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EDITORIAL

This special issue of the "Swiss Observer" may probably come as a complete surprise to many of our subscribers and is probably a first contact for many new readers who may never have heard of us. It has been prepared jointly with the Secretariat for the Swiss Abroad and the Political Department in Berne and sent to every Swiss family in the British Isles. The circulation of this number is therefore very much larger than usual.

First of all, I should like to extend a warm welcome to all new readers and take this opportunity of introducing the "Swiss Observer" to them. Our publication was founded in 1919 thanks to the initiative of a patriotic Swiss of London. Despite a World War and the varying fortunes of the Swiss Colony as a whole, this publication has managed to appear regularly for over fifty years. This has been possible thanks to the support of many faithful readers and advertisers.

Our purpose is to try and give a picture of Swiss events in Britain and at home. How did this partnership with the authorities in Berne come about? As you probably know, the Swiss people agreed in a Referendum held in 1966 to add an Article (45-bis) to the Federal Constitution opening the way for closer links between the Swiss population abroad and the Motherland. This Article also provided for eventual legislation on the rights and duties of Swiss abroad.

Meeting in Berne last September, the 50th Assembly of the Swiss abroad devoted its session to the question of whether to give political rights to Swiss abroad. While the idea of allowing Swiss residents abroad to vote on national issues seems fraught with unsurmountable difficulties, the next best way of keeping their relations with their country of origin alive is to develop the exchange of information on Switzerland.

The "Swiss Observer" seemed an appropriate medium. Our aims being very similar, we have decided to carry out the experiment of jointly producing this special issue with the authorities in Berne.

Special quarterly magazines sponsored by Berne have already been sent for some time to all the Swiss residents of French- and German-speaking countries. The present issue of the "Swiss Observer" is the first of a planned series of quarterly issues, which, it is hoped, will be mailed to all the Swiss living in English-speaking countries.

In this age of shrinking distances and cultural integration, one may ask whether a publication such as ours serves a useful purpose. After all, Britain has just joined the Common Market and we all belong to one continent. One may perhaps question the relevance of a publication helping to preserve Swiss individuality abroad. I for one believe that the very uniformity of the modern world is a

good reason for keeping a live interest in one's cultural and national background.

Hoping that those of you who are not subscribers might be interested in receiving our publication, we have enclosed a subscription form. Do not think that we are a club with well-established traditions and habits. Our purpose is to serve the Swiss community in Britain. So if you have ideas on what the "Swiss Observer" should be, please let us know. We shall be pleased to publish any letters from readers wishing to air their views.

Pierre-Michel Béguin

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INFORMATION



In 1967, the Secretariat of the Swiss Abroad sent a questionnaire on information to all Swiss communities outside Switzerland.

At the Assembly of the Swiss Abroad in the same year in Lugano, an augmented Commission devoted a session to this very important subject. Soon afterwards, a sub-commission was appointed under the chairmanship of Dr. L. Guisan with the mandate to study the question of how to improve information channels and to find ways and means to reach all Swiss abroad.

The present special issue of the "Swiss Observer" is the result. As in German-, French- and Italian-speaking communities.

Where the information scheme is already working, the local periodical is used. The scheme is sponsored by the Federal Political Department in conjunction with the Secretariat of the Swiss Abroad in Berne. A small Executive was formed consisting of Monsieur le Ministre M. Jaccard (centre), and Mr. C. Borel (right) of the Federal Political Department and Mr. L. Paillard (left) representing the Secretariat of the Swiss Abroad in Berne.