

A helpful fund

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If you're thinking of returning to Switzerland

"FROM long experience we know that a Swiss citizen abroad who intends to return home has to plan his repatriation very carefully if he is to be spared unpleasant surprises."

That was the theme of a talk given in Manchester last month by Mr Benito Invernizzi, manager of the Berne-based Solidarity Fund for the Swiss Abroad.

And he added: "It is well known that things often turn out different to what one expects and there can be many disappointments."

In the case of a young married couple with children of school age, although children were generally able to adapt more easily to new surroundings than their parents there could be problems because of the differences in the two countries' educational systems.

Individual educational establishments had the right to accept or reject foreign examination certificates, and in some cases entrance exams would have to be taken in one of the Swiss national languages.

If either the father or the mother had Swiss citizenship there would be no difficulty in obtaining a residence permit, although certain formalities would have to be carried out. They were not included in the very restricted quota of foreign immigrants, neither were they likely to have problems in finding

work.

But registration with the civil authority in the new place of residence had to be done within a fortnight. And those liable to do military service had to register with the military authorities within eight days. A young man under the age of 21 might find himself ordered to go to a recruiting school.

Turning to the Swiss labour market, Mr Invernizzi said the latest figures showed unemployment had increased, so it was vitally important to investigate the situation beforehand, unless there was the firm offer of a job in Switzerland.

However, despite the warning about more unemployment, the figure quoted by Mr Invernizzi turned out to be very modest compared to the situation in Britain – just 0.4 per cent!

Certainly a qualified worker under the age of 40 would have little difficulty in finding a good

position, providing he wasn't a watchmaker moving to the Bernese Jura, where a number of watch factories had closed down.

On the commercial side there were plenty of opportunities, especially for managers. Single people would find things easier than couples, not least because of the housing situation, which could cause problems in urban areas.

The Federal Office of Industry, Trade and Labour was ready to assist people from abroad in finding jobs.

The best advice for anyone contemplating returning to Switzerland was not to hand in their notice until they had found a new job.

For older people wanting to return to their homeland to retire their main worries were over matters relating to old age and sickness insurance.

Switzerland had signed an agreement with Britain and many

other countries which gave greater security to Swiss citizens overseas because it meant their pension could be paid in Switzerland.

Those who had contributed to the Swiss insurance scheme would be entitled to the benefits of this as well as their British pension. However if the period over which contributions had been paid was not the same as that of a compatriot in Switzerland of the same age, then only a partial pension would be paid.

Mr Invernizzi's final world of advice: "Remember that in changing from one country to another you need a great deal of patience and good humour."

● *Because so many of our readers are concerned about the problems they might have to face on their return to Switzerland, the Swiss Observer is to start a series of detailed articles describing the pitfalls – and how they can be overcome.*

THE HELPFUL FUND

IN Northern Ireland a Swiss who had an electrical business there received immediate payment of lump sum compensation from the Solidarity Fund for the Swiss Abroad when a bomb planted by the IRA destroyed his shop.

This example was given by Mr Invernizzi to counter the view held by many people in the United Kingdom that they were

so far removed from political unrest that they did not need the same financial protection as their less-fortunate compatriots in more unsettled countries.

The fact remains that since the fund was launched nearly 24 years ago it has paid out Sfr. 6,520,000 to 486 members – mainly in Africa, where 430 members received a total of

Sfr. 5,505,000.

In Europe only eight members have benefitted, to the tune of just Sfr. 60,000. Yet of the fund's 10,585 members, 7,528 live in Europe.

Mr Invernizzi said that it was the only cooperative organisation for Swiss residents abroad whose activities stretched out to every country in the world.

The man of prayer and meditation

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exposed to you – the nakedness of crime, the weakness of poverty, the defenceless back of your enemy.

"And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil." Brother Klaus did not seem to see temptation in sex but in the "Kiss of Judas", in his frustrated public life, betrayed by foe and friend, even by his eldest son. This can turn you away from God in bitterness. May it open the way into the heart of God. This is deliverance from evil.

The handcuffs on the picture point to the daily practice:

Freedom and bondage; I am a prisoner; a culprit and have no right to accuse the other. I can set him free. How? I must find out for myself.

The symbols of the four evangelists – at the same time the symbols of the four elements – simply express that this truth represents the four pillars of the world and the Gospel of Christ.

Thus the meditation of Brother Klaus is not an escape from the world but a direct confrontation with its problems. Though meditation does give insight and opens the inner eye for truth, if it is not practised in the body it remains sterile. Both in combina-

tion will change a world.

If a catholic theologian in April 1981 could say over the Swiss Radio: "I am convinced that it is of no help to make people better Christians. The system is at fault and we have to change that", Brother Klaus would shake his head and send him home to do penance for saying such a nonsense.

"Why", he would ask, "do you accuse the people near and far? Are you afraid of becoming a tool in God's hand through prayer and self-discipline?"

And there is something else. There is a lot of talk about "experience". Brother Klaus had

plenty of it. It was the integration of experience into his entire life, its assimilation with hard discipline that gave it value and helped him to become the man he was.

He has walked the way, put down the signposts which we can safely follow without being shattered through terrible experiences as he was. Do not go for religious experience if you can avoid it.

There is no short cut. Prayer and daily practice is, after all, not a luxury for pious people but a necessity for anyone who wants to become truly human.

To be continued