

Pictures of Democracy : modern communalities

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PICTURES OF DEMOCRACY.MODERN COMMUNITIES.

The federations depicted under this heading are not associations which can, like pasture-land or water-conduit corporations, look back on a past of several centuries, but which have come into existence in more recent times, some even quite recently.

1. "How a road was made and paid for". For the purpose of building a ramified road permitting the better exploitation of pasture-land and forests on the "Brienzerberg", a road-making co-operative society was constituted in 1922, with 60 abutters as its members. The cost of the road measuring 13.67 miles amounted to some £46,264. and was borne at the rate of a quarter each, by the confederation, the canton, the parish of Brienz and the said co-operative society. There was no difficulty in allotting the shares of the latter to its 160 members. In 1945 the last had paid his part and the joint enterprise has come to an end. There is nobody who would be without this road now. "I should like to see the one who dares to take it away from us" the chairman said in his last address.

2. "One of the 5000 dairy co-operative societies". The Pfaffenbach dairy co-operative society is presented as an example of how the peasants of a small district collect, to have their milk made into cheese at their jointly owned dairy.

"The Pfaffenbach dairy co-operative society is only a small example of the strong co-operative movement which has spread, in recent years and decades, in rural districts and evolved in an interesting manner. Side by side with the 5069 dairy co-operative societies there exist thousands of other agricultural co-operative societies, of which only the most frequent ones can be mentioned: 2355 co-operative societies for the amelioration of the soil, 1584 co-operative societies breeding horned, and several hundreds other cattle, 1071 purchasing and selling co-operative societies, 2297 co-operative societies for the insurance of horses, horned and small cattle, then again many co-operative societies having other purposes, like cider-pressing, viticulture, the running of a thrashing machine and the like.

These associations are for the greater part embodied in a regional or a Swiss federation. To realise that this movement has resulted in the rise of some considerable economic powers, one only has to visit the V O L G (Association of Agricultural Co-operative Societies of Eastern Switzerland) in Winterthur, with its large store-houses, granaries, drying plants, cider presses, mills, goods railways etc.

This development, however, deserves attention, not only on account of its visible growth, but also on account of its new tendency, i.e. new from the legal point of view.

What was at the origin of our state were the market co-operative societies, i.e. associations of a private character. Probably one is right in saying that our state could not have found its present form without the activity of those co-operative societies, many of which are older than the Swiss confederation founded in 1291. The state has grown out of the country people's league for mutual economical assistance, - or expressed in other words, - out of private association.

At present we witness the interesting fact of modern private co-operative societies being built into the state and about to take over public functions. Under the pressure of the agricultural crisis of the thirties, when the problem arose of mastering the milk flood and propping the prices by state subsidies, the dairy federations became obligatory organisms. By its decree concerning milk production and distribution issued in 1937 the confederation has in due form prohibited co-operative societies from quitting their federation and also individual members from leaving their dairy co-operative societies. Dairy farmers, on the other hand, can be compelled to adhere to certain dairy co-operative societies. These co-operative societies are thus deprived of one

of the co-operative movement's most distinctive traits, the liberty to unite and to retire. The farmers united in co-operative societies, the co-operative societies embodied in associations and these as members of a central federation have become tools of the state and are as such essential for the regulation of milk production and price fixation according to the state's intentions.

This trend has been stressed by the prescriptions of war-economics; through proving, in times of difficulties, pillars of the country's purveying, these economical obligatory organisms have merited an esteem that will also no doubt continue to have its effect after the war.

Such blending of state and co-operative society, which has taken place more than once in Switzerland's history, this interweaving of public and private bodies evidently originates from a spirit and a disposition of our people for co-operative community. These typical qualities result in the Swiss, whether a member of a small or a large collectivity, never being a guided subject, but co-responsible for the making of his own destiny.

LETTER FROM SWITZERLAND.

Switzerland's economic situation at the end of the 3rd quarter 1946.

Generally speaking, Swiss industry has been enjoying a period of prosperity. The excellent turn of the market arises not from the increase in the export trade, as one might think, but from many other causes, chief of which are the following: the maintenance in Switzerland of an autarcic regime owing to the shortage of imported semi-manufactured products, the heavy demand on the home market, excessive capital investment and the enormous expenditure of the State.

Nevertheless, Switzerland's present economic situation does hold a certain element of danger which the Government is striving to eliminate as far as possible. One of these factors is the shortage of labour which is causing a sort of outbidding on the labour market and giving an inflationary trend to wages and prices.

The total returns for Switzerland's export trade during the first nine months of the year show that the upward movement of exports and imports registered since the end of hostilities, has grown still more during the period under review. Imports total 2,421 million Swiss francs and are thus four times in excess of the value shown for the corresponding period last year; in volume, they are six times greater. Exports total 1,874 million francs. The considerable increase in arrivals of merchandise and raw materials in Switzerland has brought about a change in the country's trade balance; in effect, returns for the first nine months of 1945 show an overplus of 416 million francs, while this year there is a deficit of 547 millions. The present situation is far more normal than it was last year, because Switzerland's trade balance has always shown an apparent deficit, except during particularly difficult periods. This deficit is compensated by the yield on Swiss capital invested abroad, the tourist trade, international insurance business, transit trade, etc.

The increase in imports has caused an increase in the Customs revenue. The latter had fallen to a very low figure in recent years. During the first three quarters of the present year, 192 million francs were registered for Customs revenue, 145 millions more than that shown for the corresponding period of 1945. The situation of the Swiss Federal Railways has also been favourably influenced, first by the increase in foreign trade, secondly by the revival of the international tourist trade. During the first eight months of the present year, railway traffic has developed to such an extent that receipts are much greater than could have been hoped. The overplus of receipts during this period rose to 135 million francs and has made it possible to cover all invariable expenditure (payment of interest, redemptions, etc.) which, spread over the whole year, average 9.5 million francs per month.

As we have just seen, the Swiss hotel trade has witnessed the return of a fairly considerable proportion of its foreign clientele this year. The Swiss themselves have also travelled a great deal and the revival of the hotel trade, which began a year ago, has continued. For August 1946, 3,4 million night registrations were recorded, a peak never reached since 1934, the year in which official statistics were instituted for the hotel trade.