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Agricultural Protectionism on the Neoliberal Agenda? The Approach of the Director of the Swiss Business Federation to Agriculture

ANDREA FRANC
Department of History, University of Basel, Switzerland
andrea.franc@unibas.ch

Abstract: Neoliberals are known to oppose agricultural protectionism. In Switzerland, however, a member of the neoliberal Mont Pelerin Society was responsible for pushing forward the highly protectionist agricultural policy of the postwar years. Drawing on newly available archival sources, this article illustrates the endeavours of the director of the Swiss Business Federation Gerhard Winterberger (1922–93) in favour of agricultural protectionism. Winterberger, in his public talks or in his correspondence with Friedrich August von Hayek, selectively used neoliberal theory to justify his commitment to agriculture.

Conservatives usually oppose collectivist and directivist measures in the industrial field, and here the liberals will often find allies in them. But at the same time, conservatives are usually protectionists and have frequently supported socialist measures in agriculture.

—Friedrich August von Hayek, *Why I Am Not a Conservative*, 1957 (Hayek, 1960: 397–411)

Introduction

The well-known neoliberal economist Milton Friedman once complained that his ideas were 'converted into untenable caricatures' (Burgin, 2012: 218). The following article will take a closer look at such a conversion of neoliberal ideas into highly protectionist measures and thus contributes to explaining Switzerland's exceptionally high per capita subsidies to its farmers (Stiglitz and Charlton, 2005: 218).

The history of liberalism and neoliberalism has been thoroughly studied in recent years. Burgin has worked on the emergence of neoliberal thought as an intellectual renewal of nineteenth-century liberalism in the wake of the Keynesian economics of the 1930s (Burgin, 2012). Nicholls looked at the emergence of neoliberal thought, particularly in Germany (Nicholls, 2000), and Harvey considered the implementation of neoliberal policies in the form of Thatcherism and Reaganism (Harvey, 2007). While much ink has been devoted to neoliberal policies and the phenomenon of the rise of neoliberal ideology has been thoroughly studied, the rise of agricultural protectionism

in the late 1970s and 1980s alongside neoliberal ideology has gone unnoticed. Thus far, scholars of neoliberalism have overlooked the introduction of extensive barriers to free agricultural trade that has taken place during the height of the neoliberal era. Switzerland stands out as the country of reference for both phenomena. One of the first books of the neoliberal canon, *Die Gesellschaftskrisis der Gegenwart* (*The Social Crisis of Our Time*) (Röpke, 1942), by the German economist Wilhelm Röpke, is based on the example of Switzerland as the ideal neoliberal nation. Not only are the federalist and direct democratic political system mentioned, but also, in particular, the prevalence and societal importance of self-reliant family farms and small family businesses. Cooper has stressed the fact that the family, as a natural, non-state support system for the individual, is at the core of the neoliberal system (Cooper, 2017). Early neoliberal thinkers such as Röpke considered rural living and farm work a 'healthy' environment that would produce supportive, self-reliant families. His biographer Solchany used the adjective 'ruralophil' to adequately describe Röpke (Solchany, 2015: 43–5). This article argues that the rural history of Europe in the twentieth century was shaped by 'ruralophil' academics from all kinds of intellectual backgrounds who produced intellectual arguments in favour of protecting family farms and agriculture as a 'culture' rather than as an economic sector. Agriculture stands out as a special case in neoliberal thought; this article looks at the example of a Swiss neoliberal economist.

Gerhard Winterberger (1922–93) was the director of the Swiss Business Federation for seventeen years, from 1970 to 1987, after entering the organisation in 1961 (Franc, 2002–14). He was one of the most powerful protagonists in economic policymaking in Switzerland during the second half of the twentieth century and was publicly known as a devoted neoliberal and member of the neoliberal Mont Pelerin Society.[1] However, Winterberger was also one of the most fervent advocates of protectionist measures in agriculture. Therefore, this article shows how Winterberger's lifetime dedication to agriculture contradicted his professed neoliberalism when faced with the radical decrease of family farms in Switzerland in the postwar decades (Baumann and Moser, 1999). The article does not seek to indulge in the heterogeneous and vast neoliberal literature on agriculture produced by more prominent neoliberal thinkers such as Milton Friedman, Friedrich August von Hayek, Wilhelm Röpke or, particularly, Karl Brandt, who was an agricultural economist by profession (Plickert, 2008: 235–40). Rather, it uses archival sources, some newly available,[2] to demonstrate how this literature was either ignored or misused by the seemingly neoliberal policymakers on the ground. Clearly, Gerhard Winterberger appeared to be a true neoliberal from the outside, but his personal affinity to agriculture led him to promote protectionist and planned measures in agriculture the way Hayek defines conservatives in the introductory quote to this article.

First, I will outline the role of the Swiss Business Federation, the largest and most powerful national interest group, in the Swiss policymaking process, as well as the judicial changes that made it even more powerful after the Second World War. I will then show how the director of the Swiss Business Federation, Gerhard Winterberger – because of his membership in the Mont Pelerin Society (MPS) – was in touch with neoliberal thinkers such as Milton Friedman, Friedrich August von Hayek, and Wilhelm Röpke and frequently quoted the latter, in particular, in his writings and speeches.

Then, I will illustrate how, around the year 1968, the student movement, which was supported by eminent Swiss intellectuals, prompted the Swiss Business Federation to go public and defend the market economy from attacks by the socialist student movement. Next, I will show how Gerhard Winterberger is to be held responsible for a massive breach of the neoliberal agenda by promoting agricultural protectionism.

The Swiss Business Federation, a powerful interest group for Swiss private business

The Swiss economy is a system of liberal corporatism (Meier, 2002: 116–19). During the Second World War, the government appointed organised interest groups to run the controlled wartime economy (Meier, 2002: 117). The Swiss Business Federation[3] had been established in 1870 to defend private sector interests vis-à-vis the federal state founded in 1848. The organisation was the umbrella group for the regional chambers of commerce as well as for intra-trade organisations of the various industrial and trade branches. Therefore, it was the voice of the established and organised private sector. It was run by a director and overseen by a board and a chairman, who was traditionally the president of one of the large Swiss industrial companies (Nerlich and Hofstetter, 2002–14). During the Second World War, the director of the Swiss Business Federation was part of the federal commission that negotiated imports and exports to and from neutral Switzerland with the Allies as well as with Germany. As the Swiss Federation is headed by seven ministers (Church and Head, 2013: 164), it was during the war that the director of the Swiss Business Federation was dubbed the 'eighth minister' (Hässig, 2006). As this 'eighth minister' was not subject to political election or in a governmental position, his range of action was, in many respects, broader and more long-term oriented than those of the elected ministers or parliamentarians. This power was made official following the war with a vote on the so-called economic articles in 1947 (Borner and Bodmer, 2004: 15). One of these economic articles finally wrote the process of prior consultation of interest groups into the Swiss constitution (Borner, 1977). This system of pre-parliamentary discussion has been a custom in Switzerland since the 1930s, and the vote of 1947 made official the influence of interest groups on policymaking, and in particular, the influence of the Swiss Business Federation (Morandi, 1998).[4]

The postwar decades would become an era of power for domestic organised private-sector interests in Switzerland. Not surprising to Swiss political economists (Borner and Bodmer, 2004), the decades of the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s were also a period of new protectionism. Compared to other Western nations, however, it seems that industrial protectionism during these decades was less pronounced in Switzerland because of the high level of global integration of Swiss industry (Weder and Wyss, 2013). Agriculture, however, was an exception. By comparison, Switzerland developed the highest per capita protection worldwide in its agricultural sector, where a wide range of new protectionist policies was introduced (Stiglitz and Charlton, 2005: 218). Thus far, political economists have attributed Swiss agricultural protectionism to a strong farmers' lobby (Frey, 2015; Moser, 1998: 51). I contest this view on the theoretical level by referring to the newest developments in political economy, which suggest that the

'idea' represented by an interest group, rather than the interest group itself, might be held responsible for protectionism (Rodrik, 2014). Furthermore, I also contest this view with qualitative historical research, which shows that the interest group for the private business sector preserved agricultural protectionism as well (Franc, 2016). Economic theory and qualitative historical empiricism can be linked by investigating the 'idea' of the Swiss farmer as the symbol of national identity as much as the symbol of the neoliberal ideal protagonist within the spontaneous order of a self-supporting society. As politico-economic theory of the last several decades has held the Western farmers' lobby responsible for the massive agricultural protectionism, it might make sense to look at the records of farmers' lobbies using historical methods (Moser, 1998: 51). However, in light of Rodrik's groundbreaking new contribution to political economy, it seems more promising to study the interest group of Swiss private business, the Swiss Business Federation, rather than the interest group of Swiss farmers, the Swiss Farmers' Union, in order to reach conclusions regarding European rural history of the postwar years.

The Swiss semi-direct democracy, with its many public votes, referenda and initiatives, was a valuable tool for the influence of the Swiss Business Federation. Its actual purpose was to influence votes that concerned the interests of the organised private sector, using the financial allowance from its member organisations. Another purpose, which arose in the postwar years, was the smooth collaboration or integration of Switzerland's economy into the international economic system with the establishment of the various supranational organisations such as the Bretton Woods Institutions, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), the European Economic Community and the European Free Trade Association (Nerlich and Hofstetter, 2002–14).

A very reliable partner of the Swiss Business Federation was the daily newspaper *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, or the *NZZ*. The newspaper was established in 1780 by the liberal movement. In 1868, the *NZZ* went public and, in order to acquire a share, one had to be a member of the Liberal Democratic Party or at least be committed to liberalism (Maissen, 2005). During the Second World War, the newspaper became Europe's liberal torch. The *NZZ* published numerous articles by Wilhelm Röpke, one of the founders of the neoliberal Mont Pelerin Society (MPS) (Hennecke, 2005: 129). At the same time, many of the editors of the *NZZ* would be invited to join the Mont Pelerin Society after its founding in 1947 (Plickert, 2008: 163). Traditionally, one of the editors published a summary of the MPS's meetings in the paper. Several of these *NZZ* editors and MPS members held PhDs; some taught at the University of Zurich, and several actually left the newspaper when they were offered tenure there. In addition, several editors were elected to national or regional parliaments for the Liberal Democratic Party. Particularly during Winterberger's term of office, the Swiss Business Federation and the *NZZ* engaged in an intellectual symbiosis (Franc, 2016).

The Swiss Business Federation and the Swiss Farmers' Union had no official organisational connections. They were simply the two most important and influential interest groups within the Swiss democratic system, and they clashed repeatedly on questions of agricultural protectionism.[5] Only in 1977 did the directors of the two interest groups agree to meet regularly for informal lunches,[6] and only in 1986 did Winterberger initiate an official task force on international trade and agriculture, including both

the Swiss Farmers' Union and the Swiss Business Federation and the third most prominent interest group, the Swiss Union of Crafts and Small- and Medium-Sized Enterprises.[7]

Neoliberal on the outside: The director of the Swiss Business Federation

Gerhard Winterberger (1922–1993) joined the Swiss Business Federation in 1961 as the secretary in charge of economics. It was his job to prepare the economic groundwork for the attention of the director. During his time as secretary, he met his contemporary, René Juri (1922–2003) (Marcacci, 2002–14), who had already become the director of the Swiss Farmers' Union in 1958, in meetings regarding the parity in salary for farmers. In those meetings, the two seem to have clashed when Winterberger attempted to convince Juri that Swiss farmers could count on Swiss taxpayers' support only by softening their hardline demands.[8] When Winterberger was made director of the Swiss Business Federation in 1970, he had already influenced the course of the organisation for almost a decade in his former position. In the seventeen years preceding his retirement in 1987, Winterberger is said to have been one of the most powerful men in Swiss economic policy (Hässig, 2006).

Winterberger was born in rural Switzerland, the grandson of a peasant. He studied economics at the University of Bern, where he received his PhD in 1947. The war and postwar years had brought numerous eminent researchers to Switzerland, especially from Germany and Austria. At the University of Bern, Winterberger was supervised by the Austrian economist Alfred Amonn, who obtained Swiss citizenship in 1942 (Brechbühl, 2002–14). After completing his PhD, Winterberger spent semesters in London, where he became fluent in English, as well as in Geneva at the Graduate Institute of International Studies. In Geneva, he studied with the German co-founder of the MPS, Wilhelm Röpke, another eminent exile, as well as the German economist Walter Eucken, another future MPS member, who was an invited professor in Geneva at the time (Franc, 2002–14; Jetzer and Winterberger, 1982: 10). Wilhelm Röpke became Winterberger's mentor, and the two continued to correspond until Röpke's death in 1966.[9] In 1959, when Winterberger was still an insignificant secretary of a monetary association close to the Swiss National Bank, he had already received his invitation to join the MPS signed by Friedrich August von Hayek.[10]

Despite this neoliberal academic influence, Winterberger was culturally rooted in the so-called Swiss spiritual defence (Mooser, 1997; Zimmer, 2004). This mindset had developed during the Second World War when Switzerland was surrounded by nations at war and insisted on remaining neutral. The spiritual defence was based on the image of the hardworking, taciturn peasant up in the mountains minding his own business. Winterberger was a patriot first and a neoliberal second; that he was interested in the rural culture of the peasants of his home region is highly typical of the spiritual defence of the 1940s. On his own, he actually conducted a scientifically valid anthropological study (Winterberger, 1955). Later on, as a Bernese from the countryside in Zurich, he didn't fight his image of the down-to-earth rural peasant, but rather called attention to it. The media reported how frequently he was seen at rural events in his home area of

Interlaken.[11] Moreover, in his contact with Wilhelm Röpke, an ardent admirer of the Swiss peasant culture, Winterberger played up his background. 'Your pasture boy',[12] he signed his letters to Röpke.

Winterberger's influence was complemented and reinforced by Willy Linder (1922–2000), who was the same age as Winterberger and René Juri and headed the economic section of the *NZZ* from 1972 to 1987 (Scherrer, 2002–14), that is, during almost all of Winterberger's tenure at the Swiss Business Federation. Linder was a member of the MPS as well; he taught as an associate professor of economics at the University of Zurich from 1977 to 1989, and from 1988 to 1993 he headed the Institute of International Studies in Zurich, the Swiss neoliberal think tank financed by private business (Scherrer, 2002–14). For the fifteen years during which he wrote the economic commentary in the weekend edition of the *NZZ*, Linder carefully refrained from touching on the subject of agriculture.[13]

Promoting the neoliberal agenda in the 1970s

In Switzerland, the year 1968 marked the rupture of the national intellectual union with the spiritual defence. Left-wing activists demanded a societal adoption of socialism, while eminent intellectuals such as the writer Max Frisch criticised the predominant Swiss mentality as uptight and officially endorsed the Social Democratic Party (Meier, 2007: 97–103). A system change in the West seemed very real to people like Winterberger, particularly in the early 1970s when the acts of terrorist left-wing groups in Germany and Italy were met with sympathy by the student movement. Therefore, in his first years after taking over as director in 1970, Gerhard Winterberger decided that the Swiss Business Federation should make itself more visible and should publicly defend the Swiss private sector as well as the market economy.[14] During these years, the student movement and its elder sympathisers such as Max Frisch advocated socialism and condemned neoliberalism without bothering to consider the disruptive debates going on among the neoliberals themselves. When trained economists and members of the MPS such as Winterberger or Linder advocated a protectionist economic policy, the left was only too happy to denounce it as neoliberal (Kappeler, 2011: 73).

Winterberger understood the communication of the interests of the domestic organised private sector as a moral and patriotic duty (Winterberger, 1989). In 1975, more than a century after the establishment of the Swiss Business Federation, he established a public relations office.[15] In the same year, the Swiss Business Federation started its own publication series, which published mostly speeches by its officials. In 1981, they even published an article by Gottfried von Haberler (1900–81), former Harvard professor and internationally known opponent of protectionism of any kind (Baldwin, 1982). Haberler, like many other members of the MPS, spent vacations in the Swiss mountains with his wife and had accepted an invitation to speak at an event held by the Swiss Business Federation and later accepted a private invitation to Winterberger's home. For his article, Haberler was paid 6,000 Swiss francs from the Swiss Business Federation's war chest.[16] Thus, Winterberger had managed to involve the over-eighty-year-old Haberler in the Swiss Business Federation's PR. Haberler's reputation as a

clearcut free-market neoliberal served to further strengthen the neoliberal profile of the Swiss Business Federation in public.

But throughout these years, it was mainly Winterberger who toured the country speaking on numerous occasions, mainly in front of middle-class small- and medium-sized business people. Even at the most rural and communal meetings, he quoted and referred to Hayek or Röpke at length. Röpke, who had published extensively in the Swiss media before his death in 1966, was recalled with affection by many middle-class listeners in the 1970s and early 1980s. Friedrich August von Hayek had also visited Switzerland on several occasions and was a renowned figure of authority to his audience. To the press and the public, to friends and political enemies alike, Winterberger was the undisputed Swiss authority on neoliberalism. In the Festschrift presented to him on the occasion of his sixtieth birthday, the introduction stated, 'He has always countered requests for protectionism with a clear "No"' (Jetzer and Winterberger, 1982: 11), a dedication that shall be refuted in the next chapter. Still, by the end of his tenure at the Swiss Business Federation in 1987, Winterberger had managed to tag the organisation as well as himself as neoliberal, despite the obvious contradictions to neoliberalism. Foremost, neoliberalism sees interest groups as enemies of the free market, as they defend the special interests of members instead of the interests of society as a whole.[17] Therefore, Winterberger managed to create a public image, which, in academic economics, had to be qualified as a contradiction (Borner and Bodmer, 2004: 15). But beyond that, he managed to hide the even more obvious contradiction of the fact that he not only defended the special interests of the private business sector, as was his actual role and as neoliberal theory would have expected of him, but he went further and used his influential position to strongly defend the interests of Swiss farmers. This defence of agriculture was in no way part of his job profile and can only be attributed to his deep commitment to peasant culture, to the 'idea' of the family farm, which he fought fervently to maintain. Winterberger's affinity for agriculture is a typical example of 'when ideas trump interests' (Rodrik, 2014) and how neoliberal ideas were 'converted in untenable caricatures' (Burgin, 2012: 218) by the practitioners on the ground.

Röpke for agriculture

Thus, agricultural protectionism particularly stands out in the economic policy followed by the Swiss Business Federation during the long office of Gerhard Winterberger. Agricultural policy developments in Switzerland were so opposed to what the MPS stood for that, as mentioned before, Willy Linder, a member of the MPS like Winterberger, carefully omitted any comment of them in the *NZZ*.[18] In the early days of the MPS, agricultural protectionism was a very important and heavily debated topic. It was Wilhelm Röpke and Alexander Rüstow who argued in favour of the traditional family farm as a stabiliser of society and, as such, in need of a particular policy (Plickert, 2008: 238). Röpke and Rüstow were, however, at the far end of the spectrum. In the MPS debates, they were extensively countered by Karl Brandt, who had specialised in agricultural economics in Germany and then emigrated to the United States. Unlike Röpke and Rüstow, Brandt did not want to preserve the number of small family farms,

but he pleaded for social measures to smooth the structural adjustments, that is, the exit of small farmers from agriculture (Plickert, 2008: 235–40). These debates took place in the MPS in the 1950s, when agriculture in Germany still employed about half of the population (Plickert, 2008: 235–40). In Switzerland, however, agriculture employed only 16 per cent of the population in 1950 and 10 per cent in 1960 (Winterberger, 1961). At the MPS meeting in St Moritz in 1957, Hayek pushed Wilhelm Röpke and his friend Alexander Rüstow into the conservative corner. In his famous speech, 'Why I am not a conservative', Hayek classified agricultural protectionism as conservative (Hayek, 1960: 397–411). In 1960, in his masterpiece *The Constitution of Liberty*, Hayek devoted an entire chapter to the 'irrationality and absurdity of modern agricultural policy'. He explains the 'remarkable solicitude which the public shows … for the fate of farming' with 'aesthetic considerations'. Obviously, Hayek was addressing Röpke and his followers when he added: 'The same [aesthetic considerations] is true to an even greater degree of the concern shown by the public in countries like Austria or Switzerland for the preservation of the mountain peasants' (Hayek, 1960: 362–3). With the withdrawal of Röpke and Rüstow from the MPS in the course of the Hunold affair in 1961 (Hartwell, 1995: 100–33), nobody except Gerhard Winterberger was left in the MPS to propose the vague, cautious and romantically tainted 'third way' of protecting family farms. With Milton Friedman's matter-of-fact condemnation of agricultural protectionism in the form of 'parity price support' or 'sugar quotas' in his classic *Capitalism and Freedom* (Friedman and Friedman, 1962: 35), agricultural protectionism was banned from the neoliberal canon for good.

In Switzerland, however, more so than in the United States or even in Germany, Röpke was a local hero and much better known and quoted than Hayek or Milton Friedman (Solchany, 2015). After his exit from the MPS, and despite his very deep dissents with Hayek and the young Americans around Friedman, Röpke still stood for neoliberalism in Switzerland. His declining health and early death in 1966 kept Röpke from analysing and commenting on the spiralling developments in agricultural policy in Switzerland and in most other advanced countries. The following decades saw a sharp decline in the number of people employed in agriculture in advanced nations as well as a massive increase in agricultural protectionism because of competition between these nations as well as from developing countries (Patel, 2009). The 'new protectionism' of the 1970s and 1980s was, first and foremost, an agricultural protectionism, and when the GATT was transferred to the World Trade Organization, agriculture had to be left out in order to achieve any sort of agreement (Bhagwati, 2000).

In addition, in the 1960s many former colonies gained their independence and intended to compete with European countries not only in commodities, but also in processed food products. When the renowned economist and author of the Prebisch–Singer Thesis Raul Prebisch became the secretary-general of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development of 1964 (Toye and Toye, 2003), the advanced nations could not just brush aside developing countries' demands for market access (Stiglitz and Charlton, 2005). Therefore, the context of European and particularly Swiss agriculture was already a profoundly different one in the early 1960s, some years after the debates on agriculture in the MPS in the mid-1950s. Thus, first, Röpke's position on

agriculture, as long as he still belonged to the MPS, was a very isolated one, and second, the context of this position changed dramatically in the decades that followed. These two aspects were, however, not taken into account by his Swiss followers.[19]

Gerhard Winterberger started publishing on agriculture in the mid-1950s, not only in prominent Swiss newspapers such as the *NZZ* and *Der Bund*,[20] but also in small regional or organisational papers.[21] He also published two books on the economic structure of his rural home region around Interlaken (Winterberger, 1955; Winterberger, 1960a). He understood rural conditions like the back of his hand and had personally witnessed the deep structural change that took place in Swiss agriculture with dramatic speed in the postwar years. Winterberger was an expert on issues such as the regional differences in the decline in salaries for professional cheese makers employed by agricultural cooperatives in relation to the disappearance of independent milk buyers.[22] His articles in the media often represented debates with regional officials about some minor changes in the laws. In the matter of the professional cheese makers, he advised the agricultural cooperatives to raise the salaries of their employees in order to prevent the disappearance of the profession and a decline in cheese production. This, he argued, was crucial in order to fulfil the so-called cheese-and-butter plan, which foresaw the import of cheap butter in favour of the export of high-quality Swiss cheese. Winterberger did deplore the loss of entrepreneurship in Swiss agriculture, such as the disappearance of independent milk buyers, but he did so within the narrow frame of an increasingly planned agricultural policy (Baumann and Moser, 2002–14).

Working in the city of Zurich in the postwar years, Winterberger found that his colleagues frowned upon his commitment to agriculture. In a letter to Röpke in 1956, he complained about the disdain of his work colleagues, urban Zurich central-bank economists, for farmers and small businesses:

> Some economists of the National Bank have told me, the mountain farmers should go work in factories. It would do no harm, if the mountain population would regress and urbanization would continue, culture only exists in the cities, etc. I suggested to those gentlemen to read your books and to busy themselves more with history, politics and sociology instead of nothing but bank balances.[23]

Röpke wrote constantly about the importance of family farms and small businesses in Switzerland as well as in Germany. In the pages of the *NZZ* alone, every few weeks Röpke's name would appear in relation to agriculture. Röpke introduced agricultural protectionism as 'the last attribute of national individuality'.[24] He prepared the ground for Winterberger, who would eventually win over the urban Zurich intellectuals – or at least keep their critiques at bay. In numerous articles in the 1960s, published mainly in the monthly magazine *Schweizer Monatshefte*, which was the core publication of the circle of Zurich's neoliberal intelligentsia around the *NZZ*, Winterberger debated the various policy mechanisms that supported small, mountainous family farms (Winterberger, 1965). This was possible because the constitutional economic articles of 1947, which had made official the influence of the Swiss Business Federation among other things, had also authorised the federal state to take measures to preserve Swiss agriculture, if necessary by deviating from the article guaranteeing freedom of trade and business.[25] With the 1952 federal law on agriculture, this authorisation was made more concrete by

actually excluding agriculture from the market economy (Baumann and Moser, 2002–14). Gerhard Winterberger was – despite his neoliberal appearance – in favour of these judicial developments and invested in the debate on how agricultural policy should be designed following the coming into force of the 1952 law on agriculture. In 1961, he positioned himself in disagreement with his former teacher, Alfred Amonn, in a review of Ammon's book on Swiss economic policy (Amonn, 1959). Amonn, also a member of the MPS, had criticised Swiss agricultural protectionism, which was, in retrospect, only about to begin in these years. Winterberger scolded him for neglecting historical, traditional, sociological and supply security aspects and reproached him, indicating that rational economic thinking had prevented Amonn from seeing the true importance of agriculture (Winterberger, 1961). The spiritual defence of the war years, which particularly drew on food autarky provided by the Swiss peasants, as well as the tradition of military conscription – another issue where Swiss members of the MPS renounced neoliberalism – was an important factor for agricultural protectionism: security considerations were an important aspect of the agricultural laws.[26]

After his instalment as the director of the Swiss Business Federation in 1970, Gerhard Winterberger lobbied in favour of the various agricultural laws presented in those years. One representative example was the so-called chocolate law of 1976 (Franc, 2016), which introduced import duties on processed food containing agricultural commodities and allowed for export subsidies for Swiss food processors, namely, the chocolate companies.[27] Following a consumer group petition, the law was put up for a referendum, and Winterberger organised the campaign in favour of it. The opponents of the law called it neo-protectionist and with good cause. They feared a consequent rise in consumer prices caused by import duties and increased taxation to fund export subsidies. Even though the law concerned the food-processing industry, the respective member organisations were not interested in campaigning, let alone financing the campaign. The only exception was the chocolate industry, which was in critical condition in the 1970s. To finance the campaign, Winterberger actually gathered the support of the Swiss Farmers' Union and various other farmers' organisations, but although these organisations prepared and partly financed the campaign, the political argument visible to the public was that the law would help to preserve jobs in the food industry. And, by a very narrow margin, the people voted in favour of the chocolate law (Franc, 2016). While consumer group opponents called the law neo-protectionist, neither Swiss members of the MPS nor neoliberal commentators publicly criticised Gerhard Winterberger, who orchestrated the political campaign in the background as the director of the Swiss Business Federation. The records of the Swiss Business Federation do, however, contain a letter of one of the member organisations, the Swiss Association of Importers of Colonial Goods, which attacks Winterberger's lack of devotion to the neoliberal cause directly:

> This industry [the food industry] is pursuing protectionist objectives, which don't comply with the liberal foreign policy pursued by the Swiss Business Federation. The degree of liberalization tediously reached by OECD and the GATT would be undone and in the future, food imports of developing countries would have no chance on our market. If the domestic food industry is being discriminated by constraints related to agricultural protectionism, it would be opportune to plead

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for an abolishment of agricultural protectionism and not for its further expansion on trade with processed food.[28]

While Gerhard Winterberger's answer to this letter is not in the records, there are numerous publications in which he defends his position against exactly this reproach. His argument against such allegations was, as documented in numerous articles, the 'Swiss uniqueness' (Winterberger, 1960b).

This 'Swiss uniqueness' is a leitmotif of Winterberger's attitude towards agricultural policy, which, over the decades, evolved considerably. In the 1950s and particularly in the 1960s, when Winterberger was economic secretary at the Swiss Business Federation, he must have contributed critically to the implementation of the parity salary for farmers (Jetzer and Winterberger, 1982: 11), which had been introduced as policy in 1954 and remained in effect until 1998 (Moser, 2002–14). While the sources don't reveal Winterberger's particular contribution, they show that the Swiss Business Federation was obviously involved in shaping the price mechanisms to support the parity salary.[29] Moreover, Winterberger never denounced the parity salary, which offered the legal base for planned prices and subsequent overproduction.

By the 1970s, Winterberger's position was oscillating between a general wish to support family farms and a critique on overproduction and heavy subsidisation, which must have led to 'disagreement' with the Swiss Farmers' Union. From 1958 to 1987, Winterberger's counterpart was, as mentioned, René Juri. The hardliner was the director of the second most important Swiss interest group for almost two decades, even longer than Winterberger led the Swiss Business Federation. Juri stood for an uncompromising and never-contending policy of protecting and subsidising the large productive family farms in the plains. Neither milk lakes, nor butter mountains nor the highly unusual public intervention of the president of the Swiss central bank[30] seemed to make Juri waver the slightest in his position. Next to him, Winterberger had no trouble coming across as a neoliberal.

The wake-up call for Juri as much as for Winterberger must have come in 1985, when the continuation of the law supporting domestic sugar production[31] finally came to a referendum and was rejected by Swiss voters. Juri and the Swiss Farmers' Union had demanded not only a continuation of the subsidising of beet sugar production but even an extension of its arable area and production. Winterberger, in his recommendation to parliament, spoke out against an extension of area and production and called for an examination into whether there weren't economic instruments that would render subsidisation unnecessary but he backed the protection of Swiss beet sugar production by import tariffs.[32] Apparently fed up with milk lakes, butter mountains, high prices and the Swiss Farmers Federation's blatant refusal to consider organic or animal-friendly policies, the Swiss people refused to accept any effort to further the support of domestic sugar production.

It was only in the mid-1980s, after the debacle of the referendum on the sugar law, that Juri started considering accepting a system change to direct subsidies and certain ecological obligations. Winterberger seems to have played the mediator between the Swiss Farmers' Union and the head of the parliamentary commission responsible

for the agricultural agenda to be implemented in 1986, when Switzerland had to be ready to participate in the Uruguay Round of the GATT. Incidentally, the head of the parliamentary commission happened to be Winterberger's colleague Richard Reich (1927–91) (Peter-Kubli, 2002–14), at the time the national councillor for the Liberal Democratic Party and director of the Society for the Promotion of the Swiss Economy,[33] which worked closely with the Swiss Business Federation. In the 1960s, Reich had worked as an editor at the *NZZ*, and in 1982, he had become president of *Schweizer Monatshefte*. Reich, a declared neoliberal himself, finally came around to publicly defending the introduction of direct payments to farmers in Switzerland. Winterberger managed to convince him that the state had to offer the hard-line Swiss farmers a financial incentive to produce less.[34] Again, face to face with René Juri, Reich's public image of a neoliberal wasn't even scratched.

Next to Richard Reich, Winterberger converted a whole generation of Swiss liberals of the postwar decades to serve the 'idea' of the family farm as the core and root of a good, free and self-reliant society. Not only did he portray the smallholder in the mountains as representing the true spirit of liberalism (Winterberger, 1980) and therefore the secret of neoliberalism, he also portrayed the mountain farmer as the symbol of Swiss uniqueness and therefore appealed to national pride.

The 'Swiss uniqueness'

Many intellectuals before Gerhard Winterberger had used the term 'Swiss uniqueness' (Kury, 2003), which was used to strengthen the Swiss spiritual defence during the war years. Wilhelm Röpke, in particular, had in his work from the 1940s onwards referred to Switzerland as the ideal country and as 'an exception in history' (Röpke, 1942: 47). During the war years, in the spirit of the spiritual defence, Switzerland developed a more 'organic' nationalism (Zimmer, 2004) that relied on the image of the self-reliant peasant people in the mountains. The federalist structure of the Swiss nation, particularly, and its direct democratic instruments and, furthermore, the absence of a tradition of a strong central state in the form of a monarchy led to the idea of Switzerland as an exception, of being a unique sort of nation. Winterberger, who had conducted anthropological research and kept himself updated on historical and anthropological research in Switzerland, in the postwar years further developed the theme of the 'Swiss uniqueness' and the idea of Switzerland as an exception in his writing and speeches. This development was an applied process; his writings were often prompted by current legislative projects, and in order to emphasise his position on these issues, he expanded upon the term 'Swiss uniqueness'. After Friedrich August von Hayek's return to Europe as a professor at the University of Freiburg – which, though in Germany, is very close to Zurich – Winterberger began a polite correspondence with him. He sent Hayek his own writings, which Hayek used to comment on briefly, and for Hayek's eightieth birthday, Winterberger wrote a tribute in *Schweizer Monatshefte* (Winterberger, 1979).[35] Subtly, between the lines of these writings, Winterberger's differences with Hayek become apparent. In the birthday tribute, which was several pages in length, Winterberger, who published, spoke and politically lobbied on agriculture, did not mention Hayek's position on agriculture. But

he did send Hayek his publications, which strongly supported 'Swiss uniqueness', and, in one example, he elaborated on the centuries-old cooperative agricultural structures in some of Switzerland's farming areas (Winterberger, 1983b). Winterberger uses the ancient cooperative farming structures as an argument in favour of the 'naturalness' of the exceptionally weak Swiss trust law, which was the basis of Swiss liberal corporatism and the power of the interest groups for which he was a representative (Winterberger, 1983a). But mainly, Winterberger's texts convey the pride and self-assertion that he, and with him a great number of Swiss people, drew from their identification with the Swiss peasant culture. Winterberger would become a master of painting the organic 'Swiss uniqueness', which on its surface aligned so well with neoliberal theory. In 1960, a year after his invitation to join the MPS and becoming part of the Swiss Business Federation as its economic secretary, he published an article with the title 'Swiss uniqueness and European integration' (Winterberger, 1960b). The article used the theme of the Swiss peasant society, cloaked with neoliberal attributes, to construct an organic-historical argument for why Switzerland should not join the European Economic Community.

As Winterberger puts it, the free Swiss peasant republics assured their citizens a greater extent of personal liberty than the lower aristocracy in Europe. The evolution of Switzerland contrasted with the rise of feudalism in the rest of Europe. For many centuries, the European aristocracy hated the peasant republics in the heart of the Alps, which were equal or even higher than they were. In Germany and France, the aristocracy looked down on their own peasantry; the peasant was regarded as a simpleton.

Winterberger's words reveal how neoliberalism was able to strengthen Swiss self-confidence as a nation of free farmers. Thanks to the slow but steady breakthrough of neoliberalism, Swiss peasants were no longer the 'simpletons' of Europe. They represented both the ideal citizens of Wilhelm Röpke's utopia and the intelligent information bearers who created the optimal 'spontaneous order' described by Friedrich August von Hayek (Hayek, 1960; Sugden, 1989). Winterberger managed to link bits and pieces of neoliberal theory to the nineteenth-century Swiss author of peasant literature Jeremias Gotthelf, who had called the Swiss peasant a 'tool of god' (Winterberger, 1965: 517). Thus, on the ground, far away from the academic literature of neoliberal theory, an actual member of the Mont Pelerin Society was at the forefront of introducing extensive agricultural protectionism. Gerhard Winterberger managed to hide the fact that, by the 1980s, agriculture in the Western world,[36] and more so in Switzerland, had become the opposite of a spontaneous order. It had become a heavily planned state sector, producing a thicket of bureaucracy and swallowing billions of Swiss francs in subsidies.[37] The Swiss peasant was no longer a tool of god but at the mercy of Swiss taxpayers willing to finance agricultural protectionism on the seemingly neoliberal agenda.

Conclusion

During the height of the neoliberal era, the late 1970s and 1980s, the Western world introduced massive protectionist policies in the area of agriculture.[38] The record-breaking agricultural protectionism of Switzerland in the postwar years has traditionally been attributed to a strong farmers' lobby. Following Rodrik's input of the 'idea' as a

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driving force of protectionist policies, this article doesn't focus on the Swiss Farmers' Union but rather looks at the Swiss Business Federation, a different, powerful interest group within the very particular Swiss direct democratic system. As a newly available source of the Swiss Business Federation, the interest group of the private business sector show, the long-time director Gerhard Winterberger pushed forward and enabled agricultural protectionism due to his commitment to the 'idea' of the farmer. This is notable because Winterberger was a publicly known neoliberal, a member of the Mont Pelerin Society and a protégé of the eminent neoliberal economist Wilhelm Röpke. Winterberger supported a neoliberal social order based on self-reliant family farms. In turn, the preservation of the family farm, particularly in the mountainous areas of Switzerland, served as justification for agricultural protectionist policies. In a delicate relationship that endured over three decades with René Juri, a hardliner and the director of the Swiss Farmers' Union, Winterberger managed to steer the Swiss Farmers' Union towards agreeing to downsize overproduction and accept direct payments. Obviously, Winterberger used his position as director of the powerful private business interest group to 'protect' agricultural protectionism. Not only did he manage to create the contradictory image of a special interest group as neoliberal, but he managed to let the contradiction of his support of agricultural protectionism go unnoticed. The general hostility of the left to traditional Swiss values, on the one hand, and the hard line of the Swiss Farmers' Union, on the other, facilitated the promotion of agricultural protectionist policies in contradiction to neoliberal economic free market values.

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Notes

1. On the Mont Pelerin Society, see Burgin (2012); Mirowski and Plehwe (2009); Plickert (2008); Hartwell (1995).
2. The records of the Swiss Business Federation have recently become available at the Archives of Contemporary History (AfZ) in Zurich (hereafter AfZ Vorort). Further, the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* and the *Schweizer Monatshefte* have digitalised every back issue. This article also refers to material from the Hoover Institution Archives (HIA) at the University of Stanford and the Röpke papers from the Institut für Wirtschaftspolitik at the University of Cologne.
3. Known as *economiesuisse* in the present day. At the time, the correct German name was *Schweizerischer Handels- und Industrieverein*, shortened as *Vorort*.
4. For the federal constitution of the Swiss confederation and its earlier versions, see <www.admin.ch/opc/de/classified-compilation/19995395/index.html>.
5. AfZ Vorort, 143.3.3, Paritätischer Lohnanaspruch in der Landwirtschaft, Notizen, wi [Gerhard Winterberger], 17th February 1965.
6. AfZ Vorort, 12.1.10, Handakten Gerhard Winterberger, Korrespondenz René Juri (Gerhard Winterberger to René Juri) [no place given], 8th July 1977.
7. AfZ, Vorort, 12.1.10, Handakten Gerhard Winterberger, Korrespondenz René Juri (Gerhard Winterberger to René Juri), Zurich, 28th October 1986.

8. AfZ Vorort, 143.3.3, Paritätischer Lohnanaspruch in der Landwirtschaft, Notizen, wi [Gerhard Winterberger], 17th February 1965.
9. Institut für Wirtschaftspolitik, University of Cologne, Wilhelm Röpke collection, Correspondence Röpke-Winterberger.
10. HIA, Friedrich A. von Hayek Collection, Box 80, folder 17, Friedrich August von Hayek to Gerhard Winterberger, October 1959.
11. *Schweizerische Handelszeitung*, 9th October 1980, p. 4.
12. Institut für Wirtschaftspolitik, University of Cologne, Wilhelm Röpke collection, Winterberger to Röpke, 20th May 1957.
13. *Die Weltwoche*, 27th March 1986.
14. AfZ Vorort, 12.1.10, Handakten Winterberger, Protokoll Klausurtagung, 5th September 1975. See also *WZ Wirtschaftszeitung für alle*, March 1981.
15. The name of the PR officer was Kurt Wild. Wild continually sent publications by Winterberger or the Swiss Business Federation to Friedrich August von Hayek – which explains the appearance of his name in the Hayek papers.
16. AfZ Vorort, 12.1.10, Handakten Winterberger, Korrespondenz Winterberger-Haberler.
17. This area of economics is termed Public Choice.
18. *Die Weltwoche*, 27th March 1986.
19. Richard Ottinger, Swiss member of the Mont Pelerin Society and editor at the economic section of the *NZZ*, had been a rare critic of Swiss agricultural protectionism. Before retiring in May 1968, he denounced the misuse of Röpke by the farmers' organisations (*NZZ*, 10th March 1968, 30th December 1974).
20. Daily newspaper of Bern, the capital city of Switzerland.
21. For a complete list of publications by Gerhard Winterberger, see Jetzer and Winterberger (1982). For digitally available articles, see <http://zeitungsarchiv.nzz.ch/ or www.retro.seals.ch>.
22. *NZZ*, 4th November 1955.
23. Institut für Wirtschaftspolitik, University of Cologne, Wilhelm Röpke collection, Gerhard Winterberger to Wilhelm Röpke, 17th April 1956 (German original, translation by author).
24. *NZZ*, 2nd July 1964.
25. The Swiss constitution actually had, since 1874, an article called Freedom of Business, which practically wrote the market economy into the Swiss constitution. See Dubler and Winzeler (2002–14).
26. See as an example the so-called chocolate law described below. For an overview of the Swiss law on agriculture as well as its chronological development, see <https://www.admin.ch/opc/de/classified-compilation/91.html#91>.
27. See the current law and its chronology since 1974 at <https://www.admin.ch/opc/de/classified-compilation/19740334/index.html>.
28. AfZ Vorort, 142.2.6, Eingabe des Schweizerischen Bauernverbands zu Forderungen bei der Einfuhr im Aussenhandel, Colgro (F. Hayoz, president; H. Gölden, director) to Gerhard Winterberger, 19th May 1978 (German original, translation by author).
29. AfZ Vorort, 143.3.3, Paritätischer Lohnanaspruch in der Landwirtschaft.
30. The president of the Swiss central bank warned the public in 1985 that they were bound to pay up to five billion Swiss francs for agricultural protectionism. See Leutwiler, as well as AfZ Vorort, 140.4.1.4, Artikel und Broschüren zur Landwirtschaftspolitik, Literaturverzeichnis.
31. Vote on the 'Bundesbeschluss über die inländische Zuckerwirtschaft' of 21st June 1985 <https://www.admin.ch/ch/d/pore/va/19860928/index.html>.
32. AfZ Vorort, 144.7.2.1, BB [Bundesbeschluss] über die inländische Zuckerwirtschaft vom, 23rd March 1979; Gerhard Winterberger to Federal Council, Zurich, 29th May 1978.
33. Wirtschaftsförderung, see Weibel (2002–14).

34. AfZ Vorort, 140.4.1.4, Artikel und Broschüren zur Landwirtschaftspolitik, Notizen und Handnotizen NR [national councillor] Richard Reich.
35. HIA, Friedrich A. von Hayek Collection, Box 80, folder 17, and Box 56, folder 34, correspondence Hayek-Winterberger.
36. For agricultural protectionism from 1986 onwards, see the OECD producer-support estimate on the OECD (2016), Agricultural support (indicator), <doi: 10.1787/6ea85c58-en> [accessed on 28th April 2016], and from the postwar years onwards, see Spoerer (2010).
37. In 2014, public expenditure was over US $5 billion annually to 54,000 farmers. This led to a producer-support estimate of 56.4 per cent, that is, each Swiss farmer would receive over half his income at the farm gate from taxpayers. See on that the OECD agricultural policy survey OECD (2016), Agricultural support (indicator), <doi: 10.1787/6ea85c58-en> [accessed on 28th April 2016] and, on Swiss farming statistics, <http://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/portal/de/index/themen/07/03/blank/ind24.indicator.240201.2402.html>.
38. This being the era of Thatcherism and Reaganism, see Harvey (2007).

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