

A Swiss finds Work in Germany (A report of a Swiss citizen)

I was introduced to the manager who greeted me cordially. I looked for a room, and in a week I found something decent in the home of a woman who belonged to the "Ernste Bibelforscher" [1]. So I was in good company. Next day I went into the business in order to look around. I had been promised the position of business manager. The salary seemed to be adequate. I was introduced to my colleagues. They were surprised; a Swiss is a kind of rarity and they admired, especially, my shoes, and also that I did not have to use the greeting, "Heil Hitler". I greeted them in the morning, "Grueezi mit enand" (Greetings, folks). The answer was "Heil Hitler". Later they started to answer "Gruess Gott" (God's greetings) and nobody hailed anymore. I made friends. They invited me for supper. When we sat down, somebody whispered, "Isn't that the broadcaster from Beromuenster?" I got nervous. I put careful questions. I got out my feelers; so did they. Soon we were friends for life. They told me what was going on, showed me documents of which existence I only knew from hearsay. Everything which is rumoured outside of Germany seems to be true, many things are worse.

I had ample opportunity to learn about the new conditions. Already the first day the Gestapo was very much interested in me. Their interest, itself, was of course no surprise to me, but I was surprised that they did it so clumsily. Each night the Gestapo phoned the hotel, whether the Swiss was still living there? Each night they requested my passport for safekeeping. Each morning I had to get it again. I also needed food stamps. I thought that the Swiss rationing system was complicated. It is very simple indeed compared with the German system. I received a whole billfold full of stamps. Each coupon worth five grams. When I moved into my new room, I informed the police at once. Again I had to fill out formulars about things which certainly were no business of the police. Some questions, such as of the possible Jewish grandmother, I refused to answer. But I could not get away with it. When everything seemed to be in order, and I left with a hearty "Gruess Gott" it came into my mind to ask where I had to go in case I wanted to return to Switzerland. The official answered flippantly: "You cannot return at all. We will march into Switzerland in a few weeks". I left and felt very bad. What if the man was right and I could not leave?

I talked to a Czech, and he told me that I had committed the greatest stupidity in coming to Germany. I agreed with him. But I had to know how I stood. I wrote to my Consul and told him that I could not report yet as my working book had been taken from me. I also told him what the German official had told me in respect to my returning to Switzerland. After a few days, I received an evasive answer. Now I got very nervous. I blamed the Swiss authorities who had not given me a clear picture of the circumstances. Later I met other young Swiss men who agreed, that they would not have accepted work in Germany if they would have been advised by the Swiss

authorities that they might not be able to return.

Soon the first pay-day arrived. I was curious. I received a long envelope filled with figures. Deductions, taxes, fees, voluntary contributions. Not much remained. My colleagues watched me. They saw my disappointment. They started to complain also. A family man received 160 marks; another had 90 marks; another, 120 marks per month. It is no surprise that they voiced their anger if no stooge was listening. They showed me former pay-books. One man made, before

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the Hitler regime, twice as much, and had only half the taxes to pay. I went to the manager. He listened coldly. I threatened to leave unless he fulfilled his promises. I understood that my salary was net, not gross. I could not buy a thing with these cuts. "You will not be able to leave and you cannot give notice; you are under the jurisdiction of German law". I answered, "Yes, I can go and I will. I am a free Swiss citizen and will leave whenever I choose." He became embarrassed. He is short of help. He phoned the Trustee of Labour (Nazi official). He stated that a pay rise would be illegal and that the firm was right. I went to see the Trustee myself. His function is to settle disputes between the individual worker and the firm. He advised me to serve notice in the legal way as the firm concerned is in disrepute because of its labour practices. One notice goes to the management, another to the employment office, which has to endorse the notice before anybody can leave. I opened my notice with the following words, "I want to leave because my country has been insulted and agreements made with me broken." No answer after one week. I went, personally, to the employment office. I took a friend as a witness. We entered into a luxurious office. The official became angry when he saw us. He was badly dressed and did not appear to be trained in an office. Most likely he is a party member who has been rewarded with this job, and now tried ardently to make good. He says: "There are the two Swiss." Pause. "Do you suggest to believe that you have the same rights in Germany as in your dirty little country? Here no rights are preserved for you. Go and get back to Switzerland. We did not ask you to come. Go fast where you came from. It is not my job to represent the interest of employees. The interest of the firm comes first." We listened quietly and watched him. I see his sleeve as he gesticulates lively with his arm. There are holes on his elbow. I try to say something. He goes into a fit and yells that the Gestapo will be very interested in us and that it will not be easy for us to cross the border. Then he gives me a paper with the permission to leave my position. We are excused. Another scene developed with the manager of the firm. He is all red and threatens with the Gestapo. I am fed up. I go to the legal aid of the German Labour Front. Again elaborate office space. In a dark waiting room sat the people who come here for their rights. A woman leaves the office crying. We could hear through the door, in which manner "German Volksgenossen" are treated. I told the legal advisor that nowhere in Europe had I ever received treatment so bad as in Germany. He tries to calm me down. He thinks the persons involved have been irritated. He advised to complain about the treatment at the employment office in order to collect, also, some good experiences in Germany. I filed suit before the Labor Court. I was interested to learn about the procedure of this institution. I saw a counselor, "Oberrechnungsrat". I tell him my case. He listens for a while, then he interrupts and says: "Did you see today's papers? No? So Switzerland is sending munitions and guns to England. You are Swiss. Go to hell and fast! I will not listen to a Swiss!" I looked at him. I said friendly: "Gruess Gott" and left.

I found a better paid job. I waived written agreements. They are of no account in

Germany. You have to have connections and money. Then all doors are open to you.

Many war prisoners are to be seen in German streets. They work under guard on bomb shelters and water installations. Many look like family men and are very depressed. When I passed them in the morning, I whispered, "Bonjour, messieurs". They whispered back in case the guard did not watch.

There are also Frenchmen who came "voluntarily" to work in Germany, driven by starvation. Their attitude compares unfavorably with the proud and confident attitude of the Czechs, the Danes and the Norwegians.

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The Poles who are in Germany are marked with a square badge, and the Jews with the star of David. Both are treated like dogs. Transport after transport of the Jews [is] sent away. They are permitted 25 kilo baggage. The Gestapo seals their living quarters and confiscates the possessions. They are sent to the East, and with the exception of the old men, are put out on roads without shelter and clothes and have to build new roads.

Some Czechs told me about the occupation of their country. All valuable goods are requisitioned and carried away by the Germans. But the passive resistance is marvelous. Almost no news about it has come to Switzerland, but the Czechs are prepared and wait for the moment of liberation.

Alsations have a special function in Germany. I met one who fought in Dunkirk and later was sent, for several months, to a prisoner's camp. He did not tell his experiences. He asserted, however, that he is a Frenchman and wants to stay one. All men from Alsace are released and permitted to take work in Germany. Of course, for slave wages. A special problem are the Swiss in Germany, whether they are there since years or are newcomers. You never know where they stand. I preferred to mix with Germans, where I knew that I had to be careful with what I said. I met a Swiss woman, mother of 10 children, who is very proud that four of her sons fight for the Germans. I met others who were quite ready to support a German Anschluss (occupation).

There is a League of National-Socialist Swiss in Greater Germany with their office in Stuttgart. The leader is Major Leonhardt, and another Swiss National-Socialist leader lives in Vienna, Franz Burri. They fight one another; most likely, they both gamble for the future "Gauleiter" job in Switzerland. Leonhardt addressed a meeting of 50 to 60 National-Socialist Swiss in a German town. He attacked the Swiss government as socialistic and especially the "traitor" Guisan. He told about a Swiss free corps to be formed at the eastern front. He would be the leader of this group and that he was sure that thousands of Swiss soldiers would cross the border, illegally, into Germany in order to sign up. Then he ended: "National-Socialists, Swiss men, close your eyes and you will be able to listen to the current of your German blood in your veins. It is the blood of your people. We Swiss greet the leader of Greater Germany, Adolf Hitler, 'Sieg Heil'." In the discussions, a naïve man asked, what would be the position of the French, Italian and romanic Swiss? His answer was, "They are not Swiss, they may do what they want."

Propaganda material which calls for a Swiss free corps for the eastern front has been shipped en masse into Switzerland. While I had great difficulty to go back to Switzerland, there are numerous persons who travel back and forth without restrictions. The Swiss Consul told me frankly that I would have received my visa a long time ago, if the German authority would not be suspicious of me. It is a pity that while the German

custom officials investigate thoroughly whatever crosses the border, the Swiss officials in their purity abstain from thorough investigation. Therefore, it is easy to send propaganda material to Switzerland. Important information on the Swiss military defense also goes freely into Germany. About 1,000 young Swiss have crossed into Germany illegally up until now. They are either Nazis, or unemployed or adventurers. They are assembled in certain localities, requested to tell what they know, then receive military training and are sent to the Eastern Front. Some realize soon what they are in for. They come to see their Consul in order to receive permission to go back to Switzerland. But as they have crossed the border illegally the Germans apply the severe laws of immigrants to them which renders them without rights. "Under the protection of the Swiss Embassy" we read on our matriculation cards. This protection has vanished into a kind of illusion. Certainly

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the Swiss diplomats have a difficult position in Germany. They cannot help much. But it has to be said that anybody who stands knees bent in Germany will not achieve anything. It should not be that the impression is created that Swiss representatives in Germany have no other function but to collect the Swiss military taxes from Swiss citizens living in Germany. Again and again I met fine Germans who are concerned about the fate of Switzerland. Influential men said to me: "If Germany attacks Switzerland, then I do not want to be a German anymore. Shoot them when they come and shoot them good. You Swiss do not know what you have in your country."

Editorische Anmerkungen

1 - Fußnote im Original: „Christian pacifist sect.“