

Two-way traffic : the Swiss abroad meet at St. Moritz

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Two-Way Traffic

THE SWISS ABROAD MEET AT ST. MORITZ

THE Assembly of the Swiss Abroad is held in a different place in Switzerland every year, either a town or a holiday resort which commands enough hotels to accommodate between three and five hundred Swiss at the height of the tourist season in August. It stands to reason that more people attend an assembly held in a town which is easily get-at-able than in a rather remote place like St. Moritz where this year's rally was held from 16th to 18th August. Even so some 350 Swiss from all corners of the earth journeyed to the Engadine which presented itself in brilliant sunshine on the first day of the Assembly.

Friday was devoted to the exacting work of the Commission of the Swiss Abroad (ASK), the true "Parliament" of the Swiss living away from home. On it the majority of Colonies have their representatives, from countries as far apart as Peru and Turkey, South Africa and Scandinavia.

The Swiss Colony in Great Britain was represented at the meeting of the Commission at St. Moritz by Mrs Mariann Meier for the South and Dr. H. B. Knuchel for the North.

The Chairman of the Commission, Dr. G. Schurch, opened the first session at 9.30 a.m. at the well-appointed and luxurious Kulm Hotel. The Commission was hard at work all day and there was little time to rest before a press conference was held at 5 p.m. followed in turn by a reception given by the commune of St. Moritz. Its President welcomed the Commission, and generous refreshments of precious local wines and delicious dried meat were presented.

After dinner the first plenary session was opened by the President of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (ASO), Dr. G. Schurch. Amongst the Guests of Honour who attended the gathering were Federal Councillor Bonvin, members of the Cantonal Government and a representative each of the highest Federal Legislative, the National Council and the Council of States. Many Government departments were represented, the Swiss radio and the press, and in addition several members of the Diplomatic and Consular Services were present, amongst them Consul and Mrs Ribi (formerly of London, at present in Zagreb), the Swiss Consul in London and Mrs Tosio and the Vice-Consul in Manchester and Mrs Sollberger. Germany, France and Italy had the largest contingents (between 25 and 40 members each) whereas from Great Britain, apart from the Consular representatives, only few people attended, such as Mr and Mrs A. F. Suter and daughter, Mrs G. O. Davidson, Prof. J. Inebnit, Dr. H. B. Knuchel, Mr J. A. Reiber and the Editor of the "Swiss Observer" with her son and three daughters.

The President gave a short picture of the Organisation, followed by brief reports on various aspects of the work done by the Secretariat in Berne, specially by Dr. H. J. Halbheer, the Director. A short statement on the Solidarity Fund was presented by its President, Dr. Froelich.

The party then split up into three groups. One discussed questions affecting the Colonies and the activities of the Secretariat, the second concerned itself with the service for young Swiss abroad and the third with Old Age Insurance and Military Service Substitute Tax. The delegates of the Solidarity Fund held their Annual Meeting. The members of the Fund in Great Britain were represented by their delegate Mrs M. Meier. It was nearly midnight when this group at last disbanded.

On Saturday the theme of this year's assembly "die Selbstbehauptung der Schweiz in der Welt von heute und morgen" (how Switzerland can hold her own in the world of today and tomorrow) was considered.

The first speaker was Corps Commander R. Frick, the Chief of Training of the Swiss Army who spoke on Switzerland's Military defence. Next followed the former Federal Councillor Prof. Max Weber (member of the National Council) who spoke on Switzerland's economic position. The third speaker, the Central President of the Nouvelle Societe Helvetique, addressed the assembly on the spiritual defence of Switzerland.

It is rare to have three excellent lecturers of a very high standard in a row. They gave a most convincing and reassuring picture of Switzerland's position.

Next Fursprech M. Jaccard, Head of the Service for the Swiss Abroad of the Swiss Foreign Office dealt with the proposed Article of competence concerning the Swiss abroad which is at present with the Swiss Political Department.

The head of Information of the Swiss National Exhibition 1964, Mr J. Beglinger gave the latest news about the "EXPO," and a short message in Italian by one of the inland members of the Commission rounded off the morning session.

There was a special lunch preceded by separate meetings which had been arranged by the Protestant and Catholic clergy in charge of church questions concerning the Swiss abroad.

After lunch it was the turn of the Swiss living abroad. Speakers from several countries gave short talks on the main theme. The representative of the Swiss Colony in Great Britain, Mrs M. Meier, opened the session. She was followed by speakers from France, Austria, Italy, Sweden and Spain.

Prof. Inebnit made a plea for international civil service. The Chairman promised that the subject would be put up for discussion at next year's Assembly when the theme would be "Switzerland and the Developing Countries."

The Tourist Director of St. Moritz, Mr Kasper, welcomed the audience in Ladin, one of the dialects of Romansch, the fourth national language. He pointed out the advantages of the Engadine and St. Moritz in particular and said that the first electric light in Switzerland had been established on the very spot at the Kulm Hotel.

The highlight of the afternoon was Federal Councillor Bonvin's speech, a most unusual piece of official oratory. The illustrious speaker addressed the meeting without a manuscript and managed to clothe the official greetings from the Government into a message of goodwill coming straight from the heart.

The President then thanked all the speakers for their valuable contributions. He said that no great decisions had been taken and no resolutions had been formed. But it had been a most stimulating and interesting meeting and the most urgent need had been established, that of informing more thoroughly the Swiss abroad of what was happening in Switzerland.

With this the serious part of the Assembly was concluded and the members adjourned to a reception given by the Cantonal Government. To the strains of a local brass band drinks were served, and everywhere great satisfaction was expressed at the excellent spirit of the gathering and the real two-way traffic between the Swiss abroad and their compatriots at home.

In the evening a festive crowd met at another of St. Moritz's luxury hotels, the Palace, where the Banquet was held. The Editor of the "Swiss Observer" had the honour of being put at the top table next to Federal Councillor Bonvin and the Commune President of St. Moritz, Mr H. Flisch. A group of visiting yodellers from Central Switzerland entertained the party during dinner, and afterwards National Councillor O. Hess delivered a message from Parliament.

The "Cor Romantsch da San Murezzan" delighted the gathering with beautiful songs from the Engadine and young men and women in picturesque national costumes performed some lively dances. A dozen or so recruits from Swiss communities abroad rendered a few soldiers' songs, and then a local rural band played "Landler" tunes to which energetic dancing went on till two o'clock in the morning.

When the visitors woke up on Sunday morning they discovered that snow had fallen in the night and the whole of St. Moritz and the neighbouring mountains were covered in white. This unfortunately meant that the picnic on Alp Surlej had to be cancelled. But as the sky was a brilliant blue and the sun shone serenely, the outing by postal motor coach to Silvaplana and aerial cabin car to Piz Corvatsch took place just the same for those who had stout shoes and warm clothes. The view was magnificent and it was a most unusual treat to sit in warm sunshine in several inches of powdery snow at Murtel station (9,000 feet).

The unexpected snow and change of plans meant that the usual closing ceremony on the Sunday afternoon of the Assembly did not take place. But even if the National Anthem could not be sung by the whole community, the feeling of belonging was there and opinion was unanimous that the 41st Assembly had been a great success in every way.

—*The Swiss Observer*

NEWS OF THE COLONY ★ ★ ★ ★

Auckland Swiss Club

Members of our Club were invited to participate in the National Concert presented by the "United Nations League" on 19th October, 1963. The programme was a trip around the world in music and dance and the items, all with their special national flavour, began with New Zealand, followed by dancing from Tonga, Latvia, Latin-America, Malaya, Spain and Poland, etc., as well as music from Hungary, Scotland, Ireland and Switzerland.

The items given by our members was yodelling by Mrs Doris Binder and a "Bodestaendige Laendler" performed by Mr & Mrs Hans Enzler to our very popular Laendlermusik by Charly Rickenbacher and Louis Mueller. The very large audience was immediately captured by the lovely yodelling of Mrs Doris Binder and the speed and gaiety of our music and dance, followed by never-ending applause.

The final number was given by a group of Maori girls, bringing the national wheel round full circle. The entire company of 100 performers, representing 20 different nations, assembled on the stage at the end of the programme, presenting a most impressive and colourful sight in their national costumes.

—H.B.M.

Our Congratulations to Mr & Mrs Erich Flueck: to their little baby son, Cederik, born on 28th October 1963.

—H.B.M.

Wellington Swiss Club

The Wellington Swiss Club's Chilbi was held at the Brooklyn Community Hall on 19th October, 1963. Although the attendance of members was rather disappointing, those who did come thoroughly enjoyed themselves with the many activities offered.

A special attraction for the children was the puppet show which highly amused the young audience. There were as well films for the kiddies while their parents could start things rolling on the kegelbahn, shooting, lucky cards, tombola and other games essential for a successful Chilbi. When hunger or thirst overtook one after such strenuous