

Why Switzerland has no strikes

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Objektyp: **Article**

Zeitschrift: **The Swiss observer : the journal of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK**

Band (Jahr): - **(1962)**

Heft 1422

PDF erstellt am: **27.06.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-694924>

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LETTER FROM THE AMBASSADOR

Swiss Embassy in Great Britain.
December 1962.

Dear Compatriots,

By courtesy of the "Swiss Observer", I am appealing to my fellow-countrymen in the United Kingdom on behalf of the Solidarity Fund for Swiss Abroad.

Coming at a time when our sense of social and economic security has been badly shaken by recent events in the political world, this appeal warrants the closest attention of every Swiss who realizes that the apparent security we enjoy today is only relative. In these particular circumstances it is, therefore, my duty to remind all my compatriots in the United Kingdom that the Solidarity Fund, founded in 1958, is a co-operative society of mutual aid for Swiss nationals living abroad. Its purpose is to provide financial assistance for all those who join its ranks and who, through no fault of their own, may be deprived of their means of livelihood as a result of war, internal unrest, or general political measures. According to the latest figures, the Fund has helped fellow-countrymen in 93 cases and paid them 817,000 Swiss francs. The Solidarity Fund functions not only as an insurance against loss of livelihood but also as a savings bank. The annual payments of a contributing member are refunded to him on request at the age of 65. In the case of premature death, the depositor's contributions are repayable to the next of kin. Membership of this Fund is open to all Swiss over the age of 20 living abroad and registered with a Swiss Embassy or Consulate. Moreover, any Swiss society or firm can join as a collective member.

The cost of membership is very low indeed when compared with the financial benefits provided by the Fund. A prospective member agrees to purchase at least one share in the Fund to the value of 25 Swiss francs, in addition to the annual contribution he elects to pay. Furthermore, he undertakes to pay towards the administrative costs of the Fund a sum equal to 8% of his annual contribution and to renounce all interest which accrues to the Fund. These are the only financial sacrifices a contributing member is required to make.

Recent amendments to the Fund's Statutes enable a member to insure against loss of livelihood on a larger scale than was hitherto possible.

Instead of making annual contributions to the Fund, a member can now choose to pay a single savings deposit as a life contribution on the following scale:

Annual contribution	Single savings deposit (life contribution)	Compensation for loss of livelihood
Swiss francs	Swiss francs	Swiss francs
25.—	429.—	2,500.—
50.—	858.—	5,000.—
75.—	1,287.—	7,500.—
100.—	1,716.—	10,000.—
150.—	2,574.—	15,000.—
200.—	3,432.—	20,000.—
300.—	5,148.—	30,000.—

Those who prefer not to join the Fund as contributing members can support its activities by donations, for which gift shares are issued in multiples of 25 Swiss francs.

The financial guarantee of the Solidarity Fund's resources by the Swiss Federal Government, which came into force on 20th October 1962 is, however, far more significant than the contractual improvements mentioned

above. The unanimous support given by the Federal Parliament to this co-operative assistance scheme is evidence of the will of Swiss people to identify themselves with the well-being of their fellow-nationals all over the world. In view of this, I am calling upon every Swiss in the United Kingdom whose financial means permit to demonstrate his sense of solidarity with the homeland by joining the Solidarity Fund of the Swiss Abroad. I should like to add that a whole-hearted response to this appeal could well influence public opinion at home in respect of the inclusion in the Federal Constitution of an article aimed at strengthening the position of the Swiss abroad.

The Office of Swiss Abroad in Berne has recently announced that as from 1st January 1964 the qualifying period will be extended from one year to two years; those who want to join the Fund for their own protection are therefore urged to apply soon.

More details of the Solidarity Fund are given in a special edition of the ECHO, available in German, French and English. Copies of this journal for the Swiss abroad and application forms, together with any additional information required, can be obtained from the Swiss Embassy in London or the Swiss Consulate in Manchester.

Yours sincerely,

ARMIN DAENIKER,

Swiss Ambassador.

WHY SWITZERLAND HAS NO STRIKES

By DOROTHY VAN ROSE

This year marks the 25th anniversary of an agreement which led Switzerland into an era of industrial peace — when her most important industry voluntarily renounced strikes and lay-offs.

The agreement, by the employers and workers in the machine and metal industry, brought an end to class warfare in Switzerland and wrought a fundamental change in her whole economy.

It laid down methods for the solution of labour and wage problems through negotiation and collective agreements. As a result, no single stoppage last year lasted for a full day.

Three Stages

No wage schedules or working conditions are laid down; the agreement leaves the actual regulation to the individual industries. But it does commit both sides to negotiation on wages and other problems.

Of course, the agreement does not mean that employers and workers coo to each other like lovers. Questions on hours, wages, and so on are bargained for stubbornly. But the common aim — the preservation of a prosperous economy and the rule of law — is always kept in sight.

The agreement calls for a three-stage procedure of conciliation: negotiations between employers and workers in the particular works concerned; conciliation through the representatives of organisations from both sides; and the setting up of arbitration machinery, whose decisions are binding.

Under the agreement men's wages have increased by 67 per cent. since 1937. Most industries have modernised their plants in the same period without passing any of the cost to the consumer.

With the agreement also came a marked change in outlook among both employers and employees. Previously, they were declared enemies and meetings between their leaders were scarce. Strikes were accepted as normal and from 1926 to 1936 a total of 29,056 work days were lost.

The man responsible for this change was Konrad Ilg, President of the Swiss Metal and Watch Workers Association, the largest union in the machine industry.

M. Ilg, a dedicated union man and Marxist since before the First World War, had been a member of the Olten Committee, which, in 1918, tried to force the Swiss Government to submit to its economic and political demands by a national general strike.

A Threat

It could not have been easy for a fighter like M. Ilg to acknowledge that his Marxism had been wrong.

But he must have seen the danger light in the fate of the unions in Germany, Italy and Austria. As Fascism in Italy and National Socialism in Germany, with an Austrian variation of the latter, advanced, the free unions began to vanish. The Popular Front in France was struggling against internal enemies and Switzerland, too, was seized by the contagion of political unrest.

But far-sighted Socialist workers in Switzerland were realising that the fate of their organisations was closely linked with that of democratic government, and that class warfare methods were a threat to this.

So, in 1937, when the authority of employers and workers associations alike was threatened by proposed compulsory Government arbitration in disputes, M. Ilg discussed his project of a peace agreement with Dr. Ernst Dübi, President of the Employers' Association of the Swiss Machine and Metal Industries.

"Betrayal"

Dr. Dübi set about getting the idea accepted by the Employers' Association — almost a superhuman task, for the employers were used to a different approach from the unions.

Meanwhile M. Ilg was preparing the ground within his own Association. After obtaining the approval of his central committee full information was sent to every worker. Success came when his organisation approved the agreement, already accepted by the employers.

When the agreement was made public, in October, 1937, it caused a furore among the Left-wing elements in the country. M. Ilg and his associates were accused of having betrayed the cause of the workers.

However, the past 25 years have shown that this courageous "betrayal" has been of tremendous benefit to industrial relations, and to the economic development of the country.

(By courtesy of "Daily Telegraph".)

AN UNUSUAL GIFT

The Commune of Holderbank (Aargau) was presented with an old steam engine. The Commune Council decided to let the children of the village have it as a "toy". The engine, which weighs 22 metric tons, was originally in service with the Seetal line and during the last few years it was used as a shunting engine at the Cement Works Holderbank-Wildegg, who have now made a present of it to the village. The engine will finish its life on the sports-ground and serves as a most welcome toy. Its scrap value is over Fr.20,000.—.

[A.T.S.]



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