

Comment

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COMMENT

THE FIGHT AGAINST DRUGS

In its last Annual Report, the Federal Council discloses some alarming figures on the growth of crime and drug abuse among the young in Switzerland. In 1969, 521 persons were convicted for drug offences. There were 2,313 the following year, and 3,680 in 1971. The rising proportion of teenagers convicted is just as striking: They accounted for 47 per cent of reported cases in 1969, 60 per cent in 1970 and 75 per cent in 1971.

The Swiss Government suggests the following interpretation: "It is obvious that family ties have been loosened in many cases and teenagers are frequently left to themselves. It is often when they are confronted with emotional difficulties in their families, their school and their work that they lack the advice and understanding which would help them to overcome these difficulties."

To fight against this deteriorating situation, the Federal Council put forward the following proposals:

1. Transformation of the environment and the essence of teenage life. Parents should be urged not to abandon their children as frequently as they tend to do. At this level, it is the cantons which come into play, via cantonal educational departments.

2. Revision of anti-drug laws. This has already been started. Sentences against drug traffickers will be made more severe, whereas "consumers" will benefit from supervisory measures and care units.

3. Creation of a Study Group entrusted with working out a common plan of action at every level—federal, cantonal and communal. The decision

for such a scheme had already been taken in principle by the conference of cantonal education chiefs in March 1971.

The most striking point of this report is that, coming from so high up, it is remarkably "human". The Federal Council and the Department of Justice and Police, which have jointly drafted this part of the document, do not confine themselves to figures and abstractions, but put their fingers at the heart of the troubles: the deterioration of family life. This involves the disappearance of mutual understanding between parents and their children; growing doubts on the value of the family and marriage; the absence of purpose of having and rearing children; the loss of bearings of parents; the failure to fit the family in the construction of a society in which it is worth living. It is in fact the equivalent to pin-point the trouble on society's absence of purpose.

Altering the law will only marginally affect this drugs business an almost universal trend—because laws are the conscious reflection of what a society wants to be. Although they influence it, the executive of a country and the law-makers do not constitute this society. If a sizeable part of the population creates an "anti-society", the laws which define the original and traditional society, will only be abided

to by deterrents, such as embodied by the police.

Drugs are a case in point. Society has condemned them so far, and so have many responsible people who think in terms of the values of this society. But this is debateable. The principle underlying the use of drugs is "pleasure". The days are well past when pleasure was condemned. One may object that drugs are an "artificial" form of pleasure, but this is perfectly debateable, as a large slice of life is perforce "artificial", and because many respectable civilisations have in the past honoured the virtue of drugs. The other point is danger to health. There again, opinion varies according to belief in society taboos. While no one in his right mind will praise the virtue of hard drugs derived from opium, it is arguable that those derived from cannabis (pot) are no more harmful than a couple of glasses of wine. But the decision whether this statement is true (and even the findings of the scientist about this) depends on the purpose of society.

The solution to the drug problem will therefore require a consensus on the purpose of society, and to start with, a revival of social conscience. Among the young it will require a belief that there is only *one* society.

(PMB)

SWISS EVENTS

FEDERAL

The promotion of women

Late in February, the "Weltwoche" had an article written by a woman on the promotion of women in the Swiss public service. It pointed to several discrepancies between the principles sanctioned by the Swiss people in February 1971, when they gave women the right to vote on federal issues, and the attitude of the administration in respect of female promotion. The Confederation came out as a rather "imperfect" employer.

The statistics given in the article show that of a total of 110,000 public servants (federal administration, the Post Office and the Railways), there is one woman for seven men. When the first five categories of the salary scale are considered, one finds only one woman for 160 men. This is confirmed by the Federal Directory, which has the names of only 18 women out of 2,800 high officials.

Administrative personnel officers naturally have an answer for this situation. They explain that female public servants with the ability to aim for

the top jobs are harder to find than shorthand typists, and when they are available, they are more difficult to replace once they leave their jobs to care for their families. Marriage deprives them of permanency, which is a serious handicap in the federal service, where promotion is usually based on length of service. When they return to work after having reared their children, they start at where they have left off and lose all chance of promotion.

According to the author of the article, Miss Ursula Wolfbuehl, these reasons only partially explain the state of affairs in the public service. Having interviewed a number of female staff, she became convinced that higher federal executives were biased, consciously or not, and would tend to appoint a man rather than a female rival with equal ability to a particular post. Despite the many principles laid down by administrative heads of department, these prejudices tend to make them expect more sustained work, more punctuality from women than from male employees, who would be more readily forgiven for errors and eventual laxity. Moreover, feeling themselves in a