

Letter from Switzerland

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LETTER FROM SWITZERLAND

As is well known the Russian author Solzhenitzyn has been deprived of his Soviet citizenship and deported to the West. Without entering into the political and psychological details of his case, which has attracted world-wide publicity, it may nevertheless be of interest to examine the question whether the Swiss authorities could, under similar circumstances, act similarly and deprive a Swiss citizen of his citizenship.

The answer is that this could not happen to a Swiss citizen born in Switzerland. But it could, theoretically, happen — according to Article 48 of the “Bürgerrechtsgesetz” (law concerning the rights of citizens) — to a Swiss with dual nationality. If such an individual's behaviour is judged to be “of considerable disadvantage to the interests and the prestige of the country” and if the authorities of his native Canton agree, then the Federal Justice — and Police Department in Berne can declare him deprived of his Federal-, Cantonal- and Borough citizenship.

Moreover according to Article 41 of the same law the naturalisation of foreigners, which means their being granted Swiss citizenship, can be revoked within five years, if they have been given Swiss nationality on the strength of false information or concealment of important material facts.

This is the position today. But during the second world war things were different. Under the plenary powers granted to them by the two chambers of

the Federal Parliament, the Federal Council took a decision on 18th May, 1943 — which remained in force until 18th May, 1947 — enabling it to expatriate quite a number of people, mainly sympathizers with Nazi-Germany. In actual fact 51 people, some Swiss born and some with dual nationality, were deprived of their Swiss citizenship and deported across the frontiers.

Could a native Swiss citizen be prosecuted and sentenced by a Swiss court for having made anti-Swiss propaganda abroad? Under Article 266 bis of the Swiss Penal Code he could, for either actively endangering the security of the Confederation, or for making untrue and distorting statements and publishing them, be prosecuted, convicted and sentenced to imprisonment for up to five years. All this provided that the Federal Council has authorised such prosecution and does itself not act on mere suspicion.

The last case of this kind goes back to April, 1953. A Swiss Communist, Emil Arnold by name, journalist by profession and member of the Federal Parliament as well as the Cantonal Parliament in Basle, was actually imprisoned for eight months and deprived of his parliamentary mandates for two years by the Federal Penal Court. He had, while attending a journalist's meeting in Budapest in 1951, made a short speech. In it he had said that Switzerland was a centre of American espionage and pro-war propaganda. Moreover he had said that the freedom of the press did not really

exist in Switzerland, that the Confederation was re-arming to a degree which was out of all proportion and that it had actually given up its traditional policy of neutrality.

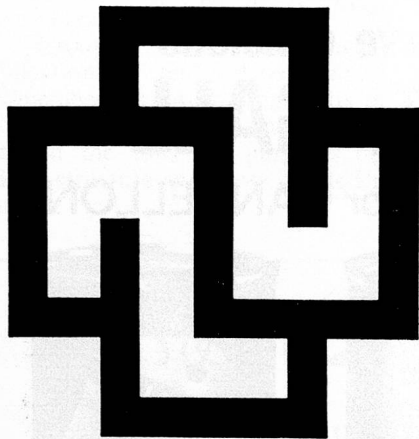
These statements, made in Budapest during the cold war, were in 1953 sufficient to secure prosecution, conviction and sentence. According to available legal opinion this would not be possible and a “Case Arnold” could not happen any more. But happen it did and Emil Arnold is still alive to tell the tale, aged 77.

This short letter provides the answer to a question, which is being asked in a number of Swiss papers at present. The question being: “Could a case Solzhenitzyn happen in Switzerland?”

* * *

While it would be an exaggeration to say that there is an economic crisis in Switzerland, it is nevertheless true that the Confederation is no longer the boom-country that it has been. A number of closures of factories — 215 in 1972, 161 in 1973 and six during the first two months of 1974 — are indicators which clearly point to a change in the economic climate. On looking at the available figures of factories and smaller workshops which have had to close down, since 1968, one is struck by the fact that amongst these there are no fewer than six shoe factories: namely the firms Hug, Walder, Oco, Henke, Siegrist and Melchnau.

It may be of interest to put the



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following figures on record: in 1966 149 shoe factories occupied 14,900 people; in 1970 127 shoe factories occupied 12,000 people; in 1971 117 shoe factories occupied 10,800 people; and in 1972 109 shoe factories occupied 9,800 people. The trend is clear, and the reasons for this adverse development are manifold. To begin with currency changes and devaluations have had the effect that products from the USA, from Italy and from the United Kingdom have become between 20 and 30 per cent cheaper than equivalent Swiss ones and these latter accordingly more difficult to export into the above named and other countries. Then there is the free trade with the nine EEC countries which reduces the import duty on various products and it is worth mentioning in passing that the shoe industry was not able to obtain preferential treatment, as the paper industry did. According to published statistics even developing countries like Senegal or Taiwan (Formosa) have of late become serious rivals. Only a very few years ago Senegal exported Fr.1,000

worth of shoes to Switzerland, but today the figure amounts to Fr.2 million. On top of all this several Latin-American states have of late considerably restricted the export of raw material and have started to manufacture shoes and other leather goods themselves.

A consoling factor in all this: practically all male and female workers who have lost their jobs through closure of their plants, factories and workshops have been absorbed in other industries and the number of unemployed people is still infinitesimal.

* * *

During the month of March a lot of voting has taken place all over Switzerland, and particularly in the canton of Zurich. While not going into details of all the elections which have been held in towns and boroughs, two political proposals which had to be accepted or rejected are nevertheless

worth mentioning. One was for the voting age in the canton of Zurich to be reduced from 20 to 18. Not only all the cantonal authorities, but also practically all the political parties – with minor exceptions – had recommended adoption of this change. But the population voted the proposal down by 213,045 against 69,564 votes, i.e. 3:1.

The second proposal concerning better protection for tenants of rented flats was adopted by 163,163 against 115,267 votes, although it emanated from the three cantonal left-wing parties (Socialists, Communists and Progressive Organisation Zurich, known as POZ) and although both the authorities and all the centre and right-wing parties had strongly recommended its rejection. The attitude of the voters is no doubt a sign of a healthy democracy: they have shown clearly that they have a will of their own and that they are not inclined to be led or guided by whatever the authorities or the political parties may say.

Gottfried Keller

NEWS from the COLONY

Swiss Carnival in Liverpool, 23rd March

When the Committee suggested that the old Swiss Fasnacht should be celebrated again this year, this was enthusiastically welcomed. Our members, Mr. R. Zueger and family, previously of the Hotel St. Hilary, Wallasey, now offered us the amenities of the Dresden Hotel, Bromborough. Our room was strikingly adorned with Fasnacht caricatures, coloured streamers and balloons. The tables echoed the same cheerfulness with squeakers, brilliantly coloured streamers, funny hats and coloured napkins. Swiss Polka music hailed the arriving guests and quickly everyone was toasting each other. A Pirate, a Queen of Hearts, a hefty Austrian hunter complimented a trendy Hippy family. After the President's short welcoming speech, three judges set out to award well deserved prizes for the three most original groups and costumes. We all agreed heartily with their decisions. A most congenial atmosphere was created with a thoroughly Swiss meal. As always a glass or two of Fêchy loosened the tongues and gladdened the hearts of even the most timid ones. By the time meringues and other delicacies arrived everybody was immersed in a Fasnacht spree and ready to romp and dance through all sorts of record music. This may not have been our biggest party, but by far the gayest one. It was quite as convivial as the genuine Swiss Fasnacht over the water. Everybody was very reluctant to leave and go home, where next morning the everyday worries and chores were waiting again.

Maertel Moor

ADOLPHE STEINMANN

It is with deep regret that we announce the death of Mr. Adolphe Steinmann, Rennweg 97, 4000 Basel. He died on 14th March after a long and grave illness, at the age of 78.

Adolphe Steinmann hailed from the Canton of Solothurn and came to this country in 1923. He was with the Swiss Bank Corporation where he rose to a high and responsible position.

He took an active interest in the affairs of the Swiss community in London and was a member of several societies, above all the Swiss Mercantile Society whose efficient President he was from September, 1933 to February, 1939. The Society made him an Honorary Member for his valuable services.

He married Miss Susi Mueller from his own home town in his mid-fifties and the happy couple had one daughter. It is to Mrs. Steinmann and Beatrice to whom our deep sympathy goes. All those who had the privilege of knowing Adolphe will remember his distinction and kindness and will be proud to have been amongst his friends.

M.M.

BIRTHDAYS AND ANNIVERSARIES

We have just heard that Mr. Hugo Vonwiller, of 21 The Warren, Chartridge, Chesham, Bucks, was 80 on 20th March.

Mr. E. Zwicky will be 77 on 24th April and Mr. J. B. Brutsch, of Courtfield, 17 Melvin Shaw, Leatherhead, Surrey, will celebrate his 85th birthday on 23rd. Mr. G. Keller (Kuesnacht) will be 69 on the same day. On 26th April, Mr. F.

Delaloye will be 87, and Mr. A. C. Boller, of "Tadorne", Derrière le Canard", 1162 Saint-Prex/VD, will have his 75th birthday on 8th May. Mrs. A. Sommer will celebrate her birthday on 15th May.

Mr. W. Schedler, of 58 Meadway, NW11, will be 70 on 24th May, and Consul F. Burgunder (Baghdad) will have his birthday on 29th May. The 30th May is the birthday of Dr. A. Weitnauer, Swiss Ambassador in London, and Mr. A. Zullig will be 67 on the same day.

The following wedding anniversaries will take place: on 23rd April, Mr. and Mrs. G. Bouverat will have been married 55 years, and on 2nd May, Mr. and Mrs. F. Burri 28 years. Mr. and Mrs. W. Flory will have their 38th wedding anniversary on 16th May, and Mr. and Mrs. O. Grob their 44th on 18th of the month. The same day, Mr. and Mrs. R. Senn will have been married for 28 years.

Best wishes and many happy returns to all these and any other readers who will be celebrating birthdays and anniversaries shortly.

DELEGATES OF SWISS COMMUNITIES ABROAD MEET IN BERNE

The Commission of the Swiss Abroad met in Berne on Saturday, 9th March. On the two previous days, meetings had been held of the Council of the Solidarity Fund for the Swiss Abroad and of the special Commission on Information.

The Council of the Solidarity Fund was chaired for the first time by the new President, Dr. G. Schelling. The main item on the agenda was the draft of the