

Swiss national day celebration

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

Objektyp: **Article**

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

Band (Jahr): - **(1947)**

Heft 1072

PDF erstellt am: **14.08.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-692395>

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SWISS NATIONAL DAY CELEBRATION

1291



1947

at the CASINO THEATRE, LONDON, W.1
on SUNDAY, 27th JULY, 1947.

Brilliant sunshine and a cloudless sky heralded in the 656th Anniversary Celebration of our country's Independence, by the Swiss Colony in London, which, as usual, was held a few days previous to the actual date (1st of August), so as to give as many as possible an opportunity of attending.

One could wish, that an equally clear and cloudless sky would spread over the political horizon of the world, so that mankind could enjoy the short span of life which is allotted to them, without constant fear and alarm for the future.

Still this poor world of ours is in a state of turmoil and to talk of "Peace in our time" is almost a mockery. Instead of finding a common ground where all countries, large and small could work together in unity to heal the wounds which this greatest of all wars has inflicted upon us, petty jealousies, mistrust, cunning and craftiness are endangering the lives of future generations. In some parts of the world to-day war is still waged, still the guns are roaring and the shrill sounds of the sirens are bidding men, women and children to seek shelter from air attacks.

How long will this madness prevail? One would have thought that the terrible war years, with its miseries, sacrifices and utter destruction would have taught us a lesson, would have made us eager to work with all our might and strength for peaceful solutions of the differences which were bound to arise.

In a time of evil foreboding, full of dangers, threatened by financial and economic disasters, we cast our eyes heavenwards to seek guidance and enlightenment, and like our forefathers centuries ago, we will bend our knees and humbly fold our hands to ask God Almighty to inspire us with that love towards each other which passes all understanding. He alone, can give us that Peace which millions of our fellowmen so ardently desire.

* * *

In order to forget for a few fleeting moments this depressing state of affairs and to pay homage to those men, who centuries ago on the sacred spot of the Rütli vowed to stand together in distress and danger, in joy and sorrow, the Swiss community assembled this year at the Casino Theatre, Old Compton Street, W.1.

Already two weeks previously all the seats were booked, and many applications for accommodation had to be refused; the theatre which can seat 1,500 persons was packed from top to bottom. Owing to the fact, that so many of our countrymen had to be disappointed, I would suggest to the organisers to study the question of booking a still larger Hall, it need not necessarily be a theatre; what about the Central Hall which has a bigger seating capacity and is on the whole less stuffy? At the same time, I would recom-

mend to the body who is responsible for this gathering, to fix in future, whenever possible, this celebration to take place on the actual day, namely the 1st of August, as it would, in my humble opinion, greatly enhance the "Stimmung" knowing that on the same day back home in our country our brethren were uniting for the same purpose.

One outstanding feature of this year's celebration was to see so many of our young compatriots present, due, no doubt, to the fact that our Swiss youth can once again come over here, if only for a restricted period. It is a healthy sign, and we are grateful for this rejuvenation of our Colony.

Whilst our younger generation should be encouraged to take an active part in the social life of our colony, I would, however, advocate that in future "babes in arms," should, whenever possible, be left at home; it is hardly fair to them to be dragged along to a performance which they are unable to understand or to appreciate, and it is equally unfair to the participants to have to listen to the less melodious additions to the programme, which a number of these little ones thought necessary to make.

Like last year at the Stoll Theatre, it was again not possible to have the theatre decorated with our cantonal escutcheons and flags, owing to L.C.C. regulations, which was a great pity as these emblems, more than anything else kindle a patriotic feeling.

Apart from the two large Swiss flags and the Union Jack displayed, nothing, except the actual programme, brought it home to us that we were celebrating, in close community, the birthday of our beloved country.

At one of the recent meetings of a Swiss Society in London, the suggestion was made, that in future the programme of the 1st of August celebration should be made more attractive by getting artistes such as "Yodellers" or a group of gymnasts from our home country. I heartily support this suggestion, as in all fairness to the artistes, who so kindly gave their services, these annual performances are somehow drab, with very little colour and equally little change from year to year; but perhaps financial reasons deter us from such a welcome diversion.

New ideas and a new moving force have lately gained ground in our Colony, as the Swiss Minister has so aptly mentioned in his excellent oration, and so let us hope that ways and means can be found to make our next celebrations livelier and more attractive.

* * *

The first number on the programme brought our excellent Swiss Orchestra into action with a March entitled "Under the Banner of Victory" under the conductorship of Mr. E. P. Dick. Owing to the holi-



THE SWISS MINISTER DELIVERING HIS ADDRESS.

day season the orchestra was not at full strength, which accounted for some of the shortcomings.

Then Pasteur M. Pradervand, in an impressive Prayer, asked for God's blessing, rendering thanks to Him who has so kindly guided the destiny of our little country.

The "Swiss Pact" (Bundesbrief) was read by Father A. Lanfranchi, its simple and sincere language always creates a deep impression on its hearers.

The patriotic address was given, on this memorable day, by our Minister, Monsieur Paul Ruegger, who specially interrupted his holiday in Switzerland to be amongst his countrymen on this day. He received a warm ovation from an expectant audience. He said:—

Mes chers confédérés,

Le six-cent-cinquante-sixième anniversaire de notre Charte fédérale, de la fondation de notre patrie, nous trouve groupés, serrés autour du drapeau dont nous sommes si fiers, mais nous incite en même temps au recueillement. Notre pensée se dirige, à travers le temps, vers les premiers créateurs de notre patrimoine spirituel. Vers les Confédérés qui, se rencontrant le 1er août 1291 sur la prairie du Grütli, jurèrent, pour eux et pour leurs enfants, de vouloir être libres et de s'entr'aider. Elle se dirige aussi, à travers la distance, vers les nôtres en Suisse, vers les cimes et les hauts plateaux où les feux de joie s'allumeront le 1er août, tandis que le pays tout entier retentira des voix de ses cloches.

Notre réunion d'aujourd'hui, comme les réunions de Suisses qui ont lieu, ces jours-ci dans

d'autres centres d'Angleterre, de l'Empire britannique, à travers le monde, porte l'empreinte, à la fois de l'amour du pays et de la nostalgie. Mais aussi, et peut-être surtout, elle doit être l'occasion pour nous tous, Suisses vivant à l'étranger, de renouveler une promesse, un serment solennel: Le serment des premiers Confédérés les engageant "à se prêter les uns aux autres n'importe quel secours, appui et assistance, de tout leur pouvoir et de tous leurs efforts." Cette promesse solennelle est aussi nécessaire, aussi essentielle aujourd'hui en temps de paix qu'elle l'était hier au milieu des dangers militaires qui menaçaient le sol aimé de la Patrie.

Dans chaque phase de l'histoire de notre Pays, il faut donner un sens nouveau et plus ample à nos libertés, il faut mesurer chaque développement important de notre vie nationale au barème des trois principes essentiels de la Charte de 1291: sécurité, solidarité, justice.

Tout récemment, il y a quelques semaines, le sens de solidarité profondément ancré dans notre peuple s'est manifesté lors du vote en faveur des assurances sociales. Dans le domaine, toujours plus important pour nous, de nos relations avec les autres Etats et peuples, la solidarité, humaine et chrétienne, a poussé à la continuation de beaucoup d'œuvres de secours, plus nécessaires que jamais, au soutien, également si indispensable, de cette admirable institution née sur notre sol qu'est la Croix Rouge internationale. Tous ces efforts doivent bénéficier aussi de l'appui constant et sans relâche, matériel et moral, des Suisses à l'étranger. C'est mû par un esprit de solidarité enfin que la Suisse s'associe à l'œuvre entreprise par la Conférence siégeant actuellement à Paris et qui a pour tâche d'explorer les avenues pouvant conduire au relèvement économique de tout notre Continent meurtri. Tandis que, dans le domaine de la justice organisée, de l'arbitrage, dont le principe est aussi inscrit en des termes si nets, si clairs au Pacte fédéral, la Suisse souhaite reporter sur la nouvelle Cour de justice internationale la confiance qu'elle avait placée, il y a plus d'un quart de siècle, dans la Cour permanente de La Haye. C'est dans une action positive, selon l'esprit actif de notre neutralité constructive et utile pour tous, que la Suisse peut, jour par jour, fournir sa part dans la lutte contre la "malice des temps" et aider à la recherche de la sécurité pour tous.

C'est l'application, c'est la transposition dans les domaines d'aujourd'hui, des principes, des promesses, des engagements moraux découlant de la Charte dont nous célébrons aujourd'hui le glorieux anniversaire.

My dear compatriots,

Reverting for a moment to the language which as vehicle of thought is familiar to you all, and addressing the British-born Swiss wives and mothers, whose loyalty to their adopted country I most gratefully acknowledge, as well as those young Swiss who have not mastered as yet their national idioms, I feel I must dwell on some aspects of the Federal Charter of August 1st, 1291, which is in many ways so surprisingly, so perennially modern. On the ideas of solidarity, of fraternal assistance — unto the death if need be — of peaceful settlement of all disputes, of tolerance and peace.

Barely three days ago — on the occasion of a

gathering at Mansion House in aid of the universal "Save the Children" fund — I had the welcome opportunity of hearing ideas, which are, which should be, which *must* be our own time-honoured ideas, expressed, on the highest level in this great country, in moving and yet simple words. The Prime Minister of Great Britain, Mr. Atlee, recalling the piteous sight of distressed children in Central Europe, victims of a transmigration on an unparalleled scale, proclaimed that, if at any time there had been rules against "fraternisation" as regards children — which then never have existed — he himself would have certainly and deliberately broken these rules. The aid for children in distress must indeed not be hindered by any barriers whatsoever.

And the leader of H.M. Opposition in the Upper House of Parliament, Lord Salisbury, in paying tribute to the Prime Minister, expounded the great truth that charity must not, may not know any boundaries, and that the impulse of charitable help may be the instrument for dispelling, like smoke-screens, all barriers and curtains which, otherwise, may seem to divide our continent and the world.

Hearing these words, great in their truth and simplicity, I thought, my dear compatriots, of the great privilege which, thanks to the Federal Charter of August 1, 1291, and to the moral and political edifice created thereon, is our country's blazing shield. In former days we may have affirmed, in gatherings of our colonies abroad, that Switzerland's hour *would* come. To-day we may feel that, if we all live up to the great promise of our national Charter, simply but sincerely, our hour *has* come. For the thoughts, the words I have just quoted are, my dear compatriots and friends, *our* doctrine — the doctrine of the International Red Cross, born on our soil, whose colours and emblems are taken from our national flag.

The creed of the Red Cross is to fight human suffering, to protect innocent victims of strife, children, the disabled, prisoners, interned civilians.

This great task can be accomplished only — for the welfare of mankind — on a perpetually neutral soil — from a centre shielded by a country without political ambitions. Along these lines the immediate and indirect contribution of Switzerland to the community of nations has been and can be considerable. It means applying, on a larger scale, the principles of peace and of mutual assistance embodied in the Charter of the Grütli.

Liebe Landsleute,

An dieser 1. Augustfeier, die uns in eindrucksvoller Zahl zusammenführt, möchte ich Euch zunächst allen in aller Einfachheit danken für die Treue, die Ihr unverbrüchlich unserem Vaterland in den Kriegs- und Nachkriegsjahren gewahrt habt.

Das Land wird und muss weiter auf Euch zählen. Noch ist der Ausblick in die Zukunft nicht klar, noch stehen vielleicht Krisenzeiten bevor. Sie werden überwunden, wenn alle Landsleute daheim und in den Auslandskolonien stets Schulter an Schulter zusammenstehen. Auf einem unserer alten Rathäuser steht die Inschrift "*Unitas civitatis robur.*" Die Eintracht ist die Stärke des Staates.

An keinem anderen Tag fühlen wir die Kraft dieses Vermächtnisses so tief wie am Jahrestag des Bundesbriefes von 1291.



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Einen Dank möchte ich auch ausdrücken an die Vereine, an alle Schweizervereine in London und überall auf den britischen Inseln. Ihre Aufgaben sind gewachsen, seitdem der von uns allen erhoffte Zustrom von neuem Blut an unsere Kolonien eingesetzt hat. Lange haben wir Schweizer in England, wie in anderen Staaten, eine gewisse Ueberalterung der Kolonien befürchtet. Diese Gefahr scheint heute beschworen. Wenn auch viele der jungen Leute, die wir in unserer Mitte sehen, zu einem kürzeren Aufenthalt, für Studien oder zur Ausbildung, hier sind, so stellt doch der fluktuierende, aber sich stets erneuernde Zuwachs eine Vermehrung unserer Kolonie in Grossbritannien um rund 15 Prozent dar. Eine höchst erfreuliche Tatsache, im Moment in dem unsere Schweizerjugend im Interesse ihrer Zukunft mit der Welt in Kontakt kommen *muss* und andererseits viele Auslandschweizer aus anderen Ländern zu Rückwanderern geworden sind.

Darum, liebe Eidgenossen, mein Appell zur Solidarität. Die vortreffliche Leitung unserer Schweizervereine kann viel helfen, um unsere jungen Landsleute zu beraten, ihnen beruflich an die Hand zu gehen, vor allem bei ihnen, durch Anschluss an die Vereine, die Liebe zur Heimat stets wachzuhalten. Es handelt sich um eine tägliche Aufgabe der Solidarität im Sinne des Bundesbriefes vom 1. August 1291.

Cari concittadini del Ticino e delle retiche valli,

Voi sapete ormai — e lo sentite — che se alla fine della mia allocuzione soltanto, io vi parlo nella

vostra lingua, che per tante ragioni mi è cara, ciò non è dovuto ad una mancanza di comprensione o di gratitudine per la vostra fattiva opera al seno della Colonia. Anzi. La Colonia svizzera in Gran Bretagna sa ciò che deve, in tanti campi, all'esempio, all'aiuto, al patriottico concorso dei Ticinesi. Gli Svizzeri italiani residenti a Londra, nel Regno Unito, nell'Impero britannico, formano da tempo un gruppo numericamente importante, cospicuo e, soprattutto, unito. Mi rammenterò sempre del settantacinquesimo anniversario dell'Unione Ticinese di Londra, celebrato quasi tre anni or sono. Fu la prima grande riunione della nostra Colonia tenuta malgrado la guerra e malgrado i bombardamenti. In quella memorabile riunione si sentiva veramente il soffio dello spirito ticinese, il quale è così benefico, così essenziale per la compagine della nostra Confederazione. Oggi, celebrando il Natale della Patria, ci ricordiamo che la culla delle prime libertà elvetiche non fu soltanto posta nei tre Cantoni della Svizzera primitiva, ma anche, quasi contemporaneamente, nelle alte vallate ticinesi (Blenio e Leventina). Come lo disse il vostro, il nostro grande Giuseppe Motta, fin dalle origini, fin dal 1291, le sorti del Ticino e della Svizzera si toccano e si compenetrano.

Ogni voto, ogni augurio che formiamo per la vostra terra fedele, per la patria svizzera tutta, erompe dal cuore nel nostro grido:

“Evviva la patria, Evviva la Svizzera.”

The Minister's speech was acknowledged with great acclamation.



Then followed the singing with orchestral accompaniment of the "Cantique Suisse," and it was certainly not the fault of the orchestra that the audience did not respond with more vigour, the singing was timid and "patchy," which can be partly accounted for by the sweltering heat. They do these things better at home, but they usually kindle their patriotism with livelier beverages than tea and lemonade which makes all the difference.

And then came two numbers which brought a little colour into the proceedings, the Swiss Accordion Group, under the leadership of Mr. Gandon, all dressed in Swiss costumes, played a March, Valse and Laendler, which made things lively, judging from the "Yuchzers" which echoed throughout the theatre.

They were followed by the members of the Corale Unione Ticinese, in their cantonal costumes. They sang and played with much gusto those lively melodies of their native canton which we all love so much. Miss J. Bassi with her fiddle was able to enthuse her lively spirit into her fellow artistes, she was an able substitute for Mr. Valchera, who is away on holiday, and who, in spite of the clever performance of Miss Bassi, was greatly missed.

Both the Accordion players and the songsters of the Corale were vigorously applauded.

The first part of the programme ended with a selection from Romberg's "Student Prince" well played by the Swiss Orchestral Society.

An interval of forty-five minutes then took place, to enable the audience to partake of welcome refreshments, and to greet and make contact with each other. Towards the end of the interval Mr. E. P. Dick brought his orchestra on to the stage to play a March "Sons of the Brave" and a Swiss Potpourri, and as the audience had now managed to get a breath of fresh air and a few cooling drinks, they lustily joined the orchestra in singing some of our homely songs, amongst them our good old "Bärnermarsch."

The lights were then lowered for showing two Films of Switzerland. In the past, I have on several occasions criticised these performances, hoping that one of these days we might get a real fine film worthy of the occasion. My hope has not yet materialised. I am still ignorant as to who are the selectors on the other side, of what should be shown to us on this our National Day, whoever it is, they seem to have a pretty poor opinion of our taste.

To see and hear a film portraying a capital row at one of the meetings of a "Gemeinderat" somewhere in the canton of Berne is not an elevating item, especially on a day like the 1st of August, when we endeavour to proclaim unity and brotherly love which inspires us.

The other film depicted a Musical Festival held at Lucerne, for some reason or other the views of the town and lake were better than the music, but that might have been due to a technical hitch. It is a great pity that Mr. Fer, who always most willingly puts his services at our disposal, was not supplied with better films.

When the lights were switched on again the members of the Swiss Male Choir, led by Mr. E. P. Dick, came on to the stage, they sang in their usual competent manner "Soldatenliedli" from Peter and Attenhofer's "Das weisse Kreuz im roten Feld," owing to the choir not being complete, due to the holiday season, the latter song, which is meant to be sung by a large choir, lost some of its impressiveness.

The last item on the programme was reserved for community singing, and together with orchestral accompaniment that old and yet ever young song "O Bluemli mi" was sung with feeling and enthusiasm.

This brings my report about this year's National Celebration to a close, and I sincerely hope that the few remarks which it contains will be taken in the spirit in which they are meant, namely as "constructive" criticism.

Thanks should be expressed to the President of the 1st of August Committee, Mr. R. Dupraz and its members, and in particular to Mr. A. Bon, who was instrumental in collecting the Funds for this event, to Mr. J. Zimmermann the untiring and hard-working Secretary, and lastly to all the artistes who did their best to provide us with a pleasant entertainment, not forgetting the many young and charming Ladies, mostly dressed in Swiss national costumes, who sold programmes, post-cards and emblems, and thus did a tire-some job with ever smiling faces, and to all the generous donors, who, by their splendid gifts, made it possible to secure the Casino Theatre.

* * *

And now, dear compatriots, we are living at a time when great changes, affecting the thoughts and actions, the habits based on tradition and experience, and even our ideals, are making themselves felt and are taking place, whether we like it or not.

It is a period, during which we see the old order which has served up till recently and has achieved what we are wont to call our modern civilisation, slowly, but inevitably make room for a new arrangement which is, as yet, hidden from our eyes, but for which we all, each according to his ideas, strive and yearn.

We Swiss, on this 1st of August 1947, feel that we too are subjected to all those tormenting, conflicting, perplexing and anxious currents of thoughts and actions arising from them. We see our, on the whole smoothly and peacefully working, democratic way of doing things, assailed by happenings beyond our frontiers.

Switzerland to-day is a nucleus of what Europe to-morrow, and the whole world later on might be and we are ready to sacrifice everything rather than that oasis of sanity in the heart of Europe should be destroyed.

And in this spirit we will remember the "Rütli Schwur," and that motto from which springs our whole achievement, political, economical and cultural and to which we have a right to be proud to-day.

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