

News from the colony

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NEWS FROM THE COLONY

A WORKING DELEGATE'S IMPRESSION OF THE ASSEMBLY OF THE SWISS ABROAD

Having read the Editor's report of, and comments on the Jubilee Assembly in Berne at the end of August, it seems somewhat superfluous to add yet another review. On the other hand, it is my duty to report not only to the Federation of Swiss Societies in the U.K. and the interested societies, but also to the Swiss community at large. For their delegates to the Commission of the Swiss Abroad, our "Parliament", have a definite job to do.

I arrived in Berne in glorious weather which lasted to the end of the week and then, on Sunday, changed sadly. Already on Thursday morning I attended a meeting of the Commission on *Information*, a subject of great importance to all Swiss abroad. This Commission has been working for a number of years trying to find a method by which all registered Swiss abroad could be reached. We heard that by using existing colony papers or creating new ones, compatriots not previously reached, could now get information from Switzerland four times a year, free of charge, and this meant that contact with the homeland would be strengthened with most Swiss abroad and not only the loyal patriots working in societies and/or subscribing to a colony paper where there is one.

We learned that already two-thirds of all Swiss abroad have been reached in French, German and Italian speaking countries, including Scandinavia and the Netherlands, etc. Once the English speaking countries have been brought into the scheme—the "Swiss Observer" is to serve as a model—seven-eighths will have been affected, leaving out the Spanish speaking countries. We cannot yet promise when the first special number of the "Swiss Observer" will appear, for there are many problems, seeing that this is the first non-federal language to be used.

The meeting also discussed the "Echo", and it was stressed again that the new publication should not become too much of a competition to the magazine. In the afternoon, there was a second meeting on information, at which most editors of Swiss papers abroad attended. Some of their problems were discussed, mainly teething troubles now that the new scheme is working.

These meetings prevented me from attending the Rifle Shooting contest in which Father P. Bossard came fourth, a great achievement indeed. My preparatory work and preliminary contacts, so important for working delegates, also kept me from watching the grand spectacle of the *tir de combat*

organised by the Federal Military Department.

On Friday, at 8.15 a.m. (!) the *Commission of the Swiss Abroad* met in the fine Council Chamber of the Berne *Rathaus* under the chairmanship of the President of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad, Councillor of States Dr. Louis Guisan. There were nearly 70 members present, a score from inside Switzerland and the others from as far as the Americas and Thailand, New Zealand and Tunisia, South Africa and Scandinavia. Great Britain was represented by the two regular delegates Dr. H. R. Bolliger (North) and Mrs. Mariann Meier (South) and her deputy Father P. Bossard.

The President reported on his journey to USA and Canada where he attended some 30 to 40 events in Swiss communities. We were informed about the eighth revision of the Old Age Insurance and how it affects the Swiss abroad. (*See report of Consul Adam's talk on this subject to the London Group of the N.S.H.*)

Next we were told about the progress made with the legal application of Art. 45bis regarding the take-over by the Confederation of the social welfare of the Swiss abroad, hitherto left to Cantons and Communes. The draft law will now go to the two Chambers. It had been considered by the Commission at their March meeting, and Swiss benevolent societies abroad, too, had been consulted. Some further progress has been made with regard to the military exemption tax, and the much-attacked withholding tax (*Verrechnungssteuer*) is still under review. The first draft for political rights for the Swiss abroad is in preparation. All this shows that the question put by the Editor in the issue of 25th August whether the Constitutional Article for the Swiss Abroad was to remain an empty paragraph, may be answered with a decisive NO, even if the Swiss abroad were not granted suffrage.

The Swiss schools abroad have been under fire in the press recently, and it will be most beneficial once the report by a special commission is published. It was given to the members by the Commission's Chairman, Prof. Dr. H. Roth, and made a considerable impression.

New members were elected and various national groups confirmed. It was decided to hold next year's Assembly in Eastern Switzerland at the end of August, and that the theme should be the work of Swiss societies abroad.

Two matters gave rise to much discussion. The resolution of the ASSAOM (*Association des Suissés d'Algérie ou d'Outre-Mer*) asking for more protection, was to be passed on

to the federal authorities concerned, rather than deliberated at the General Assembly; after all only the Commission was really competent to act in this manner. The second matter was the double-taxation agreement between Switzerland and Germany, which was very unfavourable to the Swiss living there. This agreement was in the process of being concluded without the sanction of the Swiss in Germany. As the Swiss in Italy would soon be affected in the same way, they had taken steps to insure prior consultation and had a promise to this effect from the highest quarters. Thus the Swiss in the South have profited from the sad case of our compatriots in the North.

During the interval, there was a splendid concert in our honour outside the *Rathaus*: The band of *Swissair*, over 50 strong, serenaded us in several rousing marches, performed with precision and harmony.

Half way through the customary lunch after the meeting, I had to leave to attend the Council meeting of the *Solidarity Fund of the Swiss Abroad*. Later in the afternoon, this was followed by the General Meeting of the organisation, at which only a small number of members turned up. The main item at both meetings was the structural reform of the Fund. It has been found that the idea of solidarity which prompted the founders to create this self-help had lost its appeal, and that, in order to increase membership, the savings idea must be fostered.

(Please see report on page 14)

The Friday evening was given to a folklore festival in the *Kramgasse*, an excellent opportunity to meet friends, amongst them several Ambassadors and Consuls previously in London in one capacity or another.

The *Plenary Assembly* has been covered by the Editor. The venue was most suitable to house the over 800 participants (official figure) without feeling shut in. The discussion on the main theme "Political Rights and Duties of the Swiss Abroad" brought out not only the hopes and expectations of the Swiss abroad, but also the doubts and difficulties. The highlight of the day was the eloquent address by the President of the Confederation. His speech has already been taken care of by the Editor.

Conclusion

The gala performance of the "Magic Flute" and the outing to Interlaken brought the 50th Assembly to a close. On the whole it may be termed a great success. I was particularly

proud to have a good contingent from G.B., numbering just on 30. This—in contradiction to the Editor's statement—compares favourably with other countries. From France came just under 100, but their Colony is over six times as large as the community in the United Kingdom.

Personally, I could not help a feeling of disappointment. The theme was not only about our rights, but also about our duties. Yet precious little was said about these. Were all those so fervently in favour of voting rights members of the Solidarity Fund and subscribers to their community's newspaper? Did they support the efforts made by their societies to help in youth work, Church and charity activities? Did they always leave a commendable visiting card behind and help to create a good image for their homeland? I wonder.

Fortunately, my feeling of discomfort was allayed on Sunday morning during the ecumenical service at the beautiful Berne Cathedral. The working party of all Christian Churches in Berne had organised the service, and in so doing they felt it was wrong to show the Swiss from abroad only Switzerland's "Sunday Face". So they let an Italian, a Hungarian and a negro from West Africa, all three residents in Switzerland, testify as to their experiences and difficulties of getting into touch and making friends with Swiss people. This moving testimony in conjunction with the two short sermons and a most appropriate Lesson from the Book of Ruth (I 1-6 and IV 13-17 etc) made sense of our duties towards

our homeland, and if ever I shall remember one of the ecumenical services, it will not be any of the previous ones with wonderful words of praise and exultant patriotism, but the one of Sunday, 27th August, 1972.

(MM)

MANCHESTER SHIP CANAL

On the 23rd September, 1972 our members and their friends were presented with a new event, a Boat Trip along the Manchester Ship Canal and 39 members of the *Manchester Swiss Club* entrained at Manchester to travel to Liverpool.

On arrival at Liverpool they preceded to the Princess Landing Stage where they embarked on the T.S.M.V. "Egremont". The cruise began by viewing from the river the dock installations and shipbuilding yards before proceeding via the Mersey Estuary and the Manchester Ship Canal to Manchester. Undoubtedly it was a happy initiative. Sailing for almost forty miles of constant activity and interest past modern dock installations, green fields and ocean going ships in transit, through lock, under swing bridges and high level road and railway bridges, all combining to present a panorama of unusual sights.

The Manchester Ship Canal is an important artificial waterway and ranks with its large international trade with other famous ones such as Suez, Panama and Kiel. By the second half of the 19th century it had become essential that Manchester should be

made into a port, to deal successfully with the developments of inland industries and other activities and to reduce the high cost of carriage to and from Liverpool and its crippling dock charges and also to speed of traffic in general.

Work on this canal started on the 11th November, 1887 and it was opened on the 1st January, 1894. The Manchester Ship Canal starts at Eastham locks some 6 miles from Liverpool port, and 25 miles from the Mersey bar. The canal is 36 miles long and has a water depth of 30 feet from Eastham to Ince oil berth, and then 28 feet onward to the terminal docks at Manchester. The nominal bottom width of the Canal is 120 feet with a few variations. On the journey to Manchester there are five sets of locks to be passed through, one each at Eastham, Latchford, Irlam, Barton and Mode Wheel and vessels are raised to the Manchester water level, on their inward journey.

The canal is bridged 19 times and of these nine are swing bridges, seven for road traffic, one for the dock railway and one for the most famous Barton Swing Aqueduct which carries the Bridgewater Canal over the Ship Canal. Of the remaining ten bridges, five are railway viaducts, and five high level road bridges. The total cost of £15,500,000 was well justified by the ever increasing ship tonnage using it and which reached already 16,400,000 tons in 1954.

After a cool misty autumn morning the journey, which turned to sunshine as the day proceeded providing

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an interesting and pleasant day for all our members, who were most thankful to our Committee for having given us the opportunity to have a closer look at this product of human imagination, creative ability and technical achievement.

E. Berner

CITY SWISS CLUB OCTOBER MEETING

Like the Nouvelle Société Helvétique, in the previous month the City Swiss Club devoted its October monthly meeting to the political rights of the Swiss abroad, a subject which was illustrated with great fluency and competence by Dr. H. R. Bolliger from Manchester.

The Speaker explained why he had advocated, before the 50th Assembly of the Swiss Abroad in Berne, a rejection of current proposals allowing Swiss abroad transiting in the Motherland to vote on federal issues. He dwelt briefly on the main arguments—which have already been described in previous issues—namely, the problems of inadequate information and “geographical unfairness”.

He explained at some length why some foreign Swiss communities, mainly the Swiss of France, were more eager than others to partake in Swiss political life. With the help of slides showing graphs and charts taken from an economic survey by the Club of Rome, Dr. Bolliger undertook to demonstrate, in a most enlightening and original manner, how the essentially varying life-styles of Swiss living abroad, and particularly overseas, would affect their voting.

Dr. Bolliger's argument was that, whatever their remaining ties with the Homeland, the Swiss abroad were conditioned by their surroundings and could not really live and feel as the Swiss at home on national issues. Among various examples, he screened a chart showing the variations of calorific and animal protein intake among populations of the world and argued that even such considerations had a bearing on behaviour, particularly political behaviour, not forgetting that some of our compatriots overseas live on a very different diet. Regarding the problem of information, the Speaker illustrated his point mentioning the case of personal colleagues who had proved their ignorance of the second reading in the Commons, a bill altering local government boundaries. He underlined the implications of a similar law in Switzerland in taking as example the uproar which moving Biesfelden from Basle-Country to Basle-Town would create. The Swiss abroad would more often than not be unaware of the importance of such a law, and would therefore not really be fit to vote on it. Dr. Bolliger said that national political activity, which he considered as one of

the main themes of daily conversation in Switzerland, could not possibly carry the same interest abroad.

During the lively discussion that followed, the general consensus of the meeting proved to be very much in support of Dr. Bolliger's point of view, and several speakers rose to state that they had more interest in British current affairs. Nevertheless, the problem of information on Swiss matters was raised forcefully and it was recalled that the “Swiss Observer” would soon be conveying official and more detailed information from Berne.

The attendance was particularly important and there were about 40 members and guests present.

(PMB)

Press Attache in Saigon

Mr. Carlo Jagmetti, Press Attache at the Swiss Embassy in London, has left his post for a two month stint at the Embassy in Saigon, where he is to fill a temporary vacancy. We wish him an interesting—but hopefully not too eventful assignment. Mrs. Jagmetti will remain in London with her children. We hope that their long wait will not be too trying.

(PMB)

Swiss school reported in the Guardian

The *Guardian* of 24th October had a feature on *Noah's Ark*, a charitable trust devoted to the care and education of severely retarded children, founded and run by our compatriot *Miss Alice Hoffman de Visme*, whose venture we reported in the “Swiss Observer” of 23rd July, 1971.



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The article, written by Maureen O' Connor, points out that the children under Miss Hoffman's care have all been rejected by other institutions “ostensibly designed to help them” and expresses tremendous admiration for the love of her small and proficient staff.

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IMPORTANT CHANGES IN THE STRUCTURE OF THE SOLIDARITY FUND

At the General Meeting of the Solidarity Fund of the Swiss Abroad (Berne, August 1972), the Council presented a plan of proposed changes in the structure of the Fund, which should be passed at the AGM next August and put into force in 1974.

The main change is that members will have a chance of not only increasing their contributions, and thus their benefits in case of need, but that they should also forego their interest in favour of solidarity.

The new system visualises a member estimating himself what he would want to receive in case of loss or livelihood through political strife or war. This cash payment ranges from Fr. 2,500 to Fr. 50,000. Once he has decided on the figure, he has three possibilities: a) a single annual contribution (hundred-fold payment in case of need), b) double (fifty-fold payment) c) four-fold contribution (twenty-five-fold payment). Under a) one has to pay 24 years until one may have a 100% repayment of the contributions, under b) one pays 10 years and under c) five years. Now, if one remains a member after the required number of years, repayment may amount to 135% and more.

Two examples: Mr. X pays Fr. 200 annually for 20 years, total Fr. 4,000. At the end of that time he receives back Fr. 4,920. Yet all the time, he remains insured against loss of livelihood. In such an event, he would be paid an additional Fr. 10,000.

Mr. Y pays an annual contribution of Fr. 400 for 20 years; total Fr. 8,000. At the end of this period, repayment would amount to Fr. 11,120. Should he meet with misfortune according to the rules, he would not only get his payment contracted for, but an additional Fr. 10,000.