

In celebration of an ideal

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In celebration

AUGUST is here again, and Switzerland celebrates her National Day as usual. But what exactly are the Swiss celebrating?

Are they fêting their nationhood or their standard of living, their neutrality or some abstract idea?

In eight years time the Swiss nation will be 700 years old, which is something to celebrate. Since 1847, Switzerland has not been to war. This is also something to celebrate. So is the fact that the Swiss enjoy one of the highest standards of living in the world.

But all this is not the real cause for celebration. There is more to it than material things. For every advantage enjoyed by the Swiss, one could find a corresponding disadvantage.

Take, for example, the amount of unemployment in Switzerland. By most people's standards it is very small but it has risen from 0.3 per cent in 1982 to 0.9 per cent at

the end of May this year. Some 26,355 people have no gainful employment in a country of five million nationals.

The horological industry has been having a bad time for years. When automated plant can turn out electronic watches to sell at a few pounds yet which are still accurate to within a few seconds a

**By PETER E.
SLATER**

year, what can the Swiss labour-intensive industry do?

More than 430,000 people are employed in the manufacture of machinery and metal goods. This is about half the workforce in the manufacturing sector, and produces 15 per cent of the total value added in Switzerland's domestic economy.

Much of the industry's output is machinery for the textile industry,

with two-thirds of it exported. It earned nearly Sfr 24 billion in 1982 but the recession has hit it badly.

The very solid material virtues of the industry have, in this instance, militated against it, preventing it from responding to the new conditions in the market by assimilating new ideas and making it difficult to produce the new products that are needed.

Average wages have risen more steeply than productivity, so that despite the praiseworthy increases in output obtained, the industry's products are too expensive, especially when the strength of the Swiss franc is taken into account.

Britain's exporters complain about a pound worth only a fraction of its value a decade ago. How much more difficult it must be for his Swiss counterpart.

No one would deny that Switzerland has incomparable scenery and enjoys the benefits of cheap,

THIS address to the Swiss living abroad is by the president of the Swiss Confederation, Mr Pierre Aubert, on the occasion of Swiss National Day 1983.

Dear compatriots abroad.

The first of August gives the president of the Confederation the opportunity to address directly the Swiss living abroad. This is a great pleasure, and in the name of the Federal Council I convey to you on this occasion my warmest wishes.

We at home are thinking of you, and we realise that the Swiss abroad are playing their role in strengthening the ties of Switzerland with the nations.

Many of those who are your neighbours judge Switzerland by the picture you present of our country. Everyone of you, therefore, has the privilege of re-inforcing these links between Switzerland and the rest of the world.

Your attachment to your

homeland means you are celebrating today an event which lies far back in time.

As you well know, we are not commemorating a victory or a change of political regime. The August 1 bonfires are a symbol of an alliance with which the Swiss unite their strength in mutual solidarity. It is an alliance which has now lasted almost seven centuries, and to which we shall continue to adhere.

Throughout the perils of history, our country has remained true to its ideals of independence, liberty and democracy. It has turned its inner diversity to good effect by firmly embracing the principle of federalism.

Our national motto is an appeal to solidarity, and on this are based our social security, the private and public assistance schemes and the mutual respect for each other without which such a diverse country as ours could never have prospered.

Compared with others, and

looking back on our own poverty-ridden past, we can be proud of what we have achieved.

But we can no longer live in isolation in a world which has become interdependent. What goes on outside our frontiers is of concern to us. You know this better than anyone!

We have not been spared economic difficulties. Unemployment is a heavy burden in some parts of our country, and thousands of our fellow citizens are living in fear of their future.

Most of all, we would be harming ourselves if we turned to isolation to prevent foreign competition. It is all the more necessary for us to co-operate with our most important partners and to help those who are in difficulty.

We must actively pursue efforts to revive the world economy, to support attempts by the international community to help

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clean power from hydro-electric power generation. But energy requirements are steadily rising, even though there has been a slackening in the growth in the past few years.

As in other countries, the arguments rage over the desirability of various alternative forms of energy supply and their effect on the environment. Few doubt that the energy needs of the future will be met only by considerable sacrifices on the part of nature.

Research is continuing into the possibility of using such energy sources as the sun, the wind, the earth's internal heat and so on when the present energy sources become economically, socially and environmentally unacceptable. At present, costs are prohibitive and efficiencies too low to attract bulk users.

Energy for vehicles is a problem without any real solution even remotely possible at the moment,

the poorest nations and to prevent the bankruptcy of debtor states. Every one of us is prepared to sacrifice a little of his surplus in order to help the poorest of the poor.

It is also in our interest to expand development and humanitarian aid. After all, we want to be heard on the world stage in order to defend our ideas and interests.

Taking this day of celebration as an opportunity to look back in time, we can see that standing up for freedom, the respect of mankind and the will to more solidarity represents moral values – moral values which, irrespective of all cultural, linguistic and religious differences, are more necessary than ever before if the world is to survive.

May every one of us today, wherever he or she is, be a witness to this past. It is in this spirit, dear compatriots abroad, that I convey to you the best wishes of the Federal Council.

yet the damage to the environment and to health is undeniable.

Switzerland's neutrality is not an unmixed blessing. True, it has kept her at peace for over a century but it has also put constraints on her trading stance and caused problems of conscience concerning her international relief activities.

She still agonises over the question of joining the United Nations, even though she is an active member of many of the specialised agencies of the UN and hosts many international bodies.

The role of government in the affairs of the people causes its own problems. Modern society is rapidly changing and the young, in particular, are impatient for change.

But the very stability of the Swiss system of government makes change a very slow business. When the Swiss come to a decision it is a good, well thought out decision, but it may take years to arrive at it.

Military service is becoming increasingly unpopular, even though events in the South Atlantic have shown what can happen to a people who cannot defend themselves. Anyone who considers he has a claim to their territory will not be deterred by anything less than superior force.

Swiss neutrality is not enough to ensure her integrity, unless it is backed up with sufficient force to make any aggression too costly to be attractive. Needless to say, the will to use the force must be evident.

Nothing of any value can be bought without hard work and sacrifice, whether it be freedom, peace, jewels or a happy marriage. Perhaps the greatest danger to the Swiss nation is apathy.

Too many referenda, too comfortable an existence or perhaps just laziness cause people to be reluctant to get involved in the running of the country.

Switzerland would not be the first nation to lose its freedoms by default.

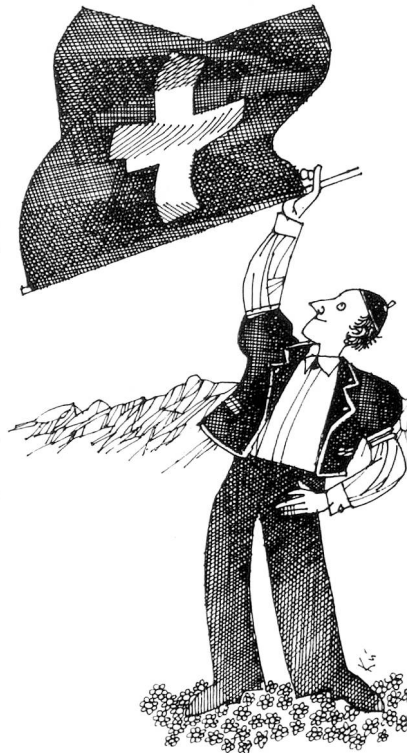
This is a materialistic age and spiritual values are being forgotten

or ignored, or worse still, compromised. The Church, no matter what the denomination, has tried to adapt its teachings to the theories of scientists, sociologists, politicians or anyone else who happens to be fashionable.

Whenever one believes, one either believes it in its entirety or the belief is worthless. Any attempt to water down one's beliefs for whatever reason can lead only to their eventual abandonment.

Without strong beliefs the nation's morals decay and its citizens drift into anarchy, lawlessness and misery, no matter what the proponents of the new liberalism say to the contrary.

Switzerland therefore celebrates, besides the more obvious things such as those already mentioned, an abstract ideal – a democratic alliance of honest men who are their own masters and who deal with each other with justice.



The definitions are as many and as abstract as the ideal they are trying to define. One thing is certain. An ideal that has survived for nearly 700 years must be worth celebrating.

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