

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: - (1982)
Heft: 1792

Artikel: August 1: A time for an appraisal of the nation
Autor: Slater, Peter E.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-687210>

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: 07.08.2025

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

August 1: A time of the nation

AUGUST 1 has come again and Switzerland celebrates her national day. But what is it that is being celebrated?

Since everything changes in time it cannot be the same Switzerland that was founded in 1291, nor even the Switzerland of 1970 to 1972, that I came to know and love so much.

An easy answer would be that the Swiss are celebrating the fact that they live in the nearest approach to a real democracy that has yet been devised.

Her people enjoy one of the highest standards of living in the world, and the rate of inflation is so low as to be almost non-existent by comparison with other, less fortunate, neighbours. Unemployment is so small and the crime rate so low that most nations are green with envy.

But the easy answers are seldom accurate. It is true that the Swiss do enjoy the advantages mentioned, but that is only one side of the coin. Switzerland is not Utopia, however much it may seem like it to a cursory observer.

Problems exist within and without to the extent that, in 1972, Jean Rohr could write about "le malaise helvétique." The nature of the problems and their remedies provide material for many large volumes and can only be touched on in an article of any reasonable length.

Switzerland is a neutral country and must be able to defend herself and feed her people if she is to maintain that neutrality against possible threats from without. Her people must be united if she is to withstand the many pressures put upon her by various outside interests.

The separatist movement in the Jura was one such threat to Switzerland's integrity from within that could have led to far wider consequences. It is a typical example of misunderstanding and shortsightedness on the part of authority.

What was a mild request from the predominantly French-speaking people of the Jura to be allowed to follow a French style of life was seen by the Bernese authorities as the first stage in a breakaway from the German-speaking remainder of the canton.

Their efforts to prevent this caused the affair to grow into a major row, including some half-hearted attempts to emulate foreign terrorists. That this did not amount to more than a bungled attempt to blow up a munitions store owes more to the inbred law-abiding nature of the Swiss and their abhorrence of violence than to the actions of the authorities.

Luckily, common sense prevailed and, in 1970, the people of Berne voted by a large majority to amend the Cantonal Constitution to allow the people of the Jura to decide for themselves what they wanted.

The result was what the Bernese had

By PETER E. SLATER



feared – they opted for their own canton. A new constitution was drawn up and approved in 1977, and by the end of September 1978 the new canton of Jura was in being.

A potentially very dangerous threat to the integrity of Switzerland had been eliminated by the common sense of the Swiss people and the exercise of their democratic rights. But no one can say that the same result would have occurred if the Bernese had been more understanding and liberal in the first place.

The attitude of the younger Swiss to military service is not such a happy picture. Like young people everywhere, they are full of high ideals and see armaments as no way to settle any of the world's problems. Also, they naturally resent the interruption of their normal lives that military training causes and the apparent nonsense of much military discipline.

However, as recent events in several parts of the world have clearly illustrated, no small,

weak nation can rely on its stronger neighbours respecting their integrity even though they can be seen to pose no threat to anyone. Where ideology or just plain greed are involved, no excuse is needed for aggression.

Everyone knows that Switzerland is neutral and could not be an aggressor even if she desired it, yet it is a fact that spies are actively attempting to subvert her people and discover the secrets of her defence. Why would anyone do this if it were not for aggressive intentions towards Switzerland?

Given the obvious aggressive intent, how can it be countered? The only way is to have a highly trained and superbly equipped defensive force. The Swiss army of citizen-soldiers is such a force but it can only remain so if its members are willing to make the effort.

The military authorities must bend to the wishes of their civilian soldiers and relax such irritating disciplinary measures as excessive emphasis on hair cuts and so on. The tribunals which consider the merits of the cases of conscientious objectors could be reformed so that they are seen to be impartial and not courts martial.

In time of war as in peacetime, Switzerland must rely on her agricultural industry to feed her people. As in the Second World War, she could well be surrounded by warring powers and suffer a blockade which would deny her access to much vitally needed produce.

But agriculture is a very hard task master. The work can be monotonous; it is always hard and the hours are long, usually from dawn to dusk. Holidays are virtually impossible if one is also the owner of the farm, unless one's neighbour is willing to add to his own burden by looking after your animals and tending your crops.

It is small wonder that the young find the attractions of the cities irresistible. They have plenty of free time and can earn more money without having to do distasteful tasks in inclement weather. So as the old owners die or retire, more and more farms are either amalgamated with existing farms, adding to the already heavy work load, or are lost to agriculture and used for housing or factories, or just lie fallow.

Farm labour gets ever more expensive as the farm workers try to match the affluence of their compatriots in the cities, and the farmers turn to mechanisation in an attempt to reduce their wages bill. This is also expensive and has the additional disadvantage of being

for an appraisal

high energy consuming and the cause of much pollution.

With fewer people to produce more food to feed the ever increasing populations of the cities, intensive methods of farming have to be utilised. This also uses large amounts of energy and causes chemical pollution. The result is tasteless, insipid food and vociferous protests from the environmental and back-to-nature movements.

Given the nature of the Swiss terrain – only around 1¼ million hectares are cultivated – many of the farms are hill farms, if not almost vertical. The problems of these farms are especially severe. Not only are they isolated, so that their workers require compensation for unsocial conditions, but the machinery required either does not exist or is prohibitively expensive.

Some amelioration of the various problems have been achieved by legislation but, for many of the problems, nobody seems to have any ideas for their remedy.

Turning to the cities, the increasing size and population, to say nothing of the increasing industrial activity, lead to increased demands for land for homes and factories, increased demands for energy and increased

demands for food and services. They produce the logistical nightmares of rubbish disposal, sewage treatment and pollution prevention.

Although Switzerland has large amounts of hydro-power the reserves will soon be overtaken by demand and other forms of energy must be used. These bring their own problems. Oil and natural gas imply an international reliance which could compromise Swiss neutrality and nuclear energy has such well known disadvantages as not to need description.

Since peoples' expectations in the advanced industrial societies of the Western democracies have been raised to levels that are impossible of fulfillment, a growing number of young people are disillusioned with the present social order.

Being young, inexperienced and having high ideals, they are easily led to believe that the existing order is wholly evil. As a result, they either opt out of society and try to form their own or resort to extreme and often violent measures to reform the present society, which inevitably brings them into conflict with the authorities.

One of the things of which Switzerland

may be justifiably proud is the way in which they are trying to tackle this particular problem. In an attempt to open a dialogue with the young the authorities set up the Federal Commission for Youth Affairs.

This organisation, contrary to everyone's expectations, did not condemn the young although they did not condone their violence. Instead, they admitted that young people had valid grievances which the rigid enforcement of present measures for law and order only exacerbated.

A paper called "Theses" was issued as a basis for discussion. Young people were treated as individuals to be treated with respect but not indulged or patronised.

The success of this approach so impressed the West German authorities that they invited the Swiss to join them in discussions concerning their mutual problems. A pamphlet issued by Pro Helvetia gives details of the events so far. Although the problem is far from solved, the number of disturbances is down and a dialogue has been started.

Switzerland's image abroad has suffered a number of knocks in recent years, in

Turn to Page 9

'Dear compatriots abroad . . .'

DEAR compatriots abroad . . .

On August 1, we Swiss celebrate our National Day. We do so in all simplicity, without great pomp or circumstance.

Many of you have already witnessed our traditional festivities and can recall the processions of children, with torches and lanterns, the bonfires with their flames rising to the sky, and the way our national anthem gives due expression to our feelings of liberty and independence.

It is with this picture in mind that I convey to you today the cordial greetings of the Federal Council and of all the Swiss people.

Today, in particular, we feel united with you across the frontiers and the oceans. And we are deeply joyful that you have not forgotten your homeland – that small country with its alps, its lakes and its valleys.

Fortunately, life here in Switzerland is quite good. When we observe the difficulties which other countries are facing, we should be happy, thankful and

A National Day message from the President of the Swiss Confederation

satisfied.

From all parts of the world, the news that reaches us is of political and social unrest, of unemployment, of human misery and despair. All the greater, therefore, is our duty to contribute to the best of our ability to an easing of these difficulties.

But here in Switzerland as well, we are not without our problems. Our country is poor in natural resources – a situation which has shaped our industrial evolution in a particular way. We import raw materials and semi-finished goods and then transform them, through skilled work, into high quality products largely for export.

This two-way movement links us closely with foreign countries and – for better or for worse – with the fortunes and the failings of world economy. And this dependence is of meaningful significance. It obliges us to open up our country to the wide world,

to work actively at all levels and in all organisations serving to bring peoples closer together.

Dear compatriots, a few months ago the Federal Council decided to submit to the Swiss people the question of our country's possible future membership of the United Nations.

Opinions are divided – convinced supporters on the one side, determined opponents on the other. And at the heart of the political debate is Switzerland's neutrality. Switzerland will remain steadfast and true to its policy of armed neutrality. But the Federal Council is convinced that this principle is compatible with entry to the United Nations.

Our neutrality is no way means disinterest. It does mean, however, non-involvement in armed conflicts. This policy leaves the door open for international co-operation in eliminating dissension and disputes, for aid and relief campaigns in cases of catas-

trophe and, in particular, for the persuance of our policy of offering Switzerland's good services as a measure of mediation.

History has demonstrated how important such a role of a small nation can be.

Dear compatriots, your homeland is a country of many varied aspects, of diverse languages and cultures. It is not always easy to find a common denominator acceptable to us all. But we have always succeeded in finding a suitable and satisfactory solution in a spirit of compromise.

If only this formula could be applied on an international basis, then perhaps the peaceful solution of many conflicts would be easier.

Switzerland is dependent upon international understanding of its position. We would ask you to contribute to this comprehension of Swiss thinking and of Swiss deeds.

The Federal Council and the Swiss people thank you for your efforts and convey their good wishes to you and your families.

THE LIFE of the Swiss community in the North will never be quite the same again without "Professor" Jean Philippe Inebnit, one of the driving forces of the Yorkshire Swiss Club.

Jean Philippe Inebnit died on March 6 at the age of nearly 92, and we have only recently learnt of the disappearance of a man who will be missed by many of those who shared his beliefs and idealism.

Born in 1890 at Les Brenets, Mr Inebnit went to secondary school at Le Locle and studied literature at Neuchâtel University.

During the First World War he was jailed for refusing to perform his military service. He was at that time an admirer and follower of the Swiss intellectual and pacifist, Pierre Cérésole.

He married in 1917 and then taught in various institutes before leaving for England, where he was offered a post as French teacher in a Leeds school in 1920. Eighteen months after having settled in the city he was offered the post of assistant lecturer in French literature at Leeds University.

This is where he remained for the rest of his career, eventually becoming senior lecturer in French history. But Mr Inebnit always claimed that his academic interests were secondary to his dreams for a better world and his personal endeavours to foster that dream. Indeed, he espoused

several causes with utter dedication until the end.

His most abiding concern was that of disarmament and of diverting the energies expended on armies and on teaching young men to kill towards constructive and peaceful purposes.

Well before conscientious objectors could opt for a non-military service rather than being sent to jail, Mr Inebnit campaigned hard for such a system. In doing so, as in waging his other campaigns, he kept in touch with many historical figures such as Max Petitpierre, Lord Caradon, Mrs Roosevelt and even Mr Nehru. He also corresponded with former Vice-President Hubert Humphrey, with whom he shared ideas about the American Peace Corps.

As a dedicated internationalist, Jean Philippe Inebnit was an active member of the United Nations Association and was a stalwart of the International Voluntary Service. He worked with the Abbé Pierre, a well known French humanitarian of the post-war years, in building homes for refugees and orphans.

It is naturally difficult to assess his impact, but perhaps what is more important than a person's historical mark is his total participation in mankind's fight

for a better world. And this adequately describes Jean Philippe Inebnit, whom many people remember in Switzerland for his inspiring conferences.

He was known to several federal councillors to whom he tried to preach his firm beliefs concerning the evils of military service. On several occasions he travelled all the way from the North of England to Switzerland to defend conscientious objectors before military courts.

In his 80s he was still harbouring great plans. He was campaigning for the planting of trees in the Sahara desert and set up an organisation to this end. He took up the cause of Swiss women who marry foreigners and whose children lose the privilege of Swiss citizenship. He corresponded with these women, 1,000 of whom sent him letters expressing their grievances.

But the Swiss of the North will also remember Jean Philippe Inebnit as the main founder of the Landsgemeinde at Hebden Bridge. For many years, he conducted this event stirringly, lending to this gathering of Swiss people from all over the North some of his patriotic fervour.

Mr Inebnit was, indeed, a strong patriot and never became a British citizen. But he was first

and foremost a citizen of the world and lived up to this ideal completely.

PMB

THE following incident, which happened to me some 20 years ago, showed the concern, appreciation and happiness Professor Inebnit had for his fellow human beings.

I was a bus driver at the time. One evening I noticed this white haired man running down the lane towards the bus with a massive bunch of flowers in his arms. Realizing that he would never make the bus stop in time, I pulled up and waited a couple of minutes allowing him to board.

By the time I had reached the bus station in Leeds the incident had gone from my mind, but not from Jean Inebnit. There was a tap on the driving cab door and there stood this gentleman, thanking me for waiting for him as he had a very important meeting to attend and would I accept this large bunch of flowers as a token on his gratitude. It was typical of the man - always thoughtful, always concerned for others. I have often wondered who really should have had those flowers. Now, I shall never know.
- **P. Selby-Huber, Leeds.**

Time for an appraisal of the nation

From Page 7

particular the chemical industry which is one of the country's larger earners of foreign currency.

The disaster at the Italian chemical works, the questionable marketing methods used in the Third World and the affair of the Briton who reported his company to the EEC have all helped to give the impression that the making of profits takes precedence over the welfare of their fellow men and the observance of international law.

It is all too easily forgotten that these same organisations have been responsible for many thousands, if not millions, of people being alive who would otherwise have died. This is not to say that there are not people and organisations unworthy of the Swiss people, but they are not the norm.

The country's financial institutions have always been fair game for the ignorant and

envious, but again the events of recent years have caused serious concern. The Swiss banks have never had London's reputation for investments but they have been considered safe.

It will take some time to restore confidence after the scandal involving dishonest employees which caused one bank to suffer considerable losses.

Other problems, like the non-membership of the UN, contribute to the misunderstanding of Swiss motives and actions by the international community, and the nation is not very good at blowing its own trumpet. Much more could be done to tell the world about Switzerland.

Naturally, the foreign media concentrate on events which are not particularly favourable to her since these are news. Information to the contrary is available but one has to ask for it.

All this would appear to give the Swiss

little reason to celebrate but that would be to forget that Swiss hard work and common sense, together with their uncommon humanity, have seen them through far worse troubles.

The Swiss are still largely contented with their lot; the constitution is being revised to take account of modern conditions; educational standards are being unified; women's rights are being recognised. It is all excruciatingly slow, but progress is being made.

Switzerland is not a nation that is given to making hurried decisions and then having to mend the damage caused as a consequence. The Swiss prefer to think things through to their logical conclusion.

So the celebrations are justified. The Swiss know their problems and are doing something about them. "Vive la Suisse!"

I only wish I were there to join them in their celebrations.