

# Dialogue

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# Switzerland in the

**F**or about two years now *Swiss Review* has been reporting regularly on the reappraisal of Switzerland's history in the period during and after the Second World War. This subject is not only many-sided and controversial, but it is also of very great concern to many Swiss Abroad. As 'antennas' in the field our fellow countrymen abroad are the first to feel how things are going with media reporting about Switzerland and the Swiss image in the countries where they live. The many letters received by *Swiss Review* bear ample witness to this.

So we have decided to include two pages of readers' letters in this issue of our magazine and to devote them exclusively to Switzerland's conduct during that crucial time fifty years ago and the present bitter controversy about it. Readers will certainly understand that we cannot publish all the letters we receive and that we have to shorten most of those we do feature to allow as many of you as possible to express yourselves.

## The editors

When I heard that even the neutrality of Switzerland was in question, I boiled over. This was laughable! And this question coming from the USA, a so much larger country than Switzerland which did one of the things that it now reproaches the Swiss to have done: rejecting immigrants. Since the early twenties, Ellis Island was famous being called "The Heartbreaking Island" and, right now, the USA is making it harder for the Canadians to cross their common border..

*Madelaine Micheloud, Canada*

I have read and am rereading parts of the very interesting *Swiss Review* 5/97. Your interview with Mr. Disch has my

special attention. I wish to focus on the response to your question regarding the role of Swiss citizens living abroad. During 1997 I have written many letters to newspapers and magazines in the USA and also to the owners of a Swiss regional newspaper. The responses, or lack thereof, have been amazing to say the very least! What is most disturbing is that neither the Consulate General of Switzerland in New York, nor the Swiss Embassy in Washington, has in any way, shape or form kept the Swiss Abroad informed.

*Rolf L. Meyer, USA*

Images of Switzerland are as follows: calculable security, manufacturing precision, pharmaceuticals for the welfare of mankind, brilliant mountain railway constructions, an exemplary road and rail network, productive agriculture and landscape protection. Multilingual Switzerland is admired for the harmony reigning there. Citizens decide on important issues, and that is democracy to a high degree. As a Swiss Abroad I am always respected. Switzerland has a profile not to be ruined by polemics, not to be weakened by hard controversy about the socially beneficial optional state pension scheme. Do not leave the Swiss Abroad out in the rain.

*Carl Kauz, Germany*

I agree with the commentaries which appeared in *Swiss Review* 5/97 under 'Contradictory opinions'. For my part and that of the group of friends around us, the image of Switzerland has not been tarnished by all the noise. This is all the more true since it has been made

by individuals who are certainly not without political interests. We should remember that there are two million Jewish voters in New York.

*Pierre Bioletto, France*

I notice that these attacks have reappeared at the time when the Swiss have refused to become integrated with a Europe which clearly does not represent all the qualities and advantages which they possess – ones which have been characteristic of Switzerland ever since William Tell. Is there not a relationship of cause and effect?

*Jean Meyer, France*

I read the editorial and the forum 'Image of Switzerland' with great relief. At last a reaction – long overdue – to the international problems with Switzerland's image. But the position taken on the problematic conduct of Switzerland before and during the Second World War could have been a bit more precise. Only when there are no longer any taboos at all can positive rebuilding start, a process which has – not without justification – been damaged by the exaggerated media controversy.

*R.-M. Schulz-Rehberg, Germany*

Switzerland saved not only thousands of Jews but also resistance fighters of all nationalities, without distinction of race, opinion or religion. My husband and myself were among those refugees. We were interned in a camp near Geneva. We were fed and put up 6 or 8 to a room. We slept on the ground, covered with straw. But our lives were saved, and that is without price. In addition, the whole cost of this accommodation was paid by the Swiss people.

*Marie Haas-Verdan, France*

I do not know what the press in Switzerland writes on this subject – but conversations back home are not edifying. In Germany and where we live in Nuremberg not much is said about it. I believe that it is much more a Swiss problem.

*Margrit Kugler, Germany*

I do not share Elsbeth Guggler's opinion about how the Dutch react to the Nazi gold in Switzerland. At the university I have heard derogatory remarks even from the teaching staff. As if I

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# Second World War

were responsible for it... And I find that the media in Holland jump to conclusions without first waiting to get the facts. At all events I think that the image of Switzerland has suffered greatly in Holland.

**Sandra Haller, Holland**

Please consider: Many people besides Jews are unnerved by Switzerland's actions during the war; in fact, some of them are Swiss. Our dismay has little to do with recent clumsy reactions to the news. It looks back much, much further than five decades.

**Patrick Whelan, USA**

When Swiss Review addresses its readers on the subject of the concentration camp gold, it should not be one-sided under the extremely questionable title 'We did not enrich ourselves'. The

It was with great interest and satisfaction that I read the interview with Paul R. Jolles re the Swiss behaviour during the Second World War. I congratulate him for calling a spade a spade and telling the world some truth about Switzerland during the difficult years from 1940 to 1945.

**Jakob Knaus, Canada**

The interview with Paul R. Jolles takes an attitude to the Eizenstat Report which was long overdue. As far as the armaments deliveries to Germany are concerned, the percentage was not known to me previously. But one thing I have always known: Switzerland as a centre of agents for all the belligerents was an open book, and for the Western powers too. If arms exports had prolonged the war to any great extent, the Allies would have bombed our armaments factories very early on. It needs American senators not to be able to see the connection.

**Hermann Schroff, Germany**

When Mr. Jolles says: "We did not enrich ourselves", he indulges in the classical confusion between the mass of the people who in fact in the vast majority of cases did not enrich themselves, and the war profiteers, those who are always at their origin, i.e. people with good reputations, financiers and bankers. When he talks of our armed neutrality and tries to make us think that we owe it to our army that we were not invaded by the Nazis and the fascists, he takes us for complete idiots. **Narcisse Praz, France**

Unfortunately, many of those with grand titles today were not even wearing short pants in 1939/45. They do not even ask themselves the question of whether they would ever have worn them, or been born in the first place, in the likely hypothesis of a German invasion and the existence of a 'European Stronghold II' made up of Switzerland, the Alps, etc.

**Louis Rossier, France**

It would be very useful and necessary for the Swiss media to make known abroad everything that was done, amongst other things, to help tens of thousands of French and Belgian children, as well as the assistance given

to child victims of the war by Swiss families and foster parents during those years. I too took care of many Jewish, French, Polish and other refugees in hospital – no one talks about that. It should be said out loud, and matters of gold and money should not be the only issues.

**Lucienne Hegelbach, Belgium**

It is true that seen from a distance after nearly sixty years some aspects of the conduct of our government at the time may appear worthy of criticism, particularly to have put brakes on the influx of Jews and other refugees while accepting their gold and their money. But it should not be forgotten that our authorities had to do everything possible so that the threatened hedgehog, which was our little country at the heart of a Europe at war, could continue to exist in spite of all. At the time I was chancellor at the Swiss consulate in Lyon, and because of that I was aware of all the political and economic juggling which our federal and other authorities had to perform day after day. Also, my boss at the time and myself clandestinely brought Jews threatened by the Gestapo into Switzerland with the help of a Swiss-French dual national who was in the resistance.

**René A. Cuttat, France**

In Swiss Review 4/97 you say under "Gold Vreneli": "But now we have to ask whether it was made of Nazi Gold." This comment is in my opinion hypothetical and out of context in this sensitive issue. According to the catalogue "Die Münzen der Schweiz" (The Coins of Switzerland) no vrenelis were produced between 1935 and 1947.

**P. Guyer, South Africa**

It is now also being repeatedly stated that Switzerland supplied the Nazis with armaments worth hundreds of millions of francs. I can hardly imagine that under the watchful eye of General Guisan and all the frontier troops so many armaments could have been exported to Germany. As far as I was informed as a private soldier doing my service, two or three times we were on the highest level of alert because of an expected attack on our country. But if only a small part of what is being stated were true it would mean that we soldiers would have been shot at with Swiss guns and ammunition. I hope that things were not as bad as that.

**Walter Linsmayer, Holland** ■



magazine takes guilt upon itself by listening to those forces in Switzerland, which, in spite of definite facts, are not prepared to learn anything. By doing so it damages the reputation of Switzerland. Have the courage and take the liberty of letting those express themselves who are prepared to analyse the role of the Swiss National Bank and the Swiss big banks during and after the Second World War in a more critical and perhaps more factual way than Mr. Jolles either can or wants to.

**Alfred Sennhauser, Austria**