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Comment

A CONSTANT PREOCCUPATION

One of the most important political developments last March was the rejection by Parliament of an initiative launched by the National Action Movement for a reduction of the number of foreigners in Switzerland. The main points of this initiative, which had been backed by over 68,000 signatures, were to reduce the resident alien population of Switzerland to half a million by 1977 and to redistribute it in such a way that no Canton, with the exception of Geneva, should have a foreign element surpassing 12 per cent of the indigenous population. As the foreign population now stands at nearly 1.1 million, such a package will entail, if it is accepted by the Swiss people during a referendum to be staged on 1st December this year, the forced repatriation of 180,000 men and women a year. Parliament decided to reject these proposals outright and opted against submitting federal counter-proposals to the people on 1st December in the belief that existing provisions and present efforts would contain the inflow of foreigners.

It now remains to be seen whether the Swiss people will agree to measures which many people have qualified as insane. Even Mr. James Schwarzenbach, leader of the Republican Party and author of the most important anti-foreign initiative to date, the one that was narrowly defeated during an historic referendum on 7th June, 1970, has completely dissociated himself from this new move. Mr. Schwarzenbach recently said at the National Council that expatriating so many men and women would be worse than what General Amin of Uganda had ever done. He said that the extreme nature of the measures pertained to "plebeian rancour and irresponsibility" — and in fact they certainly reflect deep seated anti-foreign resentment among the lower layers of the Swiss population.

Although Mr. Schwarzenbach was one of the founders of the National Action against the dangers of "over-foreignisation", he broke away from it and joined the Republicans because the National Action's objectives were even more extremist than his own. Although he is deeply concerned by the social and national implications of harbouring an alien population which will soon account for one-fifth of the total population, he is not prepared to envisage the "radical" solutions claimed by angry representatives of working people who are confronted with foreigners every day, at work and out of work.

Instead, his party (the Republicans) have just presented 53,000 signatures required for the backing of yet *another,* but milder, anti-foreign initiative to the Federal Chancery in Berne. Four initiatives have been presented so far on the one issue of foreign labour.

The initiative is the device offered to the ordinary Swiss citizen to directly control the laws of his country. When an initiative has been launched over a federal issue it must receive the signed support of 50,000 citizens. The Government then decides whether or not to present counter-proposals to the people. In most referendums, the people have to choose between the proposals of the original initiative and those put forward by the Government. In the great majority of cases, they opt for the latter. This of course doesn't reduce the usefulness of the original initiative, which will have prompted the Government into action. The various administrative measures that have been taken to stem the inflow of foreign workers have been taken in reaction to the initiatives that have already been launched on the matter.

The first of these initiatives was sponsored in 1965 by the Democratic Party of Zurich which Mr. Schwarzenbach represented at the National Council. It called for a reduction of the number of foreigners with a yearly or residential permit to be reduced to ten per cent of the population. Departures were to be phased at five per cent a year and as humanely as possible. The initiative was rejected by the Government in 1969. The Democratic Party didn't insist to have it carried through to the people because it had faith in the Government's promises in this matter. But in 1969, an initiative committee against "over-foreignisation" chaired by Mr. Schwarzenbach collected 71,772 signatures in record time to ask for practically the same thing: reduction of the foreign population to ten per cent of the resident population with the exception of Geneva. This was rejected by about 51 per cent of the Swiss people in June, 1970.

On 3rd November, 1972, the National Action movement launched the third and most drastic initiative against foreign presence. This is the text that has just been debated at length, and rejected by Parliament.

But now a *fourth* initiative, launched again by Mr. Schwarzenbach, has been endorsed by a sufficient number of signatures. More humane than its fore-runners, it calls for a reduction of foreign residents to 12.5 per cent of the population in ten years. It is also suggested that foreigners should no longer be allowed to enjoy residential status. This would be compensated by a better deal for seasonal and border workers who would be freed from certain restrictions.

In addition to these four popular initiatives, a Republican National Councillor, Mr. Reich, has launched a personal initiative in favour of a more humane immigration policy stabilising the resident foreign population as soon as possible. A similar initiative is due to be launched this April by an association by Catholic workers and employees.

Such a string of political actions shows that the foreign population issue has been the most constant pre-occupation of the Swiss for nearly 20 years.

P.M.B.

SWISS EVENTS

One Swiss in five would like to live abroad

One Swiss in five would emigrate if he had the opportunity. Such was the startling result of a poll organised among about a thousand persons across the country. The exact proportion of would-be emigrants was 21 per cent, showing a tendency higher in Switzerland than in most other countries. Similar polls conducted elsewhere showed the following proportion of people wishing to emigrate in other countries: United States ten per cent, Spain 13 per cent, Australia 13 per cent, Canada 15 per cent, Great Britain 39 per cent and Uruguay 41 per cent.

The poll did not say whether this desire to live elsewhere reflects insatisfaction, or whether it was related to a tradition for seeking a new life overseas. This could well be the case of the Swiss, who not so long ago were *compelled* to emigrate. To the question "where would you like to settle down?", 13 per cent of would-be Swiss emigrants said they would like to go to the United