

Assembly of presidents of Swiss Societies in Great Britain

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N.S.H. MEETINGS

The London Group of the "Nouvelle Société Helvétique" had a particularly busy month in January. Not only did they show the usual **Annual Film** of the most memorable events in Switzerland, which is made available also to other societies in England and elsewhere by the courtesy of the Secrétariat des Suisses à l'Etranger in Berne. These films afford the Swiss abroad an excellent opportunity to refresh their memories not only of the year's events, but of the background of things in Switzerland generally. The N.S.H. surely deserves unstinted praise for this annual film show, which this time was enriched by a colourful nostalgic portrayal of the Léman.

It so happened that the film show had to be combined this year with a talk by **Dr. H. J. Halbheer**, the Director of the "Auslandschweizerwerk", the organisation for the Swiss abroad, which has been existing over fifty years under the generous patronage of the mother society, "Nouvelle Société Helvétique" in Switzerland. Dr. Halbheer talked in excellent English on "Switzerland and the Swiss abroad". Naturally he took the opportunity of drawing our attention to the many special facilities available to the Swiss abroad who wish to keep up their intimate connection with the home land. Special arrangements have of course been made to encourage us to visit the National Exhibition at Lausanne, which will give us the most impressive and comprehensive review of everything Switzerland stands for, works for and aspires to in this troubled world. But the "Auslandschweizerwerk" works, of course, on a permanent basis to do the same thing modestly yet lastingly. Any Swiss book can be purchased through them at a one-third discount, scholarships are offered to the young Swiss abroad for training in any profession in the home land, summer and winter camps are arranged for our children in the most lovely parts of Switzerland and lecturers are sent out from Berne to the colonies to keep them informed, a task which however is particularly well served month by month through the "ECHO".

The **Solidarity Fund** of the Swiss Abroad, another achievement of the N.S.H., has now over 7,500 members, enjoys a Government Guarantee thanks to which over half a million Swiss francs have already been paid out to compatriots abroad who lost their livelihood. Regarding the Military Tax, the "Verrechnungssteuer" and so many other things of direct interest to the Swiss abroad the Secretariat, the N.S.H. and the **Auslandschweizer-Kommission** have succeeded in obtaining important reforms and concessions in our favour. Their advice is sought as a matter of course, nowadays, by the Government and others whenever the interests of the Swiss Abroad are involved. The debate regarding special provision being made for the Swiss Abroad in the **Federal Constitution** continues with increasing momentum. Dr. Halbheer concluded his survey with a fairly confident reference to the possibilities of satisfactory relations of Switzerland with the Common Market, but also on a note of warning regarding the continuous drain of Swiss scientists to America, a problem not unknown to the British either.

Not enough with this most stimulating double bill of the January meeting of the N.S.H. on the 14th held in the Livingstone Hall, it fell to the London Group also to organise an **Informal Dinner** and public discussion on 29th January at the Glendower Hotel on the occasion of a visit of **Monsieur Maurice Jaccard**, Head of the Section for the Swiss Abroad, Federal Political Department. He came

mainly to study our plans for the establishment of a Swiss **SOCIAL CENTRE** in the Swiss business Centre being erected in Leicester Square for the Swiss Bank Corporation. But at the invitation of the N.S.H. he talked to the meeting after dinner on the progress of the question of a special article in the Federal Constitution for the Swiss Abroad and other subjects of general interest to our Colony. He also pleaded for more support of the Solidarity Fund, pointing to the grievous losses of compatriots in erstwhile flourishing colonies. Monsieur de Stoutz expressed thanks to the N.S.H. for the successful evening and its work in general.

E.

ASSEMBLY OF PRESIDENTS OF SWISS SOCIETIES IN GREAT BRITAIN

The thirty-sixth meeting of the Presidents' Assembly took place at the Swiss Embassy in London on 15th January. Nearly thirty ladies and gentlemen attended from as far apart as Guernsey and Manchester, and the meeting was chaired by Mr. V. Berti (Schweizerbund). Monsieur J. de Stoutz, Chargé d'Affaires, Monsieur F. Ansermoz and Consul Tosio represented the Swiss Embassy. Dr. H. J. Halbheer, Director of the Secretariat of the Swiss Abroad in Berne, was present as a guest.

One of the most important items on the agenda was the Swiss Centre which is now being erected near Piccadilly Circus. The Presidents were informed of the various efforts which are being made to bring about a cultural and social centre under the same roof as the commercial centre. As soon as definite facts are available the Swiss Community will be informed.

The Solidarity Fund was recommended once again, and the book "The Swiss Colony in Great Britain according to Occupations" by the Rev. Father Boos was discussed. The book, which is extremely interesting, was written as a thesis, and the author has asked for a financial contribution. This, the Assembly felt, was not possible owing to lack of general interest.

The revision of the constitution of the Assembly was up for discussion. Some changes were necessary, specially with regard to providing funds for the delegates of the Swiss Community in Great Britain to attend the meetings of the Commission of the Swiss Abroad.

The future of the Fête Suisse was also discussed. It was felt that it should revert to its former family gathering character, and that expensive performers from Switzerland should not be envisaged in the future.

Monsieur de Stoutz took the chair *pro tempore* whilst the elections were being held. He thanked the outgoing officers, in particular the Chairman Mr. V. Berti, for their work. The Vice-Chairman not being willing to stand for chairmanship, Mr. Berti was invited to serve for another year as the Assembly's Chairman. The Honorary Secretary, Mr. O. Béguin (Swiss Church) was elected Vice-Chairman and Mr. A. Jaccard (Swiss Mercantile Society) Hon. Secretary.

OUR NEXT ISSUE

Our next issue will be published on 13th March. We shall be grateful to receive reports and contributions no later than the first post on Wednesday, 4th March. Short news items only can be accepted later.