

**Zeitschrift:** The Swiss observer : the journal of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK  
**Herausgeber:** Federation of Swiss Societies in the United Kingdom  
**Band:** - (1977)  
**Heft:** 1735

**Artikel:** Switzerland  
**Autor:** Meier, Herbert  
**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-692063>

### **Nutzungsbedingungen**

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

### **Conditions d'utilisation**

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

### **Terms of use**

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

**Download PDF:** 10.08.2025

**ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>**

# Features

## *Switzerland: from page 8.*

official censorship, and there is a free press. Yet there is no more lack of prevailing opinions than there is elsewhere, and freedom of thought is for some only a freedom for themselves, and not one they are prepared to grant to others. The Swiss has the right to found societies and he founds them with abandon. The political parties are societies, too. The constitution has nothing to say about them, but they are certainly opinion-makers. Not that they are alone in this; trade unions also publish their views. They have a voice in political matters and as a result of a special consultation procedure they can influence proposed legislation and decisions. In Switzerland (as in most other countries) economy and politics are interconnected. The representatives of the people in Parliament often come from trade, industry or the trade union movement. And since – to quote the French-Swiss novelist Ramuz – «the idea of rank lives in every good citizen», many of them are officers. Thus opinions are balanced out, and the result is the Helvetian compromise. Many claim that it is because of these agreements that the nation remains intact. Others find that they are being excluded from politics in this way. All perform their civil duties, the unpopular payment of taxes, the duty of voting, of serving in the army. All males are conscripted and undergo military training, seventy per cent being found fit for active service. Those found unfit pay a so-called substitution tax. The Swiss army has always been a militia.

### *A rifle for every man*

The soldier is first trained in a recruits' school, and regular exercises and courses follow in subsequent years. Switzerland attacks nobody. Today the country's independence is defended – conquests

belong to the past. Military strength is meant to dissuade an enemy from an attack. That is the concept, the justification. Ideas such as this – that a powerful army ensures peace – are accompanied by the will to participate in international agreements banning war, and not only because Switzerland is the patron of the Red Cross. Every soldier meanwhile has his weapon, ammunition and uniform at home. There is no fear of revolutions. The Swiss are proud to have an accurate rifle and a well-organized civil defence system.

### *Farmers and hotel-keepers*

One hundred and fifty years ago Switzerland was an underdeveloped country. Bad harvests meant famine and starvation for thousands. Today the farmers can count on state support. The idyll of the old-time farm has made way for a rationalized production facility. Seven Swiss out of every hundred work in agriculture and produce nearly half the food the country requires. Agriculture should be able to supply the

nation's needs in an emergency and should protect the landscape. The farmers have thus become landscape gardeners. For whom? For the Swiss themselves, and for the others. The others are mostly tourists. Thanks to the tourists, the Swiss have discovered their own landscape and have begun to put it to use. But it was a Swiss who first opened Switzerland's temple of nature to European society. Albrecht von Haller, a physician, naturalist and poet, wrote hymns to the Alps. The Genevese Horace de Saussure explored them scientifically. Rousseau finally attuned the European psyche to the unspoiled world of nature. Switzerland now offered itself as a showcase. Today whole valleys and regions live on tourism. The Swiss have become pioneers of the hotel trade, in the outside world as well as in their own country. There was a Valaisan, for instance, whose forefathers had built Baroque altars and who one day opened a hotel in Paris to which he gave his name: the Ritz. The Ritz Hotel became the symbol of an era.

Military flying near the Matterhorn

(Photo FMD)



# Features



Distribution of Cheese in the Justis valley

(Photo SNT0)

## *Some uranium, but not much*

Some uranium has been discovered in the Emmental region with its huge farmhouses, but not much. Switzerland has hardly any raw materials. A little iron ore for times of need. But it is normally not worth mining. Salt is available, likewise hot springs and sulphur waters for spa treatment. Switzerland in fact has not very much to live on. From the first there was no alternative to the transit trade and export. The crossbow, as used by the national hero, has been chosen as a brand of quality. Quality and precision are the weapons of Switzerland. But more goods have to be imported than can be exported. Tourism, foreign investments, services and licences improve the balance. A country with no natural resources has to depend on its industrial production, on its own hard work and imagination.

## *The Swiss are inventive ...*

And where imagination fails them, they have the sense to follow up

other people's ideas. There are plenty of stories of industrial development. A foundryman named Bühler decided that you could grind grain with iron rollers instead of with millstones. He cast the first grinding rolls. Today one quarter of the world's total grain production is ground in Bühler roller mills. A Thurgovian called Geigy traded in dyestuffs in Basle. He bought his raw materials in China and Jamaica. Out of his small business grew one of Basle's chemical companies, that today rank among the largest in the world. Those who have few roses have to produce their fragrance synthetically. Essences and other substances for perfumes and aromas are made in Geneva. Leopold Ruzicka made possible the synthetic manufacture of musk and was awarded the Nobel prize. Musk is the most expensive perfume base. The measurement of time seems to belong to the Swiss heritage, and the country's watchmakers have not been able to resist perfecting it down to a millionth of a second.

The atomic clocks developed by the laboratory for horological research in Neuchâtel are so accurate that they have already replaced time signals that were previously obtained from the stars. Our time is now more accurate than ever before – one of the miracles of the industrial society! The electronic timepiece, the quartz clock, is also a Swiss invention. Today seven out of every ten watches in the world are of Swiss provenance. Yet the Swiss were not the first watchmakers. Religious refugees from France, the Huguenots, brought the trade with them. Industrial development in Switzerland actually began with the textile trade. Cloth was spun, woven and printed on the cottage system, then later in factories. Crises due to the industrial revolution had to be overcome. And finally an automatic weaving system was found that yields even better cloth. Today Swiss textile machines have a worldwide reputation. Among them the famous Sulzer weaving machine, in which the shuttle of the old loom has been replaced by gripper projectiles carrying no bobbin. The cloths and creations of the Swiss textile industry are rated high by haute couture. The early textile industry also produced the chemistry of dyestuffs, from which pharmaceuticals later branched off. Mechanical engineering likewise began with the making of textile machines. A country without a seaboard now builds mighty diesel engines for marine propulsion. It was a young German, Rudolf Diesel, who invented this engine, which was then developed by Sulzer in Winterthur. Foreigners have repeatedly brought ideas into Switzerland. And they are not deterred from pursuing them. The multinational corporation Brown Boveri (BBC) began as a company founded by the German Boveri, who originally came from Savoy and the Eng-



# Features



Electronics and automation in the swiss watch-making industry.

lishman Brown. The two constructed the first generators for a power station in Baden near Zurich and opened the eyes of the Swiss at the end of last century to their only raw material – water power. Today BBC build turbo-

alternators of 135,000 kW, the biggest in the world. But man does not live by electricity alone, so the Swiss have also gone in for food manufacture. Henri Nestlé, chemist and pharmacologist, considered good milk a sufficient raw

material. He turned it into milk powder and first used it for making babyfood. That was in Vevey on the Lake of Geneva, where the company that bears his name, Switzerland's largest industrial undertaking, is located. Its most famous product today is Nescafé. A thing Switzerland has begun to export on a growing scale is its industrial experience, technical know-how. This has become a commodity, and one that is particularly useful to the developing countries. Swiss engineers now plan and build in all parts of the world, for instance hydroelectric power stations and dock installations. They have founded enterprises that sell basic research, planning, management, technology. The Swiss virtues, quality and precision, on which the country's economic existence depends, are also backed by capital.

*Herbert Meier*

*(Continuation and end  
in the edition of december)*

## Solidarity Fund of the Swiss abroad

Gutenbergstrasse 6, CH-3011 Berne



### Solidarity Fund = double precautions

- through safeguarding against loss of livelihood as a result of political events
- through accumulating savings in Switzerland on favourable terms

The Solidarity Fund is a

#### Mutual Assistance Scheme of the Swiss abroad

founded as a cooperative in 1958. It offers numerous possibilities according to your assessment of your own personal situation. It is worth your while to examine it more closely.

#### Inquire in the first place of your Embassy/Consulate

or of the Secretariat:  
Solidaritätsfonds der Auslandschweizer  
Gutenbergstrasse 6,  
CH-3011 Bern

Ask for our illustrated brochures  
«Glück im Unglück» («Votre chance  
dans le Malheur») and «ABC»

