

The Yearbook of the N.S.H.

Autor(en): **J.J.F.S.**

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THE YEARBOOK OF THE N.S.H.

The 1956 Yearbook of the Nouvelle Société Helvétique — its title is "Die Schweiz, Ein Nationales Jahrbuch" — edited by Théo Chopard, once more places before the public a collection of specialised studies dealing with various aspects and problems of Swiss national life.

Twenty such studies make up the present collection. They have been contributed by well-known Swiss intellectuals: economists, professors, political writers, journalists. Written in German, French and Italian, each study has been prepared by an expert on the particular subject selected for the purpose; this method lends it authority and adds to its interest. One of the studies is contributed by a lady.

The chronological table of notable events, a feature of former yearbooks, is now omitted.

The central theme this year is "Switzerland ten years after the war". Against the background of this "Leitmotif" the post-war development of Switzerland, its industrial, political and social progress, and its national defence, are analysed.

The studies are all brilliantly written and represent a rich field of knowledge, thought and scholarship. We would have liked to examine them all in turn but they offer such an "embarras de richesse" that it is not possible, within the scope of a short review, to do justice to each one separately.

The Editor himself, Théo Chopard, submits a beautifully written article in which he discusses with profound thought and stimulating logic the social evolution of Switzerland through the last ten years. In the course of his notes he refers to the "national malaise", a phenomenon of recent growth which has been the source of much concern to all who have the welfare of their country at heart. The "malaise" has, it seems, arisen from a widespread but vague perception of a maladjustment, a sullen conflict, between the different layers of society, a feeling that all is not well with us. How to meet and overcome this dangerous current is the substance of Mr. Chopard's contribution.

Switzerland's foreign relations, notably those with Germany, France and Italy are treated with clarity and understanding by Walter Allgöwer, Pierre Béguin and Brenno Galli, both in retrospect and as they exist at present. From a commercial point of view as well as on ethical and cultural grounds closer friendship with these countries is advocated.

Of particular interest to the Swiss residing abroad must be Dr. H. R. Christ's thesis on the post-war development of the Swiss colonies. The available data shows that whereas in 1939 some 400,000 Swiss were living abroad, their number today is not more than 250,000. The reduction is largely accounted for by a shrinkage in Swiss colonies of the iron curtain countries and of those in the Far East. On the other hand an increase is registered in the Americas, in Africa and in Australia. A startling sidelight on the interchange of nationals is afforded by the information showing that the number of foreigners who have settled in our small country is twice that of the Swiss colonies spread over the whole world.

Mascha Oettli of Zurich writes with conviction yet with restraint on the unsatisfactory status of Swiss women in the political sphere. She presents a strong and well-argued case in support of their enfranchisement and points out the anachronism resulting from the fact that the oldest democracy in Europe persists in its denial to grant its female citizens the civic rights which women in almost every civilized nation now possess and enjoy.

Herbert Alboth is the author of an article on the Swiss national defence — "Armed Neutrality" is his headline. It is a study of absorbing interest, written with much factual knowledge and with a clear vision of the importance of the subject. In 1951, he reminds us, the Swiss army entered upon a programme of re-organisation, a programme which today is almost completed. Heavier and more modern armament was introduced including, for instance, a 9 c/m anti-tank gun and a large number of quick-firing machine guns of a new design. The mounted services have been motorised and neither aviation, radar devices and means of protection against atomic attack are being neglected; the army, in fact, as at present equipped constitutes a formidable weapon against any aggressor.

The military budget reflects the cost of this armament. In 1945 the total outlay was 907 million Swiss francs. By 1947 it had receded to 381 million but from then on it increased steadily to reach 723 million in 1955. Considerable though these sums appear to be they yet represent not more than about 2% of the country's national income and bear comparison with the 1,375 million spent yearly on alcohol and tobacco or the 1,483 million cost of the social services. Another factor worth bearing in mind is that two-thirds of the military budget flow back into Swiss private industry and that the re-armament programme has provided employment to thousands of wage earners.

We warmly recommend the Yearbook to all who take an intelligent and thoughtful interest in the progress of Switzerland and we congratulate Mr. Chopard and his collaborators on a very fine performance.

J.J.F.S.

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