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# COMMENT

## GERMAN-SWISS IMPERIALISM

*Hispano-Suiza*, an important Genevese family firm with a glorious past of achievements in the field of armaments, motors and machines, having fallen into financial straits, had to seek salvation with a German-Swiss consortium comprising the giants *Sulzer*, *Bührle* and *Rieter*.

This was not the first example of a French-Swiss abdication in favour of a more powerful German-Swiss competitor. Last year, the electrical company of *Sécheron*, the only French-Swiss firm to build railway engines and railway components, found it difficult to survive and had to approach Brown-Boveri, who took over the company. Thus Geneva's electrical industry can be said to be in German-Swiss control. A year or two before the *Sécheron* takeover, there were strong rumours and scares that Geneva's most prestigious machine-tool company, and the one with the most developed technological know-how, *La Société Genevoise des Instruments de Physique*, was going to be the prey of American interests. A vast transfer of stock had been recorded and it was logical to suppose that the new owners were American, as the Americans have never missed a chance of putting a finger in the cream of Europe's industrial cake during the prosperous 1960's. It turned out, however, that Swiss chemical interests had taken a stake in the Geneva company. As nearly all the Chemistry is German-Swiss owned, this particular case could be considered as one more example of German-Swiss economic invasion.

Most takeovers in French-speaking Switzerland are initiated by German-Swiss firms, and a sizeable number of the new plants being built there belong to the German-Swiss industrial giants.

Switzerland is best-known (forgetting its scenery) for its cheeses, its watches, its machines and its banks. In all these fields the Swiss-Germans are in the lead. The first cheese company is *Gerber*, a German-Swiss concern. The most important watch company can safely be regarded as *Omega*, also German-Swiss. The most important machine factories belong to *Bührle* (*Oerlikon Bührle* for guns and machine tools and *Contraves Bührle* for precision products), to *Sulzer* (who produce a vast range of industrial equipment but who are best known as manufacturers of about a third of the world's marine diesels and a renowned shuttleless weaving machine), to *Brown-Boveri*, *Escher-Wyss* and *Machinen Fabrik Oerlikon*, the last four of which are fully or partially integrated and form the backbone of Switzerland's heavy electrical and mechanical industry. The same is true of the famed Swiss banks. The "big

three" are Zurich and Basle-based and it is, quite correctly, the Gnomes of Zurich and not those of Geneva who have caused sleepless nights to British Treasury officials for so many years. What is true of banks is also true of insurance: the *Winterthur*, the *Zurich* and the *Rentenanstalt* are left unmatched by comparable companies on the other side of the river Sarine. Textiles are traditionally German-Swiss. Then there are the chemicals, lead by the new mammoth born out of the recent marriage of *Ciba* and *Geigy*, then *Hoffmann La Roche*, *Sandoz*, *Lonza* and *Emserwerk*, all of them Swiss-German! One could continue to enumerate the German-Swiss firms which have made the name of Swiss industry. To keep to a small pick only, we can name some who are universally respected by the experts. They would be: *Landis and Gyr* (electromechanical appliances), *Rieter* (spinning machines), *Nestlé* (plastic machinery), *Von Roll* (hydraulic and power machinery), *Elektrowatt*, *Bauknecht* and *Thermes* (electrical durables), *Buehler* (plastic and milling machinery of all kinds), *Metzger* and *Balzer* (universally-used laboratory balances and vacuum pumps) and *Gebrüder Fischer* (forged castings and high quality steel). We should also mention *Knorr* and *Maggi*, founded by Swiss-Germans, in the field of the food industry.

To be fair, we should recall that the largest Swiss company, *Nestlé*, is a French-Swiss company (in that it is based at Vevey and has its main home plants in French-speaking areas). French-Switzerland holds its own in chocolate, another of those highly-prized Swiss products, with *Suchard*. It would be dishonest to overlook some of the most important French-Swiss companies, many of which have acquired household names in their respective fields. They would be *Tornos* and *Schaublin* (metal-cutting machine tools), *Hermes-Paillard* (typewriters and cine-cameras), *Rolex* and *Longines* (watches), *Thorens* (luxury gramophone turntables). French-Switzerland holds the lead in department stores, because the Geneva-based and private *Maus* group is believed to command the highest turnover, but *MIGROS* is a German-Swiss creation. Universally adopted in the other linguistic regions, it has revolutionised the ordinary man's way of life more than any other single company. The only Italian-Swiss company that has an international name would be *Agietronic*, makers of spark-erosion machines.

Listing individual French- or German-Swiss companies isn't the best way of finding out what economic power each linguistic group commands because one single large corporation can have the same turnover as twenty family affairs. What counts is *size*, and by that token there is not a single French-Swiss corporation, *Nestlé* apart, fit to stand with its Swiss-German brethren in the oncoming

battle between trans-national corporations.

This imbalance fortunately does not have any unhealthy consequences. The *Romands* do not have to envy the Swiss-Germans for all their factories because there is enough wealth to go all round. But this does not alter the fact that a city like Geneva is somewhat artificially enriched by a host of international organisations, foreign banks and holdings, whereas towns like Basle and Winterthur hold the very real and tangible producers of wealth. Also, the movement of organising talent is very much from West to East, so that Zurich, for example, has an impressive French-Swiss colony. German-Swiss companies are then being increasingly managed by *Romands*. This is a happy state of affairs and prevents all resentment. There are no underdogs among the Confederates.

(PMB)

## SWISS NEWS

### SHIPWRECK ON LAKE GENEVA

The weather over the Léman had a threatening look for the whole of Friday afternoon, August 7th. The storm signals on the Swiss shore had been winking from 3 p.m. The radar at Cointrin airport had spotted an oncoming stormy front and had transmitted the necessary warnings to the rescue services of the Lake. But the pilot of the French pleasure boat "Sainte Odile" didn't consider the heavy black clouds looming above Nyons and the gathering storm as sufficient reasons for postponing his return trip from Saint Yvoire to Thonon, and he set off with 25 passengers. Two hundred yards away from port the storm suddenly gathered in strength. Within seconds the wind was gusting to 90 m.p.h. and the black cloud above Nyons had suddenly crossed the lake. He decided to turn back and it was during his manoeuvre that a particularly powerful wave ripped off the boat's windscreen. Water immediately cascaded inside the boat and as it was devoid of security bins it promptly overturned. Twenty-five passengers were thrown in a boiling lake with waves three metres high. There were fortunately many witnesses of the scene and amateur rescuers rushed on the scene in rubber dinghies. They managed to save eighteen passengers. One rescuer, a French count, saved six persons. But four women and three men of French and Belgian nationalities perished on a spot which was hardly a mile away from where the "Fraidieu", a pleasure boat of the same kind, foundered with 24 children a year ago. An enquiry into the disaster has been opened. The pilot of the boat has repeatedly asserted that the omens had not warranted a cancellation of his return trip to Thonon.

The might of the wind, *Joran*, which had abruptly rammed the boat and caused it to overturn had been absolutely unexpected. The mayor of Saint Ivoire believes for his part that the pilot should never have sailed off. He had never seen such a storm on the Léman for thirty years.

(ATS)

### A SHORTAGE OF PRIESTS

A new chapel has just been consecrated at the Seminary of Lucerne. As the Catholic Church is steering through a troubled period, the question can be raised whether the pews of this new chapel will ever be filled. The rector of the Seminary, Otto Moosbrugger, gave his impressions to a "Tages Anzeiger" interview.

He said that the number of students at Lucerne's Seminary had remained stationary. There had actually been a slight increase. But of the 130 male students and six girls attending the Seminary, only 40 to 50 had the definite intention of becoming *priests*. Twenty others had not yet arrived at a determined idea on their future career: they had undertaken studies in theology more or less for their own sake and with no practical intentions in mind. The remaining 50 definitely wished to engage in a religious career but were not prepared to be consecrated priests.

The first overriding ground for this shyness towards the plunge into priestly life lay in the *refusal of celibacy*. But behind this primary question there were many related theological problems. Students feel, for example, that the Catholic Church does not value the present conception of marriage sufficiently. The theology student is strongly torn between the secular and the religious world. He is now feeling less at home in faith and prayer (especially private prayer) and is therefore attempting to find the traditional security of faith and prayer elsewhere. Another point to mention is the increasing tendency of the modern man to *live privately*. Families have become closed and private units and the almost exclusive preserve of personal life. The celibate priest has therefore become *lonelier* still.

The new *social mobility* which is transforming life and its conditions so rapidly is a fact which prevents many from taking any definite and irrevocable step. They are ready to "engage themselves", but not in the short term only.

A changing understanding of the Church has also had a strong bearing. Many students are disappointed by the present structure of the Church, which they see basically as a power structure. They see its real meaning as lying in a world service. Others find that the work of the priest should become more specialised. The notion of the "all round priest" goes against the univer-

sal tendency of our technical society. As a final and important ground for staying away from priesthood, many students are aware from the Bible and Church history that there are other conceivable forms of priestly service than the traditional Catholic ministry.

This situation is bound to lead to not have any unhealthy consequences. Cese of Basle requires 15 to 20 priests a year. At present, it only receives about eight. With the help of rationalisation and a wise use of manpower the crisis has momentarily been averted. But in 10 years and on present trends, there will be a shortage of 250 priests in the Diocese of Basle. The situation will be similar in the Diocese of Chur. It may be somewhat better, but bad enough, in the Diocese of St. Gallen.

### THE NEW FIGHTER

While Swiss experts were still trying to make up their minds on the aircraft they should adopt in replacement of the Air Force's obsolete "Venoms", Hawker Siddeley chipped in with an offer for renovated "Hunter" jet fighters. The British firm also offered its most publicised showpiece, the vertical-takeoff machine baptised the "Harrier", to the Swiss. Each aircraft would cost 12 million francs and could be delivered from the beginning of 1972 onward. The Swiss authorities are now studying this British tender.

### ASSISTANCE TO THE SWISS ABROAD

The Federal Council has authorised the Department of Justice and Police to put in place a study commission to elaborate a federal law in respect of assistance to Swiss nationals abroad. The Commission will examine a plan drawn out by the Department of Justice and Police in virtue of the new constitutional provisions on the Swiss abroad. When this plan will have been passed by the Commission it will be submitted to the cantons and various interested bodies.

(ATS)

### SWISS COWS FOR BRITAIN

Three hundred opulent, spotted Simmenthal cows took the plane at Cointrin airport with a British destination. They had just spent three weeks of quarantine in the stables of the Comptoir Suisse in Lausanne. On their arrival in Britain, they had to spend three more weeks of quarantine. These were enough reasons for taking the great precautions in protecting them from contagion during their journey. Switzerland exported 2,120 heads of cattle of the Simmenthal breed and 7,150 heads of the brown, or "Schwytz" breed in 1969. The main importers were the Italians, who prefer the brown or "Schwytz" cows. Other clients were the eastern European countries such as Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Russia and