

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: - (1975)
Heft: 1700

Artikel: South African Journey
Autor: [s.n.]
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-686745>

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. [Siehe Rechtliche Hinweise.](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. [Voir Informations légales.](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. [See Legal notice.](#)

Download PDF: 16.05.2025

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

invested £30m in developing the system and has been pushed to the brink of insolvency.

The Bank's balance sheet announced on 30th September totalled 39.99 thousand million francs, a 0.2 per cent increase on last year.

INTERNATIONAL WATCH MUSEUM

At the beginning of the century, a small museum of old watches was opened in the School of Watchmaking and Engineering at La Chaux-de-Fonds (Neuchâtel — Switzerland); by 1967, owing to its steady growth over the years, it had already been enlarged on three

occasions. A few years later, it became apparent that the premises available were no longer suited to a permanent and functional display of the rich collections; consequently it was decided to build in the capital of Swiss and world watchmaking a whole new complex of ultra-modern buildings to house the new international museum. Inaugurated in October 1974, the museum was designed to be a meeting place and focal point for international watchmaking circles, unique of its kind in the world from the scientific, technical and documentary points of view. The main feature of the museum, emphasised by its architecture, is its dynamism. Placed under the sign "Man and time", it is not limited to

displaying exhibits from the past, but is also wide open to the future. After admiring the collections of antique and hand-made items and watching various audio-visual shows, the visitor is shown a workshop where old watches are restored. He then enters an information area which introduces him into the heart of contemporary watchmaking. The section "Modern Times" shows all the production sectors in existence today and the latest technical achievements, while a documentation centre offers those interested in an opportunity to consult the specialised library. In this way, every visitor to the museum, whether amateur or professional, can relive the wonderful history of timekeeping.

SOUTH AFRICAN JOURNEY

by the Editor

For the past three years, I have been fortunate in being able to opt for rather ambitious holidays. I have given accounts of these holidays in past issues of the *Swiss Observer*, and some readers may remember my reports on the Swiss of North Africa in 1972, and some aspects of Swiss presence in India as seen during a stay in that country in October 1973.

Last year, I decided to have a look at a most controversial country, whose political system never fails to make people emotional in social conversation: South Africa. I took the decision to go there as early as June, since it was only possible to go there for a manageable expenditure by buying the ticket ninety days in advance. I was over there for five weeks during November and December — an ideal time because it is summer in that part of the world while the gloom of winter has fallen on the British Isles.

Swiss business in S.A.

During that trip, I naturally had my eyes open for signs of anything Swiss. Without going out of one's way, it was easy to see that there are strong links between Switzerland and the Republic of South Africa. British Airways have obvious commercial reasons in having their daily route between London and Johannesburg pass through Zurich. The Jumbo Jets used for the journey pick up a fair number of Swiss at Kloten. Some alight at Nairobi for a Safari holiday, but many others continue to Johannesburg, which has a large and active Swiss community. The Swiss can also take Swissair. Our national airline has a twice-weekly connection to Johannesburg via Kinshasa, and uses its new fleet of DC10 Trijets for this purpose.

I suppose that only a minority of the residents of Swiss origin in South Africa are South African citizens. It is

likely that most of those who live there have come within the last ten years, which have seen an unprecedented economic expansion in the country. Certainly, most of the major Swiss firms are represented in South Africa and many have manufacturing plants there. Those that we saw by driving in the Johannesburg area with factories are Sulzer and Sandoz. But companies like Brown Boveri, Kuoni, Nestlé, Schindler, Ciba-Geigy and the major banks have establishments in the country. Johannesburg has several Swiss jewellers. Swiss watches are advertised everywhere on luminous displays and it seems that these watches are more firmly established in the South African market than their Japanese competitors. Moreover, piles of "Hero" tins can be seen in supermarkets.

Johannesburg also has a chain of Swiss confectioneries and one or two Swiss restaurants. Cape Town has a Swiss restaurant. Even Windhoek, capital of South West Africa, has a "Swiss Cleaner" standing on the main street. A tall, glass and steel building above the M1 Motorway near Johannesburg, housing the offices of several companies, is called "Helvetia House". Several private residences in the city have the same name.

The work of missionaries

Long before South Africa had become a business attraction, the Swiss had come to the country as doctors and missionaries. One of the oldest missionary hospitals of South Africa was built by a Swiss at Elim, Northern Transvaal, about a hundred years ago. I spent several days in the area and met several Swiss members of its medical and technical staff. The oldest missionary post to be set up by the Swiss Mission in South Africa stands about twenty miles away and is still run by a Swiss, the Rev. Theo Schneider. Many South Africans of Swiss origin are in fact the children of missionaries. We met one of them, Dr.

Jean Francois Bill, at the Federal Seminar of Theology at Alice, Northern Cape province. At the nearby Fort Hare University, which is one of the three black universities of South Africa, a South African Swiss, Mr. Marco Brutsch, is helping students from the Ciskei Homeland to get better yields out of their maize fields.

I spent nearly half of my stay in South Africa in Johannesburg. This is a huge and expanding city. Most of it is a vast expanse of residential suburbs with jacoranda trees lining plush avenues with villas in the midst of green lawns with private swimming pools. Johannesburg is the business and industrial centre of the republic. It is at the heart of a region known as the Witwatersrand extending up to Pretoria, 30 miles to the north, and Vereeniging and Sasolburg to the south. This area is highly industrialised and can be compared to the British Midlands or the German Ruhr.

This is where the bulk of Swiss residents in South Africa live. There are over 5,000 of them in Johannesburg's Consular district. One is also surprised to see so many cars with a "CH" sign on them in the City.

The Swiss of Johannesburg like to see each other and to meet in a patriotic setting. This differs considerably from other countries and I would include Britain among them where Swiss expatriates have by now merged with the local population for most of their social life. That the Swiss of South Africa should have adopted a different pattern is due to the social set-up in the country. The situation is similar to America, where a great many different national communities both join in the "melting pot" and maintain their original identities. An American will always be keenly aware of his origins and join German, Swedish, Russian, Polish, Swiss or other groups. Likewise, the many national communities of South Africa do not see themselves as purely South African. They are German, Dutch, Italian,

Swiss immigrants and will find a sense of belonging by meeting people of similar origins. In fact, the real South Africans, those who wouldn't be prepared to live anywhere else, are the Afrikaners. These are the people who settled in the country originally and who run it politically.

Club life

Before leaving for South Africa I had obtained the addresses of a few people. Some were Swiss and one of them, Mr. J. A. Girardin, who has been farming 450 hectares of land in Northern Transvaal since 1926, offered me his hospitality for a few days. This gave me a fair glimpse of rural conditions. It wouldn't be offensive to say that the system over there is quasi-feudal, but one must say that the African labourers who work the land for a maximum of £17 a month do not appear too unhappy. They are given land of their own to cultivate over weekends and seem to be happy enough at the present order of things. For how long is another question. At any rate, it was a new experience to enjoy so much respect and have older men speak to you with doffed hats!

Since the Swiss of South Africa like to meet among themselves, they have established clubs in several large towns. There are such clubs in Johannesburg, Pretoria, Durban, Port Elizabeth and Cape Town. By far the most important Swiss Club is the one at Johannesburg. I passed by it quite by chance while driving from Kyalami to Halfway House, on the northern outskirts of Johannesburg. A simple "Swiss Club" sign points towards a dirt road (see picture) and several more such signs lead the newcomer over some two miles of muddy track crossing through development land.

The Swiss Club has brand-new premises and vast grounds around them. Having parked on a plot that could accommodate a good one hundred cars, I knocked at the first door I saw. A coloured female employee led me through a huge kitchen and a bar to the Clubhouse Manager, Mr. H. Bleuler, who in turn presented me to the full-time Club Secretary, Mrs. Pam Mai, for further information about Swiss activities in Johannesburg.

From what she told me, I gathered



Signpost to Swiss Club in the countryside north of Johannesburg.

that the Swiss Club was a bustling affair. Some facts will point to this: the Clubhouse has an Assistant Manager and twelve full-time black staff. Its dining room can cater for up to five hundred people. The restaurant and bar are always open. Its sports premises include a swimming pool and a football pitch.

This Clubhouse is the meeting place of the Swiss Society Helvetia which has 800 members. Two associated groups, the Swiss Male Choir and the Swiss Rifle Club, also meet at the Clubhouse. The Clubs part of the Swiss Society are the Chess Club, the Gymnasts Association, the Tennis Club, the Swiss Ladies Club, "Pro Ticino/Grischun", the "Swiss Bears Ice Hockey Club", the Soccer Club, the Section Romande and the Swiss Riding Club.

A short visit was enough to see that the place was active enough. There was movement to and fro; chairs were being moved in the lobby and Swiss-German chatter could be heard in the bar. A dinner for 300, given by a departing Swiss executive, was being prepared for the evening.

A glance at the monthly news-brochure of the Swiss Society told

of the many events planned for the month of November alone. Among them was a two-day chess championship, a gymnastics contest, a picnic and a Christmas party for the Maennerchor, and a Sports Festival. The brochure was advertising bridge lessons at the Club. Another interesting event was the weekly family dinners. Its menus were published in advance in the magazine, which also advertised group flights to Switzerland organised by the Society.

I asked the Secretary on the position of the average member towards Separate Development. The general attitude was a progressive one and if the Swiss of Johannesburg could vote, they would support the growing Progressive Party. This Party condemns most forms of apartheid and is in favour of giving the blacks "qualified franchise", that is, allowing those with adequate education to vote.

The foreigners and the non-whites

Most Swiss are concerned about the political situation in South Africa, but, like most whites in the country, know that there is nothing they can do about it.



TRAVEL WEEKLY TO AND FROM SWITZERLAND AND ENGLAND

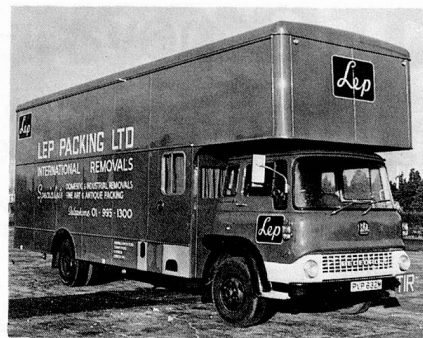
Providing DOOR TO DOOR SERVICES with vans specially equipped to carry

- Household Removals.
- Exhibition Goods.
- Works of Art. — Machinery.

For full information contact

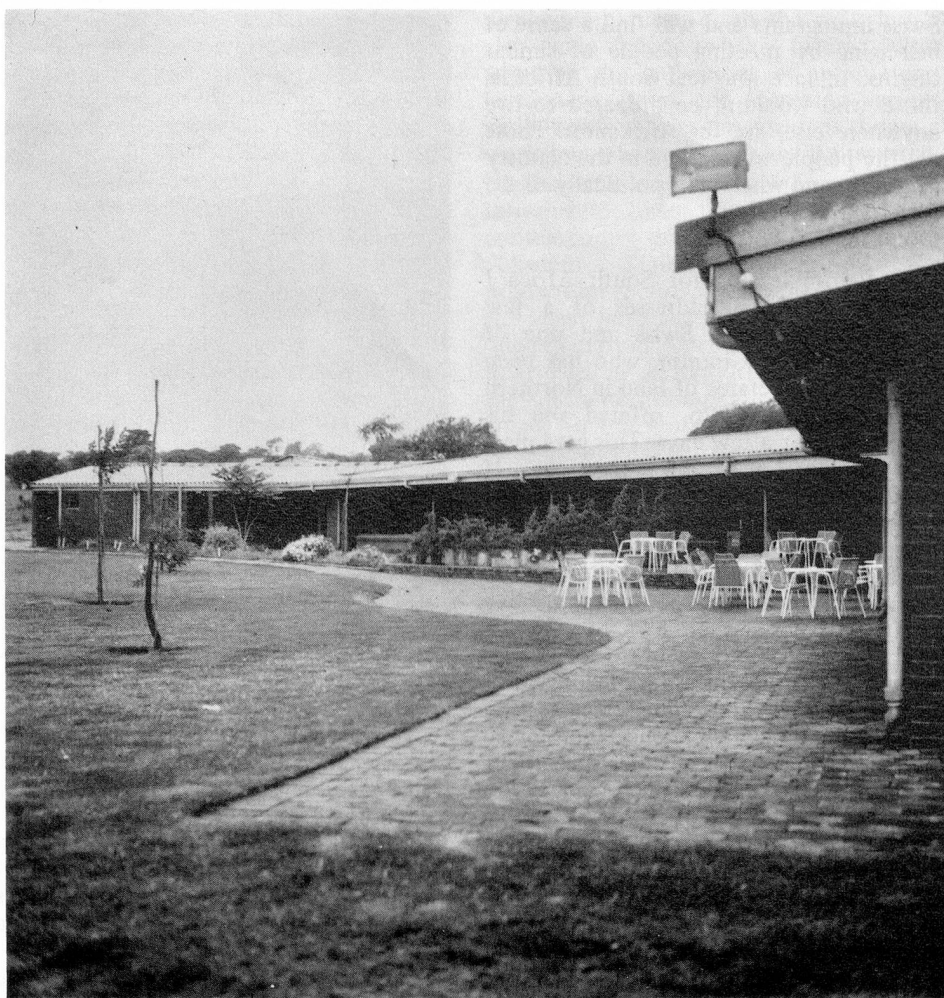
In Switzerland FRITZ KIPFER, Statthalterstr. 101, 3018 Berne. Tel: 031/55 50 55. Telex: 32693

In England LEP PACKING LTD. Corney Road, Chiswick, London W.4. Tel: 01-995 1300 (Ext. 110) Telex: 23944

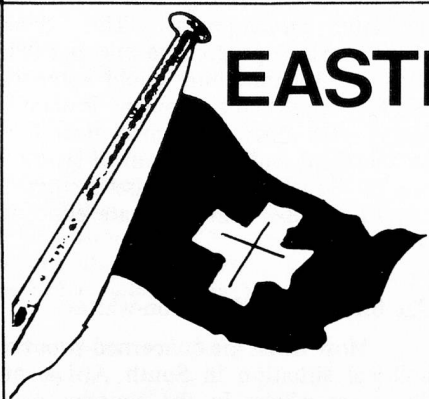


Like most people, they have to live with it and find an adequate response. This can range from outright support to the system (with the help of various rationalisations to which the Afrikaners abide the most strongly) to strong resentment and moral unrest. Whatever their political view, most established Swiss appear to be ready to leave the country if and whenever they have to. There is acute awareness that the situation as it prevails today will not last everlastingly, since the four million whites are outnumbered five to one by the non-white population of South Africa.

The premises of the Swiss Club are out of bounds for blacks in accordance with apartheid by-laws. Mrs. Pam Mai said that the most vocal supporters of separate development among the Swiss community were the least educated. This fact is not surprising and is met in other discriminatory situations. People from the lower classes get a social boost when they arrive in South Africa. They can afford to live like the middle classes and are in well-paid positions of command. Although there are great differences of status between them and, say, an Afrikaner university professor at Pretoria University or a British-Jewish businessman in Johannesburg, the white-black polarisation has the effect of putting ex-working chaps on the right side of the barriers. This fact counted as much as his trebled wages to a man I met from the North of England. He had just come back from a holiday in his



Rear view of Swiss Club and terrace.



EASTER IN SWITZERLAND

(ALSO ALL THROUGH THE YEAR)

Flight
arrangements to:

Zurich – **£42**

Geneva – **£40**

Berne – **£40**

Basle – **£40**

Jet aircraft
departures: daily

FOR RESERVATIONS and DETAILS

KEYLINE TRAVEL LTD., (3rd Floor)
28 CONDUIT STREET,
LONDON W1R 9TA. Tel: 01-499-5941

homeland and still shuddered at the old class hang-ups which were revived during his stay.

At the time of my visit, the third anti-foreign initiative had just been rejected by the Swiss people. The Swiss community in Johannesburg had been following these developments closely and appeared to be shocked by the fact that their fellow men at home should have seriously considered expatriating some 500,000 foreign residents. Mrs. Pam Mai said that they had the feeling that their compatriots were no better than the South African in their behaviour towards the non-whites. The implication was, I think, partly to justify the political set-up in South Africa and the participation of the Swiss in the fruits of Separate Development. The argument seemed to be: "How can the Swiss criticise South Africa for its apartheid policies when they are prepared to force half a million people out of the country?" The resemblance between the foreign labour situation and the black labour situation in South Africa explained why the progress of the third initiative was followed so closely by the Swiss of Johannesburg.

A journey overseas also brings home the importance of the Swiss short-wave services. All the Swiss I have met listen to this service. Although the English-speaking press appears, so far, to be fairly independent, the news material on the radio bears a heavy government imprint and foreign broadcasts are a vital source of objective world information.

Before closing this report, I will venture to say a few words about life in South Africa, although this has nothing to do with Switzerland.

As everyone knows, life is conditioned over there by the existence of a vast majority of blacks, coloureds (mixed blood) and Asians, whose very numbers are considered as a serious threat to the civilisation of the minority. The way devised to handle the problem by the Nationalist Government, which has held power continuously since 1948, was to legalise discrimination in every sphere and build up the vast framework of apartheid, or "Separate Development".

The Colour Bar

As a result, blacks, coloureds and Indians were made to live in their special

townships and each group given a special status. The blacks, who are by far the most numerous (there are about eighteen million of them against two million coloureds and a million Asians), are the worse off. Their townships are not as well built as those of the other groups. They are paid less and on average earn twelve times less than the whites (up to twenty times less in the mines). They can't get qualified jobs on account of the Colour Bar, they can't live where they choose, they can't own property in white areas (87 per cent of the land), they are for the most part condemned to migrant status and to see their families three weeks a year, they can't go in a white restaurant, they can't use white buses ... and so forth.

The blacks are therefore made to lead a life of their own. They have their own townships, which are out-of-bounds for whites. They organise their own football, tennis and golf championships. They use their own swimming pools, bottle-stores with Bantu beer, beaches, camping sites, hotels, theatres and cinemas. They have their own newspapers, their own radio programmes, their own banks, post offices, churches, libraries and hospitals. They have their own homelands (Bantustans) endowed with their own legislative assemblies.

Apartheid is certainly a reality. But there are innumerable flaws. The separation can't be watertight for a host of reasons. The two communities have to meet and need each other in every sphere of economic activity — a rather important part of life. Therefore "Separation" doesn't hold in the economic life. More importantly, "Development" is a one-sided thing applying above all to the whites. The standard of living of the blacks has declined over the years and no serious observer of South Africa believes that homeland development will bring the answer to economic injustice in the Republic.

List of impressions

Unfortunately, any detailed discussion of apartheid would lead us rather far. The subject is well commented by the Press and analysed by countless books. I shall limit myself to some impression gathered during my tour. Here are the main ones:

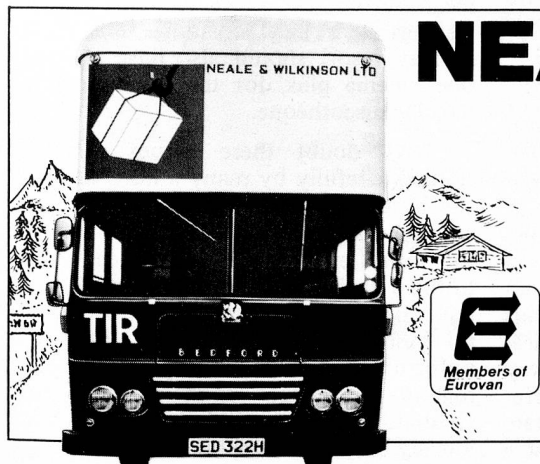
The system is very strong indeed and is a long way from collapsing. It is possible to live as a white man and completely ignore the way the other people live and feel. Apartheid is a "way of life" simply accepted by the minority and most of the non-whites. The system "works" and the whites like to stress that there is less social strife in South Africa than in Britain.

There is no single white opinion, but a wide spectrum ranging from the rabid racialism of the latecomers and the suprematism of the traditional Afrikaners to the anxiety of many young South Africans who are seeking to emigrate. These people consider the country as doomed. But the general feeling is one of complacency and of "letting live". Another widespread belief is that "change" is on its way and that "everything will be put right in good time". This, however, is *not* my impression.

The blacks do not appear to be unhappy or hateful, if their laughter and kindness to foreigners is anything to go by. There seems to be more joy of life among the poor blacks than among the overfed white suburbanites. The resentful blacks are to be found among the young and semi-educated. While their numbers are bound to grow, they are still a small minority.

To develop the above theme it can be said that hate has not yet set in the hearts of black people (although the story may be different for the coloureds). There is an immense capital of good will and very little political awareness. It is said that a white man would be risking his skin if he took a walk in a black township. My experience of such townships is different and I am inclined to believe that if a white man is attacked by a gang in a township it is mainly on account of the possible contents of his wallet. The black delinquency and drink problem cannot be linked directly to anti-white resentment. Moreover, religion plays a great role in black community, as witnessed by the many black churches and sects.

There is a great deal of passivity and acceptance by the blacks. They are fully aware that the machine guns are held by the other side — and this inhibits all ideas of a revolution.



NEALE & WILKINSON LTD

Run regular road services to
Switzerland and other European Countries

78 BROADWAY, STRATFORD, LONDON, E15 1NG, TEL: 01-519 3232.
TELEX: 897666. TELEGRAMS: 'EVERYWHERE' LONDON E15 1NG

Bournemouth:
45 Hill View Rd.,
Ensby Park,
Bournemouth,
Hampshire,
BH10 5BH.
Telephone:
0202 58521.

Gloucester:
5 Andorra Way,
Churchdown,
Gloucester,
GL3 2BS.
Telephone:
(Churchdown)
0452 712595.

Harrogate:
2 Leadhall Cres.,
Harrogate,
Yorks.
Telephone:
0423 81678.

Liverpool:
3 Victoria St.,
Liverpool,
L2 5QA.
Telephone:
051-236 8741.

Manchester:
21 Chapter St.,
Newton Heath,
Manchester,
M10 6AY.
Telephone:
061-205 4113.

Southampton:
Union Castle
House,
Canute Rd.,
Southampton,
SO9 1GE.
Telephone:
0703 23445.

A Member of the Constantine Group

The white man runs the show and the black man is there to work for him and sustain his way of life. However good and forthcoming white employers may be, the system in which they have to operate amounts to glorified slavery. It helps to develop feelings of technical superiority among whites, and stifle all sense of responsibility and enterprise among blacks. A psychological vicious circle develops: the whites are, in effect, better performers and the blacks hardly ever develop pride and responsibility in their work. They are indeed alienated from its purpose. Perhaps 70 per cent of racist feelings among whites stem from the poor performance of the blacks under them. This also helps to perpetuate a kind of relationship where it is natural for a black to cheat his boss when he can and where it is a must for the latter to wield a big stick. Liberalism appears as a false attitude under the circumstances.

There is an immense need for *justification* among the whites, and particularly among the Afrikaner majority. They will go out of their way to show their visitors all the good things they are doing for their black brethren and blush whenever sceptical remarks are slipped in the conversation. The fact is, they *are* doing quite a lot, but it is *for* and not *with* the blacks, and of course, on their own terms. These people are unaware of their dictatorial attitude. It is obvious, in their view, that decisions have to be taken for the blacks because the whites know what is *good* for blacks. It goes without saying that what is good for blacks must also be good for whites.

South Africa is a remarkable economic success. South Africans like to boast that they produce 90 per cent of the steel made in Africa and possess well over half its motor cars. Similar statistics apply to all industrial goods and one cannot deny that South Africa is an outstanding capitalist success due to the enterprise of its white minority and the sacrifice of its black and coloured labour. However, it is true that the black standards of living in South Africa are still among the highest on the continent (wages average £50 a month). One is aware that a revolution or remittance of political power to the majority would put this achievement in jeopardy because the blacks haven't really adopted the white man's entrepreneurial way of doing things. But one of the many contradictions in the whites' attitude is to say: "The blacks will never be able to run the country until they reach our level of civilisation" and despising them because they haven't reached this level while *at the same time* imposing a system of "separate" development which prevents the blacks from being "like the white man".

"See it for yourself . . ."

Defenders of South Africa invariably say to their critics that they have no right to speak if they haven't been there. Having been there myself (admittedly for a short time, but long

enough to see many things the average South African would never dream to visit) I can say that the system is as iniquitous as I thought it was before my journey. However, a journey like this *does* help one to understand the magnitude of the problems of this country and especially the psychological realities involved. Human beings need security and roots. Life is good out there and the whites have worked hard for it. One can well understand that they should strive to keep it. Selfishness is human and I don't think history has shown many examples where enlightened perception of the future has overcome immediate self-interests. History tends to progress under the weight of human passions.

This looks well like being true of South Africa. For the moment, the non-white majority are not organised and not conscious of their condition. The

whites are safe for as long as this lasts and it stands to reason that future progress will come in response to black pressure. Despite its recent declarations, the present government is not in a yielding and altruistic mood. It will require more than an expulsion from the United Nations. One thing is sure, the Nationalist rulers of the country are a little "lost" these days. Prime Minister Vorster's recent interview on the BBC, which was widely reported in South Africa, showed just how touchy Pretoria's leaders are.

A visit to South Africa enables one to have more understanding for human failings. One becomes aware of the psychological chains which entertain a fundamentally unjust system. Because of that, it is no longer possible to condemn South Africa outright like so many of our latter-day radicals.

P.M.B.

LETTER FROM SWITZERLAND

by Gottfried Keller

Some time ago the various agencies abroad of the Swiss National Tourist Office had been asked to establish — in their respective countries — what kind of wishes tourists might have or what kind of amenities might attract them to a particular Swiss mountain holiday resort. Amongst people who uttered such wishes were Germans, Americans, Austrians, Danes, Britishers, South Americans, Italians, Scandinavians and some more. Some very interesting ideas and trends have come to light, which were published in a Zürich newspaper. According to this survey, practically all those asked have stipulated that the ideal Swiss mountain resort should be "small, idyllic, in the chalet style" and without large concrete blocks of skyscrapers. According to a South African there should be Edelweiss and Alpenrosen right in front of the chalet and one should hear the music of the cowbells. Some people have opted for "villages and scenery like on a picture postcard", others want swimming pools and tennis courts, the latter coverable in case of rain, yet others wish for baby sitters and good local maps for excursions, these with distances well marked and indications in foreign languages. One rather amusing reply asked for "a little more Gemütlichkeit" and "a little less business sense" in the shops. A good many replies show a definite trend towards holiday flats and even towards youth hostels and thus away from the hotel with fixed meal times. These, it is stated, should anyway be more flexible. Hotels should offer demi-pension and to each room there should be a WC and bath, or at least a

shower. Some people have asked for organised games and hostesses, others for botanical or geological excursions, yet others for conferences and, in winter, "organised après-ski". Proximity of the resort to airports is also an expressed wish, furthermore "absolute quiet and no building noise". The younger generation has considered first-class hygienic and sanitary installations in youth hostels and camping places as of very considerable importance.

Eating is also very important when on holiday. The so-called "international cuisine", as offered nearly everywhere, is not much in demand. What some people want is described as "typical local Swiss food", which for some seems to mean Fondue or Raclette, and for some others "Bratwurst mit Röschi". Some propagate self-service, others "service of a more personal kind". What exactly is meant is not quite clear, but it might well mean service by an ever-smiling pretty waitress in a local costume. The ideal holiday resort should also have at least one cinema plus, for the youngsters, a dancing-discothèque.

No doubt these wishes will be studied carefully by many a hotel-keeper and by the managers of tourist offices of many a Swiss mountain resort. Some of the wishes expressed can quite easily be fulfilled at little cost. But some others — no concrete blocks and no skyscrapers, no building noise — cannot. Because, unfortunately, more than one lovely spot high up in the alps — in the Valais, in the Grisons, and in some other regions — has already been spoilt beyond repair.