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The other side of the coin

GOADED by a sense of injustice I can no longer repress the urge to reply to Mrs Berger's diatribe on Switzerland which appeared in the Swiss Observer.

While her penetrative remarks show not a little insight of the Swiss mentality I am saddened by the fact that she has found not a single redeeming feature to relieve an otherwise sombre picture of a country which has earned the respect of many and the grudging admiration of others.

What if the Swiss are not blessed with a sense of humour? It does not follow that they do not see the funny side of life, but when it comes to work they do not allow flippancy to interfere with the matter in hand, which accounts no doubt for their success in so many fields.

Completely bereft of raw materials of any kind Switzerland has felt the effects of the oil crisis and ensuing depression every little bit as much as the rest of the world, but thanks to her application to work and ingenuity she has surmounted many of the difficulties which afflict the industrial world.

Due to revolutionary technical innovations in the last decade many of those who had lost their jobs have acquired new skills which they now practice successfully, thus leading once again a fruitful and contented life.

Now, what of this country? Having been here for over 50 years and identifying myself with it I am aggrieved by its indolence and lack of urgency in a situation which borders on the critical.

Whereas strikes are practically unheard of in Switzerland they have been, and continue to be, a major contributory factor, together with absenteeism and restrictive practices, to the parlous state of affairs in the United Kingdom.

With governments of whatever political hue trying desperately to keep the economy on an even keel production is at best static or in certain areas continues to fall and wage claims – particularly in the nationalised industries – are unrealistic in the present circumstances and endanger the very existence of the concerns faced with these outrageous demands.

The last straw is a suggestion to cut down the working week to 35 hours, without loss of earnings, implying that it would reduce unemployment but totally ignoring the cost.

Is it cricket, therefore, to call the Swiss materialistic and mercenary?

In conclusion I should like to allude to one side of the Swiss character which Mrs Berger can only have overlooked and that is the generosity, both official and private, in helping to relieve human suffering brought about by earthquakes or other catastrophies of nature such as happened not long ago in Algeria and Italy. – **A. Jaccard, Camberley, Surrey.**

□ □ □

I FEEL I must comfort Mrs Berger in her obviously deepfelt reaction to Switzerland and all things Swiss. I perceive that she would really love to live there all the same and feels resentful not to be able to do so.

I know quite a lot about such resentments; I suffered them for many years. But not now. I am at peace, not satisfied with all I see, but accepting that life can be pretty universal, and geography no bar to human happiness.

I would point out to Mrs Berger, and seriously this time, that it takes more courage to live here successfully than in Switzerland. I find the problems, social, economic and political, interesting, but hard to accept. They have made me stronger and more determined to use the grit which my Swiss upbringing doubtlessly has given me.

It is impossible to compare the two countries, one which has known and been undermined by two world wars with all the attendant social and economic consequences, and the comparatively young country which has been, often by circumstances outside of itself, allowed to prosper and gain without serious interruptions.

It is therefore highly important to develop a distant objectivity about the two lands, although most of Mrs Berger's criticisms are true.

The two countries are on different levels of evolution. I am glad that I was allowed to grow up in one, but to be equally conscious of the role the other played in my maturity.

Equally it is impossible and unfair to expect the Swiss at home to sympathise with us. How could they possibly understand our stresses?

There is isolation in materialism, there is also isolation in our type of poverty. Moreover, it is time that the issue was faced, for it will increasingly play a part. It will take courage.

Mit Schweizergruessen. – **Mrs A.S. Forrester, Fareham, Hants.**

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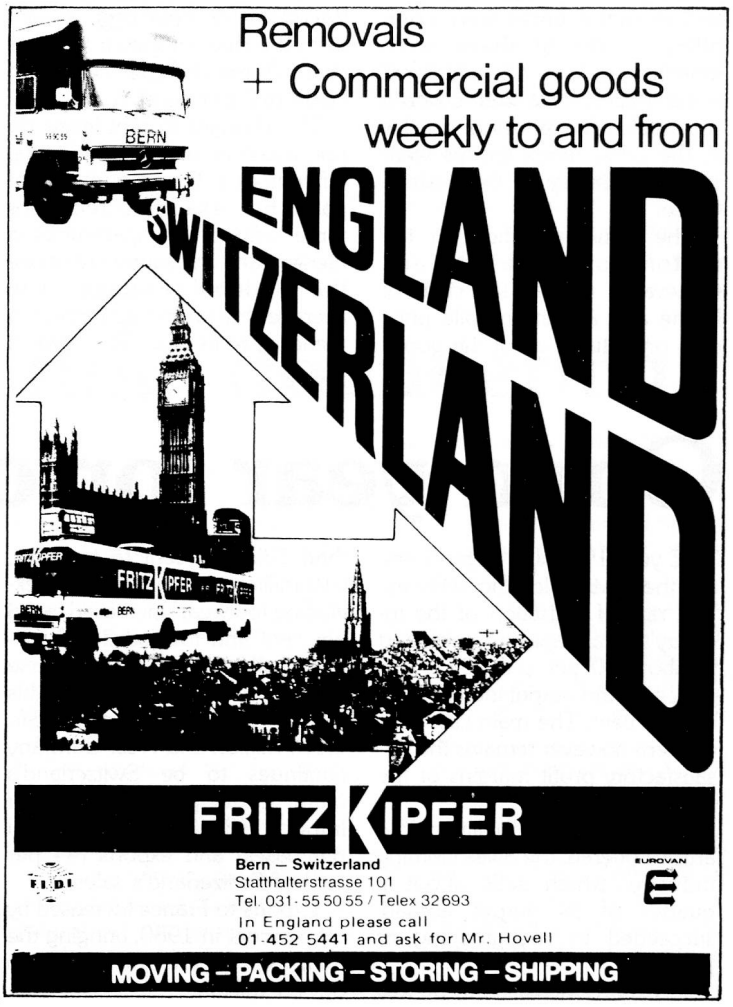
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