

It's the happiest of all countries

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IT'S THE HAPPIEST OF ALL COUNTRIES.

(The following article is reprinted from the January issue of the "GLASGOW EVENING NEWS" by courtesy of the Editor.)

I am writing this from the roof of Europe — Switzerland — happiest, most beautiful and most steadily-democratic country in the world, the United States not excluded.

With 4,300,000 Swiss, I am looking out across the desert of Europe, where nearly everyone is hungry and a large number are starving, a desert filled by peoples with warring ideologies, at least one of them backed up at the point of the bayonet.

The Swiss have something which the rest of the world seems to have lost — a capacity for work and pride in workmanship. It is an astonishing thing to come here from other countries in Europe and to see suddenly a whole people united in such a simple creed — a belief in the value of work, in the dignity of work, in the self-respect of it as well as in the prosperity which it trails in its wake.

Here is something which has had a profound influence on the political structure. It has produced a labour movement, but not a militant movement as we know it in Britain. It leaves its members with the knowledge that they have a stake in the land — something real which they must never jeopardise.

This is no more than the case, for many of the workers around me have their money invested in the factories in which they work, while at home they are rich land-owners with rich garden patches and in some cases even small farms. Their houses are as solid as the rest of their possessions, and they make the Briton groan as he thinks of the prefabricated junk which is going up at home.

When the Swiss think of socialism they tell you that it will be a Swiss socialism, if it comes — not a British or a French socialism. The present Government, elected three years ago, is actually slightly right of the centre, and might be called conservative socialism, with a large measure of local autonomy in the 22 Cantons.

It is interesting to note that the women here have no vote. The more diehard of the Swiss Conservatives are expecting the Reds to go secretly to work in the hope of getting women's franchise.

No wonder they think twice before they go out on strike.

Because of these things Switzerland to this day has no unemployment insurance. They only have local out-of-work benefits. The industries themselves feel responsible for the workers' welfare.

In any case, Switzerland has not known unemployment to anything like the extent that has at times, almost wrecked the economy of both Britain and the United States. To this day they have no national old-age pension — although that, as it happens, is now one of the most argued proposals that is up for debate in the Swiss Parliament.

One of the more serious problems of the country are the 60,000 Swiss who have been working abroad during the war. They have now returned and are looking for jobs of a permanent and progressive kind.

At the moment, there is a job for everyone, but the Swiss realise better than anyone that the present prosperity boom will flatten out.

Too much importance has been attached, and grossly exaggerated figures have been given, about the number of war and political refugees that have fled into Switzerland.

All told, Switzerland had some 295,500 people cross into her territory. The greatest number present in Switzerland at any one time was 115,000 in May 1945. To-day there are about 8,200 left, of whom at least half the number are Jews, most following Jewish businesses.

There were 10,000 Russian soldiers here at one time, but they have all been repatriated. Polish refugees did not give noticeably more trouble than the others.

But from another, equally reliable, authority, not Swiss, I have it that it was the Italians who gave the real trouble. They complained of their treatment.

"But, in my opinion," said this source, "the great majority of these Italian complaints were totally unjustified. The Swiss did their best to furnish them with comfortable lodgings and good food."

In Switzerland I have found the rich less rich and the poor less poor than any country I have been in — and I include in that the year and six months I spent in Soviet Russia. I can see no present social unrest or political calamity ahead, which will make these 4,300,000 sensible, home-and-country-loving Swiss accept the vicious, threadbare ideology of the Kremlin.

And that is a thing for which one day, all of stricken Europe will be grateful.



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