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In Wake of Disorders, Swiss Try to Sort Out Youth Problems

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Calm and gilt-edged efficiency have returned to Zurich, Switzerland's largest city and financial capital, which for 13 months was a theater of youth violence in the streets.

The shops along Bahnhofstrasse—one of those riot-torn streets in the heart of Zurich—were frequent targets of young, rock-throwing demonstrators claiming disenchantment with Switzerland's affluent, tightly ordered system. Clashes broke out as well between youths and police in Bern, Basel and Lausanne.

The disorders beginning in May, 1980, were most acute in Zurich, where violence flared on more than 60 occasions, causing more than \$3.25 million in property damage. There were more than 3,800 arrests and identity checks, and uncounted numbers of injuries.

Four months have passed since the streets of Swiss cities became normal again. Gone is the tear gas and police in riot gear. The leaderless youth movements have splintered into component groups, weary or wary of turbulence.

Nevertheless, the calm in Swiss cities this fall is an agitated one.

"It still feels like a heavy place," said a 27-year-old Zurich woman who said she was associated with the youth movement and asked not to be identified. "I feel there's a lot of mental violence, rather than physical violence _ people trying to get advantages or prove something because of the riots."

Swiss authorities still are trying to come to terms with what they tend to call "the phenomenon" of youth unrest in one of the world's richest countries, where unemployment is only about 0.2 percent in contrast to 8 to 10 percent in other countries. The complex social problem posed by disaffected youth has been addressed in these various ways:

The Swiss, the world's leading spenders on insurance, will be able to take out policies beginning Jan. 1 covering them against losses from "riots, tumult and similar disturbances."

The municipal elections next spring in Zurich, for which candidates already are being named, will certainly be dominated by debate about the unrest. The incumbent mayor, 62-year-old historian Sigmund Widmer, is one casualty of the troubles. He announced months ago he would not seek re-election.

The Federal Commission on Youth Questions, in a report this fall—its second in 11 months about the troubles—recommended amnesty for demonstrators, suggesting their conduct was no more reprehensible than that of tax cheats who "regularly" are pardoned.

The commission also declared that "the pronounced polarization in cities which have been theaters of disturbance is the consequence of reciprocal provocation. Authorities and youths have mutually pushed each other to the limit." The panel's fundamental message was the need for "communication instead of confrontation," and suggested that schools, churches and the media encourage a "dialogue" between the generations.

In its first report, issued late last year, the youth commission asserted that the street clashes "would not have erupted if we had not lost the habit of speaking, one with another, between the generations, and among the generations."

Street violence, the panel said, is "the consequence of an isolation from which a large number of people of all ages in our society suffers"

According to official estimates, there are more than 100,000 alcoholics and 6,000 heroin addicts among Switzerland's 6.3 million people.

Last year, 1,612 people committed suicide, 50 percent more than in 1970. For Swiss in the 15-25 age group, suicide ranks second after accidents as the leading cause of death.

Drug abuse took 88 lives in 1980 and 102 in 1979, compared with just 13 in 1974. Through late October, 28 people, most of them young, have died in metropolitan Zurich from drug overdoses, 8 more than in 1980.

"The common impression is that Switzerland is a small, beautiful little country with green valleys and snow-capped mountains, with a little red train running through the middle of the picture," said Guy-Olivier Segond, youth commission chairman and deputy mayor of Geneva. "That's the tourist's Switzerland, which is only part of the picture. There are cities and in the cities there are problems."

Nowhere in Switzerland have those problems been more conspicuous than at the Zurich's Autonomous Youth Center, the opening of which was the youth movement's most explicit demand and the city's principal concession. The youth center was supposed to be a "free space" for counter-cultural experiments and pursuits.

Since it was opened in early spring, however, the center has become a refuge for the region's drug addicts and alcoholics, to the intense disillusionment of some of the people who were active in Zurich's self-styled "movement".

"I fought for over one year for a youth center," one activist, Didi Weidmann, wrote in a letter to the conservative newspaper *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*. "But I had no idea it would become what it is today. You can hardly find me there any more. I do not feel at home with drunks and people stoned on hash, not to mention the hard-drug takers."

Another movement activist, however, said he could not fault the drug and alcohol abusers at the center.

Their problems, he said, "show you what Zurich can do to people."