

Why the Swiss forget Liechtenstein is not Swiss

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WHY THE SWISS FORGET LIECHTENSTEIN IS NOT SWISS

By Peter Schaffer

A few months ago, Swiss newspaper readers were regaled with a photograph of a somewhat sheepish-looking Swiss Foreign Ministry official calling at the Legation of the Principality of Liechtenstein, in Berne's old town.

It was a reminder to Switzerland's six million population that Liechtenstein, with its 20,000 people, is not a Swiss satellite but an independent state.

The Swiss official had called to apologise for an incident in which Swiss artillerymen had erroneously fired practice shells into the Principality.

Why do Swiss sometimes tend to forget that their small eastern neighbour is not an integral part of Switzerland?

Perhaps partly because even a small country like Switzerland can feel quite superior and large compared with its tiny neighbour.

But, mostly, it is probably because of an event that took place on 29th March 1923: the signing of a customs union between Liechtenstein and Switzerland.

As a result only a sign bearing the arms and name of the Principality tells the Swiss he is crossing into foreign territory. He can use Swiss currency all over Liechtenstein, and the Swiss PTT services cover the Principality — except that Liechtenstein issues its own stamps, which bring in about one-tenth of the annual revenue.

Despite these links and their dialects, which are similar to East Swiss local tongues, the people of Liechtenstein do not feel Swiss.

Though they have a princely Head of State, they are a democratic community, with their own Government and Parliament.

Liechtensteiners date the history of their country in its present form from 1719.

In that year Liechtenstein, consisting of the two counties of Vaduz and Schellenberg which Prince Johann Adam had purchased a few years previously, was declared a principality by the Hapsburg Empire.

From 1852 Liechtenstein was economically united with Austria, and in 1866 fought with it in the war against Prussia.

But Liechtenstein got left out of the subsequent peace treaty and so never formally made peace with Prussia.

Prussians, however, need not tremble at this thought. Shortly after the Austro-Prussian War, Liechtenstein disbanded its eighty-man military force and has kept things that way up to the present day.

After Austria's defeat in the 1914-18 war, the Liechtensteiners were in a difficult economic position and started refusing to handle any money except sound Swiss francs.

It was this situation that led to the signing of the agreement with Switzerland incorporating Liechtenstein into Swiss customs territory and handing over responsibility for postal and telegraph services to the Confederation.

When this agreement was signed, there was no radio broadcasting service and television was unknown. So in 1939 an appendage was signed giving the Swiss PTT the right to issue broadcasting licences — a right which was used first for sound and later for television receivers.

This led a citizen of Liechtenstein to declare a year or two ago that he would refuse to pay Swiss PTT radio and television license fees.

He challenged their legality, arguing that the appendage was never put before Liechtenstein's mini-parliament for ratification, and that therefore it has no legal force.

The Swiss authorities are believed to be asking for a revision of the 1923 agreement. But whether the license fees paid by Liechtensteiners so far are legal is still an undecided point.

(By courtesy "Weekly Tribune" Geneva.)

STONE-AGE FARMING AND BURGUNDY SPOILS

75 Years of Historical Museum of Berne

One of Switzerland's most important historical and antiquarian collections, the Historical Museum of Berne, was founded in 1894. It may look back on 75 years of extremely multifarious activities. It wishes to celebrate its anniversary with three unusually interesting exhibitions. They are to be open until the end of October of this year and will focus the public's attention on various subjects. One of these exhibitions shows "Agriculture from a prehistoric and ethnographic point of view". This field of research is of particular interest to Switzerland because its farming culture has been proven to go back to the third millennium B.C. (later stone age) and forms a part of a wider pattern.

Another exhibition, to be opened on 18th May, will show "The Burgundian Spoils and Works of Burgundian Court Art". The Museum owns unique treasures made by Burgundian art workshops of the fifteenth century which warrant a special exhibition covering the fields of history of art and culture, with magnificent tapestries as its highlight.

The exhibition "The Museum Then and Now" is of special retrospective value because it illustrates the changes in museology and the impressive growth of the Historical Museum of Berne, now 75 years old.

(S.N.T.O.)

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PERMANENCE: chaque jeudi de 15h00 à 18h00.

REUNION DE QUARTIER: huit veillées en automne et au printemps; voir "Le Messenger".

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SUNDAYS: Holy Mass at 9 and 11 a.m. in English. At 7 p.m. for the Swiss community with regard to the different language groups.

HOLIDAYS of obligation: Holy Mass at 7.30 and 9 a.m., 1 p.m. and 5.45 p.m.

WEDNESDAYS and THURSDAYS: Holy Mass at 1 p.m. afterwards time for consultations.

CONFESSIONS: (German, French, Italian and English):
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Saturdays: 11 a.m. to 12.30 p.m. and from 5 to 7 p.m. or by appointment.

SWISS CATHOLIC YOUTH CLUB — Meeting every Sunday after Evening Mass (8-11 p.m.) at Westminster Ball Room, 30 Strutton Ground, S.W.1.

CHAPLAIN: Paul Bossard, St. Ann's Church, Abbey Orchard Street, S.W.1. Tel: 01-222 2895.