Leaving the Nest?
The Offshoring Debate in Switzerland: A Long-Term Perspective
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Introduction
Since the 1990s, there has been growing concerns about offshoring and its consequences on industrialized nations and their workers. This worldwide debate is often considered as a recent one and is rarely studied by business historians. Within this framework, the Swiss case provides an interesting vantage point from which to analyze different inflections of the offshoring debate in a long-term perspective from the 19th century to the present days.

Historical Context
The internationalization's process of the Swiss economy is far from new. From the 19th century, foreign direct investments (FDI) by Swiss companies were commonplace and typically characterized as a way to compensate for the small size of the domestic market. Several authors suggest that an "accelerated internationalization" took place at the end of the 20th century, observing the growing Swiss FDI stock. Unfortunately, no data are available to estimate the scope of offshoring within this process.

Thanks to secondary literature, we know that the first relocations date from well before 1914 and were essentially concurrent with the emergence of multinationals since their will was to take advantage of cheaper labor costs. Indeed, "apart from the strategies of partial or total delocalization of firms abroad, as in the textile (especially silk), food (especially chocolate) and machine industries, even in sectors with little and no delocalization, firms developed strategies which enabled them to some extent to exploit the advantage of low labor cost abroad for part of the production process and so to lower the overall cost of the finished product" (Head König in Müller & Myllyntaus, 2008: 217). As for the practice, the debate on offshoring has been ongoing since the 19th century, with more or less intensity regarding the period and involving different actors and companies. Therefore it is far from obvious that the trends we observe today represent a fundamental change and more historical investigations are required if we want to understand changes and continuities regarding offshoring.

Research questions
- Why and when does the offshoring debate reappear over time? In what context?
- What terminology is used? How is the debate problematized?
- Who are the actors and interests involved? What alliances can be observed?
- In what way does this debate reflect a shift in the power relationships between the different actors? (workers, unions, multinationals, Swiss authorities, etc.)

Preliminary Observations

Selective Bibliography

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