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# The Swiss Observer

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# COMMENT

## HOW TO INTEREST THE YOUNG IN POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

The problem of involving the young in politics has been given prominence in several articles appearing in the Swiss Press in the past months, the most recent instance being a full-page debate in the *Basler Nachrichten* on getting young people to join a party.

If democratic institutions are to be revived and polling attendances increased, then one should start by attracting more youths. A study of the type of person who regularly votes and those who never even return their voting envelopes has doubtless been made. It would show, I'm sure, that the 20-30 age group is poorly represented.

The most available way of instilling political interest in the coming generations is at school. This is done to some extent in primary school, where children get "Civic Education". However, the influence of school, without underrating it, is not powerful enough to turn a teenager into a responsible and politically aware citizen.

What is surprising, is that political awareness, according to most authorities, has never been so strong among the young. Yet they tend to keep away from the polls. Despite their political awareness, there is a conscious lack of interest in actively participating in the life of the community, a life governed by certain institutions.

Although little is done by the parties in the way of attracting new and younger members (with the possible exception of the *Freisinnig Party*) it is doubtful that if they did increase their effort, they would get better results. There is of course an important difficulty due to the voting age lower limit of 20, which diminishes the relevance of being an active party member under that age. But in the main, the majority of young people are somewhat wary of parties. According to a girl interviewed in the *Basler Nachrichten*, parties are "*eine undurchsichtige, unselbständige Gesellschaft . . . eine sture Ideologie oder überhaupt kein klares Konzept*". If this is what the majority of the young think, parties are obviously not given much chance. Another recurring objection among the young is that all decisions, every new law in Parliament, must go "through the parties". They would favour instead direct popular rule.

(PMB)

The masters of the past wrote in a simple style that carried the scent of the country's soil. Many young people today are fascinated by the more sophisticated style of fashionable writers and tend to reject what comes under the heading of "national literature". Such an attitude would cast away Meinrad Inglin's poetry, Max Rychner's critique and Urs Martin Strub's lyric work in one large basket. Although this is shortsighted, it may have contributed to the renewal of Swiss-German literature during the past twenty years.

## Development of French-Swiss literature

There is an important difference in the recent development of French-Swiss and German-Swiss letters. Whereas the works of German-speaking writers have become political and intellectual, those of French-speaking writers are marked by an almost Baroque love of language and the visible world. Most new works currently appearing in French-speaking Switzerland are poetical and have a touch of stylistic sophistry. Whereas German-Swiss writers keep their distance with Society and the State, the French-speaker turns with a close look to the native landscape. The most prominent examples are Maurice Chappaz and Jacques Chessex. On one side, there is critical interest for social problems, on the other contemplation. To the east, a break away from tradition, to the west, a conscious return to the masters, Ramuz, Ch. A. Cingria and Gustave Roud.

The many sidedness and tensions within Swiss letters contrast with the "reasonable norm" which seems to have been generally accepted in Swiss politics, despite a multitude of parties. This is probably the most important asset of Swiss literature.

# SWISS EVENTS

## FEDERAL

### Mr. Keller's mission to the sub continent

Mr. René Keller, Head of the Division for International Organisations at the Political Department and former Ambassador in London, returned from the Indian sub-continent in the middle of April from a two week mission, during which he had talks with Mrs. Indira Gandhi and President Zulfikar Ali Bhutto of Pakistan. (He did not go to Bangladesh as was erroneously reported in our March 24th issue).

The purpose of his mission was two-fold. First, he had to sanction Switzerland's role as intermediary between the two formerly conflicting states, which are about to resume negotiations. Secondly, his brief was to see how Switzerland could carry out her task of "protecting" the 93,000 Pakistani prisoners-of-war detained in India. On the first score, Mr. Keller's mission

seems to have been a complete success. At a press conference held on his return, he said that Switzerland's "good offices" were highly appreciated on both sides and that Switzerland enjoyed a considerable capital of goodwill in that part of the world. Berne will therefore continue for the time being to serve as a link and "letter box" between India and Pakistan. This function, although it may not appear glamorous, is nonetheless highly important and plays its part towards the resumption of normal relations between the two countries.

Regarding the problem of Pakistani prisoners, Mr. Keller was faced with India's refusal to the idea of "outside supervision". The only outside body presently allowed to have an eye on the conditions of detention of the Pakistani army is the International Committee of the Red Cross. It is understood that India has grudgingly admitted this and is not making things easy for the international body. Although India appears to have left a few doors half open, and may agree