

Letter from Switzerland

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LETTER FROM SWITZERLAND

One of the problems under country-wide discussion at present, both in the Federal Parliament and in the mass media, is the declared desire of workers and employees to share the power of decision-making of the employers. As far back as August, 1971, three import Trade Union Federations launched the so-called "Initiative for Co-determination" (Mitbestimmungs-Initiative), which postulates that the workers' and employees' alledged right to a share in the power of decision-making in industry should be written into the Federal Constitution. If this were to happen, all further details would have to be the subject of subsequent legislation.

On the Trade Union side it has been made clear that what they aim at *for the time being* is co-determination on a basis of parity on the boards of directors in industrial companies. The expression "on a basis of parity" can, as the Trade Unionists see things, mean two possibilities. One of them would be that any Board of Directors would have half of its members from one and the other half from the other side of industry. Alternatively "parity" could mean that the employers' side would be represented by one-third of the total membership of a Board, the workers' and employees' side

by another third, whereas the remaining third would be reserved for "the public interest", or in other words for some functionaries. The Trade Unions have also reserved the possibility for themselves to demand, should this seem advisable one day, the same "right to co-determination" in the actual *Management*. All this is, of course, going quite far in a leftward direction, but is in line with the present trend.

The employers' organisations see things from a different angle. They speak of their "indivisible responsibility" and consequently reject on principle any demand for an institutionalised sharing of power. They concede, however, that it might be wise to eradicate "the authoritarian style of management which still exists here and there" in order to replace it by more modern methods of leadership, based on the increased delegation of competence and responsibility, as well as on increased and more detailed information about the problems of enterprises. In between these two diametrically opposed points of view stands the Federal Council, which in a message to parliament has acknowledged that "adequate co-determination" corresponds to a genuine need of the present time.

But what does "adequate" ("angemessen" in the German text) mean? It could mean a minority-representation in the decision-making body, or a 50:50 share, or it could even mean that the trade unionists should be in a majority. It is known that a minority representation is in the Federal Council's mind, just as everybody knows that the Trade Unions postulate at least parity.

The National Council of the Federal Parliament has already debated the problem and several schemes — or models — at great length and the Council of States will tackle the same task in one of its forthcoming sessions.

What kind of solution will ultimately be found cannot, at this juncture, be said. But it is fairly obvious that a simple rejection of the Trade Unions' demand right across the board would provoke yet another initiative and possibly even some unrest in some industries. Probably the employers, while safeguarding their own and their shareholders' interests, would be wise to assist in finding a compromise solution which is fair to both sides and takes into account the rapidly changing ideas of the younger generation. The problem is of topicality and its satisfactory solution is in the interest of industrial peace and the national economy.

Gottfried Keller



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