

# The "parliament" of the swiss abroad at work

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The Tourist Director of St. Moritz, Mr. Kasper, welcomed the audience in Ladin, one of the dialects of Romansch, the fourth national language. He pointed out the advantages of the Engadine and St. Moritz in particular and said that the first electric light in Switzerland had been established on the very spot at the Kulm Hotel.

The highlight of the afternoon was Federal Councillor Bonvin's speech, a most unusual piece of official oratory. The illustrious speaker addressed the meeting without a manuscript and managed to clothe the official greetings from the Government into a message of goodwill coming straight from the heart.

The President then thanked all the speakers for their valuable contributions. He said that no great decisions had been taken and no resolutions had been formed. But it had been a most stimulating and interesting meeting and the most urgent need had been established, that of informing more thoroughly the Swiss abroad of what was happening in Switzerland.

With this the serious part of the Assembly was concluded and the members adjourned to a reception given by the Cantonal Government. To the strains of a local brass band drinks were served, and everywhere great satisfaction was expressed at the excellent spirit of the gathering and the real two-way traffic between the Swiss abroad and their compatriots at home.

In the evening a festive crowd met at another of St. Moritz's luxury hotels, the Palace, where the Banquet was held. The Editor of the "Swiss Observer" had the honour of being put at the top table next to Federal Councillor Bonvin and the Commune President of St. Moritz, Mr. H. Fleisch. A group of visiting yodellers from Central Switzerland entertained the party during dinner, and afterwards National Councillor O. Hess delivered a message from Parliament.

The "Cor Romansch da San Murezzan" delighted the gathering with beautiful songs from the Engadine and young men and women in picturesque national costumes performed some lively dances. A dozen or so recruits from Swiss communities abroad rendered a few soldiers' songs, and then a local rural band played "Ländler" tunes to which energetic dancing went on till two o'clock in the morning.

When the visitors woke up on Sunday morning they discovered that snow had fallen in the night and the whole of St. Moritz and the neighbouring mountains were covered in white. This unfortunately meant that the picnic on Alp Surlej had to be cancelled. But as the sky was a brilliant blue and the sun shone serenely, the outing by postal motor coach to Silvaplana and aerial cabin car to Piz Corvatsch took place just the same for those who had stout shoes and warm clothes. The view was magnificent and it was a most unusual treat to sit in warm sunshine in several inches of powdery snow at Murtèl station (9,000 feet).

The unexpected snow and change of plans meant that the usual closing ceremony on the Sunday afternoon of the Assembly did not take place. But even if the National Anthem could not be sung by the whole community, the feeling of belonging was there and opinion was unanimous that the 41st Assembly had been a great success in every way.

*Mariann.*

*Individual reports will follow in the next few issues of the "Swiss Observer".*

## THE "PARLIAMENT" OF THE SWISS ABROAD AT WORK

The Commission of the Swiss Abroad (ASK) met for the second time this year on 16th August at St. Moritz. Under the chairmanship of Dr. G. Schuerch, the President of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (ASO), this body of men (and one woman) dealt with a very heavy agenda. As already reported, Great Britain was represented by Mrs. Mariann Meier (South) and Dr. H. B. Knuchel (North). The two proxies Mr. E. Bonvin and Mr. P. Christen were not present. Apart from delegates from many countries, several inland members devoted to the cause of their compatriots abroad attended.

The President opened the meeting at 9.30 a.m. He reiterated that the ASK was not just a group of friends who gathered like members of a skittle club, but a responsible body of people who represented thousands of Swiss living abroad. In order to be taken seriously the Commission had to follow basic rules of procedure and adhere to certain regulations. It was up to the representatives to ensure that the ASK was accepted as the true Parliament of the Swiss abroad.

The first item on the agenda was the election of a new Vice-Chairman in the person of Mr. Jean Heer (Rivaz, VD), as the present deputy, Mr. F. Siordet (La Tour-de-Peilz), had to resign on account of his duties as Vice-President of the International Red Cross Committee.

The Chairman referred to the death of Mr. Urs Feer from Lausanne, a member who had achieved great merits as one of the architects of the Solidarity Fund. The Swiss abroad owed a great deal to his devotion.

The question of postal vote was then debated and it was decided to leave it for urgent cases only when it was a question of time and the answer could be given by a single yes or no. Whilst it was important for Colonies to discuss any problem fully, the constitution of the ASO stated that representatives voted according to their own opinion which was formed during the debate at the Meeting. It was argued that Colonies overseas faced difficulties sending representatives. Against that the Chairman pointed out that proxies had been created for that reason. It had been found useful for countries far away to appoint a proxy in Switzerland, a person well acquainted with the conditions and opinions of that particular Colony. This method was far more satisfactory than a postal vote which could never be complete.

The Director of the Secretariat, Dr. H. J. Halbheer, reported on his journey to USA and Mexico. During his visit the first Presidents' Assembly of Swiss Societies in USA was held along the pattern which exists in Europe.

The Commission accepted two more groups, Ghana and St. Louis, and co-opted two new members from USA (Chicago) and Mexico-City.

The next item on the agenda was the petition of the Swiss in Italy concerning the Federal decree regarding the permission to purchase land in Switzerland. Whilst agreeing that according to international law the Swiss abroad would have to be treated the same way as foreigners, representatives from most Colonies present at the assembly last year had signed a petition asking the Federal Council to see to it that when a Swiss from abroad applied for permission to purchase land the fact that he was Swiss should be accepted as sufficient reason. The answer from Berne had been negative, and the Swiss Colony in Italy now wanted to take new steps. The

Chairman urged patience and reported that a meeting of the Executive Committee of the ASK with Federal Councillor von Moos had been arranged to discuss the matter further. Any cases of discrimination against Swiss abroad would be taken up immediately by the ASO who had been successful in every instance so far. The Chairman reminded the members that nothing should be done which could harm the cause of the Swiss abroad and he said that if we wanted to become a political body we would have to consider the whole rather than to dissipate our strength on individual points.

There was little discussion on the withholding or anticipated tax (Verrechnungssteuer) as the Colonies had had no chance to discuss the matter.

The suggestion to call the assembly "congress" was rejected after some lively discussion. It was felt that there were congresses of many kinds but only one "Journée".

Item seven concerned the Assembly of the Swiss Abroad next year which will be held in Lausanne from 28th to 30th August. The proposed theme "Switzerland and the Developing Countries" was accepted as most suitable seeing that the Assembly would take place during the time of the National Exhibition.

The next meeting of the Commission was fixed for early February to coincide with the Centenary Celebration of the New Helvetic Society.

*Mariann.*

## IT HAPPENED IN THE CANTON OF SOLOTHURN

When the authorities of the Canton of Solothurn budgeted for 1963 they foresaw a deficit of nearly twenty million francs. In actual fact the fiscal year ended with a surplus of 1.7 million francs (the income amounted to Fr.134,658,717.—).

At the end of May the people of the Canton voted on five proposals with a participation of 47.2%. 16,900 citizens accepted and 7,800 rejected a credit of nearly half a million francs as the Canton's contribution to the EXPO. The credit increase to the melioration bill covering drainage schemes, bridge and road building and river corrections was accepted by a similar majority. A slightly smaller number of citizens agreed to the Canton's joining the concordate for the creation and running of an agricultural technical college (of the cost of 8.5 million francs the Confederation will contribute 3 million). The proposal for the Cantonal School was accepted, too, and so was the public hospital bill after the people of the Canton had already accepted a three million credit in February.

The family allowances bill was altered to grant Fr.25.— instead of Fr.10.— per child per month, and the constitution of the state pension scheme was adjusted to allow more realistic pensions.

The report of the inspectorate of factories showed that 1962 beat all previous records — 39 new factories and the closing down of 10 old ones gave a nett increase of 5.06% for the Canton as compared with 3.15% for the whole of Switzerland. On 1st January 1963 602 firms were under the Solothurn factory law with a complement of 48,265 workers. 33% more overtime was worked than in the previous year, whereas the rest of Switzerland showed a decrease of 5%. In the course of 1963, however, Solothurn, too, has been showing a decline.

Building activities were on the increase all over the Canton by the end of the year. First class road building had used 6.9 million francs, roads of the second and third class had cost another 4.5 million francs. The technical renovation of the Birsigtal railway will amount to seven million francs to which the Cantons of Baseland and Baselstadt will also contribute, as well as the Confederation.

### SOLOTHURN TOWN

The capital of the Canton showed a slight favourable balance in its accounts for 1962. Income and expenditure reached the 14.5 franc mark.

Individual accounts showed deficits for forest administration on account of the bad winter and for the Bürgerspital.

The PTT (Federal Post Office) intend putting up a new head office at the Schaenzliplatz. In the east and north of the town a number of road schemes are scheduled which were sanctioned by the Inhabitants' Commune. A skyscraper (34½ metres high) is to be built on the western outskirts of the town.

The Swiss Youth Parliament held its fourth annual meeting in Solothurn. 160 young parliamentarians were welcomed by Landammann Dr. Urs Dietschi, and Federal Councillor Bonvin praised the work of the young citizens and appealed to them for responsible civic activities.

Two delegate meetings took place in Solothurn in May, that of the Swiss Association of Chiropractitioners, and that of the Central Association of Swiss Folktheatres.

### OLTEN

The citizens of Olten agreed with an exceptional majority of 1,379: 38 to join the waste water scheme of the Olten district. With this another important step has been taken towards the realisation of a water purification plant which is to be built together with twelve other Communes (cost: 23 million francs).

The Commune Assembly agreed to the compulsory sickness insurance for all inhabitants whose income does not surpass the nine thousand franc mark after deduction of tax allowances.

The general assembly of the Swiss Organisation of Citizens' Communes was held in Olten. In a unanimous resolution it proclaimed that naturalisation should be facilitated in order to prevent "Ueberfremdung" at a time when 700,000 foreign workers were employed in Switzerland.

In July the Olten schools celebrated their traditional "School Festival" which takes place every two years.

The Society of Travelling Salesmen held their annual meeting in Olten in June, and a month later 2,000 members of the Workers Touring Club competed at their festival (cars, motorcycles and bicycles).

### GRENCHEM

The Grenchen accounts, too, showed a surplus of 1½ million francs for the past year. The Commune Council proposed to the Assembly the purchase of land and houses to the value of four million francs. Only 81 out of over 5,000 citizens entitled to vote attended. The same proposals also had to go to the voters who accepted them. (Participation 40%).