

# The "Parliament" of the Swiss abroad at work

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# The Swiss Observer

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

Twice a year the Commission of the Swiss Abroad (ASK) meet to consider problems affecting the Swiss abroad. The Swiss organisations abroad themselves elect their representatives and proxies, and these, together with over a dozen interested Swiss living in Switzerland, form the "Parliament" of the Swiss Abroad which, under the able chairmanship of Dr. G. Schürch, has become acknowledged as an important body and is consulted by government and organisations in Switzerland more and more in questions concerning the Swiss abroad.

The first Commission meeting of the year usually takes place in February or March, and the second on the occasion of the Assembly of the Swiss Abroad in August. As was reported in the last issue, this year's Assembly took place in Lausanne to enable participants to visit the National Exhibition at the same time. On Friday, 28th August, the Colonies' representatives and their colleagues from inside Switzerland met at the newly renovated *Hôtel de Ville*. The Chairman welcomed inland members, delegates and/or proxies from many parts of the world and specially a few new members of the ASK. National Councillor Hackhofer and Councillor of States Zellweger are the two new inland members. New countries where the Swiss communities have united and chosen representatives are the group of Argentina-Uruguay-Paraguay. Good news, too, was to hand from the Antipodes: Australia and New Zealand will soon be represented on the Commission.

With great regret, Dr. Schürch announced the resignation of Dr. H. J. Halbheer, Director of the Secretariat of the Swiss Abroad in Berne. The members fully supported the Chairman in his praise of Dr. Halbheer's valuable services rendered to the Swiss abroad during six years.

There was some criticism regarding the minutes of the Commission, and more detailed minutes were asked for and the wish expressed that they should be issued much sooner after the meetings.

The first item of wider importance was the permission foreigners wanting to buy land in Switzerland have to apply for. The Swiss abroad also fall under this compulsion, though foreigners resident in Switzerland are exempt. It was particularly the Swiss Colony in Italy who voiced the resentment of the Swiss abroad, and readers will remember that a petition was sent to the federal authorities after the Swiss abroad had met at Sion two years ago. The answer was not satisfactory, and new proposals were worked out by the Executive of the Commission in consultation with the Swiss in Italy. The federal decree of 1961 will be revised in 1965, and it is hoped that according to the proposal put forward by the Commission, all Swiss born in Switzerland and those whose parents or grandparents were born in Switzerland or had

lived there for at least ten years, will be exempt from having to ask for permission. In most cases this is granted without difficulty by the local authorities, but unfortunately, in several cases permission was not granted or only under certain conditions, which is more than unfair. The Secretariat of the Swiss Abroad takes up such cases with success. Dr. L. Zellweger, a lawyer from Basle and member of the ASK, has done a great deal of work in this matter. He wrote an article in the "Neue Zürcher Zeitung" on 5th June, "Ausverkauf der Heimat und Auslandschweizer" in which he vigorously puts the point of the Swiss abroad and argues from the legal point of view against such discrimination.

Incidentally, another excellent article in the "Neue Zürcher Zeitung" concerning the Swiss abroad appeared on 25th August from the pen of Dr. Schürch, called "Klient oder Teilhaber?" in which he described the interest of the Swiss outside their home country in happenings in Switzerland and their determination to support their homeland.

The next item on the agenda was the proposed constitutional article regarding the Swiss abroad. The Federal Council's proposed wording is as follows:

*"The Confederation is empowered to further the relations between the Swiss nationals living abroad as well as between them and the home-country and to further any institutions serving these purposes.*

*The Confederation may — paying due regard to their special circumstances — issue the necessary rules to regulate their rights and duties, especially concerning their military duties and their political rights, as well as concerning assistance to them.*

*The Cantons have to be consulted beforehand regarding any such measure or regulation."*

The view of the Commission was that it was a good proposal and that the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad had gone as far as they could for the time being. The matter was now with the Cantons, and there was nothing new to report.

The next subject which was discussed concerned the presentation of Switzerland abroad. It was argued that there was not enough co-ordination and co-operation between official bodies, and much more should and could be done to make Switzerland better known in other countries. There could be better information in Switzerland, too, on foreign countries so as to help the Swiss resident there to make their fullest contribution. It was also stated that many Swiss abroad did not care (that was when your representative could not help agreeing secretly — she thought of the many Swiss in England who take little interest in the Solidarity Fund, the activities of the various societies, the "Swiss Observer"), but that the many who

are really anxious to represent their country well should be given all the support. It was suggested that the presentation of Switzerland should be the theme of the next Assembly in August 1965. It was hoped to have this in Solothurn, but unfortunately, there is not enough hotel accommodation, and another venue will have to be found.

Another subject discussed was the anticipated "withholding tax". There, too, the Commission's Executive and the Secretariat are taking steps to safeguard the interest of the Swiss abroad, and ways and means are being investigated to get an improvement. They will also defend the "savings book privilege".

It was announced that the book for the young Swiss was ready — please see last issue of the "Swiss Observer" for details — and that there was now a special badge for the Swiss abroad.

The Swiss schools abroad were mentioned, and it was stated that there were new schools in several parts of the world, and that it was hoped to improve them now that

the Confederation had made special provisions under the new vocational training Bill. Building grants could now be as much as 100%. In this connection it might be interesting to mention an announcement which was in "The Times" on 24th September that there were plans to open a German school in London for about eighty to a hundred children, financed by the German government. "Its chief purpose will be to serve the needs of the growing German community in London, but Austrian and Swiss children will also be admitted."

The meeting of the Commission of the Swiss Abroad showed once again that its members take their mandate seriously. The Organisation of the Swiss Abroad under the patronage of the Nouvelle Société Helvétique has achieved a status of importance, all the more weighty because it is a private organisation and can consequently represent our interests with more emphasis and success than an official organisation. We owe it our full support and gratitude.

*Mariann.*

## IT HAPPENED IN THE CANTONS OF FRIBOURG AND NEUCHÂTEL

### FRIBOURG

Fribourg is the chief centre of Catholic culture in French-speaking Switzerland. "The Times", in an article on 1st August, says that Ruskin described it as the most picturesque town in all Switzerland.

"It is on the language (French-German) frontier but it is always claimed by the Suisse Romande. The cathedral of St. Nicolas has a world-famous organ. The ancient Bourg surrounds the cathedral; it is still the seat of the authorities and there are quaint, gabled buildings and beautiful Patrician houses which are the traditional living quarters of the old aristocracy of Fribourg. The Ville-Basse is the lower town on the green slopes by the river, where live the craftsmen and the small traders. The people here are mainly German-speaking.

"There are many magnificent things to be seen in this city standing on its rocky bluff, surrounded on three sides by the river Sarine. But to the people of Fribourg there is nothing more famous than the great lime tree standing in front of the City Hall, supported by stone pillars. Tradition says that this tree sprang from a twig planted after the battle of Morat. A young Fribourg soldier arrived in the city straight from the battlefield carrying a twig, and with his last breath cried 'Victory'. He fell dead from loss of blood and the lime tree blossomed where he fell."

This old town is to be preserved. A new movement "Pro Fribourg" under the chairmanship of the historian and writer Gonzague de Reynold, has undertaken to study the problems, and it is hoped to integrate the old parts of the town into modern life without spoiling what is valuable.

At the same time, modern buildings are going up, too. There is to be a large new hotel on the Grands-Places, new administrative buildings near the station, subsidised flats, a new staff house for the estate of Grangeneuve and an agricultural domestic science college.

In the spring of 1963, the cantonal Parliament rejected an Initiative against land speculation. The citizens complained to the Federal Tribunal and won their case. A parliamentary commission has been working out measures which will help to prevent land speculation and allow the Initiative to be withdrawn.

In February there was an "Open Factory" week which enabled school children and members of the public to see twenty-five Fribourg factories. There has been a gratifying economic development in the Canton. The Commune of St. Aubin in the Broye valley (where the chief crop is tobacco) has agreed to sell a large area of land to Geigy A.G. of Basle, who intend to construct a research farm and laboratories, and the citizens of St. Aubin are assured of economic development of their Commune.

There is to be a temporary tax to pay for a water purification plant over the next twenty years. In spring, the traditional sale of wine of the "Staatskellerei" took place — they had recently received a gold medal in the competition arranged by the EXPO. The International Federation of Tobacco Producers and Planters chose Fribourg for their ninth congress.

The University of Fribourg now has a students' council for which the students elected the members for the first time in June. There are forty-one members, amongst them eight foreigners. In all the R.C. churches in Switzerland, there is a collection for Fribourg University on the Federal Day of Prayer, which amounts to over one million francs. At the end of May, the University celebrated the 600th anniversary of the University of Cracow with whom there are many bonds. In July, there was an international pedagogical seminar, organised by the UNESCO Institute on Educational Science in Hamburg, in collaboration with the Swiss UNESCO Commission and the "Fraternité Mondiale" in Geneva. At the Collège St. Michel, it will now be possible to follow a course of modern languages and Latin (hitherto only Latin/natural sciences or Latin/Greek). Co-operation between the German- and the French-speaking communities in the Canton has been intensified.

"The Times" in the above-mentioned article said:

"Those who love little things will take Morat straight to their hearts. It is small and enchanting: a real fairy story city enclosed by battlements and turrets. Morat is very precious to the Swiss; it was here that in 1476 their tiny forces defeated the immense armies of Charles the Bold of Burgundy. Red water lilies grow on the lake to this day and are still called "Burgundy Blood".