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: - (1974)

Heft: 1698

Artikel: A paradise which turns out to be hell

Autor: [s.n.]

DOI: https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-689756

Wehrmacht had passed round the Maginot Line. The third decision, by far the most important and daring, concerned the "National Redoubt". It fully applied the principle of troop concentration in the realisation that by holding to geographically limited but easily defendable objectives comprising all the Alpine routes of stragetic importance to potential aggressors, the Army was offering a better protection than by spreading out thinly along the border. The fourth decision, taken in the autumn of 1944, was to redeploy the Army along the border to conform to the completely new pattern of forces in Europe and to the movement of a battle that was following the border from east to west.

These decisions were the right ones since the essential goal – to preserve Switzerland from war – was attained. They were also adapted to available means. Guisan's wisdom was to resist the temptation to make preparation for a war of *movement* for which there wasn't sufficient equipment, and to fully use those assets which were available, above all the *terrain*..

Peace was thus won. Guisan could have gloried on a political and strategic success for which he was so largely responsible. His greatness was to assume responsibility without a claim to glory. This was the mark of a true soldier.

(Photograph by courtesy of Ringier Swiss Illustrated)

A PARADISE WHICH TURNS OUT TO BE HELL

Mr. Marcel Rey, Director of the Lausanne Relief Centre for Drug Addicts, went on a month-long mission to Nepal and India at the request of Swiss diplomatic officials on the Indian sub-continent concerned with the repatriation of an increasing number of young Swiss who set out for this distant land with the dream of finding a paradise free of all constraint, but who in fact end up there as complete wrecks.

"After a month in Nepal, I could no longer bear the terrible sight of young drug addicts from the west, many of them Swiss, virtually dying on the spot," he reported. "They have no money, not even enough to pay for the squalid hotels of Katmandu, and live in parks. They survive on their daily injections of morphine."

The problem of these young wastrels has worried the authorities for some time, and the public's awareness of the situation was aroused last year by the repatriation of a few drug addicts found in India in a pathetic state. The Political Department was submerged by calls from the embassies in Afghanistan, Pakistan, India and Nepal, all countries lying on the drugs route, calling for help in dealing with these young people.

According to a despatch by the Swiss Telegraphic Agency, the Political Department is looking for specialists who could decide which young drug addicts should be repatriated. Mr. Rey stated in his report that these hippies lived even more marginally out in the East than they did in their native Switzerland. They had left their homeland moved by dissent and refusal of the realities of life, and turned out to be "the only ones that complain when they have to queue to buy postage stamps, and the only ones who are as unsatisfied over there as in Switzerland."

Many of these young Swiss present an additional problem to embassy personnel because they are without passports, having sold them. They are so destitute that they survive on begging and

"Spanischbrötchen"

The origin of the name of this speciality of Baden, a spa in the Canton of Aargau, is not quite known. It was chiefly during the 18th and 19th centuries that the "Spanischbrötchen" (literally translated "Spanish Buns") enriched this jovial spa. The Zurich poet and painter David Hess wrote in 1815 in his work "Badenfahrt" (trip to Baden): "Most of the guests of the spa like to improve their breakfast with 'Spanischbröchten', a baker's speciality of the spa. Some do not hesitate to engulf each morning, as hot as possible, five or six pieces of this rich and indigestible puff paste. So that friends and relatives at home may enjoy this delicacy as well, they fill big boxes with it and send them by messenger. Large supplies are also taken along by guests when leaving and after a few weeks they wonder why they did not benefit more by their cure and had an upset stomach."

According to David Hess, an incredible quantity of those light but rich buns was consumed. Some 720,000 "Spanischbrötchen" were reportedly sold in Baden each summer. This consumption might have been reduced, had the guests known where their favourite delicacy was kept, namely "in the kennel laid out under the big staircase leading from the courtyard to the inn," as David Hess maliciously put it.

Did the Zurich poet intentionally fail to mention that, after Baden, his home town was the biggest consumer of the buns which he so maligned? According to the chronicle, young boys and girls from Baden started to run the long road to Zurich in the early morning hours "long before cockcrow", so that the ladies and gentlemen of Zwingli's town may have the "Spanischbrötchen" still hot and on time on their breakfast tables. Those daily dawn runs to Zurich came to an end in 1847 when Switzerland's first railroad, which ran between Zurich and Baden, took over the transport of this delicacy and as a result became popularly known as the "Spanischbrötlibahn", i.e. the "Spanish-bun railroad."

this adds to the local mass of people who have no other way to survive.

In Mr. Rey's view, the criterion for repatriating a young Swiss at tax-payer's expenses should lie in his "change of mind." Like the prodigal son, he should be able to say "Switzerland is a nice place after all." He should have plans for the future, and hopefully, the will to carry them out.

THE LIMITS OF COMMON OWNERSHIP

The *Financial Times* devoted an analysis on the Scott Bader Commonwealth on the eve of the Ernest Bader 1974 Lecture which took place at the beginning of November. We reported on the Scott Bader Commonwealth, the most important and oldest experiment at industrial co-ownership in Britain, in our issue of 13th September. The Scott Bader Commonwealth was founded in 1951 by a compatriot, Mr. Ernest Bader, who abandoned the chance to become inordinately wealthy by giving the shares in his successful chemical company to a holding company, the Commonwealth, owned by all its employees.

The *Financial Times* article by Roy Levine recognises that this system has proved successful, indeed the most successful in the chemical industry, by most financial yardsticks. Thus the employee turnover at Scott Bader is about 10 per cent whereas it is 15 per cent in the chemical industry as a whole. The firm is in the top of the tables for sales per employee and return on capital employed. But this, says the *Financial Times,* quoting an economist who is a Scott Bader trustee, "does not prove that the Bader system is superior by conventional (i.e. economic) standards, it merely demonstrates that it is not incompatible with them."

The *Financial Times* finds a number of shortcomings to the system. According to Roy Levine, the impression gathered from a visit to the firm's 45-acre estate at Wollaston is one of lack of motivation. Levine feels that the Commonwealth, with its missionary expansion behind it, lacks "firm direction."

The arguments put forward against the system is that by spreading out responsibilities, decisions are slow to be made and only as a result of much questioning at all levels. It appears that not all the employees appreciate the responsibility which is vested in them. Many employees are "apathetic" and show little concern about the fortune of a company which is partly theirs. But some others do. The Secretary of the Commonwealth, quoted by the *Financial Times,* says that "instead of the pitched battle between management and union, I can give undivided loyalty to the firm, which is partly mine. I do not feel wealthier but do feel I am working for myself. This brings a sense of responsibility and hence a greater commitment which has made me a happier man." So it would appear that Ernest Bader's ultimate aim, to promote spiritual development in the working life, is attained by *some* of the Commonwealth's partners.

The *Financial Times* believes that the system operates well on a small scale. Scott Bader employs 437 people, which is already above the limit of 350 laid down in its formation. It is doubtful that its example can be applied to the rest of industry in a modern country since creating a labour-intensive industry would be economically inefficient, and reminiscent of the days of the "Great Leap Forward" in China, when innumerable villages had their own blast furnace.

Another disadvantage mentioned by the *Financial Times* is that the Commonwealth is not likely to take risks. Its profits are retained, given away to charities, and handed to employees in proportions fixed by the Constitution. The employees being mainly concerned with their share of the profits (£123 in 1973–74) would be more conservative than ordinary shareholders who know that their assets represent a risk capital that can depreciate.

The Commonwealth doesn't provide for redundancies and the *Financial Times* wonders how the problem will be handled in the face of a likely recession. Finance could also prove a problem since its profits, however high they may be, are taxed at 52 per cent, and with rising costs the Commonwealth may have to find outside resources. But, according to Roy Levine, "the most succinct judgement on the limitations of common-ownership was Ernest Bader's statement to me that 'human nature must change'. Clearly," adds the writer, "any new system must allow for human nature as it exists."

Levine ends his report by recalling that, in Ernest Bader's own words, the co-operative movement formed in 1844 "is now largely run as a conventional business . . . and there is little sense of real democratic ownership or communal management". This historical fact resulting from the weight of human nature could be inevitably repeated with the Commonwealth, which is meant to develop as a "model of a new social order demonstrating a new industrial way of life." Ending rather sceptically, Levine notes: "If that aim fails for the whole of industry, and it is arguable that it will, Ernest Bader at least deserves a monument for trying."

Some ten common-ownership firms with a combined turnover of around £1m (excluding Scott Bader, whose turnover is nearly £10m) are grouped in the Industrial Common-Ownership Movement (ICOM). The John Lewis Partnership has preferred to remain outside mainly because of its size (there are some 23,000 "partners") but it is in close liaison. Most of the member companies have been financed by an associate body of ICOM called Industrial Common-Ownership Finance which has so far attracted some £50,000, mainly from Scott Bader.