

# Pictures of Democracy

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For these reasons the Federal Council will spare no effort to bring the negotiations with the Secretary General, which will be continued in New York, to a favorable conclusion. The final decision will lie with the General Assembly of the United Nations.

- x Switzerland has been accepted as a member in the meantime.
- xx The UNO have decided to take over the building to house therein certain European branches of the organization.

#### PICTURES OF DEMOCRACY.

##### 1. "Coalition of Consumers".

A consumers' co-operative society, based on the principles of the pioneers of Rochdale is shown as large and small enterprise. Its organization may resemble that met with abroad. Remarkable for Switzerland, however, is their large number. Every fourth family is a member of a co-operative society. An association in which the 546 local co-operative societies are gathered and which supplies these with goods, is (in peace-time) Switzerland's greatest importer and at the same time the most important customer of Swiss industry and agriculture.

True, magnitude results in economic power, but it saps or even destroys community life. Real community can grow more lively in a small parish than in some large town, where the co-operative society becomes a great enterprise, whose members no longer attend the general meeting, where intermediate functions, co-operative parliaments, interpose themselves, backed by a few active members and consumers, often only interested in the bonus.

In a study made by the V S K (Federation of Swiss Consumers' Co-operative Societies) it is stated, that the interest of the members in the co-operative society's activity diminishes as the society grows larger. Thus the question arose, how the democratic system of representation - general meeting, meeting of delegates, plebiscite, initiative, referendum etc. - could best be maintained, within great co-operative societies with many thousands of members (Basle 62,179, Zurich 27,389, Geneva 23,093 and so on), so that the contact between the co-operative society and its members would remain as lively as possible. Noteworthy in this connection is the new tendency to decentralize the co-operative organizations in towns and large parishes with numerous stores, e.g. Basle with 252, Zurich with 156, Berne with 46 etc., through creation of a store communalty in each quarter.

##### 2. "Democracy in the Making", deals with the Swiss machine and metal industries' labour peace agreement which was reached in 1937 and is still in operation, and with the possibilities and expectations derived therefrom.

"This treaty was signed by the associations concerned as a purely private contract, without the help of the state. Thereby, i.e. by means of a voluntary contract, labour peace has been secured for the most important of the Swiss industries, which employs more than 100,000 hands, which is more than a quarter of the whole number of Switzerland's factory workers. Instead of employers locking their workers out, or workers going on strike, labour peace has been agreed upon. The contracting parties relinquish compulsory measures and have agreed amicably to settle every contention, especially wage disputes, either by discussion at the enterprise concerned or, if satisfaction cannot be obtained, by arbitration, the leaders of the respective associations acting as arbiters, or, should these not be able to agree, by a neutral court of arbitration empowered eventually to make its decision binding.

The same treaty also encourages the constitution of workers' committees, competent to act in the sense of the labour peace agreement.

The contract, after having been in operation for several years and renewed recently, has stood its test. Considering that in bygone times of dearth, wage disputes were the order of the day and that as late as 1930

strikes were, at 300 factories, responsible for the loss of 265,000 working days, one will realize both the importance of the treaty's effect and the underlying change of mentality. Nowadays even difficulties of some consequence can be settled by way of amicable agreement. Never since the treaty was signed, has arbitration had to be resorted to, as every dispute could be quashed at the stage of the preceding discussion.

The particular value of the solution agreed upon lies in the fact that it was not dictated from above, but rests on the will of and is borne by the participants. Mr. Konrad Ilg, the meritorious chairman of the Swiss union of metal and watch workers, wrote: 'For Switzerland there can be no better way than that of conciliation on the ground of social peace. If we choose this way, then we shall, united and of one mind, know how to overcome the stupendous difficulties of the future.'

Ever since it was made, the metal industry's peace treaty has served, as a prototype, to other industries which have also concluded labour peace agreements.

When in July 1944, after it had existed for seven years, this agreement was prolonged for another five years, the Swiss union of metal and watch workers has, in a manifesto, clearly stated what high and at the same time far-reaching expectations were linked to it. The delegates of this union as the manifesto reads, 'do not consider this agreement to be an economical contract in the usual sense, but the solidification of a new idea. They expect it to be the origin of a reformation of social and economical co-operation in accordance with the conditions prevailing in Switzerland. For the industries and for the men in their employment the operation of such contracts, according to the principles of good faith may result in a new and exemplary form of social co-existence. This end will however only be attained, if the contracting parties insist on the observation of the agreement's ideal contents and strive for their ethical and moral deepening.'

Whilst the agreement of the Swiss union of metal and watch workers serves as example to the entire country, the workers' committees constitute an instrument of peace within the precincts of the individual factory. These workers' committees, the perfection of which, in the 1st article of the contract is said to be desirable, have the longer the more obtained enhanced significance. A recent enquiry shows that such committees exist in 124 out of the 169 firms of the metal industry, employing amongst them 85% of the total number of hands. The remaining are for the most part small works, in which the appointment of such committees encounters all sorts of difficulties. The workers' committees generally endorse that the relations between employees and employers have improved since the signature of the contract and that there is more obligingness.

In a report of an interview with the chairman of such a workers' committee, who states that he occupies his responsible honorary post with joy, he says: 'With the introduction of the peace agreement the workers' committee has become an important office of the works. Where once a domineering point of view, pure interest and power policy prevailed, the endeavour to agree and to co-operate in accordance with the principle of good faith, as stipulated in the contract, has taken effect. At one time the members of the workers' committee were looked upon as exponents of the discontented part of the workers and, as the works' agitators, frequently set under pressure. I, myself, have thus had to suffer for a long time, until mutual confidence was established. I even had to call for the protection by the union's office, which protection was then bestowed upon me by two contracting associations and has prepared the way to better conditions.'

He concludes: 'I am convinced that our industry can only stand its ground, if we succeed to collect all our force in intensive co-operation. As yet they are not so far, everywhere, as to realize the importance of perfect co-operation; at many a factory the workers' committees lead a precarious existence. Only if it is possible to procure them increased approval and to rouse them for mutual understanding and for the common interest, will they be up to their task. For this purpose they want better acknowledgment by the employers. If we co-operate instead of counteracting one another, we shall be strong enough to conquer the coming difficulties. Fortunately this insight gradually gets

a firmer footing. The workers will, with the assistance of the trade-union and of the instrument they have within the factory - the workers' committee - succeed in attaining, as an economical element, such importance and approval by the enterprise as they have so far only enjoyed as citizens in politics. We have a great evolution before us. Here, there is a new democracy in the making."

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"A SWISS LOOKS AT NEW ZEALAND".

The New Zealanders, as the Swiss, are prepared to defend their country. You know the New Zealand soldiers' songs, this is the choir of a Swiss regiment singing - (Yodel) - the joy of the sun rising, the light, the warmth.

Every Swiss loves his country, his homeland. The New Zealanders, I found, love their homeland very much too, very, very much. You are lucky to have only one national language, not four as in Switzerland; but I was just wondering how many of you realise that there are four different New Zealands within your one country. Eh - you don't believe me? Well, there is the North Island with its variations; there is the West Coast of the South Island; there is the East Coast of the South Island; and then there is Stewart Island.

I almost feel inclined to think when our wise Lord created the world He worked four days of the week making New Zealand, on the fifth He made the rain and wind and sunshine and then rested for two days and enjoyed New Zealand. It is a little bit different in Switzerland: the legend says: "When our wise Lord had made the world He had a tremendous lot of dirt left over. He found an empty little space right in the midst of Europe, so he worked hard for five days and on Saturday morning He cleaned the country and then took a day and a half rest." That is the reason, concludes the legend, why Switzerland is so beautiful.

I have seen both countries now and if it were possible I would like to live with one foot in New Zealand and with the other in Switzerland. Seriously, you can not compare the two countries - they are, in spite of being one country with four different characters each, very different. Of course you are inclined to seek in another country what you find in your own land. Put an Australian on a boat at Patterson Inlet of Stewart Island you will hear him say: "That's like Whitsunday Passage of the Great Barrier Reef." I thought so too till I looked instinctively for corals and didn't find them; and gum trees, and didn't find them; and when I fished I landed a blue cod, not a parrot fish; and when I went into the forest I didn't find Koala bears but Penguins; and no Kookaburra laughed when the sun went down, but the Tui sang in the flowering rata and the mutton birds flopped into their holes and chattered. How many cultivated fields or paddocks or villages do you find in Eglinton Valley, or shall we say, how many chalet do you find round Lake Taupo? Where do you find in Switzerland a MacKenzie country and where do you find Alps with so much snow and ice and so little rock as in New Zealand? The Swiss Alps are quite different - there they are rocks with ice and snow and the snow is different and the ice is different. In Switzerland the perpetual snow boundary in midsummer is at between 8,000 and 9,000 feet, and the mountains go up to 15,000 feet - here in New Zealand it's between 5,000 and 6,000 feet and Mt. Cook reaches 12,000 feet. It's 300 miles to the sea in Switzerland - how far away from the sea are the New Zealand Alps on either side? The Swiss Alps are the roof of a whole continent, of Europe - its rivers reach four different seas. The New Zealand Alps form the spine of the South Island.

You do not have to take your cattle and sheep indoors in winter time - you have to in Switzerland. It's useless to look in Switzerland for active or extinct volcanoes. You never will find in Switzerland such a beautiful chaotic green scenery as you see between Kaikohe and Oponini. You can search the whole world and you won't find a Kauri Forest such as you have - so don't cut them down, not even bit by bit, not unless you wish to annoy scientists and tourists and all those who love unique beauty.

New Zealand and Switzerland are not competitors - not even in regard to tourism, and therefore we can work together, as there is no need to be jealous. Now, there are very few really good hotels in New Zealand. Personally I struck only one really first class hotel for instance, in the South Island - but mind you, I have not been everywhere! How that standard compares to Swiss hotel