

Comment

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Universal problems

Swiss literature is faced today with a number of general problems. First, like everywhere else, writers are finding out new literary forms and new means of expression. The clash between the innovators and the conservative literary establishment is particularly strong in German-speaking Switzerland. Then there is the problem of "Swissness" and a painful linguistic duality. Should "Swissness" and Swiss values be maintained at all costs? May they be sacrificed in the interest of a live and universal literature? Swiss authors are deeply separated on this issue. The most important of them all, Max Frisch, clearly acknowledges his nationality and what he owes to his country but points out that he cannot be a "Swiss" writer. Freedom and creative liberty can only be safeguarded by sleighting some traditionally Swiss conceptions. But, even though the cultural connotation of the adjective "Swiss" must take a bad mauling, there is no doubt that, as far as its geographical meaning is concerned, "Swiss" has never stood for a more flowering literary life as today.

(PMB)

COMMENT

THE END OF THE "RHONE AU RHIN" DREAM?

The idea of a waterway linking the Rhone to the Rhine is very dear to the hearts of many *Romands*. It is a recurring theme, as old as the idea of a cross-Channel tunnel, and, according to the reminiscences of the elder members of my Neuchatel family, was very topical in the 1900s already. The aim was not just a canal crossing through Switzerland, but the possibility of cruising

from Basle to Geneva, from Geneva to Marseilles in a steamboat. The idea was latent in many of the important projects of the past decades. The freight station of La Praille, in Geneva, was built with the possibility of Geneva becoming a port one day firmly established in the minds of those who conceived the project. The Rhone-to-the-Rhine canal, or its myth, emerged again when extensive works were being made to irrigate the plain of the Broye, when the Broye and the Thielle canals linked the lakes of Morat, Neuchatel and Biel, and when the Aar was channelled into the lake of Biel through the Aar canal. Back in the 17th century, it was almost possible to go from Neuchatel to Geneva on boat thanks to the Entremont Canal, which joined the Orbe plain to Cossonay. From Cossonay to Morges, goods were transported on carts because the Venoges was no longer navigable. Today this canal has been filled in and there are few remaining traces of it.

In 1965, a special commission studied the feasibility of a fluvial link from Basle to Geneva and concluded that it was economically senseless. "Transhelvetica", the association that had fought for the Rhone-to-the-Rhine Canal for decades, decided that this study had been inspired by jealous railway and road interests and that its conclusions were therefore not valid. Transhelvetica commissioned the Battelle Institute to make a study of its own. The Institute, taking the social profit into account, arrived at different conclusions. The issue was becoming rather delicate and political, and Federal Council commissioned another team of experts, well separated from commercial interests, to see the problem for themselves. Unfortunately for the Transhelvetic-canal supporters, its findings are that it would pay to make the Rhine navigable up to Klingnau, where the Aar meets the Rhine, because the port of Basle will soon be overburdened, but not, in the present economic set-up, create a navigable channel further upstream.

However, the matter is not yet settled and the Federal Council, according to a traditional procedure, has submitted the Commission's report to the individual cantons. They have up to 31st July to give their opinion to Berne. The Federal Council should be making concrete proposals at the beginning of 1971. There is no doubt that the possibility of cruising from Geneva to Basle on a chriscraft is very alluring and would make Swiss waters especially attractive. The value of a transhelvetic motorway would be predominantly touristic since canals have long lost their competitiveness with railway, with the possible exception of particularly bulky raw materials. The realisation of such a project will depend on whether "touristic" can be equated with "economic" in this case.

(PMB)

SWISS NEWS

FEDERAL

New military credits held in reserve

In a "message" to Parliament, the Federal Council asked for renewed credits of about 200 million francs for improving military fortifications, extending training-fields, buying land and acquiring communication and sapping equipment. The Federal Council, which had only the week before submitted a series of economic dampening measures to Parliament, was well aware that the proposed expenditure would have effects going against these measures. For this reason it has suggested that Parliament should accept the principle of the expenditure and leave the time of actual outlay to the good judgment of the Department for Finance. This means that Parliament will be voting for credits (which are available but which may not be spent because of the official policy of restraint) to be used at an unspecified time.

The national roads budget

Switzerland is to spend 765 million francs on its highways this year. This sum is 35 million francs larger than what was foreseen in the Budget and will allow the opening of 90km of new highways across the country. Fifty-five million francs spent in excess of last year's budget written down on this year's account will soon have to be voted. New motorway stretches to be shortly opened to traffic are 26km on the N.2 between Augst (Bl) and Haerkingen (So) passing through Lenzburg and Daettwil (Ag) and 14km between Attikon (Zh) and Waengi (Tg). The remainder lies in central Switzerland, the largest stretch being on the Simplon highway in the Valais. In French-speaking Switzerland there will not be any new span of motorway opened to traffic but present works will continue. Vaud gets 63 million francs, 56 for works and seven for land acquisition. The main effort will be centered on the N.9 where work on the Villas-Sainte-Croix to Venne stretch will be nearing completion. Neuchatel gets 20 million for work between Saint-Blaise and the Bernese border. Geneva gets six million, four of which will be devoted to purchase of land and two for the completion of the link between the Geneva to Lausanne motorway and Cointrin airport.

Switzerland and the U.N.

A high-ranking civil servant, Mr. Langenbacher, was the outspoken herald of the growing opinion that Switzerland should join the U.N., at a recent youth conference on civil problems. He maintained that joining the U.N. was not only a question of solidarity with the world community but also a question of preserving our vital interests within the U.N. organisation. Switzerland should avoid keeping at a distance from U.N. activities when