

# Swiss presence in India (part two)

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Antoine's prison and charged with causing a hindrance to traffic and seclusion of human beings. From the police examination it turned out that he was more of an idealist than an unbalanced person. He had been deeply troubled by famine in Africa and had devoted his savings to help alleviate it. Hijacking a Swissair plane was, he hoped, a more effective way of increasing aid to the hungry in the black continent.

### Swiss budget almost balanced

The Federal Budget for 1974 shows a deficit of 195 million francs, compared with a 100 million franc deficit for the previous one. Mr. Nello Celio, Head of the Department of Finance, noted that enormous efforts had to be made to compress the budget to such an extent at a time when Swiss economy was continuing to expand. He stressed that unless taxes were increased, it would be more and more difficult to balance the federal budget. Federal expenses budgeted for 1974 amount to 12,851 million francs set against an income of only 12,656 million francs. Considerable cuts had to be made in the Motorway programme and in several other federal projects. The Confederation had to reduce its aid to the Cantons in several ventures. The total budget of the Confederation, which includes income and expenditure on federal property, shows a surplus of 651 million francs. In doing its utmost to keep expenditure low, the Confederation has aimed at setting an example of financial discipline to the cantons whose budgets have regularly been in deficit during the past few years. Excessive public spending stimulates business, but also increases inflation. In the present context, it was better for Switzerland to limit its economic pace in the interest of a stable currency.

### Swiss ski factory resuscitated

Skis by the Swiss firm *Authier* will again appear in sports shops around the country. *Authier* was at one time a leading Swiss ski manufacturer in the

Bière region of Canton Vaud. A few years ago, the brothers who owned the installations sold them to an American firm, *Olin*, who invested heavily in modernising its facilities. Unsatisfied with the returns of these investments, the American company decided to close *Authier* and dismissed a hundred workers early last year. The regional authorities tried very hard to find a buyer for the plant eventually secured the participation of the Stans-based firm *Haldemann-*

*Rossignol*, which is 30 per cent controlled by the French firm *Rossignol*, one of the leading world manufacturers of skis with a production of 650,000 pairs a year. The premises and the trademark were brought for 750,000 francs. The factory had to be re-equipped with machines and will start with an annual production of 40,000 pairs, which, it is hoped, will increase to over 100,000 pairs a year when the shopfloor is completely equipped with machines.

## SWISS PRESENCE IN INDIA

### (Part Two)

In our last issue, we reported on the evidence of Swiss presence in India. Several important Swiss firms have either opened branches in this vast country or concluded technical cooperation agreements, and much of Switzerland's official aid to development is channelled to India. There are many projects under way, one of the most important being a plan to introduce *Simmenthal* cattle in the southern state of Kerala. There are other agricultural projects in the Punjab. While we were staying at Bangalore's West End Hotel, a glance at the guest book enabled us to note the presence of a Swiss development aid official on his way to Chandigarh to survey one of these projects.

I had hoped to learn more about Swiss aid to India from this specialist, whom I saw eating alone in the vast restaurant of this deserted hotel, but was prevented from doing so by a middle-aged American lady dressed in a sari on her way to see *Sanchi Sai Baba*, one of India's most celebrated Gurus. Instead of talking about development aid, I was committed to an exposé of oriental religion and thus deprived of facts relevant to this publication.

### A model Embassy building

During a visit to the Swiss Embassy in Delhi, I was told of a few ageing Swiss who had chosen to retire in India. There is no longer a Swiss colony in India as nearly all former residents have returned home. 500 Swiss live in the country, about half of them in missionary and humanitarian work, the remainder in technical assistance and industry. But one Swiss still in India and drawing old age pension from Berne was once the hairdresser to the Vice-Queen of India and owned a salon in Old Delhi. Another, a fortune-teller, is apparently still in business. The disappearance of the Swiss of India has meant the closure of the consulate at Calcutta. The only remaining consulate in India (excluding the Chancery of the Embassy) is the one in Bombay.

The Swiss Embassy has been recently built among the silent alleys and gardens of the diplomatic enclave of Delhi. It is a beautifully designed building whose two storeys rest on concrete pillars. The atmosphere inside is quiet, cool, almost hushed, and a pool of limpid blue water in the courtyard absorbs the blistering heat and light of Delhi's mid-day sun. Two armed guards stand to attention beneath the pillars as the visitor, walking along the alleyway traversing the lawn between the gates and building, approaches the entrance. Despite the presence of these guards, the place would not be out of context as a secondary residential block for the rich in the pinewoods above Eden Rock or Beirut.

However nice it is to work in such congenial surroundings, I gathered from the Swiss diplomats I met there that life in Delhi was somewhat restricted from the social and cultural point of view. I was received by Mr. Monnier, the *Chargé d'Affaire*, who called two other colleagues in his office: Mr. Max Wegmuller, in charge of consular affairs (and due to be transferred to Manchester) and Mr. R. B. Rueff, in charge of Pakistani affairs.

There are understandably fewer Swiss gatherings in Delhi than in London. The only two that take place regularly under the auspices of the Embassy, are on 1st August and on 1st January. The nature of the work done by the Embassy is different, but problems with young people are strikingly similar. Many stranded and moneyless adventurers have to be repatriated. Some have to be visited in prison, where they have ended up for dealing in drugs (mainly hashish from Kashmir). I was told that young barefooted Swiss hippies could occasionally be seen begging in the heart of Delhi.

The most significant part of the Embassy's activities are related to the December 1971 India-Pakistan conflict, which Swiss diplomacy has greatly

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contributed to settle. Diplomacy behind the scenes, the good offices offered by a neutral country respected by the belligerent parties, can best be seen at work in the Indian subcontinent. Following the 1971 war and the break of diplomatic relations between India and Pakistan, the interests of the two countries have been represented by Switzerland. The Pakistani embassy, a huge mosque-like structure with a purple dome, stands only half a mile away from the Swiss Embassy and is topped by a Swiss flag. The Embassy's work at Delhi consists partly in looking after Pakistani interests, handling chancery work, passports, and the like in Pakistan and in promoting relations between the two former belligerents. Swiss diplomats have served as messengers on behalf of two countries no longer on speaking terms. In the few months following the war, high-level diplomats were sent by Berne to talk with both governments. For a while Swiss officials were allowed to visit the 90,000 Pakistani prisoners of war held in India. A Chargé d'Affaires was posted in Dacca, capital of the new state of Bangladesh, but he depended on the Embassy at Kuala Lumpur.

This behind-the-scenes and unpublished work has been going on ever since the end of 1971, when Switzerland organised the repatriation of diplomats in Dacca and Pakistan. This mandate will probably not be necessary for very much longer as India and Pakistan have signed a repatriation agreement this summer. Although the first exchanges of the

Biharis moving from Dacca to Rawalpindi and the Bengalis being moved the other way has begun, process stalled somewhat in early autumn with both parties accusing each other of not honouring their agreement. The issue hit the headlines of the Indian Press during October but was naturally swamped in the West by Middle-East events. It seems, however, that the civilian and prisoner-of-war exchange process has now picked up. Bangladesh has made things easier by granting amnesty to its Pakistani prisoners and former Bihari collaborators.

#### Wives in prisoner camps

When I visited the Embassy last October, it was more particularly concerned with the fate of 16,000 former East Pakistanis held in Pakistani prisoner camps. The Embassy had been asked by Bangladesh to visit them and organise the repatriation of the wives of these prisoners, many of whom had remained with their husbands in captivity. As it turned out, a minority of these women chose freedom. There were other categories of prisoners: 600 Indians and 500 Pakistanis had been captured on the Western front during the 1971 war; sailors had been stranded in Indian ports, and civilians had been arrested on the Indian Pakistan border. There were, moreover, about a thousand Pakistanis held in Indian jails on espionage and other charges. The Swiss Embassy has over the years been connected with the welfare of many of these prisoners by

visiting them and acting as go-between for India and Pakistan.

Chandigarh is perhaps the most important realisation which can be associated to Switzerland in India. This city was planned by Le Corbusier and has served as the capital of the State of Punjab since 1966. The decision to build a new city from scratch for this purpose was taken after the partition on India in 1947, when the former capital of Punjab, Lahore, was attributed to Pakistan. Although several cities put forward their claim to be made the new capital, it was thought cheaper and simpler to build a new town. A site was carefully selected after an aerial survey with due consideration to communications, hydrology and other amenities of the area. Chandigarh is situated at the foot of the last foothills of the Himalayas and stretches out to the south on a gently inclined slope. The part of it nearest to the Himalayas and therefore dominating the rest of the city is the Government sector, which comprises the Assembly, the Secretariat (Administration) and the High Court, the three buildings bearing the stamp of Le Corbusier.

Chandigarh can be compared in every respect, except in scale and degree of isolation, with Brasilia, the new political capital of Brasil. Le Corbusier was entrusted with its planning in 1950 when one of the two American architects originally commissioned with the project, Mathew Novicki, died in an aircraft accident. Le Corbusier was assisted by his cousin, Pierre Jeanneret and the English

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couple, E. Maxwell Fry and Jane B. Drew.

### **Chandigarh an architecture for the prosperous**

Chandigarh which is situated about 200 miles north of Delhi, has a population of about 250,000 but will have 500,000 inhabitants when it is completed. These people presently live in about 30 rectangular and self-contained sectors three-quarters of a mile long and half a mile wide. Each of these sectors have their shopping centre and are designed in such a way that essential amenities are within ten minutes walk of the farthest house. Housing is graded in 14 categories ranging from the villa for the Chief Minister to small two-room quarters complete with sanitary facilities.

Like Brasilia, it is an embodiment of architectural concepts preached by Le Corbusier and his followers. There are ample green spaces in each sector. There is sun, air and light. The town is probably true to Le Corbusier's planning ideals although only the large and public buildings follow his architectural pattern because of the cost of concrete, steel and glass. From the start, Le Corbusier had to accept that the use of bricks, the cheapest material available, would reduce the height of residential buildings to two storeys. There are no "Cité Radieuse" in Chandigarh, and this is just as well. Buildings are such that ground-floor tenants can sleep on their doorsteps while

first-floor lodgers can use the roof during the sweltering summer nights.

Chandigarh is perhaps an architectural paradise. Whether it is a "human" paradise is open to question. By Indian standards, it is an incredibly clean and airy town. But there is a striking contrast between the prosperity inherent to this kind of architecture and the poverty of the local population. Chandigarh was designed for people enjoying the same standards of living as in the West, living individually and not collectively, and owning personal means of transportation. As there are practically no cars, the straight avenues stretch out in the empty distance and white building blocks are scattered far from each other

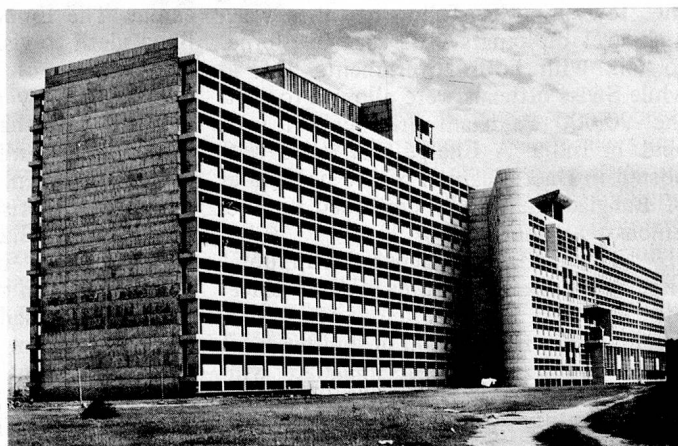
under a scorching sun, which lends an oppressive atmosphere to the place.

The concepts that have been embodied with bricks have tended to kill the human soul of the town. Chandigarh looks warm mainly in those residential areas flowering with bushes and trees where the initiative of local people have compensated the lack of spontaneity of perfect planning.

Nevertheless, we were told by residents that it was nice to live in the town's modern estates. Chandigarh is luxurious by Indian standards, although the moist weather and the cheapness of the materials used have contributed to wear on the facades of many buildings.

*(to be concluded in the next issue)*

*Home Office for  
Punjab State,  
Chandigarh.*



## **Foreign Criticism of Switzerland**

**by Jean Rodolphe de Salis**

One thing is certain: Switzerland used to be much praised and now is much criticized. Anyone concerned with Switzerland's foreign relations during the post-war period found his experiences and impressions confirmed in the *Weltwoche* articles. Anyone who has tried to make Switzerland's character, attitude, politics and culture understandable to foreigners, whether by means of lectures, articles of cultural events, or at scientific congresses and political conferences, knows that smile of politely sceptical incomprehension with which our efforts are met — not to mention the much more disparaging views about our country that people express in private conversations. And anyone who is accustomed or professionally obliged to follow the foreign press knows that it either — indeed usually — prints nothing about Switzerland, or else something unpleasant. Little or nothing on politics, but lengthy stories about the typhoid epidemic at Zermatt, about the Jaccoud case, the Mirage affair, about xenophobia, incidents at Chiasso and naturally about ski and mountain-climbing accidents. And

of course about international conferences in Geneva which usually have nothing to do with Switzerland, but are the slender link between us and the outside world of today.

### **Swiss smugness**

To be offended at what was reported in the series of articles "Switzerland in Foreign Eyes" would be absurd. But a self-satisfied shrug of the shoulders at foreign incomprehension would be worse.

Besides we have nothing to complain about. What we ourselves say and write about other countries does not entitle us to be thin-skinned about foreign criticisms.

It is true our newspapers get little attention in foreign countries that do not use our language, and are seldom quoted under the heading of "Foreign Press Comment". But a notable anthology of Swiss smugness and presumption could be compiled from what our newspapers offer their public at home in the way of criticism of conditions abroad, of

judgements on the policies of other countries, of homilies to foreign governments who in our view are doing their job badly. But we do not want to talk about this here, although it deserves to be pilloried.

And conversely we do not want to use foreign judgements to depreciate ourselves in our own sight and inflame our discontent, to the extent that we feel any, about our own failings and shortcomings. This series of articles was not published for that purpose. But in the foreigner's image of us we can and should find, as it were in reverse, what we ask of ourselves and our people, namely, a serious self-examination. Of course we should frankly correct a good many things that others get wrong about us, and replace stereotyped ideas about Switzerland by something closer to reality. But the foreigner deserves our attention whenever he touches on sensitive spots, especially those which represent virtues to us but failings to him, or where he discovers real weaknesses and sins which we cannot so easily brush off. The foreigner says indeed (in Belgium)