

The path to graceful old age

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THE PATH TO GRACEFUL OLD AGE

The following has been adapted by the Editor from an article on "Spare Time and Old Age" by Dr. Frank Arnau in the *Schweizerisches Kaufmännisches Zentralblatt*.

The advances of medicine have prolonged the life-expectancy of the ordinary man. This has brought with it a number of economic and sociological consequences.

Economically, the fact that an army of non-producing pensioners has steadily grown in recent years means that the working population has to provide for the needs of an expanding non-working element. This comes about, somewhat ironically, at a time when the labour market is as tightly stretched as it has ever been and when a vast proportion of men and women pushed into retirement by law are both willing and able to continue their professional life.

The law lays down that a man or a woman is entitled to his or her pension at 65. With this "pension ripeness" they are due to step down from salaried work, however widely this may contradict from their dispositions. The law thus decrees that the age of 65 is a limit to the span of working life and a point after which human beings are no longer capable of being productive. The prolongation of life expectancy has, however, outgrown this legislative postulate. More people are able to work after 65 than ever before. The law equally fails in assuming that human nature and temperament can be contained in a legal formula. It should, therefore, be altered and made more supple. Although it is not possible at the present to graduate the performance and ability of hundreds of thousands of producers on the verge of retirement, it is in this direction that the new human sciences should investigate. In this way there will, one day, be a possibility of making sure that a man, before he is thrown into retirement, is still fit to work intellectually and physically, and thus give him the right to a job and remuneration during the years which are now devoted to idle retirement.

A great proportion of retired people are then in the physical and intellectual position of keeping their employment advantageously for their employers, and of this fraction, an important majority would dearly like to work. There are two main unofficial bodies concerned with the welfare of the old in Switzerland. They are the "Stiftung für das Alter" and "Aktion P". The latter organisation has recently published the results of an enquiry in Zurich from which it gathered that

60 per cent of male pensioners and 75 per cent of female pensioners wishing to resume a working life, did so on financial grounds.

This would show that, of two main difficulties which beset the pensioner—which are a reduced standard of living and boredom—the former was cause for most concern. Most retired people have to make do with smaller means than during their working life. The diminution of their income is made yet harder by an increased cost of living. As a result they must accept to lower their standard of living and this often proves often difficult and a cause of frustration. The most direct step which they usually take, is to move to a smaller flat (sometimes breaking up the family community). Thousands of pensioners find it hard to make ends meet and as their needs have not necessarily diminished with their entry into retirement, they would badly like to improve their livelihood with full-time or part-time employment.

Although the above statistics would tend to show the pre-eminence of the financial element, the problems of boredom and occupation remain ever present. During his working life, the average man works 8 hours, relaxes another 8 hours and sleeps during the remaining 8. In retirement there are these 8 empty hours to fill and the days of the week all look like those of a prolonged week-end.

The problem differs according to the kind of former employment and temperament. For those who are or were, self-employed, who worked on the land, who ran a family business, such as an hotel or inn, it is simpler. The ageing grandpa can always co-operate with his children in a country business and help the family to run a farm. The problem is also easier to come by for those who have actively prepared their life of retirement and know how they want to spend it. But for the majority, the day when the professional occupation is switched off suddenly comes like an icy shower. Not only is there a loss of income and occupation, there is also a loss of *status* and *human environment*. This is often coupled with the feeling of "not being useful anymore", of having spent all reasons for living. This can give rise to a distinct feeling of inferiority.

"Action P" has successfully found employment for many retired people and these efforts will continue. But the standing problems of free time occupation remain. Anybody not prepared for retirement and whose sole occupation had been his *work* will have to develop

new interests and *hobbies* if he doesn't want to perish mentally and morally. But this can be difficult. *Reading* can be an enriching and fulfilling occupation, but if one hasn't read a book in forty years of active life, it is not easy to pick up the habit. The reading of *good* books (for example the re-reading of the classics or the inexhaustible study of history) is one of the most recommendable occupations left to the pensioner. He should also attempt to develop new hobbies, a venture for which he can find ample encouragement in MIGROS's *Hobby Classes* and an abundant hobby literature suited to every ability and temperament. *Sports* should be practised with the greatest prudence. There is no speedier way to get a heart attack than to over-exert oneself in violent sports and the elderly person should never decide to practise a particular sport without prior consultation with his doctor. *Walking* is the cheapest and healthiest of physical pastimes. The present reduced rates enjoyed by pensioners with the Federal Railways are there to encourage them to move about and enjoy new scenery. Another possibility opened to the retired (although requiring minimum means) are *packaged holidays*. It is possible to reach places which frightened explorers three generations ago at a smaller cost than a stay at some European holiday resorts. It is possible, for example, to enjoy three weeks of comfortable packaged holidays on the East African coast for 1,000 francs, less than a third of the cost of a normal airline ticket to the area.

The pattern of old age employment has changed. The hours spent at the local, for example, have been greatly reduced. Old people now spend a great deal of their time listening to the radio, reading the papers and watching television. They are far more informed and concerned by current affairs than ever before, and it is also true to say that they have become more open and ready to understand the views of their descendants. But old people should not indulge in excessive frequentations with the young. It is indeed wiser for them to meet among themselves in clubs and other friendly associations as the difference in mentality and ability with the young will never be entirely bridged.

Pensioners, taken as a social group, constitute a new market. In the same way that the young, with their new purchasing power, make up a billion franc market for youthful articles. The aged are building up a rapidly expanding market which restaurants, resorts and cinemas have learnt to cultivate. Although old age is often associated with lonely destitution, there are enough wealthy retired people to generate a thriving *Old Age Business* in which America, with its luxury homes for "Senior Citizens", leads the field. But Germany is picking up. As

an example one can cite the new "Eilenriederstift" project in Hanover. Four hundred luxury apartments will be built at the cost of 35 million marks. The home will embody a shopping centre, a bank, a beauty parlour, bars, restaurants, saunas, a cinema, a TV theatre, bowling, a garage and some other extras. Whoever wishes to enjoy this hoary paradise as a tenant must hand out a down payment of

14,000 to 36,000 marks as a "settlement charge", after which the monthly rent will vary from 518 to 1,208 marks. But this includes *everything*—rent, complete pension, service, cleaning, light, heating and medical care.

If the "Eilenriederstift" should be a true indication of a new trend, then we can expect all the problems of old age to be commercialised and emerge as the ferment of a renewed prosperity.

UNCHARITABLE SWISS JAILS

A recent article in the *Tages Anzeiger* on the state of the Swiss penitentiary system showed that there were still some backward areas (not counting the in-existent right of vote of women!) in an otherwise progressive and harmonious society. The article was a review of a recent thesis on Swiss prisons by Dr. Irma Weiss which purported to demonstrate their antiquity and the outdated principles on which they were run.

Introducing her book with the sociological aspects of crime, the author discovers on the basis of current literature and numerous interviews that the criminal finds it particularly difficult to get re-integrated in society in Switzerland. A strong spirit of diffidence and contempt towards the ex-criminal prevails in Switzerland. A man with a criminal record will find it harder to find employment in Switzerland than in more lenient countries, such as the Scandinavian countries, Holland and even Britain (countries where well-known political figures are thrown in gaol and are not ashamed to write on their prison experiences). In Switzerland, a lasting stigma remains fixed on anyone who has had the misfortune of serving a jail sentence. This attitude is projected within the walls of a prison. Inmates are treated as lesser citizens with little respect for their human dignity. All of them below thirty are called "boys" (*Bürschen*) and addressed by the familiar and deprecatory "*du*" by their wardens. Their life is much harder than what the young recruit has to put up with in the Army (whose role is avowedly to mould its protegés into hardened soldiers and exemplary citizens) and they cost about the same to feed—which is not a recommendation on the quality of their nourishment and an iniquity, considering the hardness of the labour which they have to accomplish. The day in a Swiss penitentiary starts as follows:

At the first ring of the bell in the morning, everybody must get up immediately and strip to the waist, and in his shoes (not slippers) wash and comb himself, then open his cell window. The blankets are to be folded carefully and rested neatly on the bed with the pillow. The cell door is first

unlocked upon the second ring of the bell. The inmates have to place their water jug, refuse can and tin chamber pot to the right of the door, which they must then close from the inside. A few minutes later the cell is unlocked for the second time and each inmate goes in turn to the toilet with his personal chamber recipient, which he must empty and rinse, and return immediately to the cell. At the third unlocking of the door, breakfast is brought in with the daily bread ration. The inmates have half an hour to eat it and clean their plates. They must make order in their cell and dress for work, which starts at 7 a.m. sharp at the fourth unlocking of the cell.

Swiss prisoners are considered as recalcitrant children. The penitentiary institutions in which they are confined try to ingrain them with bourgeois virtues and the slogans which glare at them on the announcement boards are reminiscent of the days of *Oliver Twist*. According to modern trends, the aim of prison is not solely to punish but also to re-educate those who have strayed. Applying this principle in a particularly obtuse way, the amateur educationists of Swiss prisons try to instil what the author calls a *kleinbürgerlich-spiessiger Moralverstellung* on their inmates. Typical mottos are: "If

things are clean *around* you, then they are clean *inside* you" and "To fall is not a disgrace, but to lie about is". The Sunday programme runs as follows:

Rise at 6.30. Toilet, breakfast, polishing of shoes and Sunday service (not compulsory). *Silence in the cells*. Lunch at 10.30 *in total silence*. Supper at 4.45 p.m. Lights out at 9 p.m.

Pursuing this method a bit further, the prison wardens control all outgoing and incoming mail and censure whatever appears to them as distasteful or uncomplimentary. They thus overstep the bounds of censure, which is there to ensure that no information permitting an eventual escape is allowed to be filtered in and they impinge on the privacy and dignity of prison inmates.

Swiss prisons have very rudimentary rehabilitation services. Prison psychologists are practically non-existent and there are no specialists ready to sieve out the serious cases, such as psychopathic killers and gravely disturbed criminals. Contrary to new practises in Holland and elsewhere, no psychological help is given to inmates, thus depriving them of a vital chance of mental re-integration.

There isn't a single institute preparing psychiatrists to face criminal cases and the author strongly urges the inclusion in a normal psychiatric syllabus of disciplines like criminal psychology, criminal sociology and forensic psychiatry. This would be the shortest way of stopping prisons from being run by amateur educationists.

Eleven Swiss prisons practise the "*Dunkelarrest*" or solitary confinement of up to a month in a dark cell, with reduced rations, no correspondence and no reading matter. Switzerland actually contravenes the United Nations recommendations on minimal requirements of prisoners. But prison management is still within the preserve of the cantons, and each one of them has its own methods. Cantons regularly break the 65th article of the Constitution, which prevents bodily pun-

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