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Nation that is still a model for the world

IN 1945 the British were a proud and law-abiding people. They had just won a terrible war after six years of hardship and suffering. They had shown great heroism in defence of ideals of which they were justly proud.

Patriotism, thrift and industry were highly valued. Democracy, fair play, and the rule of law had been defended with fortitude and dedication against one of the most corrupt and evil regimes that the world had ever seen. The Commonwealth and Empire represented an ideal in colonial affairs. Their peoples had fought beside the motherland.

Then, almost overnight it seemed to me, we were being told that far from being proud of ourselves we should be heartily ashamed. The virtue of patriotism was the evil of nationalism used to exploit other peoples.

Thrift was sinful, greed and industry was avariciousness designed to prevent other people from sharing our riches. As for honesty, that was merely a device of the filthy rich to prevent the honest proletariat from separating them from their ill-gotten wealth. Commonwealth and Empire were unspeakable exploitation of subject races.

Religion, having been discredited by science and sociology,

was replaced by ideologies. The individual should be subservient to the interests of the State, as represented by the political machines. The State could justifiably use any means to achieve its goals which, by definition, must be good.

Over the years the malaise has affected all nations, but it is only in the West that the effects can be publicly scrutinised. The enemy within is not yet entirely successful but gradually all the old values are being eroded.

Cheating and dishonesty, whether on the part of the individual fare-dodger or tax-evader, or on the part of the politicians and government who cheat and oppress those whom they rule by means of unjust laws and oppressive taxes, is increasing day by day.

More and more the State has taken over the responsibilities of the individual. One is increasingly dependent upon the State for all the necessities of life – jobs, income, housing, education... the list is endless. All this State beneficence costs enormous amounts of money, little of

which ever gets to those whom it is supposed to benefit.

Crime increases as the individual is pressed harder and harder by the rise in the cost of living. Generations have grown used to being told that they should have all their desires fulfilled.

As Prime Minister MacMillan told them: "You have never had it so good". The advertisers are for ever exhorting the consumer to want more. Such people are not deprived of their goodies without getting very ugly indeed.

Since the new creed is "please yourself" it is not surprising that crime has become a virtue. Murder is now a political execution. Robbery is now an act of protest against an unfair society.

Since the State is now supposed to look after everyone from cradle to grave, and since no one knows better what is good for one than the politicians, the individual has to bow to their wishes for the good of the masses.

Such largesse can only be

administered by using electronic computers, so the individual must conform to a rigid pattern. Liberty must be sacrificed in the name of efficiency.

"What in God's name did we fight a war for?" One may be excused for asking.

Of all the world's nations Switzerland enjoys the nearest approach that I know of to being a true democracy. The politicians have so far been kept in check and the people still control their own destiny. But a jealous world is waiting for her to fall, if not actually trying to bring the fall about.

That subversive elements are at work on the young is evident from Zurich's troubles. The young are, after all, full of ideals and energy. If society does not constructively harness their potential, evil men will inevitably lead them astray.

It is not sufficient to give one's children every advantage that a wealthy nation can afford if they are deprived emotionally and spiritually.

Switzerland with its background and traditions should have little difficulty in harnessing the energy and enthusiasm of her young. But a criminal must continue to be called a criminal. The do-gooder as well as the agitator must be kept in check. Apathy must be fought.

The majority of the world's population are still worthy, law-abiding citizens. This is a fact that must be remembered when dealing with disturbances.

The majority of the population will back the authorities if they take stern (but just) measures to ensure the maintenance of law and order. It is the duty of the administration to uphold the standards of society.

I believe that Switzerland will continue to be a model for the world if she keeps her common sense and does not over-react. At the same time, a determined effort must be made to promote all that is best in the nation so that nobody can subvert its young. The few abuses and undesirable aspects of Swiss life, which it must be admitted exist, must be dealt with.

Let anyone should think, as a Briton, I have no business telling the Swiss how to run their affairs my excuse is my love for Switzerland and the knowledge that we are all in the same boat.

My remarks apply to Britain equally, but Switzerland has a head start as far as I can see.

Peter E. Slater

Offering hope to Zurich's youth

TROUBLED Zurich is breathing easier this month following the peaceful re-opening of an autonomous youth centre, flashpoint of months of civil disturbance that have jarred the country's valued reputation for tranquil orderliness.

The youth centre's closing last September precipitated frequent street clashes which caused about 500 injuries and more than Sfr. 3 million in property damages.

Zurich's amorphous movement of alienated youths identified the centre – a ramshackle set of buildings near the heart of Switzerland's largest city – as the rallying point for grievances about what they consider a remote and unaccommodating society.

The centre's re-opening has been the topic of delicate and lengthy negotiations with civic authorities by Protestant and Roman Catholic churches and

the respected Pro Juventute youth foundation.

Under the agreement, the centre must be operated "within the framework of law and order." And the city has agreed to pay at least a million francs on renovating the building.

The complex was provisionally opened last summer following massive demonstrations and clashes between youths and police. Last September, it was closed following a police raid which, the city government claimed, produced evidence that it had been used by drug peddlers and hideout for wanted petty criminals.

The centre's closing touched off the worst wave of civil disturbances in postwar Swiss history.

Interpreting the unrest as a symptom of malaise in affluent, predominantly conservative Switzerland, many analysts and a Federal commission appealed

for understanding.

As tension mounted and youth unrest flared in other Swiss cities, representatives of the two main churches stepped in as mediators. They had the support of Pro Juventute (for the youth), a respected private foundation presided over by Swiss Finance Minister Willy Ritschard, a Social Democrat and one of the country's most popular politicians. The accord was signed last month after long and tedious negotiations.

The agreement apparently leaves open whether the centre could be also run as a sleep-in and on a 24-hour basis – a principal demand of the youth movement.

Zurich city mayor, Sigmund Widmer, told reporters the administration was "confident that the new venture will succeed." But church representatives seemed more cautious. The calm could be deceptive.