

1st open meeting of the London Group of the Nouvelle société helvétique

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 1061

PDF erstellt am: **14.08.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-687393>

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1st OPEN MEETING OF THE LONDON GROUP OF THE NOUVELLE SOCIÉTÉ HELVÉTIQUE.

Held on February 6th, 1947, from 7.15 to 9 p.m.,
at the Vienna Café, Baker Street.

The first meeting organized by the new Council of the Nouvelle Société Helvétique and attended by more than seventy members of the colony may be called as one of "great expectations". It was an excellent start and very promising indeed for things to come.

Dr. Egli, President of the London Group, took the Chair and introduced the discussion by emphasizing the ambition of the N.S.H. to be a free parliament of the Swiss Colony, a meeting ground where the problems of the Swiss abroad can be clarified in a patriotic spirit. The Swiss in England, he said, tends to be assimilated more readily than elsewhere owing to the affinities in outlook between our two countries. Our main object then is to maintain and strengthen the allegiance to our home-country. Switzerland needs friends abroad especially in these difficult times. We are her ambassadors, but in order to qualify as a good ambassador more than good intentions are needed. We must get informed of what is going on in our homeland. One of the best means are the very discussions N.S.H. is organizing and which will stimulate our minds and imagination. Let us associate our foreign born wives in these debates because they see the problems from a different angle. If we are good ambassadors of our homeland, we may also become good councillors for the Swiss at home. For the moment there exists no satisfactory method of ascertaining the considered opinion of the fifth Switzerland, the Legations abroad consulted by Berne having no machinery for crystallizing the views of the Swiss citizens living in their district. Here then is another initiative to be taken by our group.

F. Ferraris thought that our chief objective ought to be the Swiss centre. A family can't be happy if there is no home. London, one of the biggest cities, the centre of one of the biggest Swiss colonies desperately needs a home for the members of the Swiss family.

J. Boos is glad to see prominent members of the Legation in our new Council. In the past we suffered from not having sufficient contact with the Legation and we ought to be thankful to our Minister and to his Staff for having appreciated the necessity of a

closer contact between the Legation and the Colony. The realisation of the Swiss Centre will take time and in the meantime the work of the N.S.H. will be all the more important.

P. H. Aubaret found it not surprising at all that Swiss children grown up here are easily assimilated as there is no provision for giving them the necessary knowledge of the Swiss way of life. He suggests therefore that lecture courses be organised for them. Great care should be taken to make these lectures attractive by introducing films, records, paintings and competitions.

H. Andrea while congratulating the Council for starting with such a big programme would like to see some ladies sitting in the Council. It would be worthwhile also to care for the Swiss girls married to Englishmen. If we want the young Swiss born abroad to be faithful to their home-country, it is not well advised to approach them first with a form for the military tax. What is the position of the N.S.H. in this respect? It would be interesting also to hear more about the old age pension law as far as it affects the Swiss abroad.

A. Tall draws attention to the difficulties preventing abolition of the military tax. If the collection of 30,000 signatures for an initiative is not too big a task (the Swiss abroad not being able to participate in it), it would still mean to find half of the Swiss electorate on our side in the final voting.

A. F. Suter reminds the audience that there exists an annual "Auslandschweizertagung" where the grievances of the Swiss abroad can be discussed in the presence of members of the Federal Government. The military tax is of course a medieval law as antiquated as anything. Official spokesmen tell us that it will be abrogated in due course. So let us be patient and, in the meantime, obey the law.

F. Ferraris suggests that the N.S.H. should take the initiative for outings (the English climate permitting) where a genuine Swiss atmosphere would easily develop.

Dr. A. R. Lindt moves that the organisation of Swiss holidays for Swiss children born abroad should be extended. In order to get the children better acquainted with the Swiss way of life, it would be advisable to take them in Swiss families instead of hotels and camps. As far as the military tax is concerned, the solution seems to be in the Bernese saying: "nit nalah gwünnt!"

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J. Boos realizes the difficulties of educating our children here but he suggests that Saturday morning courses be organized for them.

Mrs. Staehelin is quite convinced that the Swiss ladies here could be more interested in current Swiss events and even in Swiss politics. She would like to hear some lectures about the Swiss political parties. Why shouldn't some party bosses lecture themselves?

H. Andrea appeals to the Swiss parents to teach their children the home-tongue even if it takes some pains.

Dr. G. G. Kullmann reminds the audience of the central and permanent problem of the Swiss citizenship. We are not only attached to our homeland by sentimental recollections but by belonging to a country having achieved a certain way of political and communal life. The lectures envisaged should therefore be centred on these themes: what does our democracy mean, what are its roots, why is it that we have no minorities, why is it that we have become a federal country despite the fact that parts of Switzerland were dominated by others? When living abroad we have a better chance to think of Switzerland as a whole. Therefore, prior to engaging in internal politics we should in these lectures present the central aspects of our country, its living achievements as a particular and unique federal democracy.

Ferrari suggests that while abstaining from competing with the social entertainments of the Swiss societies we could perform a useful function in co-ordinating and encouraging their social activities.

Mrs. Egli would like to see a start being made in the educational field by opening Saturday morning courses in Central London.

Renou heartily agrees with the programme already outlined: we need a Swiss centre not only for the Swiss but also to introduce English friends and to get them better acquainted with our way of life. He hopes to see soon dramatic groups performing sketches, debating groups discussing our problems here and what is happening at home.

Dr. Egli, summarizing the suggestions made he asks for the approval of first: discussing the Swiss Centre at the next meeting; second: to investigate the problem of the children; third: preparing lectures for adults for civic instruction and political intelligence; fourth: organizing a discussion on the military tax and the old age pension scheme; fifth: looking for suitable reading material, such as the booklets on Switzerland published by the Office du tourisme, and the *Auslandsschweizerecho*, it being understood that the "Swiss Observer" should be aided and supported in every way.

The meeting formally agrees to these points and asks the Council to take the necessary measures. The discussion closed at 9 p.m.

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The magnificent 200 volume Stamp Collection formed over a period of many years by the late Benjamin Goodfellow, Esq., Vice-President of the Royal Philatelic Society, London, is to be offered for sale at Auction or by Private Treaty by Messrs. H. R. Harmer, the Bond Street Philatelic Auctioneers, in the coming spring.

Benjamin Goodfellow, a well-known Manchester lawyer, was born at Hyde, Cheshire, in 1864. His stamp collecting days date back to the "seventies" when his uncle presented him with a letter flown by Balloon from beleaguered Paris during the Franco-Prussian War. His trained legal mind soon discovered there was much more in Philately than the mere amassing of stamps and whenever New Zealand and Norway are mentioned in Philatelic Circles, his research and publications are inevitably called to mind. He received a number of high awards in International Stamp Exhibitions for these two collections, each the world's most important in their respective classes, and might well have won many more but for the fact that he was frequently a judge and therefore exhibited "*hors concours*."

He was the first to make a B.B.C. Broadcast on Philately in 1934. During the 1914-18 war he, like many others in that and the recent conflict, found distraction in his hobby and as a thank-offering for the safe return of his aviator son — also a philatelist, appropriately specialising in Air stamps — he inaugurated a fund which led to the acquisition of 41, Devonshire Place as the permanent home of the Royal Philatelic Society.

Probably the desire to know "how and why" caused him to form an incomparable collection of "Re-entries" included in which are many very rare varieties which do not come into the market once in 20 years. It is expected that this collection will cause something of a philatelic sensation when offered at Auction along with a number of specialised and semi-specialised collections of various Foreign countries, notably Iran.

This auction will be followed by the sale of the British Empire Collection on March 10th and 11th, and New Zealand (30 volumes) on April 21st, 22nd and 23rd, unless this country is sold by Private Treaty in the meantime, (it is offered at £25,000). Each, in its class is a "World's best" collection. A few sections, notably Great Britain and British issues used abroad, Greece, Palestine and Transjordan, British Solomon Isles and Tasmania, have already been sold.

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