

Welfare office for Swiss girls

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dependence on accommodation of traditional hotels associated within the framework of a co-operative enterprise, and move them into expanding elsewhere. Their main advantage in doing so is that they own the best sites which were developed at yesterday's costs. Further expansion in the way of construction within a context where land is a prime factor and credit restrictions likely to continue, is likely to take place on inferior sites at today's costs and throw away the competitive advantages of these hotels. The future objectives of the traditional hotel industry, whether integrated in a co-operative association or subsisting as individual units of marginal profitability, would be to stake on an ability to move with greater facility into other complementary industries rather than rely on a providential growth factor. This, in view of the present recessionary trend in the demand for accommodation, is likely to keep to a downward slope.

Employment: No solution in sight

Two problems are a constant cause of concern to Swiss hotel circles; the continuing maintenance of high Swiss standards of service and their world reputation and the current restrictions imposed by the Federal Government on the employment of foreigners. The labour intensiveness of the hotel business requires a large amount of manpower and the service offered is directly correlated with its ability to recruit from a diverse foreign labour force. The resounding disapprobation of the October Referendum was an obvious reaction to the political radicalism of the National Action, whose success would have constituted a major threat to the political mores and brought Switzerland to the brink of economic disaster. However, the bell has tolled and this apparent victory has left few hoteliers with more than a modest reprieve. The steady flow of petitions from the hotel sector has been met with more stringent curtailments, and the referendums occurring with regular frequency have more than justified the anxiety of the hotel industry. Although rationalisation through modern techniques and equipment have enabled hoteliers to achieve a more judicious use of

manpower, the employment question has been answered only peripherally.

In an attempt to improve this situation, salary rises have been awarded, wage differentials instituted and disparities in fringe benefits between the hotel industry and the other sectors of the economy finally adjusted. These initiatives have been late in arriving. Nonetheless, they have come to a sector of the economy traditionally plagued with a high labour-turnover and absenteeism. It is too early to know whether the "contrat collectif" which came into effect in July, 1974, will have more than a superficial impact in consolidating a skilled work-force for the continuation of high Swiss standards of service.

However, the increases of 12.5 per cent awarded during 1973-74 were a necessary step in the indexation of wages and in reducing large existing disparities. Yet it is likely that these provisions will have been taken at the cost of creating a new and monumental problem, an inflationary trend resulting from a wage-prices spiral. Switzerland is not immune from this universal problem. Even though 1975 is likely to be the tightest financial year in the Confederation's history, this tendency will continue to show itself even under conditions of severe fiscal and monetary restraint. But the Swiss hotel industry will not be able to compensate this financially by increasing its rates, because higher prices will defeat price accessibility and accelerate the decline of tourist frequentation.

Modification to Swiss hotel services

Accepting that the composition and demands of tourists have undergone a certain metamorphosis, decisive actions should soon be forthcoming. If not, the hotel industry will be forced to radically alter the realm of individualised service. It is therefore an inevitable consequence that future goals in the way of accommodation, especially in resorts where seasonal demand for hotel beds and manpower are high, will have to be reconsidered or at best be modified. The establishment of a hotel whose dependence on manpower will be reduced to the absolute minimum will be a

solution to labour recruitment and an acknowledgement of the change in tourist demand for more competitively-priced accommodation. This would also provide a competitive alternative to an exclusive reliance on high and traditionally Swiss standards of service. These should be maintained for the benefit of those who can still afford it, as there are no doubt many people who are still willing to be separated from their money

Although the experience has been attempted and met with considerable success, there are still strong resistances to overcome. The innovators will have to continue promoting this new concept as a practical solution to the employment crisis and as an alternative to the highly-selective prices offered in the traditional hotel. The risk and uncertainties involved in the venture will not be eliminated until the clientèle is acclimatised to this new brand of hotel system. But the progressive reduction of errors through a better definition of marketing concepts and through experience will eventually prove to the traditional hotelier that "*la tradition n'est pas comestible*".

The new generation of hotel owners realise that the changes and improvisation necessary to meet new demands is their responsibility, and that it entails "sticking one's neck out". If one takes the trouble to examine the attributes which have made Switzerland attractive - its hotels, its gastronomy, its countryside, its opportunities for leisure - then it becomes evident that its prestigious names will never die. Like old soldiers, they will only fade away.

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