Hedy's corner

Objekttyp: **Group**

Zeitschrift: **Helvetia : magazine of the Swiss Society of New Zealand**

Band (Jahr): **37 (1973)**

Heft [11]

PDF erstellt am: **29.05.2024**

★ HEDY'S CORNER

Mrs Heidi Munam, née Oettli, is on holiday staying with her parents in Hamilton and has kindly consented to write an article about schooling in Sarawak, Borneo and it is with great pleasure that I am able to print her article in this issue. No doubt it will give many of us food for thought. Mrs Munam is well qualified to give her opinion on schooling as she is teacher of English in the senior high school classes. She is Swiss-born, New Zealand-trained post-primary teacher who has taught for eight years in Sarawak.

Barefoot to School

Those among the senior readers of this paper who went to school barefoot had better watch out — in some parts of the world that's still the accepted way of getting there. In the rural areas of Sarawak (a state of Malaysia in Borneo), for instance, the few boys who own shoes would think twice before wearing them to school. In fact, the physical effort of getting there is never considered (ever heard of a prospective sharemilker who wouldn't take on a new farm because "the kids would have to walk half a mile to catch the school bus"?) If it involves half an hour's paddling morning and night that's just too bad. A lunch of half an enamel bucket of cold rice is carried along over jungle paths and through the steep mountains. Primary school children may have to live many days' walk away from their own homes in the school boarding house, if they are lucky to get a place.

They are the lucky ones who can go to school. Theoretically, of course, everybody should go. Primary education is free or at any rate there are no direct school fees. But many paddi farmers simply cannot afford the cost of equipping all of their children with decent clothes (uniforms exist but aren't insisted on in rural schools), buying their textbooks and writing materials. If a parent can manage he will usually send his eldest son to school, though as often as not the elder brothers contribute towards sending the youngest. This makes sense in a large family — if the youngest is educated to get a job, he will not need an overly large share of the family land when it comes to dividing it up.

At the end of primary six, there is an examination. Those who pass it get to secondary school, the great majority of the rest finish their formal education at this point. After form three another half gets sieved out in the Sarawak Junior Examination, and those who manage to hang on till form five sit for the Senior Cambridge Certificate. That is as far as most schoolboys and girls get, and very happy they are to obtain a pass in the SCC, as it means a good chance of getting the most coveted prize — a Government job.