

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: - (1981)

Heft: 1775

Rubrik: Readers' Letters : What has become of those Swiss ideals?

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: 09.12.2025

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

What has become of those Swiss ideals?

AS an "Auslandsschweitzerin" I am often distressed by the almost exclusive preoccupation in Switzerland with high living standards and "stability," a stability moreover which sometimes seems to border on social stagnation.

What has happened to the great liberal ideals and the strong sense of internationalism which, from such a small country, has produced thinkers, artists, writers and educationists of world stature?

Has Switzerland become nothing more than a country of breathtakingly beautiful scenery peopled by smiling, healthy, well-dressed citizens, positively creaking with self-satisfaction?

Even our Swiss Observer, that vital link between the Auslandsschweitzer and their homeland, often resembles a travel brochure. No humour, no variety, no dissenting voice, only the Letter from Switzerland from Gottfried Keller who certainly does not appear to have any time for people with a different point of view from his own. Even the various Swiss

Clubs seem to devote their time mainly to eating and looking at pictures of the Swiss landscape.

Surely the beauty of Switzerland stands unchallenged. It does not need to be reiterated so often as though this provided the Swiss nation with a complete "raison d'être."

Reading of the continuing riots in Swiss cities I must admit to having some sympathy with the young Swiss who are asking for something different from what is offered to them by their elders. Faced with such perfect order, such stability, such all-embracing organisation and (dare I say it?) such complacency what else can they do to make their voices heard?

When returning from Switzerland last autumn my train passed through Zurich on a day when there had been riots and the people who entered the

train there, both Swiss and non-Swiss, were without exception shocked at the brutality shown by the police towards the young people. Is the voice of dissent so dangerous that it has to be suppressed in this manner?

Looking to the international scene one wonders again if there is a new spirit abroad in Switzerland; the fierce protection accorded by the Swiss banks to the numbered accounts of customers no matter who they may be, the promotion of baby foods in the Third World to the detriment of many infants.

Is affluence really blunting the edge of that humanitarian concern which was formerly so evident in Switzerland? Are the old traditional values becoming so ossified that they will soon act as a strait-jacket rather than as a support to Swiss society? — **Suzanne Tiburtius-Iseli.**

I HAVE just read "A typical Swiss?—There is no such thing!" From it I have the overwhelming impression that they are indeed all the same. They all seem to have in common a stamina to enjoy themselves outside their homes which appears to be as ferocious as it is diverse. The common denominator, of course, is outside.

Now I am a truly experienced Swiss and so I dare to say my piece. When Swiss men are enjoying themselves with yodeling and singing that appears to be peaceful and right and proper.

When, however, they take to their rifles and filled with Blut- und Leberwurst spend their time shooting at targets it conjures up undeniable concern about the Freudian connection.

So when, I ask myself, does the average Swiss really have time for the more basic and simple pastime? Do the well-fed and well-dressed ladies in the many coffee houses dream uncomfortable dreams while they help themselves to yet another Japonais or Moorkopf to feed the wrong appetite? Is that why they look so neglected in their fur coats?

You must see my point. The muchness is really a pointer to the weakness and should not be written about. It should be swept under the carpet at a time when sociologists tell us so much. So, for once, Swiss-bragging must stop or better still, should not have happened.

We are back to the counting of the franc. We could polish it while we are at it and suggest to the chauvinistic males of Switzerland that it is either time for a change or at least time to be quiet about their many pastimes and stay home. To get on with their priorities and get them in proper order.

Awful thought, can they? Or is it, as the sociologists will let us believe, just sublimation?

Yes, I must own up. I have a husband. He stays at home in the evenings. He is an Englishman, of course.

Yours mit Schweizergrüssen — **A.S. Forrester-Zimmermann.**

Switzerland's role in Iran hostages saga

TWO representatives of ex-President Jimmy Carter travelled to Switzerland in secret last year, carrying false passports, to negotiate the freedom of the American hostages in Iran.

News of the secret visit has come from Ambassador Edward Brunner, head of the European and North American division of the Swiss Foreign Ministry. He said the talks took place in a hotel bedroom in Berne.

Representing the Iranian Government were two lawyers, one French the other Argentinian. Carter's men were his personal counsellor, Hamilton Jordan, and the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Harold Saunders.

The story of Switzerland's role in the hostages saga was told on Swiss Radio International by Michel Walter. He said that thanks to the Swiss initiative the discussions in Berne resulted in a narrowing of the gap between the two sides.

So much so that in March 1980 the Swiss Ministry of Foreign Affairs thought that the chances of a speedy liberation of the hostages were good. Negotiations were actively continued until April. Then came the parliamentary elections in Iran, resulting in victory for Muslim hardliners. The new government put a stop to Swiss diplomatic efforts.

Afterwards it was Western Germany, and later Algeria, who took on the role of mediators.

Meanwhile, Switzerland helped in other directions. On April 24, 1980, Switzerland officially took over responsibility for American interests in Iran. Berne was kept fully informed of negotiations between the different governments. Swiss diplomats also gave active help on the spot.

They ensured the hostages received parcels from home. They also undertook the

repatriation of the bodies of the eight commandoes killed in the abortive American raid.

But while Switzerland did all it could to look after the 52 American prisoners, it was continually frustrated by Iranian officialdom. In a radio interview the Swiss Ambassador in Tehran, Erik Lang, went so far as to openly accuse the Iranian Government of violating its international obligations by preventing Swiss diplomats from visiting the hostages.

A few days later Ambassador Lang had his knuckles rapped for his outspokenness by his boss, the Swiss Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Raymond Probst.

On a happier note Minister Probst said the Swiss Government had received very warm letters of thanks from former President Carter and the hostages for all that Switzerland had done.