

A louder voice for Switzerland

Autor(en): **[s.n.]**

Objekttyp: **Article**

Zeitschrift: **Helvetia : magazine of the Swiss Society of New Zealand**

Band (Jahr): **32 (1969)**

Heft [12]

PDF erstellt am: **13.09.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-942239>

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A LOUDER VOICE FOR SWITZERLAND

On his return from a world tour that had taken him for many months to Swiss communities all over the world, M. Louis Guisan, president of the Commission for the Swiss Abroad of the New Helvetical Society, reported that the need most felt by our expatriate compatriots was better information on what was going on at home. His report focused the attention of the press of the Swiss Short-Wave Radio-Service and its alleged insufficiencies.

Those responsible for this service did not hesitate in making the situation clear: there were neither sufficient equipment nor enough money available to provide for a satisfactory short-wave service to all the disseminate Swiss of the planet. The need for a reform of the Service has since then been in the air and underlined in many an official speech.

An objective appraisal of what it actually achieved in its present state would lead to less pessimistic conclusions to those arrived at by Louis Guisan. The correspondence of a truly personal nature between the broadcaster and individual listeners around the world attests to the good the broadcasts of the Short-Wave Service can do. The two following letters, typical of those received at the Giacomettistrasse in Bern, sound like cries for help.

"I would be exceedingly grateful, if you would send me your programme booklet as well as intructions concerning the rigging

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of my antenna because I count among those who play with the radio knob almost every night with undaunted optimism and goodwill, in the hope of catching the sound of a familiar music or language”.

“Work apart, this place is unbelievably boring. The village of Puerto Cabezas consists of fifty wooden huts on the Caribbean coast, bordered by jungle and moor. Without the Swiss Short-Wave Service, there could be no question of remaining sane in these conditions”.

The Short-Wave Service is not only aimed however at the Swiss abroad — it is intended to “export” Switzerland to the world. It should aim, as pointed out by its director J. Curchod, to present as correct an image of Switzerland as possible. But the claims of the generalised folkloristic understanding of Switzerland contradicts this project. Moreover, it so happens that it is the Swiss who are most endeared to the klongs of cow-bells and alpine yodel. These are sufficient reasons not to discard the folklore from foreign programmes. For the benefit of the rest of the world foreign broadcasts now include more topical programmes, such as the “Swiss Mirror” and “Europe” programmes and increased information in the English, Spanish, Portuguese, French and Arab, overseas broadcasts.

The reorganisation of the Short-Wave Service is under preparation: future efforts will aim at restricting programmes to essentials. The folklore will be sacrificed to more information. Extra-European regions will receive priority and it is hoped that the increased powers of the Swiss national transmitters will make the short-wave broadcasts unnecessary for Europe.

The Short-Wave Service has up to recent times been financed by revenues derived from radio licences and specially set apart from the main flow of funds to the home services. Last year, 1.8 million francs came from this and other sources, but an extra million had to come from the Confederation. The need for more money is bound to increase and the Short-Wave Service is now asking for a credit amounting to 3 million francs a year for five years. Understandably, the confederal purse-string being pulled at from so many sides, the officials at Bern are not over-eager in satisfying these wishes. They have perhaps to be yet more convinced of the usefulness of the Short-Wave Service.

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DEAR MEMBER: HAVE YOU DECIDED ON THAT TRIP HOME YET? IF NOT, GIVE IT SOME SERIOUS THOUGHT NOW AND RUSH YOUR NAME AND ADDRESS TO MRS R. MESSMER — BE IN!