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Comment

SOCIAL CAPITALISM: AN IDEA THAT HAS LEFT A DEEP MARK ON SWISS LIFE

The largest non-public company in Switzerland happens to be a non-profit organisation. It is probably due to this fact that the Migros federation of cooperative stores could have acquired such an overwhelming importance on the Swiss retail market. Last year, its 440 supermarkets and ten sales lorries marked MMM sold 4,856 million francs worth of goods and registered a 12.9 per cent increase of their turnover. Migros' great rival, the Co-op chain of stores, also recorded similar figures and is not far behind Migros in turnover. As a result, nearly all retail food sales in the country go through two vast organisations whose statutes preclude profits and place them at the service of their customers.

With its modern supermarkets standing out in every town or district of any importance, Migros and its ubiquitous "M" symbol, not counting its many sidelines (do-it-yourself shops, oil, banking, holidays, etc.), might at first sight be considered as a glaring example of capitalistic might. The fact that it is not considered by the Swiss as a Monopoly, or as an unsatisfiable conglomerate with all-embracing power on society, is due to the ideals behind the creation of Migros. Indeed, Migros could never have grown as it did without the non-commercial and humanistic ideals of its founder, Gottlieb Duttweiler. In revolutionising the retail trade in Switzerland earlier than in most countries of Europe, these ideals have profoundly affected the way of life of the Swiss. These ideals are embodied in the organisation's statutes. These state that 0.5 per cent of the turnover of regional cooperatives and 1 per cent of the turnover of the Migros Federation should be devoted to cultural, economic and social objectives. As a result, Migros sponsors evening courses and cultural events of all kinds. It has bought land for

environmental purposes, campaigns for various causes and considers that it has a vital role to play in making Switzerland a better place to live.

Duttweiler's philosophy pertained to social capitalism. He claimed that the interests of consumers and the national interests were identical — this community of interest being underlined by the simple fact that everyone is a consumer. The purpose of a business was therefore to serve the community of consumers above all private and monopoly interests.

The Co-op is moved by the same ideals. Both the Co-op and Migros have about 900,000 members and issue widely-read weeklies of cultural and humanistic inspiration. Duttweiler even founded a party represented in Parliament (The Independents) and a newspaper (Die Tat). This shows that Switzerland has been ahead in consumer-protection for a long time. Because so much of everyday shopping is carried out at Migros, Co-op or other cooperative organisations, or some private ones, such as Denner, who strive to undercut everybody, rising prices do not cause so many grumbles as elsewhere. With prices rising by 11.9 per cent last year, Swiss housewives have faced the same problems as British housewives. But at least they know that this was not the fault of Migros and others because they are confident that these organisations are doing all they can to keep prices down and abide by the ideals laid down at their foundation. In Britain, on the other hand, a glib politician has claimed that supermarket organisations were cashing in on rising food prices and realising 25 per cent profits. As British supermarkets are in the hands of private organisations perhaps less generously motivated than the founders of Migros, such declarations were more likely to find credence among the British public, particularly during an election campaign.

The Swiss have achieved a large degree of industrial peace because Unions and Management have recognised that their interests were not necessarily in conflict. Likewise, peace has been found between consumers and their suppliers. This collective relationship between millions of consumers and one or two highly respected retail organisations has become a salient feature of the pattern of Swiss life.

SWISS EVENTS

100 KMH SPEED LIMIT HAS BEEN VERY EFFECTIVE

The Members of Parliament who supported the introduction of a 100 kmh speed limit on all Swiss roads with the exception of motorways should be very satisfied with its results after one year of implementation. The number of road accidents fell by 9 per cent with respect to 1972 and the number of fatal accidents dropped by 16 per cent. The 100 kmh speed limit is considered as having saved the lives of 272 people. Introduced on 1st January, 1973 for an experimental period of three years, the new regulation helped to decrease the number of road casualties from 1,722 people killed in 1972 to 1,450 last year. Fatal accidents on motorways have increased from 56 to 73, but none have been recorded since 17th November, when an all-round 100 kmh speed limit was introduced to save petrol. If the results of the speed limitation are as conclusive this year and the next, there is no doubt that it will be maintained indefinitely. Over half of fatal accidents happen outside built-up areas on straight stretches or bends. They are nearly always due to drivers not adapting their speed to road conditions, refusing to give priority or being inattentive at railway crossings. Drunkenness is responsible for 15 per cent of fatal accidents.

New law on foreign aid probably to be postponed

The Swiss people should be called this year to express their position on Swiss aid to the third world in a Referendum expected to be launched by Mr. James Schwarzenbach and his conservative friends. This referendum will take place, however, if the law whose draft is nearing completion is voted during the next session of Parliament starting in March. The two houses disagree on some points of the planned legislation, which will place Swiss public aid within a firm legal framework and increase it as well. There are rumours that the Government will ask for a 2-year postponement of the final vote in order to take account of recent developments, namely in regard to the petrol crisis, which have come about since the new law was first proposed. Mr. Pierre Gruber, Head of the Political Department, is said to be in favour of a postponement of the planned parliamentary vote in order to amend the draft law and accord it to these new developments. Swiss foreign aid would therefore be inscribed in the statute book in 1976 only, at which time the Swiss could eventually oppose it in a Referendum.

Observers feel that this hesitation about the future of a much talked about legislation is due to the shifting position of the Swiss people on the problem of foreign aid. With the recent unilateral increases decided by the oil producers and the growing militancy of certain countries of the developing world, the Swiss man in the street feels less inclined to show generosity towards these people. It is felt that, at the present time, any law that would grant more tax money to overseas countries would be very unwillingly supported by the average

citizen. For this reason, the Government is believed to be in favour of shelving the necessary legislation for a year or so.

It is true that these considerations do not do justice to the political intelligence of the Swiss people. The developing world is divided into rich countries, such as the oil producers, and very poor countries — to which, incidentally, Switzerland has devoted the bulk of its public aid. But the average reader of "Blick" tends to put all these countries and these people in one large bag.

The draft which was agreed in mid-February during a session of the Federal Council Commission at Zug in the presence of President Ernst Brugger, contained the following proposals:

1: In order to promote the fulfilment of the worker's personality and develop cooperation between the social partners, the Confederation is entitled, provided that the normal running and economic operation of management are safeguarded, to legislate on the rights and duties of employees of private and public undertakings in the following domains: a) company information, b) consultation on matters relating to the running of the company c) participation on social matters and working conditions.

2: In order to safeguard the rights of workers within the aims of paragraph one, the Confederation is entitled to legislate, when justified by the size of the undertakings concerned, on the creation of internal bodies entrusted with the representation of the work force.

3: The provisions of Article 32 are applicable by analogy.

If approved by Parliament and by the people, the foregoing text would be added to the Federal Constitution as Article 34-8.

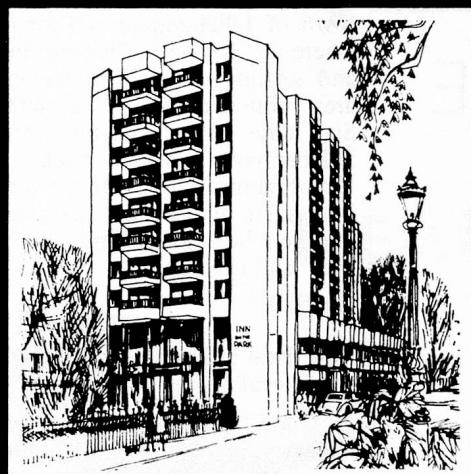
Many observers regret that the Swiss people should have to decide, when they are called to the polls on the issue of participation, between Government and trade union proposals because such a vote

NEW PROGRESS TOWARDS A LAW ON WORKER PARTICIPATION

The great issue of participation, which was raised over two years ago by the Swiss trade unions in an Initiative, is nearing a solution. The National Council Commission has agreed on the formulation of a new constitutional article on the subject which will be put to the Swiss people as a counter-project to the more ambitious proposals of the trade unions.

There are various forms of participation, some of which are already practised in Swiss industry today. Several important companies have profit-sharing and employee-shareholding schemes. Most have works committees with representatives of management and labour. But the trade unions went further than that in their initiative and have

called for a full-fledged participation in management and decision-making. This idea has been rejected by the leaders of industry, who firmly believe in a division of responsibilities and a pragmatic supervision of the economy. The Federal Council, too, was bound to take its distance from proposals which were highly political, designed to refurbish the image of the trade unions among an increasingly complacent and undemanding working class, and which aimed at a considerable alteration of the existing economic organisation. The Federal Council produced counter-proposals which went along with the unions to some extent. It suggested that participation should be set within a constitutional framework which would guarantee the normal and economic management of companies.



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would be essentially divisive. Still, there is no risk that Switzerland should slide towards a British situation, and there has never been any suggestion that any force other than the Swiss people and their elected representatives governed the country!

Long hair demanded for soldiers

The "Schweizer Soldat", a monthly magazine for troops and officers, claimed in its February number that hairstyle was a personal matter and called for a reform

of existing regulations. The magazine said that the Reform of Army Etiquette introduced three years ago by the Oswald Commission had not solved the problem of hairstyles. The magazine said that the Army's stringency in this matter made it a target of ridicule and added that by giving way on such a "trifling matter" it would not be yielding to the pressure of public opinion. Taking the example of Israeli troops during the October Middle East war, it stressed that the combat value of troops was in no way diminished by the length of their hair.

has not yet decided where he will spend his term of exile — which might be very long. At least, he won't have any monetary difficulties as his fortune is estimated at £2 million.

When he arrived at the Zurich Central Station, he was cheered by a swarm of over a thousand well-wishers and journalists contained by only seven policemen. He looked taken aback by this kind of reception which marked the beginning of his somewhat sour encounter with the Press in Switzerland. As a contemplative man just expatriated from his native land, he could hardly be blamed for showing impatience at journalists and reporters tailing him however cleverly he attempted to avoid them. Before the week was over, Solzhenitsyn charged the western press with "irresponsibility" and accused it of writing false accounts on his life and actions. Despite this well deserved dressing-down, he was followed by a hoard of pressmen as he visited the world-famous monastery at Einsiedeln on the second weekend of his exile.

He was accompanied on that journey by Mr. Sigmund Widmer, Mayor of Zurich. He was greeted by the monks of the monastery and attended evening service, signing himself several times in the Russian Orthodox fashion.

As he left this beautiful Christian monument, he was greeted by a crowd of 500 people, mostly villagers. He returned to his lawyer's home in Zurich, the town where Lenin, also banished from his country, had prepared the Russian Revolution from 1914 to 1917. The exiled Nobel Prize-winner has managed to do some shopping, despite the constant attention he is getting, and has seen the film version of his book "The First Circle", by Alexander Ford.

A few days after his visit to Einsiedeln, the writer left Zurich by surprise for Copenhagen and Norway. Disliking air journeys, he took a train which crossed Germany overnight. His privacy was efficiently protected by German officials. Having reached Norway, Solzhenitsyn visited the small town of Lillehammer not far from Oslo, where he is considering buying a house and settling down. The scenery in that area reminded him of his native Russia. Six days after having left Zurich, Solzhenitsyn was back at the Hauptbahnhof. There were fewer journalists than on the first occasion, but by then he had become accustomed to them and their antics.

New fiscal policy announced by Mr. Chevallaz

Mr. Georges-André Chevallaz, the former mayor of Lausanne who succeeded Mr. Nello Celio as Head of the Department of Finance on 1st January, has announced a revision of federal fiscal policy for this year. Breaking the news in a speech at the School of Commerce of St. Gall, he said that it was absolutely essential for the Confederation to obtain

SOLZHENITSYN GETS FIRST TASTE OF THE WEST IN SWITZERLAND

The Russian writer Alexander Solzhenitsyn received a tumultuous welcome on Friday, 15th February as he arrived at Zurich's Hauptbahnhof after an eight-hour journey from Cologne on the third day of his forced exile. The tremendous publicity and the perpetual hounding of journalists during his first week in Switzerland, which was spent at the home of his Zurich lawyer, Mr. Fritz Heeb, gave him a first hand glimpse of the less acceptable face of life in the West. Hopefully, by the time this goes to Press, the Swiss will be accustomed to the presence of this illustrious exile from the Soviet Union and allow him to stroll along the streets of Zurich in peace.

Solzhenitsyn was exiled and deprived of his nationality on Tuesday, 12th February. He landed in Frankfurt, without knowing it until he had read the signs at the airport, on Wednesday and was greeted by the German writer and Nobel Prize-winner Heinrich Böll. He spent two nights at his residence before setting off for Zurich. On Thursday, the Political Department received an application for a visit to

Switzerland. Solzhenitsyn explained that he wished to take a rest. This demand was immediately accepted and the Russian writer was given a three-month visa. His lawyer later explained that Solzhenitsyn had chosen to stay in Switzerland because any prolonged stay in Germany would have political implications.

Living in Switzerland is hardly likely to cause him such problems. There were no reactions from the Russian Embassy on his arrival. Besides, Solzhenitsyn has to submit to regulations forbidding visitors from making public declarations of a political nature. Whether or not he had been informed of these declarations, Solzhenitsyn was hardly in a talkative mood as he was submerged by journalists on his arrival. He was certainly not prepared to say anything which might delay the departure of his family from the Soviet Union. Solzhenitsyn had asked that his wife Natalya, his three children from her, a stepson, his mother and his aunt should be allowed to join him in exile. At the time of writing, it appeared that the Soviet authorities were not going to cause any obstruction. Solzhenitsyn

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more resources. He said that the constant deficit of federal finance was not a temporary economic phenomena due to the State's lack of restraint, but a result of its increased burden and insufficient tax income. A few days later, Mr. Chevallaz started consultations moving on the problem of tax harmonisation, one of the recurring themes of Swiss politics and actually subject to four future bills. The people will eventually be consulted on these matters in the traditional fashion.

Socialist initiative withdrawn

The Swiss Trade Union Congress and the Swiss Socialist Party have withdrawn an initiative launched in 1970 for the institution of a popular old age pension scheme. The trade unions were quite strongly in favour of abandoning the initiative but the President of the Socialist Party, Mr. Arthur Schmid, had to use his casting vote to follow the trade unions' recommendation and break a dead-heat situation in the Party's Central Committee. The initiative was one among three launched between December 1969 and April 1970 calling for a more or less similar system of guaranteed state old age pension. The Federal Council counteracted by putting its proposals regarding the "three pillars" to the people, who opted for these proposals against the Labour Party Initiative in a referendum in December 1972. The Socialists, whose demands were satisfied to a great extent by the Federal counter-proposals, had chosen to maintain their initiative, and hence leave the possibility of a further referendum on old age pensions open, until these proposals had been translated into solid legislation. The majority of socialists eventually realised that this stance was meaningless but a minority of die-hards insisted that holding on to the initiative was a matter of Socialist "credibility".

Diplomatic Conference on Humanitarian rights

A conference concerned with the revision of the Geneva Convention on prisoners of war opened in mid-February in Geneva's new ultra-modern conference centre. After a week of wrangling, the

119 delegations finally decided to exclude South Vietnam's Revolutionary Government (GRP) from the Conference by a majority of one vote. The day before, North Vietnam had walked out of the Conference in protest against the treatment reserved to the Vietcong delegation. The Conference had in fact opened under stormy auspices with the Israeli delegation leaving the assembly hall following a highly political address by Mauritania's delegate. Before getting down to work, the Conference eventually decided following prolonged behind-the-scenes discussions to accept the Portuguese territory of Guinea-Bissau as a full-fledged participant. This territory proclaimed itself independent last September and its declaration was supported by the UN. At the time of writing, the delegations were also agreed to give non-voting participation rights to various African liberation movements. But after nine days of discussion, the Conference had not yet determined its procedure and its agenda.

POOR RESULTS AT ST. MORITZ

Switzerland put up a disappointing performance at the 1974 World Ski Championships which took place during the first week of February at St. Moritz. Clasped eighth, it had only one medal winner: Lise-Marie Morerod, who won a bronze in the women's special slalom. This is far from the record harvest of the 1934 World Ski Championships, which were also held at St. Moritz, where the Swiss reaped nine medals. It is of course a disappointment after the Swiss performance at the Winter Olympics at Sapporo in 1972, where they collected seven medals. One thing is clear, the Austrian girl Anne-Marie Proell has definitely avenged her defeat against Marie Therese Nadig at Sapporo. The Austrian "snow rocket", as she is nicknamed, won the downhill whereas Nadig didn't win anything at all. She fell in the giant slalom and so did Roger Collombin, on whom many hopes had been pinned. Austria won the championships with 3 gold, 3 silver and 2 bronze. It was followed by France, Italy, Liechtenstein, West Germany, Canada and Poland. Hanni Wenzel, a girl from the

tiny principality of Liechtenstein, won the special slalom.

F.C. BASLE BEATS GLASGOW CELTIC

F.C. Basle beat Glasgow Celtic 3-2 in the first leg of the quarter-final tie of the European Soccer Cup. The Swiss 1973 champions, who were placed only eighth in the Swiss National League at the time of the match, on 27th February, looked jaded for the first half hour but were transformed from a pedestrian side trailing by one goal through two goals in three minutes. The first in the 28th minute, led to firecrackers popping on the terraces of the St. Jakob Stadium in Basle and a brass band blaring out from behind the Celtic goal. It was scored by Ottmar Hitzfeld. The following one was hammered in by Swiss skipper Karl Odermatt. Hitzfeld scored a second goal from the penalty spot in the 63rd minute after a Scottish defender had impeded a Swiss player. The two sides were to meet for the second leg at Glasgow on Wednesday, 20th March. It was the first time in five matches that Basle had beaten Celtic.

SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE – AN IDEA ENJOYING LITTLE FAVOUR

The collection of signatures for a new popular initiative providing for the total separation of the Church and the State in Switzerland is proceeding rather slowly. According to the Press Office of the German-Swiss Protestant Churches, the idea appears to enjoy little support.

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