

THE MAGAZINE FOR THE SWISS ABROAD

S W I S S

REVIEW

APRIL 2006 / NO. 2



Swiss farmers face
an uncertain future

Booming new
Swiss film industry

Poverty in Switzerland
and how to fight it



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2000 farms disappear every year

SWISS FARMERS ARE WORRIED: THEY FEAR FOR THEIR OWN EXISTENCE. This is why more than 10,000 farmers from all corners of Switzerland gathered on Berne's Bundesplatz to demonstrate against "current developments in agricultural policy." Farmers fear a reduction in subsidies and competition from cheap, foreign agricultural products. As the President of the Swiss Farmers' Union dramatically portrayed the situation, many farmers are already living off their savings.

The statistics are hard to believe: Every year, 2,000 farms go to the wall: that's five every day. Whereas in 1990 there were 93,000 going agricultural concerns, last year there were only 65,000. At the same time the number of farmworkers dropped from 253,000 to 190,000. And there's no end in sight: the 2011 agricultural reform will result in the disappearance of between five and ten farms every day.

Swiss farmers receive CHF 4 billion in federal subsidies every year. "Too much," say trade associations, economists and politicians who are calling for structural changes or, in other words, fewer but larger operations that can produce as cheaply as their competitors in the USA or the EU. As our feature article illustrates, however, it's not as easy as it sounds. Moreover, farmers have an important function to fulfil as landscape gardeners.

The increase in poverty and related welfare services are continually the subject of political debate. In an interview with the "Swiss Review", Walter Schmid, Director of the University of Social Work and President of the Swiss Conference for Social Welfare, outlined an effective way of alleviating poverty in Switzerland. Having been in charge



Heinz Eckert

of the Youth and Social Services Office of the City of Zurich for many years, he is well acquainted with the subject. First and foremost he calls for supplementary benefits for young families, to ensure that their children can be raised and educated properly, as well as for working people with incomes below subsistence level. In Schmid's opinion it is shameful that, in this day and age, a country as affluent as Switzerland still has people working for pay that does not even cover the costs of daily living. Schmid also criticises the fact that Switzerland's social policy suffers from an "intellectual straightjacket" that prevents the development of modern, effective welfare solutions.

A Swiss film has also become a hot topic recently. Thousands of people have been flocking to cinemas to see "Grounding", the partly fictional, partly documentary account of the final days of Swissair. Controversial discussions have been triggered by Michael Steiner's film, which blames banking giant UBS and its CEO Marcel Ospel for Swissair's grounding and presents Mario Corti, Swissair's last CEO, with a clean slate. Thanks to Michael Steiner, the Swiss film industry is experiencing a revival. Coming on the heels of the highly-acclaimed "Mein Name ist Eugen", "Grounding" is Steiner's second big box-office hit. Who is this director who has given Swiss cinema its two biggest hits in recent years? Alain Wey portrays this 36-year-old native of Zurich and takes the opportunity to chat with Michael Steiner about his new projects. His conclusion: Having overcome its agonies, the Swiss film industry is experiencing a new lease of life and is now producing such high quality works that it once more has the chance to gain international recognition.

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Cover photo: Renzo Blumenthal – Organic farmer and Mister Switzerland 2005: A symbol for modern agriculture. Photo: Keystone

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SWISS POST 

Congratulations

As a recently naturalized Swiss living abroad, I would like to thank you for the "Swiss Review", which is one of my most important links to Switzerland. Congratulations, particularly, on the layout of your December issue. The colors on the cover and the picture of the Christmas market in front of the Einsiedeln monastery made for a really well-illustrated and dynamic magazine.

FACUNDO M. SIMES LANFRANCHI,
CÓRDOBA, ARGENTINA

Step-by-step

It was very refreshing to read your objective editorial in the December issue and then the beautiful picture of the Christmas Market with the Einsiedeln Monastery in the background. In summation the whole issue was perfect until I got to the Hanspeter Kriesi contribution. This is exactly the known attitude of the academic ivory tower elite. They know everything and we out here living in the Wilderness are considered morons, numb-skulls and nitwits. Believe me, direct democracy will remain for a long time and I will keep voting from San Diego on every referendum! Keep up the good work in the rest of the "Swiss Review"!

MAX WIRTH, SAN DIEGO, USA

Planting GM crops

Many thanks for your report in the December "Swiss Review" on the people's referendum of 27 November 2005 concerning the moratorium on planting GM crops. Living at this distance from Switzerland and at some remove from internal media coverage of the issues at stake, and after voting on the questions, I am really grateful to have such detailed follow-up coverage on the outcome.



Here in Vermont we've been struggling for some time now to get a moratorium on the planting of GM crops passed (without success), a seed labeling law passed (with success but without

subsequent enforcement) and a bill passed which would protect farmers from lawsuits by GM seed manufacturers (still in the legislature).

We have already experienced the contamination of organic crops by GM genes, and we know that there are increasingly reports surfacing about the health risks of eating GM foods, and yet our efforts to awaken people to these circumstances are frequently frustrated. So it was very gratifying to be part of a vote that had such a positive and hope-filled outcome.

SYLVIA DAVATZ, HARTLAND,
VERMONT, USA

The Rebirth of Swiss Football

I would like to congratulate Heinz Eckert for his editorial and his double-page feature on "Köbi Kuhn". I am also tempted to point out that the Union Sportive Suisse de Paris (USSP) – founded in 1910 – has not waited to be prompted by the Swiss Football Association (SFV) to seek out talented young players... The most famous Swiss USSP member to play at international level was Aaron Pollitz, who clocked up 23 caps; he played in the Uruguay – Switzerland (3 – 0) final at the 1924 Olympic Games in Paris. Let's hope Köbi Kuhn's young and dynamic "bunch of friends" will thrill us with their performances at the World Cup in Germany, as they did recently in Berne. Hopp Schwiiz!

MARTIN STREBEL, CHAIRMAN OF
THE USSP, LA VARENNE
ST-HILAIRE, FRANCE

Swiss blues flying high

High-altitude blues. If you were to ask for two high-flying Swiss bluesmen, then Napoleon Washington from La Chaux-de-Fonds and Hank Shizzoe from Berne would definitely come out on top. Both are guitar virtuosos blessed with deep voices and a special feel for out-of-the-ordinary melodies. They are representatives of a vibrant, contemporary blues style of a quality that ranks alongside that of the true greats of this genre on the other side of the Atlantic. Napoleon Washington recently brought out his second album "Home-grown", which he recorded in New York. He has been playing the guitar since he was twelve, and his life to date has been pretty adventurous. He was engaged for tours in America (1991, 92 and 95) by New Yorkers Gary Setzer (brother of Brian) & The Roostabouts. He toured Europe and the United States with his old blues formation, The Crawling Kingsnake. The dawn of the new millennium saw Napoleon Washington's

debut as a solo artist with his renowned steel guitar. As an instrumentalist in a class of his own he earned universal praise with his first album "Hotel Bravo". An extraordinary concert, filmed in 2004, is becoming one of the most original advertising media ever: "The Washington Theater" is a virtual cinema on the Internet, in which anyone can discover the bluesman at work – simply by visiting www.napoleonwashington.com

Ode to the water-lilies. Organic atmospheres, hypnotic moods, intimate ballads – these are all features of the second fantastic album from the band Water Lily, entitled "13th Floor". It is impossible to place the six artists from Valais in one particular style category: they create a universe that hovers back and forth between rock, trip-hop, pop and folk and reveals a particular predilection for psychedelic moods. Gripping melodies, inspired musicians, a vocalist who sings with a voice that fluctuates between crystal clear and strained – all these combine to make Water Lily a first-rate contender for an export hit. Formed on the threshold of the year 2000, the group had already made a good name for themselves on Swiss stages by 2002, when they released their first album "Aphasie". A year later, Water Lily were awarded the "Nouvelles Scènes" prize by the radio station Couleur 3. For their new album, the group secured the services of renowned English producer Teo Miller (Placebo, Robert Plant etc.). "13th Floor" ends with an ethno-psychedelic piece that is carried by a rousing didgeridoo and seeks to invite us on an extraordinary journey. www.waterlily.ch

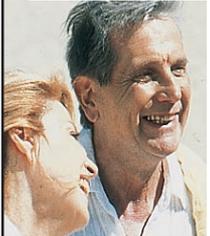
Best orchestra for funeral music. The Dead Brothers? The name of this quartet from Geneva has certainly caused a few frowns, but there is more than a pinch of irony behind this name. The Dead Brothers have declared themselves the best funeral music orchestra of the century, and as such they blend an enormous number of styles: gipsy music, swing, jazz, rock 'n' roll, folk and country. Their motto is: music should be festive. With a banjo, trombones, trumpet, accordion and guitar, they aim for a universe that comes across as comical and macabre in equal proportions. Their fourth album, "Wunderkammer", displays their musical and linguistic versatility – it is sung in English, French and German. The Dead Brothers have even unearthed an old Marlene Dietrich song ("Wenn ich mir was wünschen dürfte", 1936), which they have adapted in accomplished fashion and combined with a melody by Nino Rota.

www.voodooorhythm.com/dead.html

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An anthology of station life. In Switzerland there are precisely 1,806 railway stations, large and small. Christoph Grünig, a photographer from Biel/Bienne, has captured every single one of them with his camera and, in a series of 2,200 pictures, he documents life in these stations: the architecture, the waiting, the hurrying, the joyous reunions, fond farewells etc. Klaus Koch's stories tell of fictitious and real people who have left their mark on the image of Switzerland and continue to do so today.



Bellevues 2005,
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Worried Swiss farmers

No other branch of industry in this country of ours has changed its structures as drastically as farming. Despite this, our farmers are constantly being criticised by politicians and economists. But the farming tradition has the backing of the Swiss people. By Rolf Ribi

This statistic is so incredible you have to read it twice: Switzerland loses five farms every day. That amounts to nearly 2,000 farming businesses a year in the Mittelland – the heartland of the country – and in the hills and mountains. So, in other words, on any one day five farming families have to give everything up and stand by helplessly as their possessions, animals and equipment are sold to the highest bidders. Tears and sadness are etched on the faces of farmers, many of whose forefathers have run the farms for generations.

As the trade association Economiesuisse repeatedly emphasises, structural changes in farming are “not quick enough and not bold enough”. The association argues that the current agricultural industry is too small in structure and not productive enough. It views the creation of larger farms as a matter “of key importance”, and regards a free trade agreement with the European Union for all agricultural products as “the only way ahead”.

The “Neue Zürcher Zeitung” newspaper made the sarcastic comment that “being a farmer is not a matter of fate. Nobody is forced to remain a farmer for ever.”

Probably no other branch of industry in our country has experienced such a radical structural transformation as farming. The number of farms has fallen from roughly 93,000 in 1990 to 65,000 last year – a 30 percent drop. In the same period, the number of people employed in farming has also plummeted from 253,000 to around 190,000 – down some 25 percent. But that is not the end of it: because of the 2011 agricultural reform programme, every day over the next few years five to ten farming families will have to throw in the towel. According to Manfred Bötsch, Director of the Swiss Federal Office for Agriculture, this would mean “that 15,000 to 20,000 farms will be abandoned inside ten years.” His personal view on the matter: “The pruning measures demanded by farming are higher than they have ever been in the industry.”

Pressure from within ...

Intense internal and external pressure is driving the sustained structural change in farming in



Verena + Hans Stucki, cereal farmers, Schlosswil/BE

Switzerland. The “home-made” facts include the following: only three percent of the entire workforce is still employed in agriculture. Through their efforts in the fields and on the farm, they contribute just one percent to economic added value. Added to this is the value of socio-economic services as stipulated in the Swiss federal constitution, e.g. the security of the country’s food supply, the upkeep of the cultural landscape and the population of remote areas. Despite this, the Agricultural Report 2005 issued by the responsible federal office states that “Farming is no longer one of the most important branches of industry”.

Yet in terms of government expenditure on agriculture and food, this sector ranks fifth. Almost CHF 4 billion or 7.8 percent of government spending was ploughed into farming in 2004, compared with CHF 3 billion in 1990. The largest slice, some CHF 2.5 billion, went on so-called direct payments i.e. compensation to farmers for the upkeep of the countryside and for ecological cultivation. The state gave just under CHF 0.8 billion in support for production and sales in dairy and livestock farming as well as plant cultivation. A further CHF 0.7 billion was allocated to export subsidies, investment loans, agricultural schools or family allowances. And here’s another statistic: more than 70 percent of farming income comes from state coffers. According to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

(OECD), this figure is extremely high compared with other countries.

Nearly CHF 4 billion of government aid in return for a contribution of just one percent to the economy: this ratio is attracting a great deal of criticism. If the Swiss parliament decides to reduce state finance or if the World Trade Organisation (WTO) targets global free trade, complaining Swiss farmers will be regarded as “trouble-makers”. Trade associations and economists are demanding fewer subsidies and instead a rapid transformation of the farming industry into a structure consisting of larger farms that are able to hold their own in a market economy. “I have noticed a general trend in Switzerland that increasingly challenges farming’s special position within the economy”, says Professor Bernard Lehmann, head of the Institute of Agricultural Economics at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (ETH) in Zurich.

... and pressure from outside

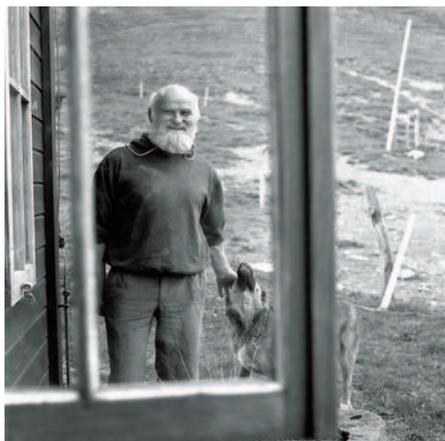
There is also very strong external pressure for structural change in the farming industry. If multilateral negotiations in the WTO or bilateral free trade agreements with the USA or the European Union are on the agenda, then agriculture faces a gloomy future; because opening borders to foreign agricultural produce, trimming down domestic market support and making exports cheaper will impact farming revenues. “All in all, the WTO measures will probably cost farming around CHF 2 billion”, estimates Manfred Bötsch, Director of the Federal Department of Agriculture. “Losses on this scale would ruin all the efforts that farming has made over the past decade”, says Jacques Bourgeois, Director of the Swiss Farmers’ Union.

The current WTO round is clearly the greatest challenge to farming. But fateful negotiations are also on the agenda with the United States and the European Union.

A free trade agreement with the USA would encourage the export of Swiss-made industrial goods. From a farming point of view, free trade with the USA would have “serious disadvantages”, according to Hans Burger, former Director of the Federal Department of Agriculture: income in our farming industry would fall by CHF 1.2 billion, the geographically distant American market coupled with US consumer behaviour make marketing difficult, and US meat, which is produced with antibiotics and hormones, is not wanted here. Nor are genetically modified products from the US. Jean-Daniel Gerber, Swiss State Secretary for Economic Affairs, sees things differently: “The American market comprises 270 million consumers. This would offer Swiss farmers new

sales opportunities, for cheese and biological products, for example.”

The opening of borders within Europe to agricultural products is viewed more positively. In a market of 400 million people with high purchasing power and similar consumer behaviour, quality products have a good chance of making decent prices and selling well thanks to the healthy “Swiss quality” image. With free trade in agricultural goods, domestic production costs and product prices are expected to



Leo Elleberger, biological-farmer, Günsberg, SO

annual income of a worker on a family farm in 2004 was CHF 39,700. This corresponds to a monthly wage of CHF 3,300 (equivalent to the minimum wage of a cashier in a large supermarket). The so-called comparative wage shows that in the valley region 38 percent, in the hills 51 percent and in the mountains 60 percent of workers on family farms earn less than in comparable occupations in industry and the service sector. In the mountains, in particular, many farming families are among the “working poor”

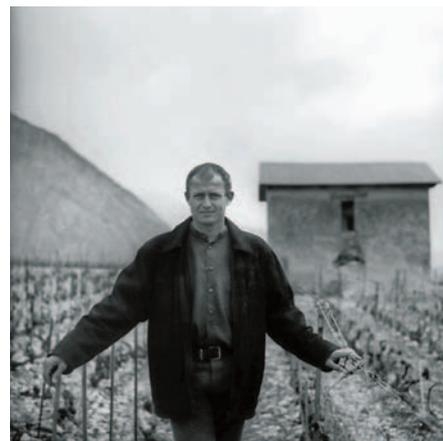


Verena Aebersold, vegetable farmer, Treiten/BE

the border, state support for the market, cheaper exports and income support for farmers.

Expensive means of production

Whether animal feed or seeds, tractors or equipment, fertilisers or pesticides, fuel or veterinary care – Swiss farmers procure the bulk of their means of production from outside the country. One quarter of these initial costs is spent on animal feed from domestic and for-



Jean-François Maye, wine-grower, Chamoson/VS

settle at the European level. This will improve export opportunities for Swiss products. The opening of the European market will hit farming very hard, with income loss estimated at CHF 1.5 billion. For Hansjörg Walter, President of the Swiss Farmers' Union, one thing is certain: “The liberalisation of world trade is unstoppable.”

Modest income for farmers

Farmers are feeling mounting pressure from both within and outside. More than 10,000 of them marched through the streets of the Swiss capital, Berne, on 17 November of last year carrying cow bells and banners. Led by the flags of cantonal organisations, the men and women made their way to Bundesplatz, in front of the Houses of Parliament, with serious faces and measured footsteps. “Stop the money men and politicians who are turning farming into a scapegoat”, cried one woman. “No-one who slaves away all day without getting paid a decent wage can understand managers' high salaries and neoliberal slogans”, complained one man. When, at the end, they raised their bells in a loud staccato, the farmers' parade became a powerful demonstration – or was it a desperate cry for help to the powers that be in parliament?

The plight of agriculture is evident from the income that farmers receive. According to the research organisation Agroscope, the average

– they do not earn enough to live on despite all their hard work.

The agricultural income per farm was around CHF 60,400 in 2004. The average over the past three years was CHF 55,600. Annual income fluctuates with product sales and direct payments received. Because almost 70 percent of all farming families are no longer able to live off farming alone, they look to generate additional earnings elsewhere – the husband works the ski lift in winter or performs forestry work for the town council, while the wife teaches or works on the post office counter in the village. An average of CHF 21,500 was generated this way in extra earnings, producing an average total income of CHF 82,000 per farm – which breaks down into CHF 93,100 in the valleys, CHF 76,900 in the hills and CHF 68,800 in alpine areas.

Agricultural income has an impact on the increase or decrease in equity. In 2004, 27 percent of farms in the valleys, 28 percent in the hills and 30 percent in the mountains posted negative equity, i.e. a loss. This means that these farming families are living off their reserves, with no resources to invest in new equipment or replacements. The financial position of around 40 percent of all farms is regarded as “worrying”.

Political pressure on the farming sector calls for drastic agricultural reforms governing production costs, marketing, protective tariffs at

eign mills. The Situation Report 2005 drawn up by the Swiss Farmers' Union clearly shows how much more our farmers are having to pay for such feed than farmers elsewhere in Europe. Based on an EU price level of 100, Swiss farmers pay 300 for seed and planting stock, for fertilisers and soil improvers 140, for plant protection products and pesticides 125, for animal feed 300, for veterinary care and medicinal products 127, and for investments in infrastructure 136.

According to Eduard Hofer, Vice-Director of the Swiss Federal Department of Agriculture, the main reason for the differences in cost is the behaviour of international suppliers, who base their selling prices on the price level and purchasing power in any given country. Moreover, their distribution plans also prevent German dealers, for example, from supplying goods to Switzerland at German prices. There are also other reasons for the higher costs in Switzerland, such as the fact that the distribution network is denser and the market smaller.

These distinctly higher prices have also caught the eye of price regulator Rudolf Strahm. In his opinion, our farmers pay CHF 1 billion per annum more than they should for their means of production. He recommends that farmers operate a “cost management” programme and believes that the responsible federal department should make sure that the farming community is given access to price

comparisons and alternative sourcing options. In addition, the price watchdog calls for farmers to be permitted to import such materials as plant protection products and veterinary medicines directly. "The need to reduce purchasing costs is becoming a survival issue for farms." But farmers can also do quite a lot more for themselves – by sharing machinery and tractors or by merging neighbouring farms.

The Swiss Federal Department of Agriculture works with different figures: if farmers elsewhere in Europe were to produce and sell 15 comparable agricultural products, they would generate only 54 percent of the revenue of their Swiss counterparts (and just 47 percent in America). However, the gap in producer prices between Europe and Switzerland has narrowed by 28 percent in the last ten years. Have Swiss consumers benefited from this? Certainly not! They pay 25 percent more for a comparable food shopping basket.

The fact that consumers here do not benefit from farmers' sacrifices is due to the margins of the processing industry and retail trade. "Food prices tend not to be based on producer prices. The margins of downstream industry and bulk distributors are much higher than those abroad. This is where reform is needed", claims Bourgeois.

Better marketing

It is not only costs that are in need of reform, but also the way agricultural products are mar-

keted. "We can absorb the pressure of international competition by supplying top-quality Swiss products", declared Federal Councillor Joseph Deiss. To promote sales, he added, the government "helps people to help themselves". The Minister of Economic Affairs believes that the prospects are good for ecologically sustainable products and goods with a clear geographical origin: "Not just cured meat, but cured meat from Grisons or from Valais; not ordinary cheese, but Gruyère cheese." With products like these "it is possible to get round the problem of higher prices because they are based on confidence and reliability".

Cheese exports are already proving successful. Switzerland already has a share of almost one percent in the EU cheese market. This equates to a quarter of the milk yield in Switzerland. Federal Councillor Deiss is "proud that today 45 percent of German consumers count Swiss cheese among the best in the world". Free trade in cheese with the European Union is set to come into force in June 2007.

"Market presence in Switzerland and the rest of Europe must be strengthened", agrees Jacques Bourgeois. And: "The marketing strategy must be geared even more towards origin and production methods." Sales should be promoted using quality products and special labels, for example for alpine produce.

Many farmers have already taken the initiative by selling fruit and vegetables, meat and cheese, milk and eggs, as well as wine and cider

direct from their farms. They are discovering niche markets for new products; they have Scottish Highland cattle grazing on their land; they are planting melons instead of potatoes; baking traditional farm bread and extracting oil from sunflowers; and inviting people to enjoy a farmer's breakfast and spend holidays on the farm.

Protective tariffs, marketing and export help

The state has long protected Swiss farmers from foreign competition – with import tariffs and volume-based quotas. The duties slapped on top of import prices are steep: 47 percent for cherries, 59 percent for white wine, 64 percent for hard cheese, 145 percent for apples, 170 percent for sugar, 183 percent for tomatoes, 273 percent for fillet of beef, 556 percent for butter and an incredible 1019 percent for chicken legs. The price of one third of all agricultural products from abroad is artificially raised more than 100 percent through the imposition of tariffs. Certain foreign products such as fresh milk can only be imported in small quantities. And the import of cauliflower, carrots, apples and pears is only approved if domestic supplies are short.

This "border control" in the form of tariffs and quotas is the main instrument applied to support domestic meat and crop production. Any dismantling of this border control would make imported products cheaper, make the sale

THE VALLEY

FARMER

■ Ulrich Ineichen is a valley farmer in Boswil in the canton of Aargau. His 112-hectare farm is one of the largest in the country. The "Sentenhof" estate looks a little like the South Fork ranch in the cult US television series "Dallas". The owner of this large farm has two employees and six tractors. Its state-of-the-art barn with open enclosure has room for 60 cows and capacity for 400,000 kilos of milk production per annum. Milking is computer-controlled. Six years ago, Ineichen switched to organic farming. He generates CHF 700,000 in turnover, of which CHF 170,000 comes from direct payments for organic production and for cultivating the area. He estimates his hourly wage at CHF 35. Ineichen is proud of his large farm's productivity levels and is able to grant himself the luxury of

a five-day week and holidays.

(Source: «Beobachter») RR

THE HILL

FARMER

■ Gottfried Grünig and his wife Silvia run a typical Swiss farm in Säriswil in the canton of Berne, where they keep 16 cows, 10 calves and heifers, 8 sows, one boar, twelve chickens and a tractor on 17 hectares of land. He would not be able to keep his farm going without state aid of around CHF 36,000 a year: one fifth of the farm's income. He receives this direct aid from the state for cultivating the soil, using the meadows extensively, living in the hills, keeping animals in a manner appropriate to their species, and looking after 107 ecologically valuable high-trunk trees. This farming family is in debt – conversion of the shed and liquid manure pit cost them half a million Swiss

francs. Silvia has a second job in a nursing home, taking the family's income to CHF 53,000. The fact that Gottfried Grünig does not receive even so much as CHF 6 as an hourly wage despite working a 14-hour day depresses him. He would not want to become a farmer these days, but he cannot sell his farm – otherwise he would have to pay CHF 100,000 in liquidation taxes. (Source: «Beobachter») RR

THE MOUNTAIN

FARMER

■ Martin Herrmann and his wife Christine are mountain farmers in Lauenen in the Bernese Oberland. Here, on 21 hectares of land, they run an exclusively dairy farm with ten cows, six heifers, three calves, seven ewes and a small tractor. In summer, the farmers work on the alpine pastures for three months – last summer with 77 cows and heifers,

one bull and 18 pigs. They receive direct payments of CHF 70,800 from the state, a good third of the farm's revenue. They generate a total income of CHF 85,000 thanks to second jobs: he works the ski lift, she baby-sits in hotels. The working day runs from five o'clock in the morning until ten o'clock at night. Up on the high alpine pastures in summer they produce more than four tons of alpine cheese ("Alpkäse") and planing cheese ("Hobelkäse"). The Hermanns cannot imagine doing any other job. As far as they are concerned, it is only right that they receive direct aid from the state. "We look after the countryside, and if it weren't for us farmers there would be no animals up there."

(Source: «Beobachter») RR

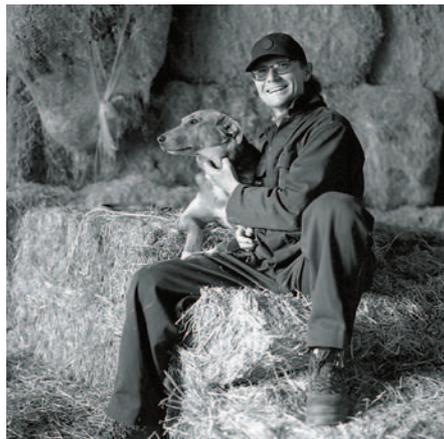
of domestic produce more difficult and, as a result, reduce the income from farming. Of course, this Swiss protectionism runs contrary to global free trade.

“Abolition of this border control will be inevitable in the medium to long term”, says Federal Councillor Deiss. “I imagine that in the next 10 to 15 years the border protection for Swiss agriculture will be reduced to the same level as in the European Union”, comments ETH professor Bernard Lehmann. It is “an il-



Louis Suter, fruit farmer, Hünenberg/ZG

good, farmers and their families receive approximately CHF 2.5 billion per annum: money which comes from general state funding. Of this, CHF 2 billion is in the form of general direct payments for the use and upkeep of meadows and fields, particularly in the hills and mountains. Ecological direct payments of CHF 0.5 billion are intended as an incentive for farmers to perform special environmental services, such as ecological cultivation, extensive grain production, organic farming and the keeping



Sepp Haas, suckler cow breeder, Ohmstal/LU

Farming is a cultural heritage

“We want to keep production-independent direct payments, and we will”, declared Federal Councillor Deiss. He also commented that the structural change would have to be made in a “socially compatible” way. He is aware that three out of four farms, particularly in the hills and mountains, would not survive without the wage payments they receive from the state.

The Federal Council has the backing of the people on this issue: according to a Univox sur-



Andreas Binswanger, pig breeder, Tägerwilen/TG

lusion to want to secure the competitiveness of Swiss agriculture with the present border protection”, declares Rudolf Walser of trade association Economiesuisse.

The Swiss Federal Council is aiming for more market and more competition with its “Agricultural Policy 2011”. The core element of the strategy is the phased abolition of current market subsidies and measures to make exports cheaper, combined with higher direct payments to farmers. For example, domestic market subsidies for butter will be halved and the subsidy for overseas cheese exports abolished. The removal of market support and the abolition of measures to make exports cheaper will free up roughly CHF 600 million, which will go to farmers in the form of direct payments. The “Neue Zürcher Zeitung” is not at all happy about this: “The right answer to the losses is rapid structural change, rather than even more money from state coffers.”

State wage for farmers

The most important instrument of the Swiss Agricultural Policy is the so-called direct payments to farmers, as compensation for performing the tasks required by Article 104 of the Swiss federal constitution: securing the supply of food to the nation, conservation of natural resources, preservation of the cultural landscape and population of remote areas.

For these “public” services for the common

of farm animals in a manner that is particularly appropriate to their species.

Direct payments as a wage for farmers only came into effect in 1992. Before then, agricultural policy in the Swiss Confederation had always been about nutrition and defence as well. In the “Battle of the Crops” in the Second World War, farmers became heroes of independence. The “old” agricultural policy guaranteed them prices, sales and income. However, the pegging of producer prices led to surplus production, rising costs and uneconomic structures. It was not until 1996, with the clear acceptance of the constitutional article by the people, that the “new” agricultural policy became possible. From this point onwards, the production of food also included the upkeep of the public environment.

Of course, a bill that runs to “CHF 2.5 billion in direct payments to 65,000 farms” will not escape criticism. The arguments raised are: the constitutional objective of decentralising the population cannot be achieved by farming alone; there is no clear mandate associated with many of the direct payments; payments are tied to land area and not to yield; the threshold for receiving direct payments needs to be raised (which would affect many small farmers in the mountains and those involved in organic farming: the direct payments prevent structural change and lead to excessive checks on the farms.

vey, 91 percent of Swiss people consider the preservation of the countryside important or very important, 97 percent are in favour of ecological farming, 87 percent want to see animals kept in an animal-friendly manner, and 70 percent want mountain farming to be given special support. Only 23 percent of those surveyed (and the trend is downward) are willing to sacrifice some of the farms. Conversely, however, 51 percent of Swiss citizens believe that the agricultural policy is leading to excessive costs.

Another answer produced by this survey is that three out of four Swiss consider the “preservation of the farming way of life” important. This is practically a declaration of love for the farming community and its traditions. Columnist Frank A. Meyer even holds the view that “the farmers we know and love make Switzerland rich. The question of farming’s future is the question of Switzerland’s future.”

DOCUMENTATION: Agricultural Report 2005 (and previous reports) by the Swiss Federal Department of Agriculture (www.blw.admin.ch), Situation Report 2005 (and previous reports) by the Swiss Farmers’ Union (www.bauernverband.ch), Main Report 2004 by Agroscope FAT Tänikon (www.fat.ch), Agricultural Information Centre – LID (www.lid.ch), newspapers and magazines: Zug Documentation Centre (www.doku-zug.ch)

Nostalgic tunes from a Swiss cow byre

When the Internet radio station buureradio.ch went „on the air“ in late December last year, the network overloaded just a few minutes into the broadcast. And the success goes on: Up to 20,000 listeners are registered every day, and guestbook entries show that buureradio.ch draws listeners from all over the world. By Peter Amstutz



Toni Brunner, Editor-in-Chief and Federal Councillor

„Buureradio? What's that?“ That's the all too frequent response if you ask Swiss about the latest and probably most unusual „radio station“ to start broadcasting in their country. This virtual station has been sending its programmes throughout the whole world via the Internet (www.buureradio.ch) since 28 December 2005: Traditional music, yodelling, folk, brass band and country sounds 24 hours a day, interspersed with approximately 20-minute talk shows (agricultural and market news, advice, federal politics, agricultural technology, Swiss wrestling, country kids, barn talk with „Buureradio“ founder, editor-in-chief and National Councillor Toni Brunner [see box] and a special guest) for both

urban and rural audiences. Broadcasts include up-to-date topics such as lonely hearts ads for farmers or tips from grandma's kitchen.

Thanks to sponsors and advertising organised by a volunteer editorial staff of two dozen working with an annual budget of CHF 500,000, more than a million broadband Internet users with an access line of at least 200 kbps (equivalent to ADSL) in Switzerland and around the globe can tune in to „buureradio.ch“ in CD quality. Financing for operation of the station has been secured for the first three years.

It had hardly even begun broadcasting when the first e-mails started arriving from excited

Swiss Abroad. Within just days of Swiss Radio International's final broadcast, „Nostalgic tunes from a Swiss cow byre“ quickly became an insider's tip among emigrants. The first well-wisher was from Ságújfalu, Hungary („Finally something down-to-earth from Switzerland“). Listeners in Holland, Thailand („It's great being so close to home when we're so far away“), India, Canada and Australia as well as Florida, Texas and Pennsylvania in the USA were the next to discover this excellent source of Swiss folk music. Within 48 hours, hundreds of compliments like „Huärrä guät“ or „This is great“ started pouring in from every continent and piling up on Brunner's desk.

This down-to-earth musical programme is „made“ with the help of state-of-the-art Internet and streaming technology provided by Digital Media Distribution AG (DMD2) in Uetendorf near Thun. There, tens of thousands of tracks from every conceivable category are stored on music servers in top stereo quality. Of these, around 6,000 are folk music tracks specially digitalised for „buureradio.“ An average of 20,000 listeners receive the broadcasts every day, one in eight from abroad. The homepage features the latest news in text form. Despite the fact that it has no studio and broadcasts in online sessions, this radio station has obviously discovered a hole in the market. As Brunner says, „People are showing such an interest in us because traditional stations hardly ever broadcast anything folksy. We're overwhelmed!“ But Toni Brunner has merely turned a vision suggested by his father Johannes into a reality. A farmer from Toggenburg, his father missed listening to „traditional music with information“ while working in the byre. Apparently others did, too. Thanks to Internet radio, the national anthem plays at noon and church bells from home ring out at the stroke of midnight. The next day always starts off with „En schänktä Tag“ by Adolf Stähli.

THE BRAINS BEHIND THE IDEA

■ SVP National Councillor Toni Brunner (32) of Ebnat-Kappel (SG), editor-in-chief and manager. As a young 21-year-old farmer, Toni Brunner moved into Berne's parliamentary building in 1995 as Switzerland's youngest MP. Working from his barn on the Hundsrücken, he presents his „Barn Talk“ show featuring special guests from town and country. „My aim is to have a lot of fun with buureradio.ch and put smiles on a great many faces.“

■ FDP National Councillor Peter

Weigelt (50) from St. Gallen, manager. This economic and communications advisor has been on the National Council for eleven years. Before that he served on St. Gallen's Municipal Council (1988-90) and Cantonal Council (1990-96).

■ Former SVP National Councillor Jakob Freund (60) from Bühler (AR), President of the Swiss Folk Music Association, is in charge of the folk music show. From 1995 to 2003 this down-to-earth member of parliament served on the National Council. His hobbies: surfing the Internet, playing the dulcimer, string music from

Appenzell, travel, sports and playing Jass.

■ Renzo Blumenthal (30) from Vella (GR), master farmer, presents the special request show. Blumenthal became an overnight celebrity on 30 April 2005 when he triumphed over 15 other candidates to win the title of Mister Switzerland. Together with his parents, Renzo manages an organic farm in Lugnez. He considers himself „natural and down-to-earth.“ The flip side: He loves pop and rock. His favourite city is Barcelona and his preferred holiday destinations are Rhodes and Cyprus

■ Tanja Gutmann (29) of Lucerne, trained SBB operations clerk and Miss Switzerland 1998, presents the special Swiss Abroad request show (requests can be made via www.buureradio.ch). As an actress, model and presenter, Tanja Gutmann leads a relatively chaotic life divided between Switzerland and Germany. And could this social education worker, trained actress and speaker of five languages imagine a future at Buureradio? „My grandparents and my father were farmers, plus I spent the first ten years of my life on a farm,“ is Tanja's explanation for this affinity.

Re-integration before benefits

The Swiss invalidity insurance scheme (IV) is deeply in debt due to the sharp rise in benefit claims in recent years. The National Council has now approved a reform aimed at re-integrating claimants back into the job market and tightening up screening. The Left is opposed to the project.
By René Lenzin



Federal Councillor Pascal Couchepin expresses his views during the debate on IV reforms in March.

In 2005 the number of persons receiving Swiss invalidity (IV) benefits totalled 290,000: 125,000 or 75 percent more than in 1990. Every year the invalidity insurance scheme records a deficit of around CHF 2 billion. And by the end of 2005 the debt had mounted to almost CHF 8 billion. Had the government not transferred surplus funds from the income compensation fund on two occasions, the debt would have been even four billion francs higher. These deficits are threatening the Old Age and Survivors' Pension (AHV) since invalidity benefits are paid from the same fund: Unless action is taken now, the AHV will run out of cash in a few years' time.

Parliament has already attempted to respond to this negative trend by introducing a fourth IV reform. Thanks to tougher screening and stricter examination of medical certificates by

specialised physicians, the number of new claimants dropped in 2004 and 2005. Yet the benefit burden is still increasing because the number of people receiving benefits still exceeds the number leaving the scheme. One major concern is that more and more young people are claiming benefits for psychological disorders. Against this backdrop, the Federal Council recently submitted the fifth IV reform to parliament. The National Council was the first chamber to debate the issue in the spring session of parliament.

Early identification and integration

The Federal Council has set itself the target of reducing the annual number of new claimants to at least 20 percent below the record year, 2003. To this end the principle of "re-integration before benefits" – which has long been a theoretical objective – is finally to be put into practice. The aim is to set up a system for early identification of persons who are regularly off work sick and exhibit a tendency to chronic illness, so that in the best case they can keep their jobs or, at second-best, can be treated or re-trained to make them once more employable. At present persons with long-term illnesses often contact the invalidity insurance only after a year, by which time they are so sick that a return to the job market is virtually impossible. This early identification system would also allow relatives, employers, doctors and provid-

ers of sick pay insurance to register sick persons with the IV.

If there is any possibility of the affected person returning to work in the near future, the IV would contact the employer to discuss early intervention measures. These could take the form of modifying the person's workplace or changing his or her function within the company. In more serious cases the IV could order measures aimed at re-integration, for example medical treatment, psychotherapy or retraining. Such measures would last no longer than one year. Affected persons have a duty to cooperate. If they refuse, the IV may reduce their sick pay. While the IV will need to hire extra staff to cope with these new tasks, the Federal Council is assuming that savings will exceed such expenditures in the medium term.

No decision yet on paying off the debt

These efforts to improve the integration of disabled persons in the job market are accompanied by tougher criteria for entitlement to invalidity benefits. Only persons who cannot be considered for integration measures would be entitled to benefits. In a move to reduce the IV debt even further, the National Council has concurred with the Federal Council's proposal to introduce cost-cutting measures. It has abolished permanent supplementary benefits for spouses as well as the career allowance: a percentage hike in benefits for persons who become disabled before the age of 45. The Left voted against the law since it believed these proposals went too far, especially since the Council is not in favour of introducing a quota to oblige employers to hire disabled people.

The question of how to pay off the debt is still to be resolved. The Federal Council had proposed offsetting the IV deficit by increasing salary contributions by 0.1 percent and VAT by 0.8 percent, but the centre-right majority in the National Council wants to discuss additional measures only once the contents of the reform are approved.

REFERENDUM PREVIEW

On 21 May Swiss voters and cantons will vote on a constitutional article on Switzerland's educational framework (see also "Swiss Review" 1/06). The Federal Council and parliament propose a standardised educational system from Grade 1 of elementary school to graduation from university. This harmonisation gives due consideration to cantonal sovereignty to the extent that it grants the federal gov-

ernment only subsidiary authority, i.e. it may step in and issue decrees only if the cantons do not implement the jointly agreed objectives voluntarily.

The new regulations governing obligatory schooling provide for a standardised starting date to the school year, a standard age at which all children throughout Switzerland must commence their education, universally applicable schooling

obligations, duration of education and objectives for individual school levels, as well as mutual recognition of school-leaving certificates. For universities the federal government and cantons must create joint bodies responsible for harmonising study levels, transfers and recognition of degrees. In addition, the federal government may define new principles governing further education.

The proposed constitutional article is virtually unopposed. The National Council approved the proposal by 176 votes to 3, and the Council of States by 44 to 1. While the cantons were not involved in formulating the proposal, they expressly welcome it. 22 out of 26 cantons voted in favour of the wording of the new constitutional article.

(RL)



2005 Swiss Abroad statistics have been published

The "Fifth Switzerland" is growing steadily. For the very first time, more than 100,000 voters exercised their political rights.

634,216 Swiss nationals were registered with Swiss embassies and consulates at the end of December 2005. Compared with December 2004, the number of Swiss citizens living abroad has increased by 11,159 or 1.8 percent. The Swiss emigrant community has grown by around 180,000 since 1990. 451,534 Swiss abroad (71.2 percent) have dual citizenship.

Their preferred countries of residence are those in the European Union (383,548 or just about 60.5 percent, see table). France is home to the largest group of Swiss emigrants (169,437) while other large colonies can be found in Germany (71,115), Italy (46,327), the UK (26,441), Spain (22,041) and Austria (13,207).

Outside of Europe, the greatest concentration of Swiss Abroad is in the USA (71,773). Statistics also show that women account for around 59 percent or 283,105 of Swiss nationals living abroad, while the men number 201,999 (41.65 percent). 145,504 (23 percent) are under the age of 18.

Of the 485,104 Swiss abroad eligible to vote, 105,212 (21.69 percent) have registered at Swiss representations to exercise their voting and electoral rights. This is a striking increase of around 10,000 (more than 10 percent) compared to the end of 2004. To view these

Swiss citizens in EU countries

France:	169,437
Germany:	71,115
Italy:	46,327
United Kingdom:	26,441
Spain:	22,041
Austria:	13,207
Netherlands:	6,856
Belgium:	6,787
Sweden:	4,435
Greece:	3,145
Denmark:	2,801
Portugal:	2,767
Hungary:	1,651
Finland:	1,423
Ireland:	1,339
Czech Republic:	1,091
Luxembourg:	956
Poland:	563
Cyprus:	433
Slovenia:	289
Slovak Republic:	210
Malta:	149
Estonia:	35
Lithuania:	23
Latvia:	27
Total:	383,548

statistics, go to www.eda.admin.ch/asd under the heading "Publikationen".

Voting made easy!

Before the referendum or election date, your political constituency will send your election documentation in the official language requested. These consist in principle of:

- explanations provided by the Federal Council concerning the individual referendum proposals,
- depending on the applicable cantonal law, a neutral official ballot envelope from the constituency,
- an official reply envelope,
- election ballots for the individual proposals.

Please note that certain cantons provide special envelopes.

If the reply envelope is also to be used as proof of your eligibility to vote, it must be signed before you return it.

If the reply envelope is not to be used as proof of your eligibility to vote, your constituency will send you a separate voter's ID in addition to the reply envelope. Include this in the reply envelope and mail it back to your constituency together with your completed ballot.

Different cantons and municipalities have different voting arrangements:

- If you received an official neutral ballot envelope from your constituency, insert your ballot in the official ballot envelope, seal this in the official reply envelope and return it;
- If you did not receive an official neutral ballot envelope from your constituency, insert your ballot directly in the reply envelope, seal it and mail it to your constituency;
- In some cantons you can use a neutral envelope if your municipality does not provide an official neutral ballot envelope. If expressly required, label this envelope "Ballot Envelope" ("Stimmkuvert"). Seal this in the official reply envelope and mail it back to your constituency.

Voting arrangements are governed by cantonal law; there are 26 different sets of rules! We therefore recommend that you read through the instructions provided by your constituency very carefully so that you can make sure your vote counts in full. If you have any questions on election procedures, please contact your constituency directly.

If you change your address, please report this to the local Swiss representation (embassy or consulate) where you are registered.

Biometric information in Swiss passports as of September 2006

In addition to the Swiss Model 03 passport, an electronically-readable passport ("Model 06") will be issued from September 2006 at the earliest. It will cost CHF 250 and will be valid for only five years.

Passports with electronically-readable information ("Model 06") will be issued as part of a federal pilot project with a maximum duration of five years. Externally it will be virtually indistinguishable from the Model 03 passport. The only difference will be an internationally recognised symbol for electronically-readable data located on the front cover – and the fact that the cover itself will be thicker and harder, due to a chip embedded in the page which contains all the information printed in the passport, including a photograph of the passport holder in a conventional digital file format (jpeg). Providing that the required electronic key is present, special scanners will be able to read this information at a short distance.

You need a Model 06 passport if you wish to visit or transit the USA after 26 October 2006 (the biometric deadline) and do not yet have a Model 03 model issued before this date. If you do not yet have a Model 03 passport but still want to apply for one before the deadline, we advise that you do so as soon as possible.

Swiss Abroad must submit applications to their local Swiss representation (embassy or consulate) for both these and the electronically-readable Model 06 passport which will be issued from September 2006 at the earliest. In future, the first part of the fee – CHF 200 – will be payable at your Swiss representation. In order to obtain a Model 06 passport, you must then visit one of the eight biometric data registration centres located

Swiss Abroad around the world

Europe: 395,397

Oceania: 27,229

Africa: 18,017

America: 163,122

Asia: 30,451



These devices will be able to read the new electronic passport „Pass 06“.

abroad (or in Switzerland). Outside Switzerland, you must do this at least one and at most 30 working days after submitting your application. Swiss representations that serve as registration centres abroad are located in Paris, Frankfurt, London, Toronto, Sao Paulo, Hong Kong, Sydney and Mexico City (upon re-evaluation it was decided to replace the centre designated for New York by one in Mexico City; see issue 4/05 of the “Swiss Review” for more information about registration centres).

If you are registered at one of these representations, please contact them in good time before going to register your biometric data. There you will be photographed and the remaining CHF 50 of the passport fee will be due for payment. Your Model 06 passport will be sent to you 60 days later or you can pick it up from your representation.

Important passport and ID card information: The data in your ID is based on the data recorded in the Swiss civil registers

(e.g. register of births, marriages, etc.), so before submitting an application for a new ID, make sure that all changes in your civil status (e.g. name change as a result of a marriage) are or have been reported in good time to your local Swiss representation. It could take several months for entries in Swiss civil registers to be updated and this may cause a considerable delay in the issuance of your ID.

The Federal Office of Police which is responsible for this task is planning to publish a leaflet with all the important information about the “electronically-readable Model 06 passport.” This will probably be available as of April and can be ordered free of charge from:

Federal Office for Construction and Logistics (BBL), Publications, CH-3003 Berne
Fax: +41 (0)31 325 50 58
www.bbl.admin.ch/bundespublikationen.

Additional information about the Model 06 passport is available at:

– schweizerpass@fedpol.admin.ch
– www.schweizerpass.ch
– Hotline: +41 800 820 008

Promoting Swiss economic growth

The initiative committee “For an end to obstructionist policy – more growth for Switzerland” of the FDP in the canton of Zurich has launched a people’s initiative entitled “Associations’ right of appeal: For an end to obstructionist policy – more growth for Switzerland!”

The people’s initiative calls for incorporation in the Swiss federal constitution of a new article 30a governing associations’ right

of appeal, whereby associations would be prohibited from appealing on matters related to the environment and zoning if decisions have already been reached on such issues by referendum or parliament.

The idea behind prohibiting association’s rights to appeal is to stimulate Swiss economic growth and both create and protect jobs.

You still have time until 16 May 2006 to sign this initiative.

PEOPLE’S INITIATIVES

The following people’s initiatives have been submitted since the last issue:

- “For sensible financing of the healthcare policy”; until 24 July 2007
- “Tax non-renewable energy, not work”; until 24 July 2007
- “Against animal cruelty and for better legal rights for animals (animal protection lawyers’ initiative)” until 31 July 2007

Signature forms for pending initiatives can be downloaded from www.admin.ch/ch/d/pore/vi/vis10.html

VOTING:

- Federal Referendum of 21 May 2006
Federal decision of 16 December 2005 on the amendment of the constitutional articles governing education
- Forthcoming referenda 2006: 24 September/26 November

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Winkelried – The Swiss “Braveheart”

Michael Steiner, winner of the Swiss Film Prize and director of Switzerland's third biggest box office money-spinner (“Mein Name ist Eugen”, 2005), has now released a new hit: “Grounding – The End of Swissair”. The pace and fascination of the film inspire optimism about the future of films made in Switzerland. By Alain Wey



Director Michael Steiner – shooting star of Swiss cinema

Is Swiss film-making alive and well? Since the beginning of the new millennium, we can answer with confidence “Yes—more so than ever.” Swiss films are pulling in Swiss cinema audiences to even better effect than some major American productions. Michael Steiner is one of the new generation of directors making attractive, popular and profitable Swiss films for the cinema. In January, his third venture “Mein Name ist Eugen” [“My Name is Eugen”], won him the Swiss Film Prize, presented in conjunction with the Solothurn Film Festival. He took this opportunity to announce his next project: “Grounding – The End of Swissair” – a swift-paced, exciting business thriller. Attracting over 200,000 cinema-goers within the space of four weeks, this film has been a resounding hit. In view of the explosive subject matter, it has even been called “the most daring work in the

history of Swiss cinema.” The Zurich-based director can congratulate himself. He has found the recipe for a Swiss film that is a success at home. Michael Steiner works at his film studio, Kontraproduktion AG in Zurich, together with scriptwriters, technicians and musicians. An encounter with a “self-taught director with his roots in pop culture”:

Journalist, press photographer, then director at Condor Film in Zurich, Michael Steiner, now 36 years old, made his first cinema film in 1991 at the age of 22. “The new generation of Swiss film-makers works with different media, different contents and different narrative modes, in terms of scripts as well as images and scenes,” explains the successful director. “It’s my impression that successful filming depends more on script-writers than on directors – in other words, on people like Michael Sauter and

his partner David Keller.” Sauter’s record includes the scripts of “Ready, Steady, Charlie!” (which sold 560,514 tickets), “Mein Name ist Eugen” and “Grounding”, the biggest Swiss cinema hits of recent years.

The box-office success of a Swiss film in Switzerland depends on its ability to spark enthusiasm in local citizens. “The most important thing first of all is to be successful in the local market and to prove that people go to the pictures when you make a good film. The subject matter is of paramount importance. ‘Eugen’ and ‘Grounding’ are clearly aimed at the Swiss market. Both subjects have a firm hold on Swiss memories: the Swissair crisis and the story of Eugen. The latter is based on a book that German-speaking Swiss people read at school. It’s about people like themselves, they can identify with it.” The Swiss clichés used in “Mein Name

ist Eugen" make people laugh at themselves. "As far as 'Grounding' is concerned," and here Michael Steiner is amazed, "the film has angered every film-goer I've met. It rekindled the rage people felt at the loss of Swissair. Everybody wanted to keep the national airline..."

This analysis also applies to Switzerland's two biggest ever box-office hits: "The Swissmakers" (940,103 viewers, 1978) and "Ready, Steady, Charlie!" (560,514 viewers, 2003). "The Swissmakers" dealt with immigration: an important issue for the Swiss. Not as a drama, which wouldn't have worked, but as a comedy. "Ready, Steady, Charlie!" took off for different reasons. That one was the first real comedy in Swiss German and made for a young audience. It is crucial for the local market to make films in Swiss German."

Steiner is happy about the revival of Swiss film-making: success with the public is worth just as much as the best financial backing from state and industry. For "Mein Name ist Eugen", Michael Steiner's team achieved a first by having the support of a strong partner from private industry as co-producer – the insurance company Mobiliar Versicherung. "Without them, we wouldn't have been able to finance the film (budget: CHF 6 million), the state grants wouldn't have been enough." Searching for private investors is typical of Steiner's approach: in addition to the Swiss Department of Culture, the canton, the city of Zurich and the Swiss television station DRS, more than 30 other sponsors financed "Grounding", including Swiss companies Amag, Migrol and Bally as well as the Japanese enterprise Sharp and the US company Reebok.

A film about a Swiss historical event? Steiner has already toyed with the idea. "I would like to make a film about Winkelried – the soldier who threw himself onto the enemy lances at the Battle of Sempach (1386) to breach the Austrian ranks. That is my most ambitious project for Switzerland. The story would start with the Battle of Morgarten and end with the Battle of Sempach. Sort of, 'Braveheart' style – that would be great. But it would take huge amounts of money, and I don't see myself being able to do it for another ten years or so. I estimate the budget at around CHF 30 million. It would have to be an international production, because it would be nonsensical to make such a lavish film for the Swiss cinema. I would need foreign partners who would guarantee right from the start that the film would show all over Europe and in America." On behalf of film fans all over the world, and especially in Switzerland, let us hope that this big project will come off one day.

www.kontra.ch, www.procinema.ch

"MEIN NAME IST EUGEN"

The adaptation of Klaus Schädelin's book "Mein Name ist Eugen" was Michael Steiner's third project aimed at cinema audiences. It tells the story of four little boys in Switzerland in the 1950s. Endless pranks and parent trouble make Eugen and Wrigley turn their backs on Berne and leave for Zurich to hunt for treasure, with a secret card in their pockets. Wrigley found the card in the cellar, and wants to find its owner: Fritzli Bühler, who is thought to live in Zurich. On the way, the boys have a chance encounter with a group of boy scouts, and join them on their trip to Ticino. They then escape by bicycle, taking their friends Eduard and the somewhat reluctant Bäschteli with them. Their parents soon discover the group's flight, and set out immediately to fetch the runaways back. Told like a fairy tale, but packed with modern gags, "Mein Name ist Eugen" brought more than 538,000 people flocking to the cinemas. The film was third on the Swiss box office hit list in 2005, after "Madagascar" (686,027 tickets sold) and "Harry Potter" (612,000).

www.eugen-film.ch



"GROUNDING – THE END OF SWISSAIR"

Based on the book "Swissair, Mythos & Grounding" ["Swissair, Myth & Grounding"] by Bilanz editor-in-chief René Lüchinger and a survey of eye-witnesses conducted by Michael Steiner, "Grounding" maps out the last days of the debt-burdened national Swiss airline, which became insolvent and was finally nailed to the floor by creditors on 2nd October 2001. The docudrama combines real people with fictional figures, archive documents from German Swiss television with elements of soap opera. "A dramatic storyline simply had to be built into it as a background for showing the grounding's victims," explains Michael Steiner. "I wouldn't have made the film if I hadn't been so outraged myself about this debacle. By 2002, I still just couldn't believe that Swissair had gone. I thought it would rise again. They couldn't just let the world's best airline disappear off the face of the earth. I didn't think it was possible – and I reckon most other Swiss people felt the same way."

www.groundingfilm.ch

Above:
Hanspeter Müller-Drossaart as Mario Corti in "Grounding"

Left: Box office hit "Mein Name ist Eugen"

"I REALLY WOULD LOVE TO MAKE A FILM WITH AL PACINO"

What are your cinematic influences? "Very broad. When I made 'Grounding' I was undoubtedly influenced by Michael Mann, but with 'Eugen' my inspiration came more from Jaco Van Dormael ('Toto the Hero', 'The Eighth Day') and Jean-Pierre Jeunet ('Amélie')."

Which genres do you particularly like? "Mafia films. If I had the material I would like to make one set in Switzerland. 'Scarface' with a Zurich accent, for example."

Is there one director who is your particular idol? "Probably Michael Mann, who made the 'Miami Vice' series. His best film was 'Heat'. But 'The Insider' was great too. However, I am also a fan of Francis Ford Coppola, Sergio Leone ('Once Upon A Time In The West', 'Once Upon A Time In America') and Martin Scorsese for his Mafia films."

What film would you like to make?

"I would like to make a film of the life of Wernher von Braun. It has never been done. The man who invented the rocket for Germany and developed the moon rocket for the Americans. His biography is fascinating: as a child he wanted to explore the moon – and ultimately he realised that dream."

Which actor would you like to make a film with?

"Al Pacino."

“There’s a lack of political will to fight poverty.” Whether the number of poor in Switzerland is a million or a mere 600,000, poverty is increasing every year and is becoming a growing problem for the country. In an interview with the “Swiss Review”, Walter Schmid, President of the Swiss Conference for Social Welfare, explained how poverty should be fought on a political level. Interview by Heinz Eckert

„Swiss Review“: The figures published by Caritas were quite alarming: Are there really a million poor people in Switzerland?

Walter Schmid: It’s impossible to provide a precise mathematical definition of what poor means in Switzerland. I think one million is too high; that figure also includes recipients of supplementary benefits who, while they may live simple lives, are not actually poor. 600,000 is a much more realistic number. But the figures aren’t really all that important. The question of whether there are 500,000 or one million is secondary. What matters is that poverty has become a topical subject in this country.

How are these figures calculated?

Generally you take a country’s average income and divide it in half. Anybody earning this amount or less is classified as poor. Using this calculation we arrive at a minimum of CHF 2,500 for a single individual to live above the poverty line and CHF 4,500 for a family of four.

Is it suspected that a large number of cases go unreported?

Since social services are regulated very differently from canton to canton, it’s extremely difficult to come up with a statistical assessment of the whole country. Not only that, but there has not been any great interest in a statistical survey of poverty at a federal level in a long time. That’s about to change. Welfare statistics are due to be published sometime this year. And as far as the unreported cases are concerned, the assumption is that around 40 percent of potential welfare recipients are not claiming benefits and trying to keep themselves afloat without public assistance.

Is this a particularly Swiss phenomenon?

It could be that the Swiss have a greater fear of going to the welfare office than people in other countries. That, however, also has some-



Walter Schmid, President of the Swiss Conference for Social Welfare

thing to do with the fact that welfare services are controlled by the municipalities and that each trip to the welfare office – especially in rural areas – is subject to strong social pressures. The number of welfare recipients under a nationwide social security system would probably be higher, which is why the number of unreported cases is probably larger here than it is elsewhere.

Is poverty still considered shameful in Switzerland?

Being poor in a country as affluent as Switzerland is pretty stigmatising. Being poor in a country with more poverty is easier since the poor there can talk about their fate with so many others. Here, poverty is still equated with personal failure, an attitude that is also making it difficult to combat. The fact is that most people did not become poor through any fault of their own.

How has the definition of poverty changed as a result of economic development?

80 years ago, poverty in Switzerland was still defined based on caloric requirements, i.e. it was determined how many calories a person needed every day to survive. Nowadays, however, basic needs include a telephone and possibly even a washing machine. In America, with its great distances, that even includes a car. Basic needs differ from country to country and from society to society. What hasn’t changed, however, is that poverty is equated with living a very simple life.

How has poverty developed in Switzerland?

The topology of poverty depends greatly on how a society deals with it. Until World War II, poverty among the elderly was a big problem both here and in other countries. Since the introduction of old age and survivors’ insurance (AHV) and the supplementary benefits in particular, we have, to a great extent, been able to eliminate old-age poverty in Switzerland. AHV and the supplementary benefits currently prevent hundreds of thousands of people from slipping into poverty in their old age. Thus, even elderly people without money can spend their twilight years in a nursing home that could potentially cost CHF 7,000 a month. Those are huge socio-political achievements that are hopefully here to stay.

Today’s poverty is caused by unemployment. What can be done to fight it?

The real question is: How can a country deal with the possibility that thousands of people of working age might no longer be able to find gainful employment and be unable to provide for themselves financially? One thing is certain: the tools we currently have at our disposal are insufficient for resolving this problem. The government, for example, isn’t allowed to interfere with wage structures or provide any jobs that might compete with commercial businesses.

Is there a lack of socio-political commitment in Switzerland?

There’s a lack of political will to fight poverty. We may have a great many social institutions but each of these is regarded individually and the aim of most changes is usually to cut expenses or maintain current levels of assistance. Nobody asks, however, whether the measures taken as a whole are actually suitable for fighting poverty and establishing some sort of social balance. And that’s precisely the ques-

tion that we should be focusing on. Let's look at an example: The objective of disability insurance is not only to pay a pension to people who are disabled, it should also be integrated into a work process wherever possible. Discussions nearly always revolve around whether more or less money should be involved. Hardly a word is mentioned about the socio-political objectives that this money should achieve.

Why is this kind of comprehensive commitment missing? Isn't there enough pressure yet?

The regulatory framework of our extremely free market economy makes it very difficult to achieve certain socio-political objectives. We have an extremely difficult time finding ways to put people with limited abilities to work in such a way that is beneficial and profitable for both society and the economy. And that's what the problem boils down to. Politics is stuck in the ideological quagmire of not being allowed to impose additional conditions on industry and, on the other hand, not being able to permit the government to compete against free enterprise. But that's not all. There's international competition to consider, as well. You can't even start any kind of experimentation in this area without running the risk of jobs being shifted abroad. That leaves very little room for manoeuvre when it comes to domestic social policy.

If poverty continues to grow, then it will certainly become a political problem as well, won't it?

This has been repeatedly predicted by certain groups who maintain that, at some point, the situation will explode. I don't think it will. Switzerland is so rich that this explosion just isn't going to happen. Even in poor countries like Romania, poverty doesn't lead to revolution and what we've got here is still far removed from the situation there.

To what extent are people to blame for their own poverty?

That's a multi-faceted question. In our society, consumerism is a status symbol that tempts young people, in particular, to build up debt. On the other hand, it's easy for these young people to get into debt. Many of them are so far into debt that they will never be in a position to pay it all off. People also frequently get into debt with a view to avoiding the need for welfare assistance. These debts, however, endanger their social networks as well since people who have borrowed money from family and friends avoid all contact with them. The result is a complete loss of social stability. This is why it's so important to work with these young people, in particular, and repeatedly point out the dangers associated with increasing indebtedness. While simpler small loans

may not be to blame, they accelerate poverty's emergence.

Is Switzerland's poverty a problem or a normal phenomenon?

Of course poverty is a problem for Switzerland, particularly because it keeps growing. And while it may not be growing as quickly as was the case over the past few years, more and more people are still falling into this category every year despite increasing affluence. While the rich are earning more and more money, the bedrock of poverty continues to grow. The divide between the rich and the poor keeps on widening, pressure shifts from the top to the bottom and there is a growing trend toward exclusion.

And is the shrinking job market coupled with rising corporate profits to blame?

One important cause certainly lies in the lack of jobs. Another factor, however, is that we don't have a family policy in place that is capable of counteracting this. We need a family policy that helps families with small and very small incomes to raise and educate their children. In Switzerland, the lion's share of public expenditures goes toward old-age benefits. Other countries do just the opposite and invest more in their family policy.

What is our social policy suffering from?

Politics is caught up in a way of thinking that makes it nearly impossible to rethink. Take the debate on whether to raise the retirement age, for example. How will that help? As long as there's no way to meaningfully deploy older

people in the workforce, not at all. The first step would have to be to implement sensible employment models.

What are your socio-political priorities? What really has to be tackled first and what measures have to be implemented?

The introduction of supplementary benefits for low-income families would take top priority. There, just a little money would have a huge positive impact. There shouldn't be any attempt to get to the bottom of all the mistakes the recipients made, however. Instead, the focus should be on helping them so that their children can be raised properly. Another change should come in the area of education benefits, which are presently very low, in order to boost these children's chances of a successful career. The next step would be to create more job opportunities not only for young people, but older people, as well. Finally, supplementary benefits should be introduced for the working poor whose wages leave them below the subsistence level.

Why is it so difficult for these demands to be implemented?

Our country is not the only one to suffer from an intellectual straightjacket, particularly when it comes to economic and social policy. The laws governing our economic regulations are viewed as God-given rules. In reality, however, they are simply one possible way to configure our economic and social life. This one-dimensional way of thinking prevents the development of progressive, modern and effective solutions to many urgent problems.

CARITAS: ONE MILLION POOR PEOPLE

■ The number of poor reported by Caritas at the beginning of the year caused quite a stir. According to Caritas, there are one million poor people in Switzerland. Caritas arrived at this projection based on the poverty guidelines set by the Swiss Conference for Social Welfare (SKOS) and figures provided by the Swiss Federal Statistical Office which estimates (based on the number of working poor households in 2003) that around 230,000 children are affected by poverty. According to Caritas, 600,000 people between the ages of 19 and 64

are poor and for pensioners the number is 200,000. When children, pensioners and all those in between are counted together we arrive at the estimated figure of one million poor people. More details will be available this year when the Swiss Federal Statistical Office publishes its first comprehensive figures regarding welfare recipients throughout all of Switzerland. Ec.

TASKS PERFORMED BY SKOS

■ SKOS started out as the „Conference on Poverty Relief“ in 1905. That forum then developed into the „Swiss Conference for Public Welfare“ which issued its first „Guide-

lines for Providing Welfare Support“ in the sixties. Among experts these quickly became an authoritative standard for developing and calculating social welfare. As a professional association, SKOS depends on the experience and active participation by people working in the area of social welfare. For this reason, people from community and municipal authorities make up a vital portion of its membership and one of the association's current cornerstones is providing opportunities for their further development. SKOS guidelines help establish uniform practices in how social welfare is handled throughout Switzerland.



84th Congress of the Swiss Abroad: A congress with a cultural influence

Between 18 and 20 August, the Congress Centre Basle will host the 84th Congress of the Swiss Abroad. Since Basle enjoys a long tradition of close links between culture and business, the OSA has chosen the following enduring theme for this year's congress: Partnership between business and culture.

"Look, then talk" is the motto for this year's congress which is largely dedicated to the discovery of those locations to which Basle owes its international fame: its museums and its industry. The two have always been inextricably linked on the banks of the Rhine. The major pharmaceutical companies, thanks to which Basle's industry is thriving, soon recognized that their prestige also depended on support of the numerous institutions in this stronghold of European culture. Private funding led to the estab-

lishment of such renowned institutions we know today as the Museum of Art, the Tinguely Museum, the Beyeler Foundation Art Museum and the Schaulager, where artists can exhibit their works in buildings designed by star architects like Herzog & De Meuron or Renzo Piano. Not only does Basle have the greatest concentration of museums for a city of its size, but also the highest number of multinationals. Business and culture share a long tradition of partnership in Basle which will be illustrated through enriching museum visits and interesting speakers.

The Congress for the Swiss Abroad kicks off on Friday 18 August, with the meeting of the Council for the Swiss Abroad in the town hall between 9 a.m. and noon. The session will continue after lunch until 5 p.m. The evening will then be dedicated to the official opening of the congress in the Congress Centre, with the performance of the musical tale "Mountains Don't Move." Federal Councillor Christoph Blocher will speak to

the Swiss Abroad attending Saturday morning's plenary meeting. In the afternoon a choice of locations such as the Schaulager, the Beyeler Foundation Art Museum, the Museum of Culture, the Museum of Art and the Museum of Antiquities is on the agenda. The evening will be reserved entirely for the banquet at the Messe Basle banquet hall. In keeping with the theme of this congress, Sunday will be given over to museum visits. You can find more information about the 84th Congress for the Swiss Abroad at www.aso.ch.

Wanted: Host families

Over the past 14 years more than a thousand Swiss Abroad have had the opportunity to enjoy the hospitality of a Swiss family. Host families and visitors were sought, placed and cared for by Swiss Ping Pong. At the end of 2006, the Swiss Ping Pong exchange project will come to an end. The OSA thanks all those involved and aims to continue the project in a new format.

This project was initially launched on the occasion of the 700th anniversary of the Swiss Confederation in 1991. The idea was to invite as many Swiss Abroad as possible to participate in the event's festivities. Women's organisations were persuaded to implement the idea, which would simultaneously enable encounters between Swiss nationals at home and abroad. These ladies were willing to take Swiss Abroad into their own homes with room and board provided by the hosts.

This one-time event sparked off an exciting project. Even after the big anniversary, Swiss Abroad continued to take advantage of this opportunity to visit Switzerland and get to know Swiss citizens on a personal level. Thus Swiss Ping Pong was born. The Stapferhaus Lenzburg provided a home for this project as

well as competent, experienced management. For 14 years Brigitte Fuchs, Project Leader at the Stapferhaus, looked for families in Switzerland who were willing to accommodate guests. Her work matching up hosts and suitable guests from all over the world has resulted in the formation of some long-term friendships.

Swiss Ping Pong has also had to cope with a new surge of visitors since the introduction of study opportunities for young Swiss Abroad. These young people attend a language course, get a taste of university life or take part in a seminar.

For the past six years they have also been placed with Swiss families and, while the number of young people taking advantage of these offers and looking for accommodation continues to grow, they appreciate the opportunity to gain an insight into Swiss family life, and the host families thoroughly enjoy the breath of fresh air their foreign visitor brings into their homes.

The Stapferhaus Lenzburg has made a strategic decision to discontinue the Swiss Ping Pong project. As a cultural institution whose activities are focused on the organisation of exhibitions both in Switzerland and abroad as well as educational services in the fields of cultural promotion and management and socio-culture, the Stapferhaus Lenzburg feels that Swiss Ping Pong no longer fits its concept.

The OSA is ready to take over the baton and, from October 2006 onward, assume responsibility for the youth-related activities of Swiss Ping Pong. Moreover, we are aiming to extend the project's offers for young people to the French-speaking part of Switzerland. With this in mind, we are seeking partners and host families in that region. The OSA hopes that, of the enormous network built up over the years, it can keep as many friends of Swiss Ping Pong as possible on its files.



Loved by locals and visitors alike: The Tinguely Fountain in Basle

84TH CONGRESS OF THE SWISS ABROAD, BASLE

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Please return the completed coupon to the following address by 30 May 2006: Organisation of the Swiss Abroad, Congress, Alpenstrasse 26, P.O. Box, CH-3006 Berne, e-mail: congress@aso.ch. Since this year's deadlines have been shortened for organisational reasons, the end of June will mark the deadline for Congress of the Swiss Abroad registrations. The registration form is included in the congress information package which can be ordered using the above coupon. You can also order the congress information package electronically at: congress@aso.ch. Please do not forget to include your full postal address.

Young Swiss Abroad meet in Switzerland

This summer, the OSA's Youth Service once again offers a wide range of recreational and educational holidays in Switzerland. We want to establish ties: Ties to our country, ties to Swiss people living in Switzerland and ties to those living all over the world.

This summer the Youth Service is expecting around 160 young Swiss Abroad to attend the two summer camps alone. We organise unforgettable, action-packed holidays with participants from over 40 countries. We offer them the opportunity to learn new sports and get to know the breathtaking mountains of the Bernese Oberland. And since not everybody feels the same urge to get out into the open air, our camps offer alternative workshops where kids can join in on artistic, electronic or musical activities. Our goal is to have fun with others of the same age.

Dates:

Summer camp 1 in Kandersteg:
16 – 28 July 2006
Summer camp 2 in Kandersteg:
30 July – 11 August 2006
Mobile in Switzerland – up in
the mountains of the Valais:
21 – 27 August 2006

Plan your future during the holidays?

Our "Training in Switzerland" program is geared toward young people who are interested in obtaining an education in Switzerland or who would simply like to take a peek at a Swiss university or training opportunities in some branch of the Swiss industry. We offer you one-on-one counselling and give you tips on educational opportunities in Switzerland.

Take an educational holiday

Swiss Abroad can learn German or French in two-week language courses. Our workshop will ad-



Fantastic weather at the New Year's camp on the Hasliberg

dress the relationship between business and culture using Basle as an example. You will also attend the Federal Youth Session where you can experience Switzerland's direct democracy first hand. Our open-minded host families are eagerly awaiting you and will let you join in on everyday Swiss life.

As always, information on these offers can be requested at: *Organisation for the Swiss Abroad, Youth Service, Alpenstr. 26, 3006 Berne, Tel.: ++41 (0)31 356 61 00 Fax: ++41 (0)31 356 61 01 youth@aso.ch, www.aso.ch*

Have you ever seen snow?

On day two of our winter camp in Hasliberg (27 Dec. – 5 Jan. 2006) I picked up a twelve-year-old Bolivian boy from Zurich Kloten airport who had missed his connecting flight in Miami and, despite the 24-hour delay, still wanted to make it to camp to join the other forty-seven campers. As soon as I had liberated him from the UM (unaccompanied minor) counter, we tackled the challenging task of weaving our way through the airport's teeming masses with his luggage to reach our train's departure platform. Once we had emerged from the artificially lit underworld of the airport's train station, my Bolivian companion discovered the thin dusting of white snow that covered everything. He practically

burst with excitement. "Is this snow?" he asked me without taking his eyes off that fascinating sight. When you watch a child's very first experience with snow, it's something you'll never forget. You could tell from his wide eyes that he could barely believe what he was seeing and the same was true with the plentiful graffiti so colourfully covering nearly every conceivable surface near the tracks.

The train took us farther and farther into Switzerland's winter wonderland. The closer we came to our destination in Hasliberg, the more snow cov-

ered the countryside and the more impressed my young guest became. While it may not have been very noticeable in the well-heated double-decker train from Zurich Airport to Lucerne, as soon as we were sitting in the small Brünig-Hasliberg train it was obvious that I was travelling with a boy from warmer climes. Shivering from head to toe, he and I pulled out gloves and a scarf from the huge suitcase we had parked in the entry area of the train. He didn't really seem to know what to do with these odd pieces of (hand-knitted) clothing so I helped him get them on. A good two and a half hours later we finally arrived at the camp's deserted main building. Everybody had already hit the slopes.

It didn't take him long to get settled in and then take his first twenty spills in the snow while trying to master the art of controlling two very uncooperative boards strapped to his feet. His big eyes with their dark lashes and the way they sparkled when they spied snow are something I'll remember for a long time to come.

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Switzerland is becoming the Mecca of low-cost airlines

Low-cost airlines are taking Switzerland by storm. At the airports in Basle and Geneva, around 30 percent of all passengers are already boarding cheap flights. In European travel, the airline Swiss is responding to competition from budget airlines by offering rock-bottom prices. By Lorenzo Vasella



easyJet and other low-cost airlines are making life difficult for Swiss.

Never in the history of civil aviation has it been so cheap to fly. If you book early you can jet all around Europe at absolutely rock-bottom prices – all thanks to low-cost airlines. From Switzerland, aeroplanes run by easyJet and Helvetic Airways alone fly to more than 50 holiday and business destinations. Five years ago there were scarcely a dozen. The number of budget airlines that are flying from bases abroad to Swiss airports is also on the increase.

Low-cost airlines have two events in particular to thank for this dramatic upturn. The first was the grounding of Swissair in October 2001 – this created a void in the Swiss airspace. Swiss International Airlines, the successor to the stranded pride of the nation, has withdrawn from many locations. The vacuum is being

filled by budget airlines. The second event was the Bilateral Air Transport Agreement between Switzerland and the European Union, which came into force in June 2002 and immediately enabled foreign companies to fly from Switzerland not only to their native countries but to others as well.

The EuroAirport in Basle/Mulhouse is benefiting tremendously from this up-and-coming sector. Almost 30 percent of its 3.3 million passengers flew with a low-cost airline in the past year. The latter are described by airport spokesperson Vivienne Gaskell as “one part of the overall strategy.” She states that low-cost airlines are an “important growth driver” for the EuroAirport and that, in 2005 alone, passenger numbers rose by 30 percent. As a result, the national airport is once again approaching the

peak figures recorded before Swissair was grounded, when 3.8 million passengers would fly out of Basle. easyJet in particular is contributing to this meteoric growth. This budget airline from England has stationed three of its orange planes at the EuroAirport since 2004, with another set to join them in the spring.

The industry leader also runs a hub at Geneva International Airport. There, as many as 35 percent of the airport’s ten million passengers take the low-cost option. The Genevans have even allocated air travel discounters their own special terminal, which only provides a basic essential service, so that the airport tax can be forced down to less than CHF 20 per passenger. Spokesman Philippe Roy indicated that Geneva International Airport also has plans to renovate the current charter building, which dates back to 1949, but the project is currently being blocked by Air France.

Traditional airlines like Swiss fear competition from the budget airlines. Swiss, Switzerland’s largest carrier – now a subsidiary of Germany’s Lufthansa – is no longer safe even in its own home, Zurich-Kloten Airport. While it succeeded in expelling easyJet to the Rhine two years ago, Helvetic Airways already serves around 20 destinations from Zurich, with a further five due to be added in the spring. Swiss responded with a new tariff structure. Like its competitors from the budget segment, it now offers flexible prices: the earlier you book, the cheaper your flight. Swiss tickets are now available on special offer for under CHF 100.

Will this strategy work for Swiss? Aviation expert Sepp Moser has his doubts. In his view, unlike the low-cost airlines, Swiss will lose money on these low prices because “carriers like easyJet fly with far lower costs than traditional airlines as they limit themselves to supplying just the basic product – transport from A to B.” Swiss spokesman Dominik Werner, however, is able to see a positive side to the competition from budget airlines: “The low-cost airlines attract a clientele that would never have flown before.” And these people too may decide they want more comfort at some point.

MONEY OR NATIONAL PRIDE?

■ Traditionally, the sight of tail-fins bearing the Swiss cross at airports abroad would always make the hearts of Swiss travellers beat faster. It seemed that here was a piece of home within their grasp. But what about now? Do Swiss people still care whether or not they fly with a Swiss airline, or are they more interested in saving money? “Swiss Review” decided to get to the root of the matter with the help of a survey conducted by the industry magazine “Schweizer Touristik” (ST). ■ Every summer for more than a decade now, the ST has been interviewing over 1,000 package holidaymakers at Zurich airport about their travel habits, with questions including the cost of the journey and the choice of airline. The survey reveals that price has always played an important role. One point of note, however, is that in 2001,

prior to the grounding of Swissair, more than 20 percent of interviewees said that they did not pay particular attention to the price. Two years later and this figure had fallen to just under seven percent. Last year, again almost twelve percent said that they regarded the price as “not important”.

■ While price sensitivity has increased since the grounding, choice of airline has become less important. In 2000, a good 50 percent of all those surveyed still looked at the tail-fin. Five years later, only 37.5 percent still felt that it was important which airline carried them to their destination. It is therefore apparent that Swiss air passengers are tending more and more to switch their attention from the service provider to their wallets. LOV

World Economic Forum

in Davos

What drives people to go to the World Economic Forum (WEF)? "Sex and China", says "Le Temps" newspaper. Of the 240 debates on offer, it was the round table on "Sex and Business" that was the most popular. Apart from a few exceptions, the leading politicians were conspicuous by their absence. Consequently, the WEF filled the front pages of the daily newspapers with invited stars: singers Bono (U2) and Peter Gabriel, as well as actors Angelina Jolie, Brad Pitt and Michael Douglas.

FIFA punishes Huggel

In the wake of the incidents during the match between Switzerland and Turkey in Istanbul on 16 November last year, FIFA's disciplinary committee ruled that the Turkish national team must play its next six home games "behind closed doors" on neutral territory. It has also imposed a six-game ban on Switzerland's Benjamin Huggel and Turkey's Alpay and Emre Belozoglu. As a consequence of this decision, the Swiss international player will not be allowed to take part in the World Cup.

Euro 2008 and security

The security costs that the Swiss authorities will have to pay for staging the 2008 European Football Championship have escalated from CHF 10 million to more than CHF 60 million. Switzerland's Minister for Defence and Sport, Samuel Schmid, explained that the initial estimate was made before the attacks on New York and that the new security standards have not been relaxed since then.

New look for Cailler

Faced with strong competition, Nestlé Switzerland is seeking to rejuvenate its brands. Nestlé boss Nelly Wenger, former director of the Swiss national exhibition Expo.02, has ordered this rejuvenation programme, which will begin with the Cailler brand

of chocolate. With this in mind, she has asked the French architect and designer of the Expo.02 monolith, Jean Nouvel, to modernise the product design. Nestlé Switzerland's long-term aim is to bring out at least twelve new Cailler products every year.

Spiralling figures

It's one record after another at UBS. Compared with 2004, Switzerland's largest bank has managed to post a 75% rise in net profit to CHF 14,029 billion. The Credit Suisse Group has also announced record results, reporting net profit of CHF 5,850 billion, up 4% on last year.

Bird flu

Swiss poultry have been cooped up since the middle of February. Following on from the directives passed back in October 2005, the Federal Council has adopted new directives to protect poultry against bird flu. They must now be kept in covered enclosures so that no wild birds can get in. The H5N1 virus has been detected in France, about a hundred kilometres from the Swiss border. Further dead wild birds and carriers of the virus have been found in Italy, Germany and Greece. A threat is also posed by migratory birds from Africa that will reach Switzerland in the spring.

Fax from Egypt

The publication of a confidential Swiss intelligence document in the press has caused an uproar in the Swiss parliament. The electronic surveillance system operated by the Swiss Ministry of Defence intercepted a fax sent by the Egyptian foreign ministry to its London embassy, mentioning the existence of secret CIA prisons in Europe. But the authenticity of the document has not been proven.

Medal haul for Switzerland

The Olympic Games in Turin were kind to the Swiss athletes. Bruno Kernén and Martina Schild came away with bronze and silver respectively in the



downhill. Ambrosi Hoffmann from Graubünden won a bronze medal in the super-G. In freestyle skiing, the acrobatics of Evelyne Leu earned her the gold. In the skeleton, the women's event was won by Maya Pedersen-Bieri from Berne, with Gregor Stähli achieving bronze in the men's competition. Tanja Frieden from Berne took gold in a new Olympic discipline, the snowboard cross. Snowboarder Philipp Schoch managed to beat his brother Simon to the gold in the men's parallel giant slalom, with Daniela Meuli winning the women's contest. Stéphane Lambiel put in a wonderful performance to earn the silver medal in figure skating. In the two-man bob, the duo Martin Annen and Beat Hefti came away with the bronze medal. And the silver medal in curling was won by the Swiss team skipped by Mirjam Ott.

Swissmetal

In Reconvilier (JU), the employees of Swissmetal are on strike for the second time in just over a year. They are protesting against the restructuring measures planned by management. More than 10,000 people from all over the "Arc Jurassien" region have demonstrated in support of the 300 or more strikers. Joseph Deiss, Minister of Economic Affairs, has appealed to the management of Swissmetal and the trade union Unia to open negotiations.

Public finances

Switzerland's accounts make for surprising viewing. In 2005, the government had to contend with a deficit of just CHF 100 million instead of the 1.8 billion budgeted. This improvement was thanks to a fall in spending of more than CHF 1.1 billion and a rise in income of CHF 600 million. And this does not even include the exceptional income: proceeds of CHF 7 billion from Swiss National Bank gold sales and CHF 1.4 billion from the sale of Swisscom shares. As a result, the budget is expected to be balanced again by 2007.

Air pollution record

During the course of January and February, concentrations of dangerous fine dust particles in the air reached unprecedented levels for Switzerland. The NABEL monitoring network continuously measures air pollution, with the limit set at 50 micrograms per cubic metre of air. In Switzerland's major cities, this permitted threshold was at times exceeded up to fourfold. Following an appeal by the Swiss Environment Minister, Moritz Leuenberger, twelve cantons introduced a speed limit of 80 km/h on their motorways. The recent wind and change in the weather have "cleared" the air, but preventive measures will still be taken.

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