

News from the colony : Swiss national Day celebration in London

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NEWS FROM THE COLONY

SWISS NATIONAL DAY CELEBRATION IN LONDON

During my first years of residence in this country in the early 'thirties, no official Swiss National Day Celebration was held in London. We were always told that "everybody" was on holiday and that any function held at the beginning of August was doomed to failure. But a small and hard working band of men and women under the chairmanship of the late Mr. Walter Meier defied the prophets and organised a First of August Celebration exactly twenty-five years ago, the like of which has never been seen since. The success surpassed even the most optimistic expectations, and all the doors had to be closed before the start of the programme when Police had to keep some two hundred people away from the totally crowded St. Pancras Town Hall. The few very short speeches in all four national languages were kept to a minimum, there was a parade of national costumes and a sale of Swiss post cards, wood carvings and other souvenirs. Above all there was well organised community singing and popular dancing — altogether an extremely gratifying success.

Then the war came, and the National Day Celebrations became less jolly and more patriotic in character under the stress of the times. It was not until 1954 that dancing was resumed as part of the event.

Owing to curfew regulations, no celebration was held in 1940, nor in 1944, but with those exceptions, all during the war, our National Day was duly celebrated, either at the Central Hall Westminster, Kingsway Hall or the Stoll Theatre, even at the Casino Theatre and at the Coliseum. In 1949 it was combined with the Swiss Sports at Herne Hill Sports Ground. In 1954 it was held at the Battersea Pleasure Gardens, when dancing was introduced again. In 1956, Battersea Town Hall was chosen, and then, in 1957, the Committee decided to move to Wimbledon Town Hall, suitable for the official part of the celebration, for the showing of films and for dancing. This was a wise step which has paid good dividends. And now it looks as if the National Day Celebration has come to stay in its present form.

This year it was on a Saturday, which meant a stop to the dancing at midnight. The earlier start (punctually at 6.30 p.m.) was perhaps the reason why the hall — so gaily decorated with cantonal flags and splendid flowers — was almost painfully slow in filling up. This was a pity, for many missed (not the opening march which was only on the programme) the simple and sincere prayer in French by Monsieur le Pasteur Jacot and the reading of the Federal Pact in German by Herrn Pfarrer Kaegi, a reading all the more impressive for its lack of pathos.

Perhaps it would be a good idea in future not to let any latecomers into the hall while any speech or performance is in progress. The sprung dance floor made every tiptoe step reverberate like an elephant's tread, which, coupled with a sometimes weak microphone, caused unnecessary interference in the early part of the programme.

A novelty this year was the stress on our cantonal autonomy. As the M.C., Mr. P. Jacomelli, read the date of entry into the Confederation of each Canton, the citizens belonging to it stood up. It was significant that not a single Canton was not represented by at least two or three

people. Need I mention that Berne and Zurich mustered by far the largest contingents! When the circle of twenty-two flags, carried by pretty girls, was complete, the Swiss Ambassador, Monsieur Beat von Fischer, who specially interrupted his holidays in Switzerland to attend our celebration in London, delivered his patriotic address.

Some queried the absence of our national languages in the main speech of the evening. But by giving this in English, the Ambassador reached every person in the audience, British born wives or husbands, dual nationals whose German or French may not be quite as fluent, our second and even third generation of Swiss in G.B. (of whom the Unione Ticinese is particularly proud), and above all it was a tribute to our English hosts and friends of Switzerland, who were officially represented by the Borough of Wimbledon's authorities, His Worship the Mayor Alderman A. E. Ayres, J.P., and the Mayoress, the Deputy Mayor Alderman N. S. Clarke and Mrs. Clarke, as well as last year's Mayor Alderman G. Waller, a great admirer of our country.

The Ambassador began his speech by pointing out our tradition of recalling the basic principles of our national life by reading the Federal Pact, and he said that it was also our custom to offer heartfelt thanks to Providence for the preservation and the prosperity of our national community. He felt sure that we were moved by these thoughts and sentiments and that they would continue to echo within us.

Next he referred to a matter of particular interest to us, the present position of the Swiss abroad in relation to his native country. "Actually, the Swiss abroad is called to accomplish a twofold task in this field: he contributes to the spiritual and economic defence of his country, and he helps it to fulfil its duties as a member of the community of nations." Firstly, Monsieur von Fischer referred to the political values which we are upholding today. "The features", he said, "which give the Swiss State its individual character and which constitute its most impressive *raison d'être* are its unique institutions: direct democracy, federalism and active and humanitarian neutrality". He considered that these working institutions could be included within the highest attainments of western civilisation and that we could be legitimately proud of them. We in Switzerland had been given the most precious gift a small state could bestow: the consciousness of being citizens in the fullest sense of the word.

The speaker next turned to the cultural aspect. "We know that today a country's status in the world does not rest on its economic position alone. Its cultural — and in particular its scientific — achievements are also of the utmost importance. Switzerland is a small land, so her means are naturally limited. But it is satisfying to note that we are accomplishing valuable feats in certain fields of research. Our Nobel Prize winners are surprisingly numerous. But our theatre and our music, too, have experienced an unexpected upsurge and won us a place in the cultural sphere, which we have never had before."

The Ambassador then referred to the economic field and the part we play there as one of the foremost countries in international trade. World-wide commerce was vital for us, but we were also Europeans and as such eager to do

what we could to bring about the economic integration of our continent. He reminded us that as neutrals we belonged not to EEC but to EFTA which had proved a remarkably successful organisation in building up, without any major difficulties, a market of ninety million people. Monsieur von Fischer also pointed out that we realised we could not accept indefinitely the existence in Europe of two economic zones strongly discriminating against each other, and that we were aware of the necessity to reach an agreement between EFTA and the Community of Six.

Lastly, the Ambassador turned to our role in international co-operation and one task which stands out in particular today. "Since the UNO Conference on Trade and Development in Geneva we have become more acutely conscious that we belong to the small group of most highly industrialized nations in the world and to those which possess most wealth per head of the population. We must therefore pay special attention to our relations with the developing countries. We cannot be indifferent to how these new states fit into the world economy. On the contrary, it is to our advantage that they should merge purposefully into it. Actually, the developing countries are demanding no less than an international redistribution of the gross national product of each state in the sense of a world-wide levelling of incomes. Here, however, we must take into account the fact that, as yet, the western industrial nations alone possess the necessary material means and the technical ability to promote decisively the economy of the developing countries. It is therefore up to them to decide when, where and how they will use the resources at their disposal. Switzerland has chosen the method dictated by her limited means and her tradition as a training country. What she has already achieved is by no means negligible.

"This, then, is Switzerland's position in the world today. As you see, it is fairly sharply defined and presents us with a number of international problems. All Swiss abroad benefit from the respect and the sympathy which our fatherland happily enjoys in the world. So they will all be glad, each in his own way, to help it to fulfil its duties. By their personal attitude, by their conscious championship of our spiritual, and cultural values and by their faith in them, they can contribute much to the understanding and the good working of our international activity.

"It is precisely here in London, this great metropolis and centre of a far-flung Commonwealth, where so many members of this world-wide community gather — it is precisely here that our commissions and omissions are of particular importance.

"As I am thinking today of our homeland, I should also like to say a word of thanks to our host country, which gives us such kind hospitality and which, for centuries, has shown us much sympathy and understanding.

"I should also like to take this opportunity of thanking the Wimbledon Borough authorities for receiving us so kindly today, and in particular The Worshipful The Mayor of Wimbledon, who gives us the honour of being with us this evening. May this day foster in us, besides a sense of deep unity with our native land, feelings of warm friendship for England and the English people."

Next on the programme was the Choir of the College of the Swiss Mercantile Society, who, some sixty strong, presented English and Swiss songs under the direction of Miss R. Harrison and Mr. D. Bonsall. The songs included "The Lass of Richmond Hill" and "Il y a longtemps que je t'aime". But when "Wo Berge sich erheben", also known as "Salut, glaciers sublimes", filled the air

there was a stir in the audience, and with the slightest encouragement the whole community would have burst into song. Perhaps the organisers could study the question of some community singing at a future celebration. In any case, the Choir deserved the unstinted applause accorded them at the end of their performance.

For some time the Committee had tried to get a film of the Swiss National Exhibition in Lausanne. Unfortunately none has as yet been produced, so a coloured film on Berne was shown, "The Town in the Heart of Europe". It was full of glimpses of every aspect of life in Berne, but alas, only glimpses, and there was perhaps not enough cohesion, a fault often found with Swiss travel documentaries. But nevertheless, the film was highly enjoyable.

The inclusion of local talent of the Swiss Community in Southern England has by now become traditional in our National Day Celebration programme. This time, the daughters of Mr. and Mrs. A. Schmid, the Misses Melanie and Marlene gave a zither recital. The zither is more popular in Southern Germany and Austria than it is here. Its name is derived from the Greek *kithara*, and it is a string instrument with a flat sounding-board. Five strings are hit with a metal ring attached to the thumb, and up to forty strings are plucked by the fingers. This was the first time to my knowledge that a zither recital has been heard in the Colony. It was most impressive, and the audience rewarded the two charming young ladies by complete silence and thundering applause. In sharp contrast to the attractively restrained performance of the two artists was the surprise item, the appearance of their teacher. With due respect for her dexterity, the theatrical use of the amplifier was somewhat overdone and detracted from the actual art of playing this antique instrument. The artistic skill and unassuming modesty of Melanie and Marlene preceding her, stood out all the more, and it is quite obvious that the two young champions, only 14 and 17 years old, have a great future before them.

Next came the turn of the Corale of the Unione Ticinese under their lively conductor and accordionist Luigi Bruni. The Corale appeared in spite of the numbers being reduced to just under a score due to holiday absentees. Their sparkling songs "Aprite le Porte", "La Figlia del Sol", "Occhi Neri" and "Quel'Mazzolin di Fiori" have become very much *our* songs, and we can hardly imagine a colony-wide function in London without the Corale's appearance.

For the Finale the Corale was joined by the S.M.S. Choir and the bearers of the cantonal flags. The Chairman of the Committee, Mr. F. Streit, thanked performers and hosts, and the "Cantique Suisse", our new (temporary) National Anthem, sung by everyone present terminated the excellent programme of the official part of the evening.

The Committee gave a reception to guests of honour and those who had contributed to the success of the evening, in the Mayoral Suite kindly put at their disposal by His Worship who later had the stately Council Chamber opened for inspection.

The majority of the audience, however, began dancing in the main hall to the strains of Harry Vardon's Band. There reigned a bright and jolly atmosphere, and the floor was covered with energetic dancers — whether it was the Twist (or was it the Shake, the Block or the Bang?) or the gentle waltz, did not seem to matter. There was the handful of boisterous young Swiss who unfortunately will persist in leaving a not altogether immaculate visiting card during their temporary stay in the Metropolis. A little more decorum would not come amiss to some of our

young compatriots. They would do well to realise that they represent their country once they are abroad, a fact of which those of us who are permanently here are very conscious.

Reflecting on this year's National Day Celebration in London, I feel I must be expressing what others felt who were there — it was an excellently organised function, with a programme not too long and whose timing was resolutely adhered to by the Stage Manager and M.C. Mr. P. Jacomelli. We all remember long programmes becoming overloaded with repeat items, but admirably, he would not be bullied into allowing encores by even the most regimented applause.

There was something to take away for everyone who went to Wimbledon on the evening of 1st August last. Granted, we had no bonfires, no fireworks, no yodelling, folkdancing and "Ländlermusik", no "Turnverein" and no "Männerchor". But even the young compatriots for all their exuberance must have felt that we, the permanent Swiss Colony in this country by whose efforts and generosity the National Day Celebration was arranged, met as a community, small in number actually present, but strong in the love of our country and humbly aware of its greatness, anxiously conscious of its troubles and fully determined to co-operate in solving them, and sincere in the praying for its future.

Mariann.

THREE RECEPTIONS

On Friday, 10th July, Mr. and Mrs. H. Kaufmann (Swiss Watchmaker) gave a Reception on the opening of their new premises at 59 George Street, Baker Street, W.1.

On Wednesday, 15th July, at the Montana Hotel, S.W.7, Counsellor of Embassy and Madame F. Ansermoz received the members of the Swiss delegation to the Fourth World Congress on the Prevention of Occupational Accidents and Diseases, as well as members of the Swiss Press in London.

On Monday, 27th July, at their home, the Swiss *Chargé d'Affaires* and Madame M. Heimo gave a Reception for the Swiss delegation attending the 20th International Geographical Congress.

AN APOLOGY

We wish to apologise to our readers for the delay of the last issue of the "Swiss Observer". In spite of difficulties caused by the postmen's strike, the issue was ready but could not be dispatched owing to the refusal by the General Post Office to accept any printed matter until the forty million letters held up by strike and ban on overtime had been dealt with.

Any subscriber whose copy of 24th July has got lost in the confusion of the strike should let the Editor know, and she will be pleased to replace it. This, incidentally, applies to any copy which may go astray in the post at any other time.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

We wish to thank the following subscribers for sending donations above their subscriptions and for taking out or renewing gift subscriptions: Mrs. R. Hions, Mrs. A. Renou, Mrs. M. A. Werder, Messrs E. Cottet, E. Luterbacher, J. A. Seiffert and Dr. V. Umbricht, Basle. We are most grateful for their kind and welcome support.

H. F. FRUTIGER †

We announce with deep regret the death of Mr. Hans F. Frutiger, of "Lynwood", 15 Northumberland Road, New Barnet, Herts.

He was born in Jerusalem on 25th January, 1881, the son of Johannes Frutiger, a Swiss banker, and one of fourteen children. At the age of 11 he was sent to Europe to complete his education, and in May 1896 he came to London to join his brother-in-law's firm of Landenberger & Co., clock and watch importers. From junior partner in 1911 he advanced to sole owner in 1934, the firm's name having been changed to E. A. Combs in 1914. In 1957 he formed a Private Limited Company of which he was the Chairman until 1st July this year, when he announced his gradual retirement after a life-time in the clock and watch trade.

He was always proud of his Swiss ancestry which can be traced back to one, Ulrich Frutiger, born in 1669 in the village of Frutigen in the Bernese Oberland. He remained a Swiss citizen, though resident in England for over sixty-eight years.

He died on 13th July, after eight days in hospital, following a fall at his home. He is survived by one sister, his widow, a son and a daughter, his younger son having been killed on active service with the RAF in 1941.

We extend our deep sympathy to his family.

CITY SWISS CLUB

Will Members please note that
NO MONTHLY MEETINGS
will be held until 8th September

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