

Switzerland mourns the death of President Kennedy

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Switzerland mourns the death of President Kennedy

The assassination of John Fitzgerald Kennedy has stunned Switzerland with the rest of the world. The next day the President of the Swiss Confederation, Federal Councillor W. Spuehler, addressed the Swiss people over the radio. He said that the Federal Council and the whole Swiss nation were deeply shocked by the terrible deed to which the President of the United States has fallen victim so tragically. "With the American people", said Federal Councillor Spuehler, "we mourn a great statesman and undaunted politician who was a sound leader of his country and a great hope to uncounted millions in the whole world."

Federal Councillor Spuehler paid tribute to President Kennedy's sense of responsibility, his genuine faith in the future of mankind, his ideals based on a free conception of life and respect of every man regardless of background and race. Mr. Spuehler referred to the incredible energy with which President Kennedy had devoted himself to the task of solving racial and social problems within American Society, his fearlessness, courage and resolution with which he had faced world-wide tensions.

"The grief at his death is a real one in the whole world", Bundespräsident Spuehler concluded, "The Swiss people feel united with the American nation in the sorrow at the loss of this remarkable President and man."

On behalf of the Federal Council and the Swiss people Federal Councillor Spuehler expressed similar sentiments in a telegram of condolence to President Lyndon Johnson. He asked him to convey the sympathy and grief of the Swiss people also to the family of this highly respected man.

Federal Councillor Wahlen, accompanied by the Secretary-General of the Political Department, Ambassador Micheli, and the Chief of Protocol, Minister Serra, paid a courtesy visit to the American Embassy in Berne.

Messages of condolence were sent to President Johnson and Mrs. Kennedy by many organisations and individuals.

At the Funeral in Washington, the Swiss Confederation was represented by the Swiss Foreign Minister, Federal Councillor Wahlen, by the Secretary-General of the Swiss Foreign Office, Ambassador Micheli, and by the Swiss Ambassador to U.S.A., Monsieur Zehnder.

The Funeral was transmitted on Swiss television in a programme by "Mondovision". There was also a "Telstar" transmission of events. TV also transmitted the Pontifical Mass in memory of President Kennedy, which was held on 25th November at the Trinity Church in Berne.

This Requiem Mass was attended by the President of the Swiss Confederation and prominent politicians and civil servants, as well as high-ranking officers of the Swiss Army. The American *Chargé d'Affaires*, Monsieur Henry J. Kellermann, lead the personnel of the American Embassy and members of the American Colony, and most foreign diplomatic missions were represented by their heads.

The Roman Catholic Deacon Stalder celebrated the Solemn Requiem, and the Trinity Choir sang the *Missa pro Defunctis* by Goller. Following the Mass, the Apostolic Nuncio and *Doyen* of the Diplomatic Corps Mgr. Alfredo Pacini spoke the *Libera*.

An American Priest, Father John Flynn, gave an address in which he paid tribute to John Kennedy as a great statesman and admirable personality whose faith had

never brought him into conflict with his courage as President of a nation. Father Flynn compared the deceased with another freedom-loving President, Abraham Lincoln, who had also died for his country. He expressed the hope that his death may bring freedom and peace to the world.

In the Basilica of Notre Dame in Geneva another Requiem Mass was celebrated on Monday, 25th November. Many international organisations were represented, as well as the town and Canton of Geneva. The same applied to an interdenominational Memorial Service which was held in the Cathedral of St. Peter in Geneva. The Rev. Visser 't Hooft, Secretary-General of the World Council of Churches in Geneva, gave the sermon.

In Basle the American Women's Club and the Swiss-American Society for Cultural Relations arranged a Memorial Service at the Martinskirche. The Basle Government and diplomats of many nations attended.

In the Synagogue in Geneva a Memorial Service was held, and in Lucerne a special Service took place at St. Xaver's.

The Berne "Zibelimärit" ended in a solemn Memorial Hour on the Cathedral Square, organised by the "Forum for Democracy". The Director of Education Paul Duebi and Prof. Walter Hofer paid tribute to President Kennedy. The author Erwin Heimann addressed the young people who had turned up in huge numbers. He called John F. Kennedy a representative of youth in the fight for human rights. A young Bernese read the message of condolence, and the crowd sang the Beresina song. A minute's silence followed, and as the bells of the Cathedral began to ring, an enormous procession started on its way to the American Embassy where a wreath and the message were handed in.

In Basle a torch procession of over a thousand people wended its sombre and silent way to the Cathedral Square. After all the torches had been thrown on a burning heap, the crowd dissolved in silence.

There was a commemorative lecture at the University, to which the Swiss-American and the Swiss-British Societies were invited.

The students of the University of Zurich, the Federal Institute of Technology (ETH) and the College of Arts and Crafts gave a demonstration of mourning in Zurich. Many people joined them, and some two thousand strong, the procession went through the town, lead by an American flag illuminated by torchlight.

Students went on a silent march through Lucerne, carrying American flags and torches. At the Kunsthau they signed a message of sympathy to be sent to the White House.

The flag at the Palace of Nations in Geneva was at half mast, whilst in many Swiss towns the church bells rang for ten or fifteen minutes as a mark of deference and mourning.

Many were the respectful signs of grief shown by cantonal and municipal Governments and Parliaments, and many events of a festive nature were postponed. During the time of the Funeral in Washington most cinemas remained closed.

But perhaps the most moving of all was, as Kenneth Lewis, M.P., said in "The Week in Westminster" on 30th November, "all that was not said by all those who did not speak" — the shock was there, silent, profound and lasting.

[A.T.S.]