

An exile voice in home government

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SWISS CLUBS, BRADFORD, LEEDS AND MANCHESTER.

The annual gathering of the Swiss in Lancashire and Yorkshire was held on Sunday, 16th June, at Hardcastle Crag and later in the evening at the Civic Hall in Hebden Bridge, in the West Riding of Yorkshire.

On arrival at Hebden Bridge in the morning we were honoured by an official reception by the Chairman of the Council of Hebden Royd, Councillor Garnet Ingham, and Mrs. Ingham. Later at Hardcastle Crag, which is situated in the Hepton Rural District, we had yet another official reception, this time by Councillor E. King, J.P., chairman of the Council of Hepton Rural District, and his daughter. We are very grateful to the authorities of these districts for appreciating our visit as of sufficient local interest to justify official recognition.

We were honoured also by the presence of M. F. Ansermoz, Social Attaché at the Swiss Embassy in London, and Madame Ansermoz. M. Ansermoz conveyed greetings and good wishes from our Ambassador, M. Armin Daeniker, and Madame Daeniker. At the meeting later at the Civic Hall in Hebden Bridge he gave us also an intimate survey of the foundation and operation of the recently opened Hostel for Swiss Girls in London.

The proceedings otherwise were on similar lines as before. The Chairman both at Hardcastle Crag and at Hebden Bridge was this year M. Jean P. Inebnit, President of the West Riding Swiss Club (Leeds). For the first time in nine years we had a day without a drop of rain; the sky was absolutely cloudless; the wooded slopes of Hebden Water Valley and the Crag were seen with greater beauty, the sunrays emphasizing the colours of the whole landscape and making of this lovely wooded glen almost a fairyland.

Another interesting occurrence this year: One of the most important and world-renowned national newspapers thought this gathering of sufficient interest to send a reporter and photographer, and the outcome is a very interesting article in "The Manchester Guardian" of June 17th. This stresses on the "Landsgemeinde" aspect and its possibilities for getting the voice of the Swiss abroad heard by the Authorities at home. The article will interest many and is herewith reproduced by courtesy of the Editor.

H.M.

Kettners Restaurant has no music and is not luxurious . . . but the Food and Wine are superb.

Roast Surrey
Capon,
Roast Aylesbury
Duckling
served every day



The Manchester Guardian, 17th June, 1957.

AN EXILE VOICE IN HOME GOVERNMENT

Swiss Landsgemeinde in N. England.

From our Special Correspondent.

HEBDEN BRIDGE, WEST RIDING, SUNDAY,

Each year in June the Swiss who live and work in the North of England hold a Landsgemeinde (a community gathering) in the steep, wooded valley below Hardcastle Crag, three miles from Hebden Bridge.

The Landsgemeinde, as it still exists in four or five Alpine cantons in Switzerland, and as described by inspired political theorists from Rousseau onwards, is democracy in its oldest, purest, and most awesome form; for on its native soil it means all the men in the canton, several thousand in one or two cases, assemble in the open air once a year to scrutinise the budget, approve or reject new laws by a forest-like show of hands and, in short, to clear up the parliamentary business at one stroke. It is direct and very primitive; and a far cry from the British voter setting down his electoral mark in some half-deserted church hall.

But the Swiss here to-day have been long enough in this country to know the comfortable virtue of compromise. Had they followed the strict and ancient rule of the Landsgemeinde, it would have meant the compulsory attendance of every Swiss restaurateur, precision engineer, textile man, technician, and so on, in the north — a weighty concourse perhaps a thousand strong if you add the Yorkshire picnickers who watched the proceedings curiously from the shade of the pine trees.

Hundred arrivals.

In the event about a hundred Swiss arrived with their families — enough to make the average urban district council look a puny thing without requiring the chairman of the day (the Landammann) to raise his voice above a moderate shout.

This northern Landsgemeinde is the only one in this country. The weight of numbers of Swiss exiles in the south (roughly 14,000 in and around London alone) put any hope of holding one out of account. It was the ninth annual meeting here and the numbers have been growing to a degree that a true son of William Tell will soon be able to describe as homely.

To some extent, the hard significance of the gathering is little more than if Mr. Macmillan, by some mercurial notion, decided to call a vasty folk-moot to remind voters of the primitive force contained in a cross on one's voting-slip. Since, however, there are about 250,000 Swiss abroad, their voices carries a certain weight at home; and the resolutions on international matters carried by the Landsgemeinde which meet in such far-flung places as Austria, several states in South America, and France are taken by delegates to an annual conference in Switzerland and thence to the central government.

After the members of the Landsgemeinde (women included here, though they would not be at home) had seated themselves on a circle of benches set in a grassy clearing in the woods — which reminded one exile of the meadow at Rütli by Lake Lucerne where the first pact of the Swiss Confederation was made in the thirteenth century — the Landammann (Professor J. P. Inebnit on this occasion) planted a pair of Swiss flags in the circle and called for the folksong, "La haut sur la montagne. . ."

After this, though privately they speak all the several dialects of Schwyzerdütsch, among themselves, the proceedings were in English. The Landammann gave a patriotic history lecture about the growth of the Confederation, a device which enabled him to introduce new members of the Landsgemeinde as he mentioned their native cantons.

Discipline.

A pause for a plaintive song from the Italian Alps, then a jaunty one, with accordion and mandolin from the French sector. Then more history as the Confederation grew; and it struck one as highly unlikely, as the picnicking Yorkshiremen crept nearer to eavesdrop, that any conclave of British democrats would have that much discipline on a flaming June day.

On, after the singing, to the strictly parliamentary business — even though it was only one item.

The business item was, typically Swiss, an international one. The Landammann, putting the motion in a deferential way, said he thought the Swiss Government should be persuaded to do more philanthropic work abroad for "less fortunate people." If anyone disagreed, well, he hoped they'd have the courage to get up and say so. He got nothing but approving smiles. So, as the Swiss children in the circle went on licking their ice-cream, this world-embracing resolution was sent off on its journey to Switzerland.