

Controversy over attack on Switzerland

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Controversy over attack on Switzerland

If any man ever seriously affected the equanimity of Swiss public life, that man must surely be Mr. Jean Ziegler, Socialist National Councillor for Geneva, Assistant Professor at Geneva University and author of several political and sociological studies including a book which has infuriated the business world: *Une Suisse au-dessus de tout soupçon*.

It can be said with almost complete certainty that this book, which was published last spring in France and promptly became a best-seller over there, is the most scathing attack on Swiss institutions ever to appear in a book. The tone of this work and its obvious lack of research make it more of a pamphlet than a proper study. A man with a rather large chip on his shoulder, Mr. Ziegler launches into a sharp offensive against the banking secret, the hypocrisy of Switzerland's "aid" policy to the third world, its national selfishness, and then embarks on an onslaught against such institutions as our Parliamentary democracy and the fact that the Swiss worker usually identifies with the middle classes. It is easy enough for him to demonstrate that Switzerland is ruled by the powers of money and recalls that only a handful of National Councillors are not members of some company board or other.

The trouble for Mr. Ziegler's career was that his book came out at the time he was due to be promoted from assistant to fully fledged professor of Sociology at the University of Geneva by the Council of State (Executive of the Canton).

Owing to the publication of the book, the two Socialists on the Council who supported his nomination were defeated by the five other conservative representatives. The result of this decision, clearly motivated by political considerations, triggered off a contro-

versy that rocked Geneva's political life. Mr. Ziegler was promptly supported by his former students and by the Association of lecturing staff at the University. But a prominent professor, Miss Jeane Hersch, author of several philosophical books, former Head of the Philosophical Department at UNESCO and a Socialist herself, wrote to the Rector of the University to tell him that Mr. Ziegler owed his professional ascension to political pressures. She added that his nomination to professorship would by no means be justified by the standard of his scientific output.

This theme was countenanced by other authorities who pointed out the several factual errors of his controversial book. A feud developed between Miss Hersch and the left-wing politician. The Geneva Socialist Party met to bar Miss Hersch. Distinguished journalists had a closer look at Mr. Ziegler and articles appeared in the *Weltwoche* which, in the main, were very unfavourable to him.

The decision to keep him in the University belongs to the State Council of Geneva. It is a collegiate decision. Whatever is decided, there will be an outcry almost as loud as the one produced by the book from one camp or the other.

As for Mr. Ziegler, he is convinced that he is the victim of a smear campaign by the banking community. He claimed that his book was nothing more than a development of the principles defended by the Swiss Socialist Party in 1888.

The book raises the whole issue of the "morality" of the numbered account. Every banker that handles the private funds of foreigners knows that the money has come into Switzerland against the regulations of another country and that he is abetting tax evasion. From an

international point of view, this appears as immoral. Yet, as anyone who has worked hard for his money would say, it is not immoral to keep what is yours and what you've worked for. This is the way Swiss Bankers see it. Realistically, they know that they serve a purpose in the world which would be taken up — less efficiently — by someone else if they weren't around.

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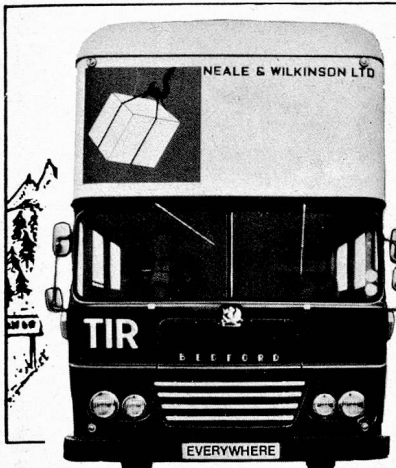


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