

600 years of emigration : the long journey from mercenary to professional

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of course, the kiosks and... the smell of the Alpine pastures! The country looks so terribly small to me. But that's a good thing, for you can go everywhere in a short time. Maybe I should like to live here once I am very old. For young people, though, I find Switzerland too well-behaved, too quiet.»

Roland Schmid, 15, from Cali, Columbia, is particularly fond of the small villages, but would not like to live there. Enrico and Mario Rigamonti, Alessandro Corboud and Vincenzo Campione, all four from Milan, and their friend Sergio Bolis from Bergamo, prefer to spend their holidays in Switzerland rather than on the crowded beaches of Italy. Karin Witzig, 12, from Virginia, and Pamela Kocher, 15, from New York, are here for the first time. Both would like to come again next year. Talli Gablinger, 10, is the youngest of the group. She has unruly fair hair, freckles on her nose and lives in Herzalia in Israel. She only speaks Hebrew, but that does not dampen her high spirits. Her two elder sisters, Iris and Zwia, act as interpreter. John Capt from Casablanca is here for the fifth time already. He thinks this year's camp with travelling from one



(Photos: Claude Huber)

place to another particularly good. Salvador Santiago from Madrid, Christian Ruegg from Heidelberg and Thomas Arein from Lagos, Nigeria, are of the same opinion.

Our young compatriots from abroad had to get used to Swiss punctuality first of all. «This year's camp is one long trek from place to place» declared Dourgan, the leader of the camp. All accompanying persons talk two Swiss languages. In this wandering

«Tower of Babel», one gets along extremely well with one another. The participants are different, and yet somehow similar. «The children do feel themselves as Swiss, although the countries where they live have left their marks quite distinctly,» says Dourgan. «They vary as regards mentality, culture, education and diets, but they are very adaptable. A quality which is often lacking in us Swiss here!» ●

Marie-Josèphe Luisier

600 Years of Emigration

The long journey from mercenary to professional

Although the Swiss abroad are still closely tied to their homeland directly or indirectly, they are hardly considered of importance by the Swiss public. But even if they often represent only a small number in their country of adoption, the 350 000 Swiss living abroad belong to the most active, able and productive Swiss altogether.

Emigration has always been a very important aspect of our home and foreign policy, even though the first relevant federal law regarding emigration agen-

cies was passed only in 1880. Already in 1855, the Confederation used its influence voluntarily for the benefit of Swiss emigrants. So for instance, the official Swiss

representation of our country received grants in the United States of America for the support of emigrants of Swiss origin.

Every Swiss student knows at least something about the three most important epochs of Swiss emigration. The best-known is the chapter on the Swiss mercenaries before the French Revolution. From the 15th to the 19th centuries, there were Swiss mercenaries in almost all European armies. During those five centuries an estimated 2 million soldiers, 60 000 officers and 700 generals of Swiss origin served in foreign armies. The Federal Constitution of 1848 put an end to any service

of Swiss soldiers in foreign armies by prohibiting all military enlistments. The above-mentioned facts come from an official source: Leo Schelbert, Professor at the University of Illinois in Chicago, is one of the few Swiss who made a name for themselves in the field of emigration history. He estimates the number of Swiss mercenaries from the first Swiss recruits who joined the Service of the Duke of Milan in 1373 up to the year 1848 as around a million. Less well known is the fact that the military emigration decisively influenced the emigration of the civil population. This was particularly the case with France. In Paris, the first Swiss community settled in the 15th century already. A further example is the agreement of 1603, in which Venice granted freedom of residence and trade to the Grisons and pledged respect for the Protestant faith to the Grison citizens. In

1766 when the Republic of the Doges counted roughly 3000 people, there existed in Venice 172 Grison undertakings. On the civil level, the 19th century can be looked upon as the great epoch of Swiss emigration. Often against their will, the Swiss took an active part in European imperialism and the so-called «emigration for the purpose of conquest». According to American estimates, more than 250000 Swiss were engaged in the expansion of the United States in the period from 1820 to 1919.

The number of Swiss emigrants during the last century cannot be defined exactly, for the Confederation started keeping relevant statistics only in 1868. Leo Schelbert mentions 410000 Swiss emigrants between 1850 and 1914. In the course of time, only very few writers concerned themselves with that dramatic epoch in Swiss history, and even the re-

cently published «New History of Switzerland and the Swiss» (vol. III) devotes a mere 60 lines to this topic. Our film makers, too, ignore a historic era which could give much material for informative presentation.

Informative presentation? Unlike the general belief, our ancestors were not compelled to emigrate in the last century purely because of economic crises or religious persecution. Social conditions, the disappearance of certain trades, vocational training, ecological changes (excessive clearance of woodlands) etc marked Switzerland and predestined her directly or indirectly for to-day's wealth. From 1920 onwards, Swiss emigration was mainly due to professional reasons, says Leo Schelbert. The success of Swiss abroad was considerable. They contributed by their acknowledged abilities and qualities. For

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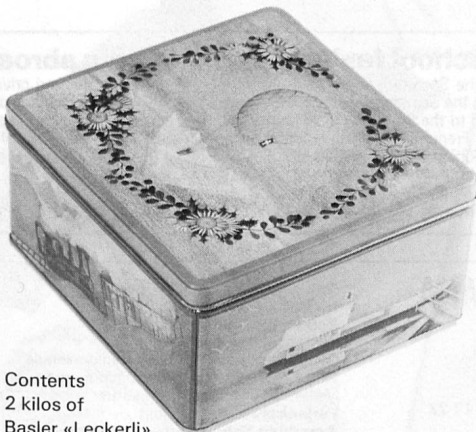
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about 20 years, the Confederation has concerned itself thoroughly with the Swiss abroad. The Federal Council declared in 1965: «The reasons which have led us to take proper notice of our emigrants, are to a large extent of an economic nature.»

The policy of the government is also expressed in that social and cultural tasks are being fulfilled

by Pro Helvetia and other organizations.

Statistics and economic results should not make one forget that emigration is above all a human phenomenon. Every emigrant, wherever he or she may live, will put the same question to us Swiss: What have we made of our country, what are we making of it and...what are we going to make of it? ●

This historic survey of Swiss emigration since the last century is an extract from the book «**Des Suisses pas comme les autres**», which is published by the weekly «Construire» and sold entirely in aid of the Foundation for Young Swiss Abroad (obtainable in French only). 216 pages of text and 16 pages with illustrations. Price: Fr. 16.- plus postage, to be ordered (prepaid) from Foundation for Swiss Abroad, 79, Route de Florissant, 1206 Geneva.

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