

# Do we now bid the "Brissago" adieu?

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# DO WE NOW BID THE "BRISSAGO" ADIEU?

On the 18th February next the sovereign Swiss people will be called upon to decide on the "initiative", which calls for the proscription of all "publicity favouring any addiction-forming products". The intention of the promoters is to curb among other things tobacco smoking, the taking of drugs and in general any other manufactured products inducing harmful addiction.

To inform public opinion in preparation for this popular decision taking, one of the Canton of Ticino's oldest industrial units, the *Fabbrica de Tabacchi in Brissago*, makers of that best known of Swiss cigars, the "Brissago", have just relayed some particulars concerning their activities to the Swiss press.

Since the venture was started in the first half of the nineteenth century at the lakeside township of Brissago, close to the Italian border, it has known a steady progress. Its present annual production is some 20 million of these thin, straw-centred cigars, which if set out on the ground side by side will make a tobacco trail from the Ticino to Baghdad.

From the beginning the Brissago has been made from the large, dark leaf of the Hickory variety of tobacco grown in the USA states of

Virginia and Kentucky. It may surprise most smokers that in the manufacture of this cigar wine, alongside tobacco, is an important raw material. But this is true: each year some 60,000 to 70,000 litres (say about 15,000 gallons) of white wine (produce of the Spanish province of Tarragona, owing to its peculiar flavour) are used to provide the "dressing", warmed over a log fire in accordance with an ancient, secret recipe. This "dressing" is then put between the filling and the covering leaves of tobacco so as to give the Brissago its original flavour.

The third element in the manufacture is likewise a natural product: it is the stem of the Spanish esparto ("lupinella") grass, which has been dried in the sun.

The enveloping of this characteristic straw in the damp tobacco leaves, which in their turn are enclosed in the "dressed" covering leaf forms the climax of the manufacturing process. It is necessary to soften the tobacco to free it of its bitter taste by washing and dry spinning. But this is not all. Lastly each cigar, whether made by hand or machine has to be dried, cooled sprinkled with wine, and stored before being put on sale after three months.

The manufacture of the Bris-

sago makes up 75% of the turnover of the *Fabbrica di Tabacchi di Brissago*. Its other products are the "Toscanelli", a short, stump cigar, pipe tobacco and snuff. The firm employs 200 operatives, 80% being women. More than half of these come in daily from Italy across the border.

Being the region's only industrial unit, the *Fabbrica di Tabacchi* is of vital importance to the whole of the lakeside area, when one considers that its annual production is of the value of 3.5 million Swiss francs. Furthermore, its pension fund of 4.2 million, which is managed separately from the firm — whose share capital is 3 million francs — ensures the welfare of the workforce.

Now, should the ideologically inspired "initiative" succeed, its consequences are likely to cause serious concern also to the remaining "Ticinese" tobacco growing and manufacturing industries, but indirectly the ripples will in due course affect the package manufacturers and printers, the post office and the railways, who carry the finished products, and finally the State, who would lose the excise tax. The *Fabbrica de Tabacchi* alone last year contributed over 700,000 francs in rates and taxes (the latter going to the AVS (old age pensions)). J.E.

*Editor's footnote:— At the time of going to press the outcome of this vote was still unknown. Many Swiss, both at home and expatriot, will doubtless take more than a passing interest in the result. The Brissago is almost one of our national emblems. We thank Mr. Eusebio for this interesting piece. George Sommer.*

## THE PROPOSED NEW FEDERAL CONSTITUTION

At the next Assembly of the Swiss Abroad at Porrentruy from 24th to 26th August, the main theme will be "The New Federal Constitution and the Swiss Abroad". In view of this, the President of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad, National Councillor Dr. Alfred Weber, has asked the Swiss communities outside Switzerland to send their views to the Secretariat in Berne through their societies, so that these could be taken into account when preparing the plenary session of the Assembly next summer.

There were two meetings on 18th January, one in London organised by the *Nouvelle Société Helvétique*, and one in Manchester called by the Swiss Club there. Both were in conjunction with the Federation of Swiss Societies in the United Kingdom, the President, Mr. B. Simon, attending the meeting in Manchester, the Vice-President, Mr. E. Tangemann, the one in London. The two delegates to the Commission of the Swiss Abroad, Dr. Alex

Lang in Manchester, and Mrs. Mariann Meier in London, introduced the subject, and their reports will be sent to Berne as requested.

As a basis for discussion, apart from the actual draft constitution, the two speakers used a report by Prof. Broggin, the two resolutions issued at the Assembly at Einsiedeln regarding a special Article for the Swiss Abroad and the citizenship of children born to Swiss mothers married to foreigners resident abroad, as well as a questionnaire.

Since detailed reports will be published after the Assembly at Porrentruy, it should suffice today to summarize the discussions as follows: a revision is only advocated if it does not weaken the democratic state of Switzerland, and that there are many omissions and new proposals which are not immediately acceptable. A special Article for the Swiss abroad similar to the one in the present Constitution should again be included. With regard to the citizenship question, the general

feeling was that this should be granted to children of Swiss mothers married to foreign fathers, but that it should not be automatic.

Although the rail strike interfered with attendance numbers, the tenor of the discussions in London corresponded remarkably with that of previous meetings organised on both subjects.

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### IN MEMORIAM

**On 22nd January, 1979 Dorothy Anna Alberti, passed peacefully away in her 81st year, at 15 Spring Gardens, Malvern Link, Worcs. The cremation took place at Worcester at 3 p.m. Monday, 29th January.**