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CRIME AND POVERTY

If you are worried that crime is on the increase in New Zealand, you can take cold comfort from the fact that most other developed countries, including wealthy Switzerland, are experiencing exactly the same problem.

The fact that in all these countries the rich get richer and the poor get poorer in relation to each other has made many people believe that this must be the root of the problem. No doubt, the ever increasing gap between rich and poor coupled with a high level of unemployment are definitely important factors for the crime wave that is sweeping through the developed world, but in no way are these the only contributing factors.

The crime rate we are experiencing at present is a rather recent phenomenon, whilst poverty has existed ever since the human race has established itself on earth. So the blame cannot be put on poverty and unemployment alone, because there are far deeper and more sinister factors at work.

In the "good old days" life was much simpler, much more basic. As long as you had enough money to house, clothe and feed yourself, you could live without too much stress. Your editor can remember the times when a Sunday afternoon family stroll along the lake shore, ending with the traditional cone of ice cream was a real treat, when a tram or a train journey into the countryside or a ride in someone else's car was the event of the year, when window shop-

ping was about the only type of shopping the family could afford, when cars were a novelty reserved for the super rich and the highest aspiration in your life was to own a bicycle, even if only a second-hand one, when evenings were spent with friends playing cards for matchsticks or the then new game of monopoly. Life was then very simple and straightforward. You were poor, you never had any sizeable amount of money in your pocket, you could rarely afford anything more than the bare essentials, but you lived reasonably contented and without much pressure from the outside. You bought what you could afford, accepting the fact that many luxury items in the shop windows simply were not meant for you. You knew that only the rich could afford these luxuries, but you did not care. You did not know much about the life of the rich and powerful because not much was made public. They lived their life and you lived yours, and very seldom did your respective paths ever cross.

You had vaguely heard about drugs, but since it was mainly opium being smoked by some old Chinese in dingy looking dens somewhere at the other end of the world, you never gave it a second thought.

There were no scandal newspapers, no tabloids and of course no TV at that time to intrude and dictate your life. Admittedly there was radio which then was restricted to a few national stations only, but as advertising on radio had not yet been thought of, the only advertisements you could come across were on billboards, perambulating sandwich-

men, in the newspapers and magazines and on the occasional leaflet in your letterbox.

Compared with today, where advertising has almost taken over your whole life, there was hardly any pressure put on you to purchase anything else beyond what you could afford or really needed. Business was far less aggressive than today. People were allowed to live the life they wanted or which they could afford without being pressured from all sides as they are today. And so this increasing aggressive behaviour which we are confronted with today hardly existed in those days. Apart from the Mafia, which for us Swiss was a purely American phenomenon, there was almost no organised crime. With very few worthwhile household gadgets to steel, break-ins and burglaries were few and far between. Robberies, street muggings, rapes, stabbings and indiscriminate shooting of people hardly ever occurred. Murders were usually the actions of a few deranged individuals and certainly did not occur on an almost daily basis as today.

The fact that life has changed so much is largely due to the modern mode of communication allowing aggressive advertising to intrude into every facet of your life. More than any other group, the poor are by far the hardest hit victims of today's constant bombardment through TV, radio and newspapers by this unashamedly aggressive publicity which, day after day, hammers into you the idea that you must at all costs purchase a new house, a car, TV sets, video recorders, computers, sound systems, washing machines and any of the hundreds of gadgets seemingly required in a modern household lest you fall utterly behind the rest of the world.

Today, in the eyes of the advertisers,

Continued next page

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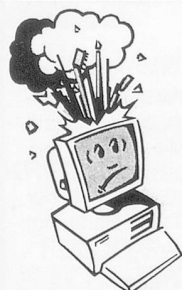
being poor is almost a crime in itself, because you are not participating or try not to participate in this mad scramble. Although you may pretend to ignore this constant advertising pressure, it nevertheless infiltrates your mind whether you like it or not.

Day after day you are being told you must be assertive, bold, successful, dynamic, macho, in other words: aggressive and that all you need is a credit card for the whole wide world to be yours. But how you are going to earn all this money to purchase all these goods in order to live up to the image of a successful and aggressive person, nobody will ever tell you. In this modern society, even hard work no longer is a guarantee for success. More often than not you have also to be aggressive, enterprising and forceful otherwise you are trodden into the ground.

Unfortunately, the people the least equipped to sustain this constant pressure are the less fortunate amongst us: the uneducated, the unemployed, the down and outs, the losers and the outcasts, all people who have not a hope in hell to catch up with this modern society and its consumerism gone mad, let alone to keep up with it.

Many of them feel that since modern life has left them behind, they are no longer part of our society and therefore they no longer have to abide by its rules and laws. For them burglaries, muggings, robberies, violence and even murder are no longer crimes, but simply a means of survival.

So as long as consumerism is being pushed to the present extremes by aggressive advertising, we will live in an aggressive society and we must accept that crime and violence against us will remain part of our lives. This is the price we have to pay to be able to live in one of the developed countries where not only money, power and financial success, but also greed seem to have become more important than life itself.



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NOTE TO SECRETARIES

Next issue of the Helvetia magazine: APRIL 1995. All contributions must be in by 15 March. Many thanks for your kind cooperation.

NEWS FROM THE SWISS EMBASSY



TRIATHLON WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS IN WELLINGTON

NOVEMBER 1994.

The Swiss team was quite successful with members finishing in positions 3, 5, 6, 7, 10, etc. Certainly a remarkable result. Perhaps the tremendous support the Swiss team received from some Wellington Swiss Club members may also have had something to do with it as the two photos show.



RESULTATE DER VOLKSABSTIMMUNG VOM 4. DEZEMBER 1994

- 1) Krankenversicherungsgesetz:
Angenommen mit 1,020,763 JA (51.8%) gegen
950,164 NEIN (48.2%)
- 2) Initiative für eine gesunde
Krankenversicherung
Abgelehnt mit 1,502,483 NEIN (76.5%) gegen
460,834 JA (23.5%)
- 3) Zwangsmassnahmen im Ausländerrecht:
Angenommen mit 1,433,162 JA (72.9%) gegen
534,588 NEIN (27.1%). Sämtliche Kantone
haben den Zwangsmassnahmen zugestimmt.
Stimmbeteiligung: 43.7%.

MORE VACANT DWELLINGS

For years vacant houses and apartments were practically impossible to find in Switzerland. At long last the situation has somewhat improved from the tenants point of view at least since there are now some 39,432 registered vacancies throughout the country. This is still only 1,2% of the total number of houses and flats. Of these, 9500 are for sale only, so the number of dwellings available for rental remains still very, very low. The hardest canton to find accommodation is Nidwalden with the best chances being in Tessin.