

The Swiss Trades Union movement and communism

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NEWS OF THE COLONY

OBITUARY.

Mrs. J. L. Chamberlain (Kaponga).

The death occurred at the Hawera Hospital recently of Mrs. Marie Regina Chamberlain, a well-known member of the Swiss community in South Taranaki, who had resided at Manaia Road, Kaponga, for 30 years.

Born in Switzerland 62 years ago, Mrs. Chamberlain in 1920 married Mr. J. L. Chamberlain, who had lived at Manaia and Kaponga before returning to Switzerland to be married.

Mrs. Chamberlain, although of retiring disposition, was a highly respected member of the Swiss community and a regular attender of St. Joseph's Church. She was always a willing helper at any functions connected with the Church or the Swiss community. She is survived by her husband, five children, Messrs. J. L. D. Chamberlain (Kapuni), C. F. and E. E. Chamberlain (Kaponga), Mrs. E. Steiner (Mahoe) and Miss A. Chamberlain (Kaponga), and two grandchildren.

Requiem Mass at St. Joseph's Church was attended by a very large congregation, including Swiss from all parts of Taranaki. The funeral was conducted by Rev. Father Breen, Eltham, and the pall-bearers were Messrs. J. Steiner (Mahoe), D. Luond (Awatuna), J. Chamberlain (Kaponga), D. Chamberlain (Kakaramaea), L. L. Ancombe (Kaponga), and J. Robson (Kaponga). The funeral cortege consisted of over 70 cars, and there were many floral tributes.

May she rest in peace.

THE SWISS TRADES UNION MOVEMENT AND COMMUNISM

By PIERRE BEGUIN.

The Swiss "Union of Syndicates" is a powerful body which represents the greater part of the working class movement in this country. There are indeed a number of Christian unions and unions of radical tendencies, but the vast majority of Swiss trade unionists belong to this single influential Union of Syndicates which is capable of bringing considerable influence to bear in political as well as professional life.

There has been no counterpart in Switzerland of the internal dissension which has occurred during the last few years in the trades unions movement of so many other western countries. In Switzerland the Communist leaders have been unsuccessful in capturing leading positions in the trades union movement, and there has been no breakaway under Communist inspiration, from the trades union movement. In this respect the situation in Switzerland is not very different from that in Great Britain.

This has been shown once again at the tri-annual congress of the Swiss Union of Syndicates which has just taken place in Lucerne, where the very important question came up for discussion whether the Syndicate should join the International Confederation of Free Trades Unions.

In 1946 the Swiss Union of Syndicates joined the World Federation of Trades Unions, in obedience to the wish which the leaders in all countries of the trades union movement have always cherished, to preserve an international workers' united front. But even then doubts were expressed whether it was possible to organise fruitful and harmonious co-operation between the free western trades unions and the strictly government-controlled trades unions in the peoples' democracies of Eastern Europe. But all the same we joined; we took this risk. But as our trades unions leaders have just stated in Lucerne, the experiment was a complete failure. The

Communists very soon succeeded in taking over a dominating part in the World Federation of Trades Unions and of making this body completely subservient to Soviet policy. And for this reason the free trades unions of the western countries decided to leave the World Federation and to set up a genuinely democratic supra-national trades union organisation.

This left Swiss trades unionists with the task of deciding whether their national organisation would join the new international body. This question was discussed at length and in great detail in Lucerne, and the Communists had ample opportunity to put forward their point of view. They cannot claim that the decision which was finally taken was arrived at without full investigation and complete objectivity.

The result was that the Swiss trades unions decided by 325 votes to only 22, to join the International Confederation of Free Trades Unions. This was not only a clear majority. It was a crushing one. A crushing victory of progressive thought over revolutionary tendencies. The Swiss working class have now shown by voting in this way that they think no more reforms are necessary; they have shown that they will have nothing to do with totalitarian methods.

The decision was taken in full freedom of mind, and it will strengthen the position of the socialist party and also the present position of the trades unions chiefs. On the other hand it will prevent the Communists from continuing their penetration of working class organisations, and so will reduce their influence. The Swiss working class movement is healthy and united, and we have good reason to be thankful that it is so.

THE TRAGEDY THAT STIRRED EUROPE

By REGINALD CUPELIN.

As thousands of men and women climb mountains of their own or other countries during the summer there will be much talk about joys and dangers of mountaineering, which now claims clubs all over the world.

When dangers are discussed, conversation will inevitably drift to the subject of Whymper and the Matterhorn and the most famous mountaineering disaster of all time.

More than threequarters of a century after it occurred, aspects are still coming to light of the full story of that tragedy—a tragedy that stirred Europe, caused Queen Victoria to ask the Lord Chamberlain if mountaineering could be lawfully banned, and brought forth the thundering "leader" on mountaineering in "The Times," which demanded: "Is it life? Is it duty? Is it commonsense? Is it allowable? Is it not wrong?"

In 1865, Edward Whymper, a young London engraver, had made seven unsuccessful attempts to climb the Matterhorn, that giant obelisk which rises above Zermatt and the summit of which lies on the Swiss-Italian frontier.

On July 14th, Whymper at last climbed the mountain from Zermatt; simultaneously, an Italian party, led by one of Whymper's former guides, Jean Antoine Carrel, failed to climb the peak from the Italian side. Whymper's victory was short-lived.

During the descent the youngest member of the party, a youth named Hadow, slipped, shot off into space and dragged with him two of the other amateurs in the party—the Rev. Charles Hudson and Lord Francis Douglas—and one of the guides, Michel Croz.

There were three others in the party, Whymper and two Zermatt guides named Taugwalder, who were father and son.

The rope broke between the four falling men and the remaining three; and Whymper and the Taugwalders were left clinging to the rocks, watching their companions sliding to death over a precipice thousands of feet high.