

Prof. E. Borel on the question of naturalisation and nationalisation in Switzerland

Autor(en): [s.n.]

Objektyp: **Article**

Zeitschrift: **The Swiss observer : the journal of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK**

Band (Jahr): - (1921)

Heft 30

PDF erstellt am: **13.09.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-691634>

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PROF. E. BOREL ON THE QUESTION OF NATURALISATION AND NATIONALISATION IN SWITZERLAND.

Steinway Hall has seldom seen, at any rate this year, so numerously attended a meeting of the members of the Nouvelle Société Helvétique as the one on December 16th, when Professor Borel, of Geneva University, spoke on: "The Problem of Naturalisation and Nationalisation in Switzerland—Its Actual State and Solution." The meeting was also a fortunate one in another respect. Mr. Baer, the President, read out the few buoyant lines which Dr. Latt had sent him just after the Parliamentary Conference of the Secrétariat des Suisses à l'étranger, of which a full report is to be found in another place in this paper. The Assembly, gratified by the compliments which Federal Councillor Motta had paid to the activity of the Swiss in London, warmly approved of sending him the following telegram of thanks: "Assemblée mensuelle a pris connaissance avec joie et intime satisfaction votre message transmis par Dr. Latt. Vous remercions actif intérêt envers aspirations suisses étranger. Envoyons conseil fédéral respectueuses salutations en l'assurant notre loyauté inébranlable."

After this Professor Borel, whom Mr. BAER introduced by giving a brief but impressive summary of his brilliant career, started his lecture, which will long be remembered not only for the deeply interesting subject dealt with, but also for the masterly way in which it was delivered. Mr. Borel insisted on the fact that a nation must have an individual character, and that Switzerland is now on the point of losing this owing to the large number of foreigners living in her territory. If we hear that the census of 1910 has revealed that 14.7 per cent. of the inhabitants of Switzerland are foreigners, we will be aware that a danger exists and means must absolutely be found to fight it. The situation is greatly complicated by the fact that these foreigners are mainly congregated in the big towns situated near the frontiers. Lugano, for instance, contains more foreigners than Swiss, namely 50.5 per cent., and the situation of Geneva (42 per cent.) is nearly equally as bad. What aggravates the problem still more is that 95 per cent. of the foreigners are Germans, French or Italians, that is to say, subjects of the big neighbouring states. The bad effects of this state of things were clearly felt during the war. To those who may raise the question as to why these foreigners generally have not taken the trouble to acquire Swiss nationality, it may be said that they have not done so mainly because they were better off as foreigners in Switzerland than they would have been as Swiss citizens. As foreigners they had no military service to do, and they were also less subjected to the disagreeableness of taxation.

The authorities, of course, have paid attention to this problem for a couple of years, and in 1914 a report of the Political Department was going to be brought before the Councils, but war postponed this action being taken. The Federal Council, however, has taken the matter up again. The outcome of its study is the "Message" of Nov. 9th, 1920, which recommends the revision of Art. 44 of the Constitution. The new Article proposes that *children born of parents of foreign origin, who were living in Switzerland at the moment of the birth, would become automatically Swiss, provided that their mother were of Swiss origin, or that both parents were born in Switzerland themselves.* These measures may seem very far-reaching and revolutionary, especially if it is considered that the children concerned will be deprived of the right of option, that is to say, they will be Swiss definitely from the moment of their birth. The authorities are of opinion that the

Constitution needs to be revised in this respect, because the Cantons, which long ago had the right to introduce similar legislation, have not made any use of it. On the other hand, the number of foreigners is increasing not only by immigration, but also owing to a far greater birth-rate prevailing amongst foreigners living in Switzerland than amongst families of Swiss origin. It has even been calculated that, if the foreigners increase at the same rate as they have done within the last sixty years, there will be 50 per cent. foreigners living in Switzerland in the year 2000. That this would be a deadly danger to our independence is quite obvious.

Professor Borel dealt at length with the advantages which would be derived from excluding the right of option. If the right of option should be granted, he said, the better elements of the foreigners were likely to be strongly influenced during their childhood with a view to making them finally decide in favour of the great country from which they originated. It would therefore mean organised attempts on the part of the foreign colonies in all great centres in Switzerland to secure for their own nations all the intelligent children, and Switzerland would have only the others as her citizens. If, however, those children know definitely that they are Swiss and cannot alter this fact, then they will in those years in which their minds are most impressionable learn to love the country they live in and become as good citizens as are the children of the Swiss themselves. There will be, of course, certain difficulties arising from the introduction of the *jus soli* (right of the soil), but, as Professor Borel pointed out, no solution of problems of this kind can be absolutely satisfactory. The difficulties arising mainly from the fact that Swiss citizenship is not a state citizenship but a borough citizenship would be dealt with by special provisions. A system of federal subventions is proposed, for instance, to assist boroughs which, on account of destitute children of this category, will have increased financial burdens.

The above mentioned proposals have not yet been dealt with by the National Council, and it is deplorable that the respective Committee of the Council of States has not shown any great willingness to endorse them, but has merely spoken in a vague way of a right of naturalisation which might be given to foreigners. All those who have really studied the question are of opinion that this right will not help us in the least, as it would not even maintain the present average of foreigners living in Switzerland, far less reduce their number. Professor Borel also commented on the so-called *Aargau Initiative*, which demands, amongst other things, that a foreigner should only be naturalised if he has stayed at least twelve years in the country, and that those foreigners who between their fifth year and their twentieth have not resided at least twelve years in Switzerland should never be allowed to be elected members of any political body, be it federal, cantonal or communal. Prof. Borel thinks that these claims, if quite comprehensible as the outcome of a certain irritation towards a number of freshly naturalised foreigners who have behaved badly during the war, are nevertheless exaggerated, and would not have happy results when embodied in the law. He thinks that the provisions which the proposals of the Federal Council contain, namely those forbidding naturalised foreigners from being elected to public boards during the *first five years* after their having been made Swiss, would be quite sufficient.

Professor Borel's interesting exposé was followed by a *discussion* in which quite a number of members participated. Eventually the following resolution was adopted, with three dissentient votes, with a view to being forwarded

to the Secrétariat des Suisses à l'étranger: "Le groupe de Londres de la Nouvelle Société Helvétique, après avoir entendu une conférence de Monsieur le professeur Borel sur la question de la naturalisation des étrangers en Suisse, et discuté ce problème, déclare appuyer les propositions présentées par le Conseil fédéral pour la revision de l'art. 44 de la Constitution Fédérale. Le groupe estime que le véritable danger menaçant aujourd'hui notre pays ne peut être combattu, entre autres, que par le moyen radical de l'incorporation, en vertu du droit du sol, d'étrangers qui y sont nés, cette mesure étant toutefois appliquée avec le discernement nécessaire, s'inspirant des limites que recommande le message du Conseil fédéral." It may be added here that the Nouvelle Société Helvétique ever since its existence has been busy pushing the study of this problem. The Secrétariat des Suisses à l'étranger has accordingly invited all groups abroad to arrange for discussions and will collect the respective resolutions. In this way the Swiss abroad have an opportunity of expressing their opinion on this most important matter.

Professor Borel was thanked by the assembly in the usual and always impressive way of clapping two "bans" in his honour.

P. L.

SOCIAL AND PERSONAL.

The Swiss Minister and Madame Paravicini entertained to lunch on December 20th: Mr. J. H. Parr, of the Ministry of Commerce at Belfast; Colonel W. Raikes, of the Air Ministry; Mr. R. L. Noseworthy and Mr. W. J. Paddon, of the Department of Overseas Trade; Mr. C. F. J. Ramsden, of the Federation of British Industries; Colonel Ernest Céresole; M. Henri Martin and Mr. Arthur Palliser, of the Swiss Legation.

Mr. François Borsinger has been promoted First Secretary of Legation by the Federal Council and will continue to exercise his functions at the Swiss Legation in London.

DIE BRÜCKE VON BIAUFOND.

Verfasst auf Grenzwahe, Weihnachten 1915.

Der 2. Comp. Bat. 25 gewidmet.

Und ob es regnet, ob es stürmt,
Ob hoch die Wolkenwand sich türmt,
Ob lacht uns der Tag, ob senkt sich die Nacht,—
An Biaufonds Brücke steht die Wacht.

Den Kaputt fest geschnüret, das Gewehr in der Hand,
So blicken die Getreuen in's Frankenland.
Heilige Nacht ist's, — doch klingt kein Ton
Zu denen die da stehen bei Biaufond.

Manch einer der spähet heut' in die Nacht hinaus
Hat Weib und Kind, hat Vaterhaus,
Und sehnsuchtschwer blickt er zurück
Nach jenem traumverlorenen Glück.

Und ist es hart zu ertragen und ist es schwer
Es ist für Vaterlandes Ehr' und Wehr.
Und blutig zahlen wir dem den Lohn
Der wagt zu passieren die Brücke von Biaufond.

A. STAUFFER.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS.

Tuesday, Jan. 3rd, 7 p.m.—CITY SWISS CLUB: Monthly Meeting preceded by a Supper at Gattis.

Saturday, Jan. 7th, from 6.30 to 11.45 p.m.—SWISS MERCANTILE SOCIETY: Cinderella Dance (Fancy Dress optional) at the Midland Grand Hotel, St. Pancras, N.W.

Saturday, Jan. 14th—CITY SWISS CLUB: Cinderella Dance at Gattis.

LA NOUVELLE SOCIÉTÉ HELVÉTIQUE GROUPE LONDONIEN.

MEETING OF THE COUNCIL ON DECEMBER 14, 1921.
at 74, Charlotte Street, London, W.1.

(Communicated.)

1.—Two members were admitted, and notice was taken of nine resignations.

2.—The President read out a letter from the Swiss Minister in which he said that in his opinion it was not advisable to continue the propaganda for the Rhine, as this question had now reached a stage where direct propaganda would not further it. This information was coupled with hearty congratulations to the Nouvelle Société Helvétique for what she had done in this affair. Her endeavours, so runs the letter, were much appreciated both by the Legation and by Switzerland.

3.—Several letters were read by the President. Mr. De Traz will resign as First Secretary of the Secrétariat des Suisses à l'étranger at the end of 1921. A letter of thanks to him was approved by the Council, as also one to Dr. Martz and a letter of congratulations to Mr. Schürch.

4.—The President read the report by Dr. Latt on the Parliamentary Conference, which is published in to-day's issue of "The Swiss Observer."

5.—The President read a letter from the Executive of the First District Committee for the work for the Swiss abroad, which is very optimistic about this movement. The future of the Secrétariat des Suisses à l'étranger seems to be now assured in spite of the difficult economic situation which prevails in Switzerland.

6.—The Secretary made a few communications relating to his work:—

(a) the scheme as to how to provide the English press with Swiss news of topical interest has been studied by the Secrétariat des Suisses à l'étranger and its collaboration is now assured;

(b) a scheme for providing the English Secondary Schools with information on the resources of the Secrétariat and on Swiss items generally was explained to and endorsed by the Council.

7.—The question as to whether it would be advisable to arrange henceforth for two General Meetings annually and how to make the meetings more attractive to the members was referred back to the Committee.

8.—The report of the Propaganda Committee was adopted. Accordingly a circular in German, French or Italian will be sent out, together with the present English application form to prospective members when the invitations to the next public concert are despatched. The Entertainment Committee will try to arrange for such a concert in March.

9.—The Treasurer's report was agreed to.

London.

Dr. PAUL LANG,

December 21st, 1921.

Secretary.

EGLISE SUISSE, 79, Endell Street, W.C. 2.

Samedi 31 Décembre 8.30.—SERVICE DE FIN D'ANNÉE—SYLVESTER FEIER—suivi d'un service de Cène—Culte d'adoration liturgique et musical.

Dimanche, 1 Janv. 11h.—M. Hoffmann-de Visme.

6.30—Pfarrer U. Wildbolz.

BAPTEMES.

Francis William Robert GYSIN, né le 28 Juillet 1921, fils de Charles et de Joséphine née Anderson, de Genève le 25 Décembre 1921.

Sonia Hildegard TURLER, née le 3 Juillet, 1921, fille de Henry Antoine et de Annie Anastasie née Steiger, de Neuveville (Berne)—le 25 Décembre.

MARIAGE.

Albert HEEHNER, de Thal (St. Gall) et Adèle Pélagie Eugénie MELLLET, de Gravelines (Nord)—le 24 Déc. 1921.

Un cordial MERCI! à tous ceux qui par leurs dons ou leurs efforts ont assuré le succès des fêtes de Noël 1921.