

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

Herausgeber: Federation of Swiss Societies in the United Kingdom

Band: - (1970)

Heft: 1586

Artikel: The swiss little red book

Autor: [s.n.]

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-686050>

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The Swiss Observer

FOUNDED IN 1919 BY PAUL F. BOEHRINGER.

The Official Organ of the Swiss Colony in Great Britain

Vol. 56 No. 1586

FRIDAY, 13th FEBRUARY 1970

The Swiss Little Red Book

We have already talked about the civil defence booklet on a number of occasions. The contents and spirit of this official publication have been strongly criticised in Parliament and throughout the news media. Now that I've had a chance to read it, I'm not going to join belatedly in the chorus of critics (actually I believe the book is not as bad as all that) but rather describe its contents and explain the purpose behind its publication.

The Background

Every fit Swiss male must do his military service and this is the central tradition of our national life! The Army appropriately tries to buttress the military education of its recruits by issuing them with a number of booklets which they must take back home, together with their equipment, to study and assimilate if possible. The "soldier's booklet", a vademecum full of precious information on how to behave during combat, was a prominent figure in this little library.

It is a known fact that civilians have been made to suffer increasingly during recent wars. For this reason, our masters have been showing a growing concern for civil defence organisation and the Federal Council has decided that civilian population should also receive free education. To this end, it has commissioned the Department of Justice and Police to produce a pendant to the "soldier's booklet", a "civil defence booklet" for the benefit of civilians. It was written by two career officers, but an array of important Swiss personalities have had their say in its final preparation.

The end-product presents very well. It has a flexible and strong cloth-jacket of a flashy red colour. It is strongly bound and designed to withstand years of regular use. The inside cover reproduces a passage of the Federal Pact of 1291, followed by an introduction by Mr. Ludwig Von Moos, head of the Department of Justice and Police. The 320 pages are glossed and richly illustrated. Glaring captions and vivid drawings are intended to bring the written message deep in the minds

of the readers. The basaltic prose of the book is alleviated from page to page by humorous sketches.

The Message of the Booklet

The philosophy of the book is expounded in the first chapter. Quite clearly, in a period of general loosening values (especially patriotic values) the authors have attempted to revive the spirit of the Grütli, and to instil in their readers the fervent belief that their motherland is a cause worth dying for. Switzerland, they never tire of repeating, doesn't seek any territorial gain. Her only wish is to live in peace with her neighbours. But the dangers of war cannot be said to have been diminished. No country today has done away with an army and military budgets are soaring everywhere. The fact that Switzerland is respected everywhere will not be a guarantee for her safety in the event of future international conflict. We must therefore be on our guard and have no right to take refuge into passivity. Our fathers have watched over us, we must ourselves watch over our children: and their security depends on the worthiness of our army. Our democracy, like everything made of human hands, is not perfect. But it has satisfied the expectations of generations of citizens and can be perfected through freely-willed reforms. It will only work if its citizens and magistrates remain vigilant and open to the necessities of changes, it evolves along a crest between the furrows of sterile immobility and destructive upheaval. No active democracy can exist if responsibility of decision is not assumed by a coherent majority of citizens, neither can there be any national peace if this majority abuse its strength and disregards the legitimate needs of every citizen. In this respect, it is vital to guarantee the freedom of religious belief and make sure that every citizen can feel that, in defending his country, he is really defending something of value. For this reason, it is desirable that Swiss women be granted political rights equal to those of men. It is only when they will be given the privilege of partaking responsibility in the country's

destiny that they will drop the indifference and lassitude which makes us sometimes doubt the vitality of our democracy. Our national independence is the basic condition that governs all undertaking to make the life of our people happier and more worthy to be loved. We want our country to remain what it always has been: a well-lit and open house where everyone feels at home and not a barred prison. The motherland is never just given to us, it must always be built, the future is cast from the present and movement is the essence of life. Each one of us must therefore devote his thoughts and heart to the service of a country which we must love, and this love is not an uncontrollable inclination but the devotion of a spirit of service to a cause which deserves a total engagement. This book appeals to the values of life and seeks to show how they can be defended.

This lofty introduction brings the reader to the first chapter, which tells him what he should do in times of peace so as not to be taken by surprise by war. Civil defence cannot be improvised.

Preparing for an emergency

Having realised that war is still a reality, it becomes essential to know what it could mean to Switzerland in terms of economic, physical, social and spiritual hardships. It is therefore indispensable to prepare the total defence of the land, which not only consists of a combatant army, but of an efficient civil defence whose task is to assure the physical survival of non-fighting citizens. Above this, there will have to be a political defence, an economical defence, a social and a spiritual defence to respectively make sure that our institutions continue to work throughout troubled times, that our country is supplied in vital goods, that the social climate doesn't deteriorate and that our population is appropriately informed so that ideological propaganda from abroad can be counterbalanced. Women have an important role to play in our defence, not in manning the deadly

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