
Switzerland

'To be free, as our forefathers were!'

Reprinted from *Neue Solidarität*

Pressure on Switzerland is increasing. Last December, Swiss voters rejected entry into the European Community's Economic Council—much to the irritation of the country's elite, who, like their counterparts elsewhere, are swimming out with the free-trade tide and leaving their country's interests behind. Switzerland is also supposed to join the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) negotiations—that is, if things proceed according to the wishes of the free trade crowd. But since according to the Swiss Constitution, the citizens must hold a plebiscite on the question, there is now a flurry of activity by both advocates and opponents of GATT. Since April 13, the advocates have even included the Swiss Farmers Association (SBV). The fact that under the GATT regime, the SBV's own members must suffer mind-boggling income losses, and that only a tiny handful of Switzerland's many well-tended farms will survive, is not stopping the gentlemen in SBV headquarters from handing their members over to the hangman.

The SBV is now making common cause with certain big industrial interests who complain that agriculture hamstringing their more or less clean international deals. At a joint press conference held by the SBV and the Swiss Trade and Industry Association, the latter's chairman, Leuenberger, made the farmers a really generous offer: "We will support Swiss agriculture," he assured, "under certain conditions," namely, agriculture is to be made completely dependent upon industry and the banks.

But the farmers themselves see it differently. Just how differently, was evident to anyone who attended the two meetings of the new opposition organization called the New Swiss Farmers' Coordination (NBKS) during the second week of April. What was unusual was not only the fact that the rooms were filled with hundreds of farmers and representatives of small and medium-sized industry, but also their fighting spirit.

Although the NBKS has only existed for a few months, it has already set into motion a number of activities which have waved a red flag in the face of the "cosmopolitans," as the German advocate of "American System" economics Friedrich List used to dub the proponents of free trade. This was put quite well in an article which appeared in the *Sonn-*

tagszeitung on April 10, shortly before the NBKS meetings: "Filled meeting rooms, heated emotions, harsh words against the GATT agricultural treaties. The New Swiss Farmers' Coordination can't complain about attendance. On the contrary: Founded only a few months ago, the grassroots movement, formed around the farmer Rudolf König and the veterinarian Franz Mäder, has dug in especially into eastern and central Switzerland. In the mountain district, it has ties to farmers' opposition committees.

"The NBKS's ideological orientation can be seen from its Declaration of Principles: The European Union is enmired in a 'swamp of corruption,' and GATT is being pushed by the United States. 'We are not willing to make ourselves subservient to multilateral organizations and other corrupt powers, nor to allow ourselves to be shamelessly looted,' the NBKS lashes out. The GATT treaty must therefore be vigorously opposed in order to halt 'the collapse of agriculture and small business.' This opposition from the base has not been exactly welcomed by the Swiss Farmers Association (SBV). In regional meetings, its Brugg-based headquarters is attempting to rouse some understanding for GATT and to close the SBV's ranks."

'Terrible conditions' among EU farmers

That effort to drum up support to GATT will most likely be difficult, since again, the Swiss farmers and small businessmen see it differently. When they visit their European neighbors, they can see with their own eyes the effect of the European Union (EU) policies, and it horrifies them. At the two NBKS meetings, one speaker after another expressed horror at the extent of the farm closings, the "terrible condition" of field and pasture, and the poverty on the farms. If the same were introduced into Switzerland, the collapse would be even greater, because they will be dropping down into the pit from a significantly higher level.

Some 320 people came to the meeting in Rotkreuz in the canton of Zug. What most amazed *Neue Solidarität's* reporter, coming from Germany, was the fact that about one-third of the attendees were young people—something unthinkable in European Union countries. In Switzerland, even farms with only 10 hectares are full-scale operations which are expected to remain family owned.

There were about 250 people attending the following night's meeting in Diepoldsau in Thurgau canton, and there, too, there were many women and young people. At both meetings, local officials showed up both from that particular canton, and from surrounding districts as well; the media were also there in force.

"Whither Europe's Agriculture?" was the theme of the meetings. The invited guest speakers were Rosa Tennenbaum from the European Farmers' Commission of the Schiller Institute, and Josef Kremmeter, a farmer from Neu-Ulm, Germany. Kremmeter spoke about the effects of the European Commission's agricultural policies on his farm, and about

the dim prospects for the future under these conditions. Mrs. Tennenbaum described the effects which the European Union agricultural reform and the GATT agreement will have on Europe's business and agriculture, and outlined what that would mean for the rest of the world.

People were shocked as Kremmeter—who still farms 110 hectares and feeds 2,000 hogs—described how agropoliticians see his farm as only a tiny operation without any future, and how he was told that he would have to grow four times as much in order to remain “competitive.” The audience was also upset by the official calculation that by the year 2000, at least one out of every two farms in both eastern and western Germany will no longer exist. For Switzerland, with its small-scale structures and extremely intensively farmed fields, such a policy would raze the countryside.

Many farmers already know this, and their attitude is correspondingly angry, especially against elected and farm association figures. Just recently, the Farmers Association agreed to a reduction of the milk price by 10 Swiss centimes (6.9¢) per liter. Association members tersely and fittingly dismiss their representatives as “chieftains of the Takeit family,” as NBKS President Rudolf König put it. But here as everywhere, the problem is, as one person put it, “How do we get rid of these characters?”

‘Now we have to mobilize’

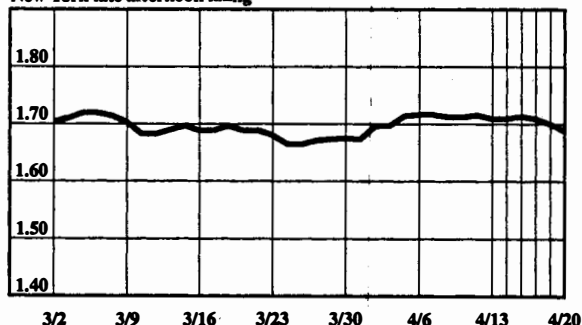
Most speakers at the meetings called upon their colleagues to stand together and show unity in order to repel the common enemy. “The farmers,” one person proudly said, “are more powerful than industry or small business. Now we have to mobilize.” And indeed, that is what they intend to do. To the outsider, this spirit of independence and combativeness is quite impressive. As Mrs. Tennenbaum reminded the listeners, it is rooted in Switzerland's history. The fight for independence waged by the mountain people 700 years ago against the overweening power of the Hapsburg monarchy continues to shape people's consciousness down to the present day. They are proud of their direct-participation democracy, and are ready to defend it with tooth and nail. “To be free as our forefathers were!” the speaker quoted from the Rütli Oath as dramatized by Friedrich Schiller in his play *Wilhelm Tell*.

And now the Swiss must defend this independence—an independence which has burned brightly for centuries, and has served as the guiding star for the rebelling farmers in the great German Peasants' War of 1524-25—against today's power elite. If they do not succeed, Mrs. Tennenbaum warned, their forefathers' struggles will all have been in vain; but if they succeed, their victory can unhinge the entire European Union and GATT system of exploitation. This accounts for why the enemy launched a huge media salvo, a flood of newspaper articles, radio reports, and even defamatory slurs on television, in an attempt to split the NBKS and fatally weaken it.

Currency Rates

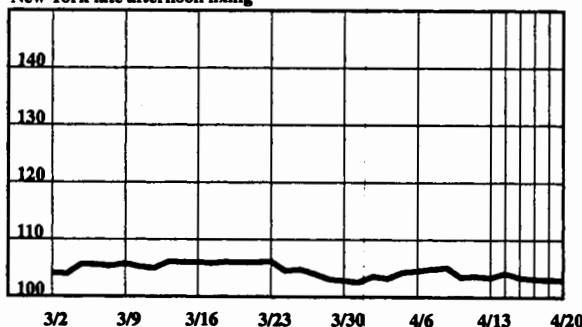
The dollar in deutschemarks

New York late afternoon fixing



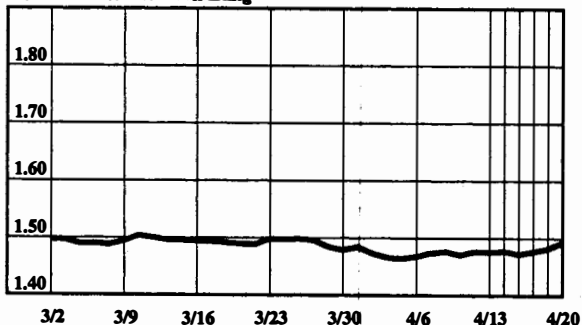
The dollar in yen

New York late afternoon fixing



The British pound in dollars

New York late afternoon fixing



The dollar in Swiss francs

New York late afternoon fixing

