

Women, foreigners and the factory law

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The industrial workforce of Zug was, to a large extent, female and foreign. In the spinning mills, women formed the majority of the workers: across the Swiss cotton industry in 1888, women made up 46 per cent of the workers overall and 56 per cent in the spinning mills.¹ Women earned between 53 and 65 per cent of the wages of men in the period from 1890 to 1914. At the Metallwarenfabrik between 1914 and 1921, they received about 60 per cent of the wages of male auxiliary workers.² The federal factory law of 1877 set the first national standards for industrial work. It limited the working day to eleven hours, prohibited night and Sunday work for women, banned women from working at dangerous machinery, granted married women a lunch break of one and a half hours, introduced a maternity leave of six weeks after childbirth, extendable to eight, and prohibited the employment of children under fourteen.³ One of the most advanced laws of its time in Europe, it was an early example of the federal state setting uniform rules for an economic activity that the cantons had regulated unevenly.

The factories built boarding houses for their young female workers, often run by religious orders. The Metallwarenfabrik and the cigar factory Kerckhoffs opened the Loreto home in 1890, followed by the spinning mill in Baar, which opened a home for more than thirty workers in 1902. In Neuägeri, a home for young unmarried workers, run by nuns, opened in 1901. After the Second World War, Landis & Gyr built a home for up to 200 Italian women in 1946.⁴

Foreign workers, above all Italians, formed a growing share of the workforce. Across Switzerland, the share of Italians among foreign workers rose from 18.2 per cent in 1888 to 36.7 per cent in 1910. In Zug, as noted, Italians made up nearly a third of the workforce of the Baar spinning mill in 1902 and nearly half of the workforce of the Metallwarenfabrik in 1910.⁵ In 1910, sixteen per cent of the workforce of the town of Zug were

foreigners.⁶ The First World War brought political pressure against the employment of foreigners.⁷

The industrial age thus prepared Zug for the international population that would arrive in the second half of the twentieth century. The Catholic, German-speaking rural canton of 1850 had become, by 1910, a place where Protestant workers from other cantons and Catholic workers from Italy lived and worked alongside the native population. Although the integration of these newcomers caused friction, it established the canton as a place of immigration. The international managers, traders and entrepreneurs who came to Zug from the 1970s onwards arrived in a society that had already absorbed several waves of newcomers.

1 Notes

1. Zug in der Welt, "Zwischen Not und Norm": Swiss factory statistics of 1882 with 70,364 male and 64,498 female workers (48 per cent women); in the Swiss cotton industry in 1888, 46 per cent women overall and 56 per cent in spinning mills. ↩
2. Zug in der Welt, "Zwischen Not und Norm": female workers earned approximately 53 to 65 per cent of male wages between 1890 and 1914; at the Metallwarenfabrik Zug from 1914 to 1921, women received roughly 60 per cent of the wages of male helpers. ↩
3. Source as cited in the printed edition. ↩
4. Zug in der Welt, "Zwischen Not und Norm": boarding houses: Loreto-Heim of the Metallwarenfabrik and Kerckhoffs (1890, closed 1905); Spinnerei Baar (1902, 30+ workers); Neuägeri (1901, run by nuns); Landis & Gyr (1946, up to 200 Italian women). ↩
5. Zug in der Welt, "Zwischen Not und Norm": Swiss ratio of Italian workers increasing from 18.2 per cent (1888) to 36.7 per cent (1910); Italians nearly one third of the workforce of the Spinnerei an der Lorze in 1902; Metallwarenfabrik nearly half Italian in 1910. ↩
6. HLS, "Zug (Gemeinde)": in 1910, a 16 per cent foreign share of the workforce. ↩
7. Zug in der Welt, "Zwischen Not und Norm": political pressure against foreign hiring during the First World War. ↩

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