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# THE SWISS WOMAN TODAY

In 1966, a working party of the Swiss National UNESCO Commission began a sociological enquiry into the position of the Swiss woman. Two years later, the Sociological Institute of Zurich University was given the task of preparing the report. The Federal Council was asked to study the project and decided to give financial support for it to the UNESCO Commission.

The report is ready and the Federal Council has accepted it for submission to the Federal Parliament. Consultative procedure has been set in motion, and a number of books, articles and essays have since appeared.

The basis of the report is formed by statistical data from the federal census and the result of an enquiry amongst married couples and single women between 20 and 65. It is the first sociological analysis of this kind in Switzerland.

Various aspects were taken into consideration, highly developed Cantons (Zurich, Berne, both parts of Basle, Schaffhausen, Aargau, Zug, Neuchâtel, Vaud and Geneva), and less well developed ones; local conditions; communes with a large number of self-employed citizens were called traditional, those with very few, modern town and country, age and income groups, nature of local earnings conditions, etc, all were taken into account. After deducting unusable interviews and addresses, the number of those used in the project were 964 couples and 629 single women.

The authors of the report maintain that there exists discrimination against women in Switzerland. They distinguish between two kinds, inside the family where the distribution of authority and power is uneven between man and wife, and outside it where women have it more difficult in society, education, work and politics than men. An important factor in woman's position is the load she carries in her role. Working mothers are usually overloaded, married women without a job generally show a load deficit. Both situations result in stress and tension.

## Education as starting-point

The difference in the social position between man and woman begins with education and vocational training. In higher schools, with the exception of Geneva, the proportion of girls is smaller than that of boys. At university level, the proportion of women at the Federal Institute of Technology (ETH) and the Institute of Economic Science in St Gall (HSG) is minute, whereas at the faculties of arts at the universities it is relatively

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*This extract is based on a report in Bulletin published by the Swiss Embassies in Washington DC and Ottawa, Canada.*

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high, an indication that university training for women tends to be looked upon as an enhancement of individual status rather than a need to take on a certain function in society.

Outside work of the married woman generally depends on economic necessity: the extent (full-time or part-time) hinges on the age and number of children. It has been established that taking up work again is on the increase after the age of 35. The majority of working women are in subordinate positions, often because of a lower educational level. Generally, they work in jobs considered specifically suited to women, and which have a lower occupational prestige. In all fields of occupation women earn roughly one-quarter less than men in comparable positions.

In urban conditions, women's educational level is noticeably higher than in rural contexts. In towns, the difference between male and female is of less importance than in a small locality where the place of the individual in the social strata is defined more precisely. Mobility and chances for development are thus greater in larger towns.

## Woman's role in marriage

The distribution of the parts played by husband and wife in marriage is roughly the same as in most spheres in society. Thus the woman has mainly emotional and expressive functions with less far-reaching decisions. This traditional distribution is found everywhere in one-third to half of all the families. In urban conditions, the traditional distribution of roles is less marked. As far as power is concerned, man dominates in about 40 per cent, women in 20 per cent and in a further 40 per cent of marriages power is equally distributed between husband and wife. In very large towns and in rural communities, the husband generally dominates. A surprising fact is that male dominance decreases in the course of the years.

## The working woman

The extreme degrees of strain either through too much or too little stress as mentioned earlier are more acute with women than with men. The physical and

psychological strain depends largely on whether the woman has the role of mother only, or is at work, or both or neither. Generally speaking, the double role of working woman and mother is an urban occurrence (the dual role of mother and farmer's wife working on the land cannot be compared with that of an urban woman out at work). But even so 77 per cent of women with homes and children in large towns do not go out to work and remain housewives and mothers, the part generally looked upon as the most appropriate for the female creature.

It is interesting to see the attitude to women's work by both women and men, quite unrelated to the true situation. In less developed and rural parts, half the women reject it; the lower the income of those interviewed, the more emphatic the rejection. Men in all income groups reject it even more sternly, mainly as being incompatible with male prestige. In large towns, too, work for married women is generally looked upon as unseemly, but women take little notice of this.

The discrimination against women as described is not accepted by a very small number only of those affected. Many women still look upon male dominance as absolutely just and right. One cannot overlook, though, the growing number of those women no longer accepting this traditional attitude.

There are two kinds of norms of discrimination. One is that woman is inferior to man, and the other that woman is different from man. Those upholding the latter, try not so much to achieve equality with men, but to get proper recognition for women where they do a good job, and to find the right distribution of roles for the two sexes.

Between 40 and 45 per cent of women protest vehemently against woman's present position in society. The personal situation is an important reason for the protest and happens most frequently amongst single women in towns who have a middling education.

## Activities outside the family

The last part of the report covers the possibilities for women who gave up work on marriage and want to take up some activities later on in politics, fashion, church; who want to improve their knowledge, or take part in social and society work.

Only few women are active in politics, obviously more in larger urban areas. Half the married women watch television daily. In Roman Catholic districts, women go to church every

week, but in rural areas too, Protestant women take an active part in church life. More than one-third of the women interviewed are members of some society or club. With regard to fashion consciousness this declines after marriage, except in large towns.

The authors are of the opinion that, although prejudice against women outside the family continues practically without change, the most important problems for women stem from inside the family. They maintain that discrimination outside the family is probably a consequence of discrimination inside the family rather than the other way round.

Finally, it is stated that the largest possible number of men and women should analyse their position. Women's organisations could play an important part in this. Without doubt, solutions would have to be found by men and women alike in order to improve the distribution of roles both within and without the family.

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#### NEW SNTO PUBLICATIONS IN EUROPEAN ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE YEAR

As a contribution to European Architectural Heritage Year the Swiss National Tourist Office (SNTO) has published an illustrated guide "Ancient castles and historic mansions in Switzerland" which deals with the subject in brief and clear fashion. A map in the appendix and small sketches show how some 90 out of a total of 3,000 fortresses, castles and ruins – often really remote places worth seeing – can be reached by public transport or on foot. The second new publication also takes the reader along paths – culinary ones this time – to historical inns and castle hotels in Switzerland. The booklet provides information on the history and services of 76 renowned hotels and restaurants and about excursions and sports facilities in their vicinity. Also mentioned are speciality dishes, from elaborate to simple but choice fare. Both publications are available in English, French and German.

#### FORTHCOMING EVENTS

**TUESDAY 21 October, 7.30 pm**, Swiss Church, 79 Endell Street, WC2, Nouvelle Société Helvétique – *Concert by the Orchesterschule der Kammermusiker Zuerich* (Youth Orchestra) and the *Iverson Consort*, London. Admission free (collection will be taken). All Swiss and their friends welcome.

**LONDON SWISS PHILATELIC SOCIETY**, 24 September, monthly meeting followed by Auction. 29 October, monthly meeting with film show. 26 November, cup competition. No meeting in December.

# AND NOW LET A WOMAN SPEAK!

In 1975, which is International Woman's Year, George Sommer, editor of *The Swiss Observer*, has interviewed a lady who has managed to combine a professional career with a measure of idealism and yet retain that quality so vital in a woman – femininity!

And who is this lady? The answer is Dr Christine A. Pickard, MB, ChB, the daughter of a Yorkshire doctor and a Swiss mother.

Not unnaturally, Christine spent many long holidays in Switzerland in her youth and got to know the country and many of her people well.

Her comments and observations about Switzerland, coming as they do from an educated woman, are therefore interesting, if sometimes slightly caustic.

She recognises her Swiss origins to the extent that she feels proud of the fact that she speaks all the national languages (except Romansch) with varying degrees of fluency.

Christine's mother, née Alice Clara Gautschi, was born in Reinach, Kt

Aargau. Her maternal grandfather was, at one time, Mayor of that town and the family roots there stretch back over many generations.

And what is it about Switzerland that she remembers with the most pleasure and, indeed, still impresses her? "Very simple", she says, "it is the closeness of the family even though it has long since dispersed".

Every 10 years they arrange a "Zusammenkunft" (the next one is due to be held in 1976) and the fact that for the last one members of the family attended from as far afield as Canada, illustrates to Christine one of the nicest aspects of Swiss life.

Although she is definitely not a "woman's libber" (she knows Germaine Greer well) she does regard the average Swiss male as being more chauvinistic in his attitude to women than almost any other civilised people although she freely admits that the younger generation is not as bad as its elders.

She prefers to describe herself as a "peoples' libber" because, as she points out, there are many instances where a man can suffer as much apparent injustice as a woman, a fact she can substantiate with various examples she met while practising as a doctor.

The most obvious, in her opinion, is the case where a man's wife dies, perhaps leaving him with young children. There is, as yet, no machinery under the welfare state for this man to be paid a pension if he should wish to give up work in order to bring up his family. He is virtually forced by the system either to put the children into care or to hire help to look after them.

Perhaps this is the appropriate spot to introduce a little more of the lady doctor's background which might, hopefully, put some of her later thoughts into better perspective.

Christine was born in Barnoldswick, Yorkshire (the town is now in Lancashire, following the re-drawing of county boundaries) and lived there until the age of 18 when she went to Liverpool University to study medicine. She qualified in 1962 and subsequently practised in Liverpool, London and later, in various parts of North Africa.

It was while she was working in Egypt that Christine discovered she had a



Dr Christine A. Pickard, MB, ChB.