

Help for Swiss abroad in distress

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

Objektyp: **Article**

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

Band (Jahr): - **(1956)**

Heft 1276

PDF erstellt am: **12.07.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-690396>

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HELP FOR SWISS ABROAD IN DISTRESS.

The Federal Council is making a renewed effort to utilise the sum of 121.5 million Swiss Francs, emanating from the Washington Agreement of dubious fame, for the benefit of sufferers from war damage amongst the Swiss abroad or repatriated. It is submitting a new draft bill to Parliament concerning this matter. Contrary to the demands of the vociferous agitators amongst the "Rückwanderer" in Switzerland for a once-for-all distribution according to the damage suffered in the last war, the Federal Council adheres to the principle that only those in need should be aided from this fund. Art. 1 declares that those Swiss citizens who "are in need of help owing to the war of 1939-1945 or owing to political and economic measures of foreign authorities in connection with the war" are to be given exceptional aid if "a) if they have lost their living partly or totally, or b) if they have suffered physically and are thereby unable or less able to earn a living, or c) if they have lost their 'Versorger' and are therefore not in a position to establish themselves in a living such as they could have expected in normal circumstances". Art. 2 declares that this help is meant especially to enable old people to live more comfortably, to assist those of working age in re-establishing a living and to facilitate the appropriate training of the young.

The intending restriction of help to those in need corresponds closely with the point of view always advocated by the spokesmen from our colony at the Journées des Suisses à l'Étranger, based on discussions of the Presidents' Assembly and one or two of our Societies. As was to be expected, the militant repatriates, headed by Mr. Duttweiler, are again up in arms against this solution, as they were agitating two years ago against the first Federal Draft Bill which had broadly speaking the same aim as the present one. The main argument of the opponents is again that only half the amount available is needed for this form of helping the needy, so that a large sum could and should be distributed amongst the other sufferers of war damage, although they are not actually in need.

This argument could as well be regarded as the best reason for suggesting, that any surplus, not required for the needy sufferers from the last war, should be devoted to helping other Swiss abroad, or repatriated from abroad, who may be in distress through no fault of their own owing to measures of foreign governments, devaluation of currencies, nationalisation of property, etc. In other words, the 121.5 million Swiss Francs should be used in the first place for sufferers of the last war still in need, and in the second place for any other Swiss abroad in distress by force majeure, now or in the future.

The best method and instrument for administering this widened help to Swiss abroad is an open question. The Government could utilise the existing channels of help for the sufferers of the last war. It could establish a new governmental organisation. Or it might contribute the sum available to the Fond de Solidarité, the creation of which is actively advocated by certain elements in Switzerland with the support of the N.S.H., the Commission for Repatriates, the "Auslandschweizerkommission", etc. Draft statutes for such a "Fond de Solidarité" for the Swiss abroad

have been carefully elaborated and could easily be adapted to include the responsibility for administering the aid in question.

The idea of the "Fond de Solidarité" has been received with much scepticism in our Colony as well as in others. The chief doubt has been whether enough support could be mobilised to create a large enough fund to inspire confidence that substantial help could really be assured for those in need. The best and indeed only way of securing this confidence would be for the Confederation to contribute a really generous sum towards the initial fund which is meant to be augmented and built up by annual premiums from the Swiss abroad wishing to participate. Evidently the 121.5 million Swiss Francs, or that part of it not needed by the sufferers of the last war could be most ideally used for giving this permanent organisation of mutual help between the Swiss abroad a flying start.

The Draft Bill of the Federal Council and the Draft Statute for the Fond de Solidarité will be discussed at the "Journé des Suiss à l'Étranger" at Locarno on August 25th-26th. As a preliminary to the participation of our Colony at the Journée, the points of view to be raised by us will be discussed at the next Open Meeting of the London Group of the N.S.H. on July 10th. It is hoped that other Societies and possibly the Presidents' Assembly may also consider questions and points of view to be submitted to the Conference at Locarno. The suggestion elaborated above regarding the wider use of the 121.5 million Swiss Francs seems to us worthy of close attention and likely to awaken much interest in Switzerland. The N.S.H. hopes therefore that the Open Meeting on July 10th will be attended by everyone in the Colony who realises the importance of this matter.

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OUR NEXT ISSUE.

Our next issue will be published on Friday, July 13th, 1956.

We take this opportunity of thanking the following subscribers for their kind and helpful donations over and above their subscription: F. Bassi, H. Andrea, E. Belart, R. Dupraz, J. A. Steiner, A. Ammann, Miss M. Paly.

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