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“FIFTH SWITZERLAND”



THE SWISS FROM ABROAD MEET IN LUGANO

Lugano — the name alone is a promise of blissful sunshine, deep blue sky, luscious scented blossoms along the lake front, happy holiday crowds; a town guarded by the two symbols of majestic beauty Monte Bre and San Salvatore. And it was just like that promise when the Assembly of the Swiss Abroad took place from 25th to 27th August.

The weather was glorious, the streets were crowded with tanned holiday makers of many tongues. The policemen in their gleaming white uniforms, including helmets, gloves and shoes, directed the traffic like lively symphony conductors. Blue trams with open summer carriages alternated with huge American limousines and racy sports cars. People seemingly without a care sat at little round tables, sipping *Campari* or *espresso*. Dark blue grapes and giant yellow peaches were displayed on the stalls, and souvenirs of every description were for sale in the shady arcades. The blue and red Ticino flags fluttered from impressive public buildings, and mauve petunias covered not only whole window boxes but completely hid iron and stone balconies. Jet fountains gave an illusion of coolness. The lakeside promenade and the parks were full of flowering shrubs and shady trees, where one could sit and relax in congenial company, talking of this and that, unhurried, completely at peace with man and nature.

And the nights — much the same picture, but cooler, lights sparkling across the calm dark waters of the lake, music floating from open terraces, a coloured play of jet fountains off shore adding a touch of fairyland. Then gradually quiet descending on the town. Round coffee tables uptilted on the empty pavements, policemen making the tour of the town watchfully, but now no longer clad in white. The sound of late dance music straining softly from the *Kursaal* windows, where gaming was still in full swing. Some long-haired youths talking at a corner; a *café* still open where one could enjoy a *pizza* at 1 a.m. The steps of couples walking home echoing in the cobbled streets, the lights still glittering across the lake, and above all the dark velvety sky sprinkled with countless diamond stars.

The “Parliament” at Work

But don't let this deceive you — the Swiss from abroad did not just gather to enjoy a holiday. Much hard work was done. The first of the 400 attending the Assembly, were the members of the *Ausschuss*, the Executive of the Commission (ASK), who met already on Thursday afternoon. The next morning was devoted to the business of the Commission, the “Parliament” of the Swiss Abroad. Not all of the representatives, deputies and co-opted members, either from inside or outside Switzerland, were present; of the total (81 men and one woman) well over half attended, having travelled from as far as Morocco and Sweden, Israel and Australia. The Swiss in Great Britain were represented by Mrs. Mariann Meier (London) for the South (regular member) and Dr. H. R. Bolliger (Manchester) for the North (deputy for Dr. H. B. Knuchel).

The new Chairman of the Commission, Councillor of States Louis Guisan, successor to Dr. G. Schuerch, welcomed the delegates in the lofty Commune Council

Chamber of the Municipal Hall. The azure flag of the Swiss Abroad, with, in one corner, the *Auslandschweizer-signet* (the Swiss cross on red background imposed on a white skeleton globe), was given pride of place between the national and the Ticino flags.

The main task of the Commission was to discuss the draft of the new *Règlement Consulaire*. (The deliberations will be more fully reported in the next issue, and this applies to all important debates and meetings).

At midday, the members adjourned to the *Kursaal* for a Press Conference, followed by the traditional luncheon offered by the Commission to members of the Press with particular interest in problems of “Fifth Switzerland”.

“One for All — All for One”

The afternoon was given over to the Solidarity Fund of the Swiss Abroad. It has done sterling work in the past few years, but it needs new members badly if it is to remain an independent body. Under the new Constitutional Article put on the Statute Book by the electorate last October, certain rights and privileges are accorded to the Swiss abroad. But there cannot be any rights without duties, and one of the ways by which we can affirm our solidarity with our country of origin and our compatriots in other lands, is to join the fund, which will also be of benefit to ourselves. The delegates' meeting was chaired by the former Ambassador Dr. F. Kappeler, President of the Fund. Unfortunately, only ten delegates from abroad attended — somewhat symbolic of the general lack of interest shown by most Swiss communities.

The first Assembly was officially opened by President Guisan at 8 o'clock on Friday evening, but participants divided soon afterwards into separate groups. One was devoted to questions of social security (AHV and sickness), one to questions of general interest, especially how to organise Swiss groups and societies abroad, and the youth service run most competently under Mr. Andri Bisaz. There was one meeting held by “*l'Association des agriculteurs, commerçants, industriels et artisans de France*”, and another of *Auslandschweizer* particularly interested in Church questions.

Two-way Traffic of Information

The enlarged Commission (ASK) met again early on Saturday morning and devoted a couple of hours to the important question of information. Ever since the Swiss abroad first started to be alarmed at a deteriorating image of Switzerland in the world, it has been felt that one of the most effective ways to achieve an improvement in the *présence* of Switzerland was to ensure better information both to and from Switzerland. To this end, the Secretariat of the Swiss Abroad in Berne organised an enquiry as to how present sources of news and information could be improved. The results were analysed and presented to the meeting by Dr. Sylvia Arnold of the Secretariat. Many suggestions and wishes were brought forth during the ensuing debate; the task will not be an easy one to supply facts, figures, documentation and comments in sufficient quantity, in several languages and suitable for a variety of countries and levels of individual culture, interest and

intelligence. But it is a worthwhile challenge.

The main theme of the Assembly 1967 was "The Effect of the Constitutional Article on the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad". A total of sixteen speakers had been mobilised to enlarge on the subject. Addresses ranged from mighty orations to modest statements, and whilst one could agree with much that was said, it emerged clearly that there was no definite indication yet as to the full impact on the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad.

President Guisan opened the Plenary Meeting at the Corso Cinema by welcoming official representatives of the Confederation, amongst them Federal Councillor R. Gnaegi, and the Vice-Presidents of the two Chambers of Parliament, Dr. H. Conzett and *Ständerat* Wipfli. The two former Federal Councillors Celio and Lepori were present, and the Chairman extended a welcome to the Ticinese Councillor of State Dr. Arturo Lafranchi, the *Sindaco* of Lugano Dr. Pelli, the President of the Lugano Commune Council Dr. E. Borsari, and the Mayor of Morcote Mr. M. Perlasca. The delegation of the Federal Political Department was headed by its Secretary-General Ambassador P. Micheli. There were representatives of other Departments and of the diplomatic and consular services, amongst them the Swiss Ambassador in London Monsieur O. Long, and the Consul in Manchester Monsieur G. Brunner. Two former Ambassadors, both well remembered from their longer-than-usual stays in London, Messrs. C. Rezzonico and G. Lepori (and Madame) were present. As usual, there were many fraternal delegates and observers, and participants to the Assembly had travelled from as far as Cape Town and Madagascar, Vancouver and Rio de Janeiro, Manila, Bangkok and Melbourne. The largest contingents, each around fifty strong, came from Germany and France, closely followed by Italy. The Swiss community in Great Britain was only very sparsely represented (apart from Ambassador, Consul and members of the Commission), viz. Prof. and Mrs. J. Inebnit and Mrs. Davidson.

How does it affect us ?

The first of the speeches was a brilliant address by the Central President of the Nouvelle Société Helvétique, Mr. Oskar Reck, followed by an *exposé* on the Solidarity Fund by its President.

Speakers from abroad included men from Belgium, Germany, Argentine and Brazil, Holland, Great Britain and France. The preponderance of Swiss orators from France, no fewer than five (though Me. G. Poulin spoke in Italian, a gesture much appreciated by the hostess Canton), seemed strange considering that France, with the largest Swiss community of all, shows only minute interest in the Solidarity Fund. Much was asked and requested by the speakers, and Dr. H. R. Bolliger of Manchester made an excellent impression by stressing that we Swiss abroad also had duties. General wishes included better old-age insurance benefits and sickness insurance for Swiss returning home, refund of expenses for the young in connection with the *Rekrutenschule*, help for Swiss sports activities abroad, longer stay of diplomatic and consular representatives, more uniform help for the Swiss schools abroad, a parliamentary representative of the Swiss abroad, a permanent International Centre in Switzerland (Prof. Inebnit).

Looking back on the speeches of that afternoon and comparing them with those made at the last few Assemblies, one could not help feeling that, in many ways, some were a rather weak continuation of what had already been said, and that an overall conception was lacking. The writer certainly does not agree with a young Swiss from

France who declared that before the Constitutional Article, the Assemblies of the Swiss Abroad had been of little value. We remember the recent meetings of St. Moritz, Lausanne, Solothurn and Berne, which, each in its way, showed a clear line, presented the image of Switzerland, good and bad, of how to improve it, and of what the Swiss communities abroad had done and could contribute. Of this year's deliberations there is not much that can be formulated in precise terms, and perhaps it is a good thing that next year's Assembly will be devoted to the *young* Swiss and their relationship with their country of origin. That should open up new horizons.

The highlight of the afternoon was an address by Federal Councillor Gnaegi who kept closely to the general theme of the conference. Thanking him, the President remarked on the attentive listening which, he said, was not usually the case in Switzerland! He closed the Assembly by commenting on the fact that we had not found a solution yet to the many problems facing the Swiss communities abroad, but that we were determined, at home and elsewhere, to make the necessary efforts to solve them.

Courtesy?

The authorities of Lugano received the participants of the congress on the roof terrace of the *Kursaal* and accorded them a very warm welcome. The Reception was followed by a Banquet at the Padiglione Conza. The Vice-President of the National Council addressed the gathering in a humorous vein, referring to the recent travelling epidemic amongst Federal Councillors, which, he was sure, we Swiss abroad could understand much better than our compatriots inside Switzerland. A picturesque folklore band "Saragnora" of Biasco, entertained during dinner, alternating with a couple of mandolin and guitar players and singers.

With the best intentions, the organisers had engaged a modern dance band, and it was unfortunate that there was no announcement as to their playing *only* for the youngsters, and that the folklore band was coming back in between "beat" numbers. Perhaps, if federal representatives and Ambassadors had been seated at random amongst the delegates, the general exodus might not have been so marked. In no time, only about 50 remained out of 400, among them a number of *Auslandschweizerrekruten*, who enjoyed excellent dancing, looking slightly forlorn in the vast exhibition hall. Was the spontaneous departure of the majority of those present real courtesy to the hosts?

Truly United

Sunday began with an Ecumenical Service at the R.C. Church of San Rocco, rich with frescoes by Discepoli. The church was full of worshippers, and the service was conducted by a R.C. Priest and a Protestant Minister, Pfr. Bernoulli, himself a *Suisse de l'Etranger* for many years and now resident in Lugano. It was an impressive *Culte Ecumenico* by compatriots of many tongues and several denominations.

The proverbial good weather at Assembly outings held for the trip on the lake. It was a happy boatload that glided along the Italian border of the lake, under the Ponte di Melide to the Golfo di Agno, finally to disembark at the famous resort of Morcote. We walked past the arcades and up the many steps of the impressive flight leading to the Church of Santa Maria del Sasso, renowned for its frescoes and the palm and cypress trees surrounding it. The Commune of Morcote had prepared a warm and friendly welcome, and not even the midday heat was able to dampen the enthusiasm of the band and the speakers

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