

The aims of Swiss trade unions

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THE AIMS OF SWISS TRADE UNIONS

AN OPINION POLL among trade unionists and non-trade unionists revealed that the great majority of the Swiss work force was in support of trade unions.

However, the majority of those interviewed and holding such favourable opinions were **not** members of a trade union. This would tend to show that the majority of workers appreciate what trade unions stand for, but do not think it worthwhile joining one as their standard of living would be improving anyway.

The same survey showed that the first demand of trade unionists was the provision for more cheap housing. Fifty-four per cent of a "sample" of trade unionists interviewed said that their most urgent requirement was to be able to enjoy cheap and adequate housing; 22 per cent demanded "equal pay for equal work"; 18 per cent felt that participation in management was a primary right; 17 per cent desired improved social facilities, both public and private; 11 per cent demanded pay increases; 3 per cent a reduction of working hours, and the same proportion again wanted prolonged holidays; 2 per cent of the interviewed people had no opinion.

The most revealing aspect of this survey was the importance attached to better accommodation. This is a point where social friction and tension with foreign residents is the most likely to be felt. Relatively few workers demanded pay increases as such, but more wanted an abolishment of pay differentials. Only 18 per cent of workers seemed to consider participation an important issue. This means that the trade unions, which hope to obtain a constitutional addition of employee participation, will have to make more propaganda among its members.

Of a working population of three million people, there are now 530,000 trade unionists in Switzerland, or 18 per cent of the work force. This small figure shows that trade unions have lost in following since the war and that collective conventions are drawn out by trade union officials representing less than a fifth of the people concerned by these agreements.

The most important trade union is the Federation of Watchmakers and Metal-workers (126,283 members) the Union of Building Workers (98,480); the Federation of Railwaymen (58,379); the Union of Civil Servants (39,310); the Union of Commercial and Transport Employees (22,913); the Union of Typographers (14,914); the Federation of Textile and Chemical Workers (13,984). All the other unions have less than 10,000 members. These unions are grouped in the Swiss Federation of Trade Unions whose total membership is 436,700.

Added to this are 13 unions affiliated to the Federation of Christian Trade Unions with a total effective of 93,680. The three unions with over 10,000 members are the Union of Christian

Building Workers (29,423); the Christian Union of Engineering Workers (27,623).

The Union of Civil Servants launched a campaign to improve the safety of the working man. There are 1000 industrial accidents a day in Switzerland, at least one of them is fatal and 20 lead to the partial or total invalidity of their victims. Only a quarter of Swiss firms belong to the Swiss Accident Assurance Fund, which last year had to lay out 419 million francs to the 75,000 member firms. These accidents cost the economy some 1.5 billion francs a year in lost production.

The Union of Civil Servants believe that trade unions have an important role to play in ensuring the safety of industrial workers and in persuading employers into adopting measures to improve physical and hygienic conditions of work. Very little has been done in Switzerland so far in the field of work medicine.

The solution of industrial accidents, which already enjoys a complete legal framework, will lie in the willingness of large firms to employ doctors and specialists on the shop floor to implement the better conditions of work. It would mean an expenditure perhaps not directly related to productivity but which would soon repay itself by better individual performance.

A Project For New Swiss Bank Notes

The first bank notes issued by the Swiss National Bank remained in circulation for 45 years. The present series of 10, 50, 100, 500, 1000 and 10,000 franc notes have been in circulation since 1956 and 1957.

Now, after only 15 years of circulation, these bank notes are to be substituted by a new series which will include a 5000 franc note.

Mr Hay, Director of the Swiss National Bank, explained that the change was necessary in order to discourage forgeries and to keep pace with technical development. A smaller format was also felt necessary, as the notes above 100 francs are inconveniently large. The future 10,000 franc note will have the width of the present 20 franc note.

The Swiss National Bank had decided that the face of these notes should carry the portrait of a Swiss scientist. It had chosen 16 possible candidates.

Among them were: Leonard Euler, the 18th century Basle mathematician; Morace-Benedict de Saussure, the Geneva 18th century geologist and meteorologist; Konrad Gessner, 16th century physician and naturalist; Francesco Borromini, a 16th century architect from Ticino; August Forel, a 19th century psychiatrist and entomologist and the physicist and explorer Auguste Piccard.

The National Bank invited 14 well known artists to choose