

# Roast Beef and democracy

Autor(en): **[s.n.]**

Objektyp: **Article**

Zeitschrift: **The Swiss observer : the journal of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK**

Band (Jahr): - **(1953)**

Heft 1217

PDF erstellt am: **21.07.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-694717>

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**ROAST BEEF AND DEMOCRACY.**

*(Under the above Heading an article by Norman Manners has appeared in the "Sunday Mercury", Birmingham on the 8th of this month, which we here-with reproduce by courtesy of the Editor. Mr. O. Wuest is the President of the Swiss Club, Birmingham.)*

A man who left the "most democratic country in the world" to live and work in Britain confesses that if he returned permanently to his native Switzerland he would feel like a "fish out of water."

He is Mr. Otto Wuest, who first came here 40 years ago. His home is with his Irish wife and family at Selly Park, and for the past 17 years he has been food production manager of a big Birmingham store. As a catering expert (he was formerly a chef) he has had wide experience in both countries.

His advice to visitors? "Do stick to plain cooking. When you ape continental cooking you usually fall down badly. Keep to plain food — it's the best. For example, your roast beef is magnificent, and people of no other country can cook it as well. And I like your eggs and bacon and steak and kidney pudding."

Mr. Wuest still keeps in touch with Swiss cooking. Every year he goes back home for his holidays and he still talks of its attractions.

"My people are proud and strongly united," he says, "despite the fact that in different regions they speak different languages. In the north, where I lived, they speak a mixture of German and "Swiss" called Schweizer-Deutsch. In the south-west they speak French, and Italian is always spoken in the southern region.

"In the different regions the architecture and cooking vary, according to the language of the people. For example, in the Italian-speaking region houses and other buildings are Italian style. Cooking is done the Italian way.

"Every Swiss man has to do duty as a soldier or pay a military tax. Army service is compulsory at 19 when we undergo 10 week's basic training in barracks. At the end of that time we are allowed to return home to carry on in our normal jobs. But we remain on the Army reserve for the rest of our lives — reporting annually for refresher training.

"I am still on the reserve, I was recalled in both world wars. In 1914 I served on the Swiss-French frontier, from where we saw a little of the war. Last

time I was allowed to remain in Britain after applying for exemption to the Swiss Minister in London.

Every soldier (and I repeat that every able-bodied man is one) keeps his uniform, equipment and rifle. It is a common sight to see a dozen or more Army rifles in a farm-house where the farmer, his sons and workers (all reservists) live.

"But we are a peaceful race. There is remarkable religious tolerance which, I think, one would not experience anywhere else. I know of a village where there was only one church, so the Protestants and Catholics agreed to share it.

"On Sundays it was an amazing sight to see the the Protestant congregation file in after Mass was over.


"Life begins early in the day. Schools open at 7 a.m. in the summer and 8 a.m. in winter. Shops are always open from 8 a.m. until 6 p.m. Everyone is allowed two hours off for lunch at mid-day. The people work hard.

"They also devote much of their spare time to charity. They support many of the TB clinics in the country. It is a marvellous place for the cure of chest troubles, though, strangely, some of our own population of 4½m. suffer from TB. I can assure you that TB girls sent over by the *Sunday Mercury* 'Give a Girl Health fund will be well looked after. They will have a wonderful time — and receive the best medical attention.

"I love England, I like to go back home annually — but to leave Birmingham permanently would make me sad. I like the English way of life and I have made many friends.

"One thing I do notice here is the way you mostly underestimate yourselves. Let me assure you that something British is at least as good as its continental equivalent."

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