

1966 the year of "Fifth Switzerland" : the tasks of Swiss diplomatic and consular representation

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1966 The Year of "Fifth Switzerland"

THE TASKS OF SWISS DIPLOMATIC AND CONSULAR REPRESENTATION

1966 has been declared "the year of the fifth Switzerland," the special year of the Swiss abroad. The reasons for this decision are manifold. The plebiscite on the Constitutional Article for the Swiss abroad will be held, and the Commission of the Swiss Abroad will celebrate its Golden Jubilee. Furthermore, last year's theme "The image of Switzerland in the world" is to be followed up by a study of how the Swiss abroad can contribute to the "presence de la Suisse dans le monde."

The following article is a resume of an address given at last year's Assembly of the Swiss Abroad in Solothurn. Its author is **Monsieur l'Ambassadeur Pierre Micheli**, Secretary-General of the Federal Political Department.

IN ORDER to treat the subject "The Image of Switzerland in the World" comprehensively, not only hours, but days would be needed. It would be fascinating to consider the various aspects of how Switzerland makes herself felt in the world.

The picture we have of our country is fashioned at the same time by sentiment as well as by reason. In our hearts we idealise Switzerland, and we are cross when the reality does not correspond to the image we have created ourselves. We feel urged to do everything in our power to bring reality nearer to our ideal.

Opposite our own picture stands that which others have of our country. Naturally, that is less definite, often contradictory and often partial. If the picture does not correspond to our own, which happens frequently, we are disappointed. We feel we are not understood and not treated fairly. We feel we have a duty to enlighten others to how we are.

Conceptions others have of Switzerland are extremely varied and variable. Opinions are based on incomplete and rash conclusions which are sometimes favourable to us, but more frequently unfavourable. Some small incident can take on undue importance and may distort the judgment of many people.

How does the image of Switzerland manifest itself? In the first place on the intellectual level. Remarkable ideas have originated in Switzerland, and it is this spiritual radiation, Switzerland's contribution of civilisation, which seems to be the basis of the Swiss image in the world. This "presence," however, would have diminished to insignificance, had there not been a Rousseau, a Pestalozzi or a Dunant, whose thoughts had a determining influence in the world.

Secondly, Switzerland's image is based on her political institutions, on her direct democracy, her federalism, on her social order and her stability. Many young states consider Switzerland exemplary in this respect.

In a more practical field, it is our technical and industrial achievements, our watches and machinery which testify for Switzerland. No doubt, our reputation in the world is considerably increased by our scientists, scholars, engineers and technicians.

One of the essential factors of the Swiss image in the world is represented by the Swiss abroad without whom Switzerland would not enjoy the same high reputation.

In what way do Swiss diplomatic and consular representations further the image of Switzerland? Administration is usually held responsible if things don't go as one would like. The Political Department is responsible for Swiss representation abroad. It, too, does not escape criticism.

There are seven Federal Departments, like there are seven wonders of the world. Enumerating them, one usually begins with the Political Department. The reason for this is that in 1849, when the Departments were first distributed, it was given to the President of the Confederation. Consequently, it had a new head every year. In spite of disadvantages which such frequent changes had, this method was adhered to until 1914 (with the exception of an eight-year break from 1887-1895), for the advantages were more numerous.

Since 1914 when the Federal Administration was reorganised, the Political Department is no longer that of the President of the Confederation. As in other Departments, the Federal Councillor assigned to it remains in charge until redistribution of Departments takes place.

The duties of the EPD are a) care of foreign affairs, i.e. the relations of the Confederation with foreign states and their representatives and b) protection of economic interests vis-a-vis foreign countries.

After 1914, the Political Department consisted of two sections, one for foreign affairs and one for trade. In 1917, on the demand of Gustave Ador, the trade section was given to the Department for Economic Affairs, where it has remained ever since.

The range of the Political Department covers:

- 1) maintaining independence, neutrality and external security of the Confederation, as well as safeguarding international relations;
- 2) the service of Swiss legations and consulates and issuing instructions to them;
- 3) preparing and, if given a mandate, carrying out of foreign affairs. Informing the Federal Council of political events abroad. Periodical reporting to the Federal Council on foreign affairs;

- 4) preparing international agreements and negotiating with foreign governments and their representatives;
- 5) protecting of Swiss citizens abroad and safeguarding Swiss interests abroad. Swiss societies and institutions abroad;
- 6) supervising and regulating frontier matters;
- 7) international offices in collaboration with other departments on technical questions.

This definition of the tasks of the Federal Political Department is still valid today. But a great deal of additional organisation was necessary. At the moment, the Department is divided into four sections for political matters, for international organisations, for administrative affairs and the services for technical co-operation. This may not be the final set-up; experience has shown that the whole organisation must for ever be changed to fit new demands.

The present construction of the EPD reflects the international relations of today. These used to be mostly bilateral, and problems were solved by negotiation between Switzerland and the other State. Today, international relations exist on various levels: on a direct and bilateral level, then on a multilateral plane where the problems are treated and solved in international organisations or conferences. The political division deals with all exterior matters affecting Switzerland on a bilateral level. The division in charge of international organisations looks after foreign affairs on a multilateral level. If an agreement with another country has to be negotiated it is the task of the political division. If it means stating our attitude at an international conference or to regulate relations with an international institution, it is the division looking after international organisations, which makes the necessary studies.

The third division, still fairly new, is that of assistance to countries in process of development, a task which is of growing importance in modern international relationship. With the purpose of helping the new order grown out of decolonisation, the service of technical co-operation has come into being.

The division for administrative affairs is the main-spring of the Department. All questions of personnel, budget, salaries, buildings of Swiss diplomatic and consular missions abroad, etc., are incumbent on it. It has an often ungrateful task, but its functioning guarantees the working of the whole EPD.

To co-ordinate the four divisions is the duty of the Secretary-General who is at the same time in charge of the division for political affairs.

The part of the set-up in Berne is only one—the other consists of the federal representatives abroad, the network of embassies and consulates. The central office in Berne can be compared to a general staff, the representatives abroad to the army at the front. The staff is interchangeable and may be sent abroad or called

back to Berne according to the requirements. The normal career of a civil servant of the EPD runs its course partly in Berne, partly abroad.

—The Swiss Observer

(To be concluded)

News of the Colony

Hamilton Swiss Club

ANNUAL PICNIC

To hold the picnic or not to hold the picnic was the prize question on February 20th. At 7, 8 or 9 a.m. club members tuned in to the local radio station and with bated breath awaited a cancellation. However, for once a handful of Swiss showed that they have learned in New Zealand to put their hat on a horse, for better or worse. And so it turned out: Clouds, drizzle, watery sunshine alternated, but what was not changeable was the sporting good humour with which a surprisingly large gathering took "the weather" in its stride.

Around 200 adults and some 100 children moved or romped around when the going was good, or took shelter under the dense branches of the trees in the Risis' large garden. A large number of members from the Auckland Swiss Club also arrived, joining and boosting the general sporting spirit. We were delighted to see so many of you Aucklanders.

That our Charge d'Affaires and Mrs Weber stayed with us all day was greatly appreciated. Mr Weber, speaking to us all over the loud-speaker system, made particular reference to, and elaborated on, that this year 1966 was the "Auslandschweizer" year. Regardless of the drizzle Mr and Mrs Weber went around the grounds to mix freely with their compatriots. Mr and Mrs Homberger, also from the Embassy, sacrificed a day of their holidays to share our picnic day. This enabled everybody to meet this delightful young couple.

The children as usual had their lolly scramble and the barbecue Bratwurst and particularly the Real Cafe Kirsch enjoyed great popularity. Spontaneously-rendered accordion items and yodel songs were much appreciated.

Games were as follows.—**Kegeln:** 1st, Arthur Mueller, Auckland; 2nd, Arthur Plank, Hamilton. **Steinstossen:** 1st, Walter Piatti; 2nd, Willy Mueller; 3rd, Ossie Risi; 4th, Rinaldo Rust.

As usual, the Risis' garden proved to be the picnic spot par excellence and once again we are greatly indebted to them for being able to use any facilities desired in garden and house. To Mr and Mrs Risi, senior and junior, who worked also the day before and the day after the picnic, we owe special recognition. To them and to the other committee members go our warmest thanks for a day's hard work, done without a hitch.

—H.B.