

Parliament of the Swiss abroad

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PARLIAMENT OF THE SWISS ABROAD

On 3rd March 1962 the Presidents' Assembly of Swiss Societies in Great Britain elected two new representatives and their deputies onto the Commission of the Swiss Abroad (ASK). They chose Dr. Mario Ludwig and Mr. J. P. Christen for the North and Mr. A. Renou and Mrs. Mariann Meier for London. For reasons outside their control the two representatives were unable to attend the meeting of the Commission last August, and the two deputies represented the Swiss Colony of Great Britain at Sion.

At this year's Assembly of Presidents on 9th February it was necessary to elect two new representatives, as Dr. Ludwig had returned to Switzerland for good and Mr. Renou had died at the end of the year. The Presidents decided, however, to postpone elections until new standing orders and terms of reference for the Assembly had been worked out, including a more satisfactory method of nominating representatives. It was therefore once again Mr. Christen and Mrs. Meier who attended the Commission's spring meeting in Berne on behalf of the Colony in Great Britain.

On Saturday, 2nd March, some thirty representatives from Swiss Communities abroad as far apart as Los Angeles and Istanbul assembled at the home of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (ASO), the Secretariat at the Alpenstrasse 26 in Berne. It was a glorious morning, still cold, but slowly warming up and with more and more ice and snow gradually melting. The Swiss flag was fluttering an urgent welcome from the top floor, and in the bright reception room the Director of the Secretariat, Dr. H. J. Halbheer, the Secretary-General Mr. R. Bovey, and the staff introduced the visitors from abroad.

After some refreshments the party adjourned to the Houses of Parliament, where the meeting took place in one of the conference halls. Punctually at 10.15 the Chairman, Dr. G. Schuerch, President of the ASK, opened proceedings. He introduced the voting members and/or their deputies from abroad and the members of the Commission from within Switzerland. He pointed out that the fact we met in the Federal Palace was a symbol of the good relations existing with the Swiss Government. The ASK, he said, was not a council of a society, but the voice of the Swiss abroad. It was called to co-ordinate views on both sides, to make sure the Swiss viewpoint was carried into the societies abroad and back again to the Swiss authorities, the electorate, the people.

Dr. Schuerch gave a short appreciation of members the Commission had lost through death since its last meeting, amongst them Mr. Alfred Renou, who had unfortunately never been able to attend any of its meetings.

The agenda was very heavy, and the morning was largely spent going through the Annual Report, accounts and budget.

We were informed that a meeting with parliamentarians was going to take place on 13th March. The constitutional article regarding scholarships in which the Swiss abroad are to be remembered was an example of pragmatic co-operation as the Federal authorities had consulted the ASK. Further questions to be discussed at the proposed meeting were Solidarity Fund and Invalidity Insurance.

As regards the proposed constitutional article about the Swiss abroad it was at present with the federal authorities. There was nothing new to report, but it was up to the ASK to "keep the pot boiling". Nor was there anything fresh to tell about the proposed relief for Swiss abroad in connection with the premiums for the Old Age and Dependents' Insurance (AHV), as the main propagator, National Councillor Malzacher, was ill. His petition had therefore been postponed.

The vexed question of the selling of land, which had taken up considerable time at the meeting last summer, was brought up again. It was reported that the petition prepared by the Swiss in Italy (incidentally one of the best organised colonies) and signed by most representatives at Sion was at the Federal Palace and no answer had been received yet. The Swiss in Italy would consider at their meeting in Rome in May what further steps to take. The cases were watched by the ASK and it was reported that their intervention in the cases where permission to purchase land had been refused to Swiss abroad had been successful. Dr. Schuerch reported that it could now be said that on the whole all Swiss abroad were given permission.

At the National Exhibition in Lausanne in 1964 the Swiss abroad and their activities would be shown in all parts of the Exhibition, but there would be a special stall in the General Part. There should be a flag of the "Cinquième Suisse" and a special corner reserved in one of the restaurants where Swiss from abroad could meet, a kind of a "Stammtisch". There would be other facilities and the Assembly of the Swiss Abroad in 1964 would, of course, take place in Lausanne.

Dr. Ritter, a member of the Staff at the Secretariat, informed the meeting on the state of the Solidarity Fund. Members from stable countries were needed to offset the heavy payments which had already been made to members in countries where political upheaval was rampant. More than Fr.1,000,000 had already been paid out. The special appeal which had been made in the autumn (readers will remember the Ambassador's letter published in the "Swiss Observer" on 14th December) had brought in a number of new members; the total was over 6,000 and new applications were being received daily. The appeal was made in a special edition of the "Echo", the magazine for the Swiss abroad, and it was gratifying to learn that this had brought in over 1,000 new subscribers. At 15/- p.a. it is exceedingly good value.

The meeting was informed about the educational scholarship and training scheme for young Swiss abroad which was reported on in the last but one issue of the "Swiss Observer", and about the book on Switzerland for young Swiss in other countries of which the German edition was almost ready (25,000 copies) and the French edition was in preparation. We were also told about the Annual Review of the New Helvetic Society which was prepared in five languages. Mr. Christen brought up the problem of the ageing Colony and was told that it was not the same everywhere; in fact, in Scandinavia and Barcelona, for instance, it did not exist, on the other hand, Hanover had similar difficulties in rejuvenating its Colony. The question would be discussed at the next meeting after the Commission on Rejuvenation, which is studying the problem in Great Britain, had compiled a report.

A proposal to form special discussion groups on helvetic problems and civic and political questions was accepted.

Ordinary business of the ASK included the appointment of new representatives, some in countries where Colonies have only recently been organised under one co-ordinating body. It was decided to try and get a National Councillor and a Councillor of States as members of the Commission. Two members from Italy and France were elected to attend the meetings of the Executive Committee of the ASK, which so far had only consisted of members from within Switzerland.

One of the important items on the agenda was the organisation of the next Assembly of the Swiss Abroad, which will be held from 16th to 18th August at St. Moritz and to which all Swiss abroad are invited. The first day will be devoted to a meeting of the Commission, followed by a press conference. In the evening the first plenary meeting will take place followed by separate meetings on Solidarity Fund, Old Age Insurance and Military Tax and General Questions. On Saturday it is hoped to have the Federal Councillor open the plenary session, followed by discussion. A banquet would be held in the evening and an outing the next day.

The chief theme of the conference will be "Spiritual Defence of Switzerland in the World Today and Tomorrow" (Selbstbehauptung der Schweiz in der Welt von heute und morgen). It was felt that after four years of talking about what we wanted it was right and proper to state this time what we Swiss abroad were prepared to do for Switzerland. In this connection speakers from several Colonies were wanted who could tell something new of how Switzerland was looked at from outside. It was also decided that the theme for the following year's Assembly should already be chosen this coming summer so as to give plenty of time for studying.

Much serious and useful work was accomplished at the meeting, and it was stimulating to have an exchange of ideas at lunch and at a get-together following the meeting. Our interests are certainly well taken care of by the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad, to whom we owe all our support. This we can best give by subscribing to the "Echo", but above all by joining the Solidarity Fund.
Mariann.

**RECORD OPERATING PROFIT FOR SWISSAIR
£4,950,000 Surplus**

Swissair's financial results for 1962, approved by the private-enterprise airline's board of directors in Zurich on 13th March, show a record operating profit of £4,950,000. This was achieved with an average load factor of 51.9 per cent.

The sum of £4,275,000 is being ploughed back to meet depreciations and write-offs, and a dividend of 5 per cent is recommended out of the net profit of £675,000.

The revenue for the year was £38,200,000, compared with £31,100,000 in 1961. Operating costs totalled £33,250,000, against £29,000,000 in the previous year. The board recommended allocations of £70,100 to the statutory reserve and £124,000 to the personnel pension fund.

Nine new jets

Swissair, who are completely unsubsidised, put nine new jets into operation during 1962 — five Convair 990 Coronados and four Caravelles. The 98-seater Coronados are being modified in Zurich to Convair 990A standard to make them the fastest airliners in service. An order for a new DC-8 series 53, to join Swissair's other DC-8s on the North Atlantic routes, was placed.

Swissair allows itself a basic 10-year period to cover the cost of its airliners, but in good years like 1962 extra money is set aside to shorten the period.

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