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COMMENT

WAS MR. VON MOOS AN ANTI-SEMITE?

From time to time, a "happening" livens up the rather sleepy political life of the federal capital. For recent months, journalists benefitted from the debate stirred up by the "little red book", that arch-conservative breviary of anticommunist wariness. Recently, the editors of an obscure periodical called "Neutralität" attempted to hatch new scandal in resurrecting Mr. Ludwig Von Moos' supposedly anti-semitic past. Fortunately, the ripple subsided rapidly, but for a few days it provoked a heated controversy throughout the Press.

"Neutralität" is a left-wing paper published in Berne. The chief editor is Mr. Paul Ignaz Vogel, a protégé of Friedrich Dürrenmatt. The famous playwright had even recently given him the third of a literary prize he had won, on account of his "endeavours towards a juster society". The periodical also contains some cultural features and on this account, has obtained a 12,000 franc subsidy from the "Pro Helvetia" foundation.

In a press conference presided by Mr. Franz Schumacher, a lawyer from Berne, and attended by well known socialists such as Mr. Riesen, Mr. Renschler and the national councillor from Schaffhausen, Mr. Walter Bringolf, the shadowy political (or rather editorial) past of Mr. Von Moos was unveiled through a release of some of his, pre-war writing. In a mini-paper which he edited by himself, the "Obwaldner Volksfreund", Mr. Von Moos had written, on 20th February 1936: "Should it surprise us that a population which feels

Swiss gets angry when it sees the ease with which the Jews pouring in from the East can obtain Swiss citizenship whereas people with good Swiss names are without work or forced into emigration?" In later editorials, equally remote, Mr. Von Moos had written: "It is understandable that the Jewish question should have been brought forward. The Jews have had such a disastrous influence on the political, economical and spiritual life of the third Reich that their persecution can only be considered as a natural reaction to their undesirable activity". In another context: ". . . where Jews set foot, there is little room left for Christians . . .". Those in fact were the most spiteful utterances of which Mr. Von Moos was guilty. "Neutralität" thought it worth while to reproduce other incriminating shreds of by-gone editorials, but they seem too harmless to be reproduced here. One of the past "crimes" imputed against him was that he backed the execution of the murderer Vollenweider in 1940, and that he was opposed to the renewal of the Swiss Penal Code. The editorial team of "Neutralität" has accordingly demanded his immediate resignation from the Federal Council!

The Political Department deigned to answer this dissenter's gambit. It said that, "with the help of clippings from the "Obwaldner Volksfreund" of the 1930's, the review "Neutralität" was attempting to throw suspicion on the political attitude held by the present head of the Police and Justice Department. The quotations give a warped image of reality. To be understood correctly, they should be replaced in the context of that period. The main aim of the political activities in which Mr. Von Moos was then engaged was to revive the young-conservatives movement. From the article which he published in the "Obwaldner Volksfreund" of Wednesday, 16th November 1938, it appears clearly that allegations charging him with antisemitism are quite unjust". The communiqué then reproduces the redeeming article, which, evoking the "Kristalnacht", commented on the spate of persecutions against Jews which followed the attempted murder, on 7th November, of a German official by a young Jew. To end that article, Mr. Von Moos had written: "These uncontrolled outbursts by fanatic and barbarian masses are devoid of the most elementary respect of the rights of citizens, not to mention the rights of persons and the reality of human feelings. We may ask, and not without concern, what the results of such acts will be in a few years time. And how many innocents will be hit in the wake of such abominations?"

However, this attempt at whitewashing Mr. Von Moos wasn't very solid because what he wrote one day does not rub out what he wrote on another day. The truth is that, like so

many of his contemporaries, he was undeniably biased against the Jews of Switzerland and their influence. In fact, he had already been publicly attacked on this score ten years ago, when he was elected federal councillor. But, as he pointed out in that redeeming article, he was strongly opposed to the anti-semitic excesses that were taking place in Germany. Being opposed to a seemingly clannish and overwhelming fraction of the population, and condoning in its actual extermination are two things, and make all the difference between well meant conservatism, a perhaps narrow-minded patriotism, and outright nazism. Indeed, who, having lived through the turbulent 30's (and I've been told that they were as turbulent in Switzerland as anywhere else) has not at one time been anti-semitically inclined and not said what Mr. Von Moos wrote as the intention of his small circle of readers? His attitude against Jews was no worse than the current anti-foreigner outlook of many a prosperous Swiss. The Political Department's defending communiqué was therefore not necessary.

Whether it is right to hobnail in the past of important public figures is debatable. In many cases, some ferreting journalist has exhumed by-gone misdeeds already well redeemed by personal grief and service to society. But if these deeds *must* be recalled, let them not be petty offences. It could eventually be worth-while to disclose such things as past extortions, frauds or underworld connections, but it is ridiculous to hit a man about a few sentences written over thirty years ago!

This feeling has been shared unanimously by the Swiss Press and the "Neutralität" review has won strictly nothing by its action. The editors may even lose the support granted to them by "Pro Helvetia"! If they planned to stage a publicity stunt, it has hardly increased the prestige of their paper. If they yearned to see Mr. Von Moos ousted from the Federal Council (many have been saying that he's not a good federal councillor) they chose unrecommended means in attacking his moral integrity. It seems, however, that their gambit was an attempt at refuelling the storm over the "little red book", for which the executive had fallen under strong attacks. What could be more natural, in those circumstances, than to attack its most conservative member?

Did they expect that their allegations would lead to Mr. Von Moos' resignation? If they did, they were day-dreaming, but if they didn't, they were poking fun at everybody in assembling such a vast number of journalists to their highly publicized press conference.

This episode demonstrates the existence of hard-core left-wingers. It also shows that, apparently, they have little to strike against, since they have recourse to very secondary issues, like

the little red book, which is hardly liable to change Swiss history, and this trivial attempt at tarnishing the reputation of an important public figure. The fact that they are harping on purely sensational themes indicates that they are badly in need of a cause and a more important following.

Still, however silly the affair, it has filled the "Swiss News" pages of most papers for a couple of days. Switzerland is so small that anything original makes headlines. While the Winterthur trial was going on, there was little else to read in the home-news section of most papers! Besides the odd crime, the odd stone-laying ceremony, the inaugurations of new purifying plant and factories, annual conferences, or the technical law-making of Parliament, very little happens in Switzerland, or so it seems to the outside observer! But Switzerland has a great number of newspapers with highly talented journalists who, when a titbit of new activity happens to emerge, have to seize it in order to exercise their craft, and, of course, to amplify and elaborate it to turn it into good reading material. That's the job of journalists—to transform events into something interesting by improving them. For this reason, small things can claim vast spaces in the pages of newspapers, who, after all, must be filled somehow. Even the recurring themes have to be rendered more acute to be made interesting. There's no denying that the Jura problem is serious, but journalists will never lose a chance to dramatize over it, if only by giving it special publicity in the absence of any other worthwhile problems. The problem which probably doesn't get any undue publicity is that of foreign workers, who, with their families, number 930,000, seven times the population of the Jura and perhaps twenty times the Separatist population.

Mind you, the same tricks are played by British journalists. They churn up the same old stale subjects, affix them with headlines, for want of any better news. Thus we get an editorial in the "Times" commenting every monthly trade figures, we spend thrilling evenings in front of the "tele" on Budget-day (to learn, in the wee hours, that beer has gone up by twopence a pint) and we listen with unbelievable interest to eternal party-political squabbles. Television and a mammoth Press contrive to keep us always interested in the news, unimportant or not. This, of course is not a bad thing as such, but it does tend to absorb much of the spare time of modern man, who spends too much of it in getting informed on dispensable facts. The danger is smaller in Switzerland, where fewer things actually happen. A Swiss newspaper therefore has more space devoted to outside news than a British national paper. Having journeyed through the history of Switzerland in the smaller classes, Swiss children learn German or French

history at school. It is not that our history is rapidly exhausted, it is necessarily too "local" (and therefore too specialized) to have any bearing on the present state of the world, and for that matter, to be particularly exciting. The larger the country and the greater its power, the more its problems can be felt to have authentic importance and interest. The Swiss must therefore feed on the little problems expounded for them in their newspapers and on the problems of others. Sometimes, a spangle that resembles a gem, like the little red book, the Florida affair or the alleged antisemitism of a politician is thrown in the humdrum of everyday politicking, and one feels that "rattling good history" is going on at home!

(PMB)

SWISS NEWS

RECENT DEATHS IN SWITZERLAND

Karl Alfons Meyer, 86, as a result of a long and painful illness, in Kilchberd. A specialist in forestry and a man of letters, Mr. Meyer contributed to this science and wrote a number of literary works devoted to the history of trees and forests. These achievements earned him a doctorate h.c. from the Polytechnikum of Zurich, the honorary membership of the Swiss Association of Forestry and the literary prize of the city of Zurich.

Mr. Albert-Louis Dentan, 73, in Geneva. A civil engineer formed at the Epul in Lausanne, Mr. Dentan began his career in France. He returned to Geneva some forty years ago and founded a well known consultancy office. He taught at Geneva's technikum and was a well known political figure. He represented the liberal party at the Municipal Council and sat on the board of the town's industrial services.

Mr. Hermann G. Stokar, 79, founder and owner of a firm of business and insurance consultants. He came from Schaffhausen and was a founding member of the association for free enterprise. He edited the "Wirtschaft Winke".

Mr. William Herren, 81. For 40 years he sat on the communal council of Cologny, Geneva, and was mayor of this locality for 12 years. His past functions included the presidency of the "International Life-saving Society of the Léman".

The opera singer Bruno Manazza, 57. He learned his art at the Zurich conservatory and started on his career as a tenor at the municipal theatre of

St. Gall. He worked subsequently for Beromunster Radio, and later at Berne, Basle, Biel and Lucerne. In 1946, he fulfilled contracts in Munich, Dusseldorf and Mannheim. He was a good friend of the composer Frank Martin.

Monsieur Sonderegger, former ambassador, 71, at Frauenfeld. He entered in the Political Department in 1928 and was sent to India in 1929. He remained there up to 1956, being Consul in Bombay up to 1943 and General Consul from then on. He played an important rôle in strengthening the commercial relations of India and Switzerland. He was ambassador to Indonesia, and then to Denmark before retiring in 1962.

Dr. Henry Larsen, a well known naturalist and taxidermist, 79, in Geneva. Born in Aarhus, Denmark, Henry Larsen studied in the United States and Germany, took part in numerous arctic expeditions before settling down in Geneva, where he directed the natural history museum. He is also known for his expeditions to Latin America with his wife May, and for numerous travel accounts.

Col. Roger Vodoz, 68, former commander of the recruit schools of Geneva and Lausanne. As a military instructor for the infantry, he has worked in numerous military training establishments. He was promoted colonel during the war and commanded the 67th Regiment (Franches Montagnes). From 1945 to 1951 he was in charge of the infantry recruit schools of the 1st Division, thus forming more than 13,000 recruits. From 1952, he worked for the Military Department as head of section for instruction, as personnel manager of the Department and as interim head of the Swiss delegation to the neutral supervisory commission in Korea.

Mr. Karl Wick, 79, a former conservative national councillor and editor of the review "Vaterland".

Mr. Jean Hotz, 79, a former plenipotentiary Minister and head of the Federal Commercial Division, in Morges. Son of a peasant of Naenikon (Zh) who eventually became prefect, Jean Hotz did an apprenticeship in banking before studying at University, which he left with a doctorate in economics. In 1922, he was called by M. Wetter, the future federal councillor, to the secretaryship of the commercial division of the Department of Public Economy (Swiss Board of Trade). He devoted his whole career to this division, heading it from 1935 to 1955. He worked under four federal councillors: Messrs Schulthess, Obrecht, Stämpfli and Rubattel, but was himself the one-time "boss" of Mr. Schaffner, the future federal councillor.