

Our Swiss abroad

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Our Swiss Abroad

The following extracts were taken from an address by M. Maurice Jaccard, head of the Swiss Federal Office in charge of questions relating to Swiss Abroad, which he delivered on the occasion of the Annual Assembly and Dinner of the Pennsylvania Chapter of the New Helvetic Society, 28th April, in Philadelphia, U.S.A.

A CHARACTERISTIC of the situation of the Swiss who live abroad is diversity. Today about 265,000 Swiss citizens are registered at Swiss Embassies, Legations and Consulates as against 400,000 in 1939. Such a comparison gives an idea of how devastating were the effects of war on Swiss communities abroad. It is also worth mentioning, that in 1939 a third of the fellow-countrymen registered at Embassies, Legations or Consulates, had a second nationality. Today there are almost twice as many. About 60 per cent of the Swiss registered abroad have acquired the nationality of the country in which they live. And were we to include in these figures all those who are not registered, then the percentage would be much greater.

When examining the situation of the Swiss abroad we must divide them up into different groups. It is very important to know whether a Swiss lives in New York, in Liechtenstein, in Buenos Aires, in Hong Kong or in Bucharest. For the sake of simpleness we shall take three groups of countries into consideration. First of all, Eastern countries, that is countries behind the Iron Curtain; secondly, the so-called Western countries, and lastly the under-developed countries. As you will have noticed the division is not a matter of chance. It shows clearly how closely the Swiss abroad are linked to events in their country of residence and to what extent they share its fate. I shall try to describe a few of the more typical problems confronting the Swiss living in each one of these three groups.

In the Eastern countries, particularly in the Balkans, there were thriving Swiss communities. Many of our fellow-countrymen had important places in industry, in trade, in the banks and in agriculture. They made a considerable contribution to the economic development of these countries, many representing renowned and often world-famous Swiss industries. In particular firms of the chemical and machine industries. Many fairly large-sized and smaller firms were founded with the help of Swiss capital. Not a few of our fellow-citizens worked as experts for the Governments of these countries and in that way reached high positions.

The far-reaching changes in the political, economic and social structure of the Eastern states wrought by war dealt a heavy blow at the situation of our fellow-countrymen. Hundreds were forced

to give up their living and return to Switzerland or settle in other countries. Only a few Swiss, mostly aged people who had acquired the nationality of their country of residence, remained in those countries.

The structural changes led to nationalisation of private property. Appealing to principles of International Law, the Swiss Government was of the opinion that these nationalisations could only take place against the payment of just compensation to Swiss owners. After long and difficult negotiations, reparations were obtained from Eastern countries in lump sums which were distributed to the victims in accordance with rules of International Law.

Besides, the Confederation as far as was financially possible, helped our fellow-countrymen to start a new living elsewhere. Its expenses, on behalf of Swiss abroad who lost their belongings in the second World War, amount to about 300 million francs.

Our world is divided up into at least two parts. This is the case in particular for Europe where the two worlds are separated by a demarcation line of a political and ideological nature, with its repercussions on the situation of Swiss abroad.

In Western Europe among our fellow-countrymen, one often comes across problems relating to Switzerland's attitude towards European integration. These problems are mostly brought up by fellow-citizens who have settled in the countries of the European Economic Community. Switzerland's attitude is often misunderstood in Western countries. A common reproach is that of overlooking reality and clinging to antiquated institutions like neutrality, our system of direct democracy and our federalism. In our opinion this criticism is unjustified. If we hold on to our institutions, it is because we believe that they alone correspond to our nature, to our diversity and allow us, a nation of five and a half million inhabitants, with two denominations and four languages, to live in peace. If we hold on steadfast to our neutrality it is because we are convinced that in this way we are of more use to the community of nations than in giving up our neutrality. We believe that our neutrality, which has its roots in an age-old experience, must be armed. The financial and other sacrifices which the Swiss nation makes for its armed neutrality reflect this belief. For 1962, the Confederation will devote a third of its whole budget to defence. Switzerland is no military vacuum in the middle of Europe and if Western Europe were to spend amounts of the same importance, it would now have 300 Divisions.

These are questions of which we must continually remind our fellow-countrymen in the West. We set great store on the Swiss abroad understanding the policy of their fatherland and approving it.

Along with the development which took place in Europe after the war and which led to the splitting up of the old continent into two, another situation developed, namely, what we generally regard as the end of the colonial system. Whole regions of Asia and Africa became independent, but they need help from highly industrial countries. The problems of the Western world are closely related to those of the underdeveloped countries, and our fellow-countrymen in Africa and Asia see it daily. They must adjust themselves to the new situation which is not always easy for everyone. In the Congo, for example, in a very short time Swiss citizens with brilliant positions lost all their belongings and were only able to save their skins. Elsewhere the prejudice to personal and economic situation was not so striking but the damage done is nevertheless very much there. It is not always noticeable and it is all the more painful when the final stage of development is reached. Other changes are the consequence of differences in the political and economic structure of these countries. We negotiate with the authorities of these regions in order to come to reasonable terms. One cannot always avoid losing one's living and it sometimes happens that a person did not gather the meaning of certain signs at the right moment. He who took precautionary measures at the right time and adhered to the "Solidarity Fund" for Swiss abroad is most fortunate.

However, all is not lost for our fellow-countrymen in underdeveloped countries. Because they are subjects of a neutral country, the Swiss in those countries enjoy great sympathy. Swiss experts who are sent as technical assistants are welcome and have already accomplished a useful task. Swiss citizens who settled many years ago in underdeveloped countries, and have gained precious experience there, accomplished similar jobs.

These few comments show how diverse are the problems the Swiss abroad have to face. When the Swiss authorities help our fellow-countrymen abroad they must not be too restrictive in their choice of means of intervention. We must adjust ourselves to the conditions. Nevertheless a certain number of guiding principles must be observed in protecting interests of Swiss abroad. Whenever possible we must seek to strengthen the situation of our fellow-countrymen by agreements with Foreign Governments. Switzerland has signed a great number of treaties with Foreign States and they have been of great advantage to our fellow-countrymen because they cover a wide field of subjects. Such examples are treaties of establishment, friendship, trade, arbitration, double taxation, social insurance and compensation. When we grant a Swiss citizen diplomatic and consular protection we appeal to these treaties or, as is often the case, to general principles of International Law. We fight with our strongest weapon. As a small country we are dependent upon International Law. It implies also that we abide strictly by

International Law. Of course, we cannot appeal to International Law when it suits us and ignore it when it might be of prejudice. The Swiss abroad must abide by the same rules with all the consequences that this may have for double-nationals. As is well-known, a rule of International Law has it that the first country of origin cannot grant diplomatic protection against the second country of origin. The Swiss citizen who acquires a second citizenship would do well to know these consequences. It does not mean, however, that he does not remain a Swiss citizen. The change merely intervenes in his international status.

The Confederation does a lot for the Swiss abroad. It would be wrong, however, to conclude that the Confederation seeks to nationalise the community of Swiss abroad. On the contrary, the Swiss authorities try to stimulate private organisations of Swiss abroad. All over the world there exist a great number of Swiss societies, the aims of which are to strengthen ties among the Swiss abroad. All these organisations are independent of the State, and the authorities do not intend to interfere. Our diplomatic and consular representations as well as the national authorities in Berne help these organisations by word and deed. Our wish is that the liberal principles on which our State is based, also be the guiding factors in our relationship to the Swiss abroad. When Swiss Laws which are of interest to the Swiss abroad have to be applied, representatives of the Swiss abroad are invited to participate in their application.

We believe that a trustful, fruitful and constructive relationship can flourish between the authorities in Berne on the one hand and all the Swiss abroad and their institutions on the other hand. You may rest assured that the authorities have great understanding for the concerns of the Swiss abroad.

—Reprinted from the "Amerikanische Schweizerzeitung"

NEWS OF THE COLONY ★ ★ ★ ★

Auckland Swiss Club

The "Tessiner-Abig." held on 9th May at the Edendale School Hall, was, as expected, a big success. The Hall was beautifully decorated with punga and cabbage trees and festoons of vine branches, grapes and Chianti bottles. The "Locanda," with a cosely-thatched roof and a friendly blinking lantern, was busy all night serving the popular Chianti wine and in the other corner of the Hall there was the "Grotto Ticino" situated under a trellis interwoven by vine branches with grapes, corn-cobs, salamie, etc., and Mr Hirzel and Miss Hirzel, dressed up in real Ticino fashion, selling "heissi