dormant pool of Swiss working-class institutions as a new cause to fight for. The others—good salaries, holidays, promotion etc. have already been fought and won. The new militants in Swiss industry are mainly young people or foreigners entrusted with more menial tasks. The foreign-labour issue is at present a greater matter of concern to most Swiss working people than participation. Although participation is a fundamental problem, and a proposition which is perhaps more likely to work in Switzerland than anywhere else—given the favourable state of industrial relations—, it has not obtained much support so far.



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