

"Fifth Switzerland" : the "Parliament of the Swiss abroad" in session : Lugano, 25th August 1967

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"FIFTH SWITZERLAND"

THE "PARLIAMENT OF THE SWISS ABROAD" IN SESSION

Lugano, 25th August 1967

Twice a year, the Commission of the Swiss Abroad meet to discuss problems affecting the Swiss communities outside Switzerland. Created by the Nouvelle Societe Helvetique, the Commission and the Secretariat in Berne are the two most important bodies directly concerned with the well-being of compatriots living outside Swiss boundaries. In 51 years, the **Auslandschweizerwerk** has earned the thanks of the Swiss abroad and the respect of the authorities at home.

The Commission consists of 21 inland members, 48 elected members and deputies and 13 co-opted members from outside Switzerland. The value of this "Parliament" of the Swiss Abroad lies above all in the fact that it is a non-governmental organisation. The more interest we Swiss abroad take in its activities, the more support we give it, the more secure and independent it will remain. Its achievements are well known; we should just like to recall the success in getting the military exemption levy partly abolished for Swiss citizens abroad, in cancelling the obligation of procuring a permit to purchase property in Switzerland and, only last autumn, in getting an Article expressly concerning the **Auslandschweizer** anchored in the Swiss Constitution.

One of the most important functions of the Organisation is to advise the authorities on matters directly affecting the Swiss abroad. At present, this concerns the new **Reglement Consulaire** drafted by the federal authorities and submitted to the Commission for consideration.

At the meeting in Lugano, the delegates discussed the relevant articles, and there was a lively debate. The **Reglement** refers to the competence of Swiss diplomatic missions and consular posts, their relations both with the federal authorities and the countries to which they are accredited. It defines their jurisdiction, their part in looking after Swiss concerns and protection of foreign interests. It covers registration of Swiss nationals, Swiss nationality and marriage contracts, confirmation of signatures, legalisation of documents, attestations, certificates and archives. But it was the articles concerning the relation of Embassies and Consulates with the Colonies, which was of special interest to the Commission, a possible help to existing Colony newspapers and periodicals in communities where Embassy or Consulates do not send out bulletins. The old problem of reaching the "isolated" Swiss was brought up, and ways and means were suggested for submission to the Department concerned, whose representatives Minister F. Bieri (Chief of Department for Administrative Con-

cerns) and Monsieur M. Jaccard (Chief of Section for Matters concerning the Swiss Abroad), were present. Their comments were non-committal, especially to the question of making addresses known to Swiss institutions and periodicals; great circumspection had to be used in this matter.

Another point which caused some discussion was what was considered "failing in one's duties as a Swiss citizen". Who was to judge? Clarification was required. No discussion ensued with regard to assistance to private Swiss citizens deprived of their liberty, nor concerning dual nationals or letters of protection, State functions, and the various other duties assigned to an Embassy or Consulate. Under registration, the difficulty was pointed out of making all Swiss, especially the young ones, register on arrival in a foreign country. This instruction clearly set out in the passport is, unfortunately, not adhered to sufficiently. Some questions were asked with regard to deposits, the safe keeping of wills and other relevant matters.

Suggestions and comments are now being sent to the Federal Political Department, so that they can be considered when the new **Reglement** is issued. It will replace the one of 1923; since then, two new international conventions have necessitated a revision. The new one will contain only 35 articles as compared to 104 previously.

The delegates — a total of well over 40 members and deputies — then discussed matters concerning the expansion of the organisation as a whole. More Swiss societies, especially farther afield outside Europe, should be encouraged to join the **Auslandsweizer-organisation** and to organise themselves in regional groups with direct representation on the Commission.

Another matter of importance brought up was the organisation of the Secretariat in Berne. This has for some time been without a director, which has been found little satisfactory, especially by some of the more active communities abroad, whilst fully appreciating the valuable work done by the staff. The Commission was informed that a suitable candidate was on the point of being engaged. Members left the appointment in the hands of the Executive Committee of the Commission, trusting that the right choice would be made, which would relieve the President of some of the work.

The Solidarity Fund and its desirable and much-needed expansion were debated. In order to remain independent, it needs more members to spread the risks more evenly.

The spring meeting of the Commission was fixed for 9th March in Berne. The next Assembly of the Swiss Abroad should take place in either Schaffhausen or Vevey/Montreux at the end of August 1968. The theme suggested is "The Young Swiss Abroad and their Relationship with Switzerland". The Youth Service has done some excellent work, especially with their

summer and winter camps, and it is felt that the young Swiss have a valuable contribution to make.

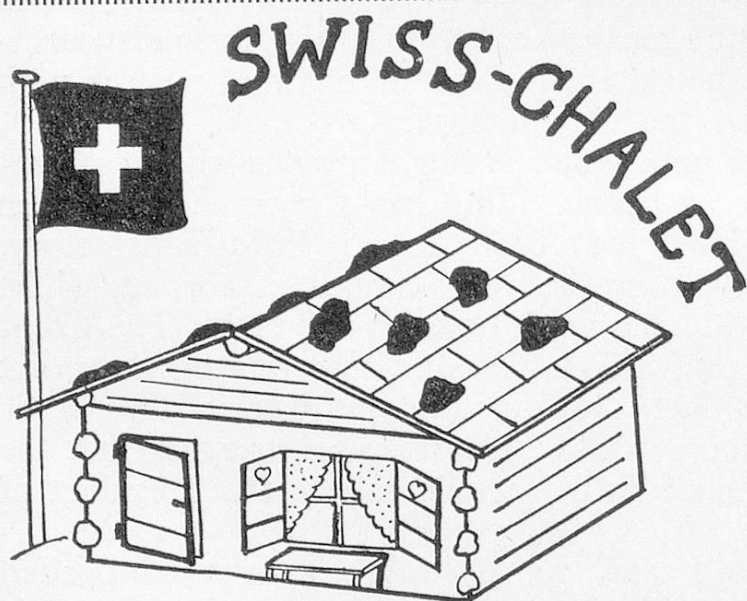
Two pleas voiced at the end of the meeting were for more consideration to be given to the Italian language (by a French-speaking member) and for records of Swiss church bells and of the National Anthem, both to be available for First of August Celebrations.

—The Swiss Observer

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OSKAR RECK, NEWLY ELECTED PRESIDENT OF THE NOUVELLE SOCIETE HELVETIQUE SPEAKS OUT AT THE ASSEMBLY OF THE SWISS ABROAD

The foreign observer of Switzerland who follows her policy and her publicity, cannot help getting ambiguous impressions. Whether, in the end, he forms a pessimistic or confident opinion depends largely on the choice which he makes from amongst a host of contradictory statements. He is mistaken, however, if he thinks that the difficulty of evaluation is only the consequence of distance. The multitude of open criticism is the expression of doubts and spreading uncertainty also inside Switzerland. It is true that we live with an unshakable order of things and on an



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