

The Swiss birthrate is too low

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The above dam – the Léman-Hongrin dam – is the latest one of comparable size to be opened in Switzerland. After eight years of work and an expenditure of 740 million francs, it was festively inaugurated in May of last year. The storage lake confined by the dam lies in the Alps of Canton Vaud, to the North-West of Lake Geneva. The Léman-Hongrin basin can contain up to 52 million cubic metres of water and produce about 740 million kilowatt-hours of energy a year. During the night, it is topped up by a set of enormous pumps delivering each 24 cubic metres of water a second and raising it 600 metres high from Lake Geneva along an 8-km duct. The hydraulic energy thus accumulated can be used during the day, when electricity is in greater demand.

THE SWISS BIRTHRATE IS TOO LOW

A recent full-page report in the "Weltwoche", Switzerland's top quality weekly, expressed concern at the country's diminishing birthrate, which has fallen by 8 per cent since 1963. 86,067 babies were born that year, and only 67,384 in 1971. The figures for 1972 are expected to fall by another 5 per cent.

The consequences of this trend will make themselves felt in about thirty years time, when a minority of active persons will be supporting a mass of old age pensioners and retired people. There are several other aspects to the situation. The Army, for example, will find it difficult to fill its ranks in a few years time.

While the indigenous Swiss population is actually declining (there are more deaths than births), the alien population is booming; Switzerland's million foreigners have given birth to 30,000 babies in 1971, or nearly half the number of Swiss babies! Sociologists fortunately expect foreign families to follow the Swiss birth-control pattern. In a few years time, the birth rate should be equivalent in both communities as resident-foreigners become more and more integrated both culturally and economically.

According to the "Weltwoche" report, the present fall of the birthrate witnessed in Switzerland (and elsewhere) can't be directly put down to the pill. It seems that the pill has allowed families to have complete control over their new offsprings, something they had wanted to do for a long time but had not been able to achieve owing to the insufficient preventive methods available before the advent of the pill. Switzerland's growing prosperity has also had a direct effect on reducing the birthrate. Prosperity has meant more job opportunities and driven women away from housekeeping. Secondly, the taste of comfort and the easy life has pushed more and more people in to placing priority on a high standard of living, and not on children.