

Journée des Suisses a l'étranger

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JOURNEE DES SUISSES A L'ETRANGER.**Basle Basle 31st — September 2nd.**

This annual conference of delegates and representative members of Swiss Colonies has become an event of growing importance. The Federal authorities are showing their active interest by sending a host of top-level officials of all the departments concerned — political, economic, insurance, legal, etc. — while M. Petitpierre himself attends whenever possible. He has done so regularly since he has become the head of the Political Department, and this year was no exception. Quite a number of parliamentarians make it a point year by year to attend the journée in order to hear at first hand the problems, views and wishes of the colonies. The press is always heavily represented and devotes ever increasing space to the discussions of their compatriots abroad and the radio service does the same in all languages, with the result that public opinion in Switzerland is fully acquainted with these proceedings.

The practical effect of these meetings and their influence at home are of course only very slow in materialising. Nevertheless quite positive results can already be shown and are beginning to mature in all directions. The most definite success so far has been achieved in the field of the *reform of the law of Swiss citizenship*, the "Bürgerrechtsreform". Two years ago the Swiss abroad were invited to discuss amongst themselves the main questions of this reform and to let the authorities know their views. A first draft bill paid much attention to these views, but fell short of our wishes in important respects. Renewed study and representations from the colonies resulted in a revised and improved draft, which however was again strongly criticised at last year's journée. The contradictory views presented by the delegates from our colony on that occasion had the happy sequel of a reconsideration by our Presidents' Assembly and the unanimous support of the more far-reaching demand that a Swiss girl marrying a foreigner should lose her nationality only by her own request. The final draft-bill submitted to Parliament by the Federal Council does not go quite so far, but satisfies most of the reasonable requests made by the Swiss abroad.

The Swiss woman marrying a foreigner can accord to this draft at least remain Swiss if she declares her wish to that effect in a suitable form. By concurrence of the Swiss abroad the principle has been adopted that from the second generation born abroad the con-

tinuance of Swiss nationality requires at least the registration at a Swiss consulate in each case. But the period is extended according to our suggestion to the 22nd year of life and the possibilities of re-acquiring Swiss nationality are much eased in such cases, as well as in favour of Swiss women married to foreigners — and their children. Re-acquisition is granted without residence in Switzerland, an act of justice to those of slender means.

It was no exaggeration of the Chairman of the Journée and the Commission des Suisses à l'Etranger, Dr. H. P. Zschokke, to claim that an excellent piece of legislation has been achieved for the first time in full consultation with the Swiss abroad. It has yet to be accepted by Parliament, but the chances are bright and time presses, because the bill must be enacted before the end of next year, when the emergency powers of the Government in these matters cease.

Our Colony was this year again represented at the Journée by Dr. H. W. Egli, Miss Alice Gretener, Vice-Consul Jakob Huber (Manchester), Prof. Jean Inebnit (Leeds), M. Alfred Renou and Mr. A. F. Suter. It was a modest representation besides the masses of delegates from Germany, France, Italy and Austria. But the institution of a special session "especially for the Swiss overseas and in Great Britain" ensured us a good hearing.

The financial declaration adopted by our Presidents' Assembly was received with special interest by governmental representatives because negotiations to end double taxation and related matters are impending, while the other points raised concerning transfers

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and new insurances may be attended to as occasion arises when negotiating new payments agreements.

Dr. Egli brought up the question of the thousands of young *Swiss girls coming here* annually, not knowing under what conditions they have to live, what work is expected of them, some not intending to work properly either. He quoted Miss Wolfer's sober report on her invaluable activity in caring for the girls in trouble to illustrate the necessity of more care being taken by parents before allowing their daughters to come here, and the need of a suitable *pied-à-terre* being established in London, to provide for these young Swiss an attractive back-ground as an aid to the maintenance of their pride and integrity in this vast city far from home. It is not excluded that some financial help from Switzerland might be forthcoming, but without some tangible help and interest from the Colony the problem can hardly be tackled satisfactorily. Mr. A. F. Suter seconded the warning to girls intending to come here in domestic service or as mother's help.

In the general session to discuss *ways and means for strengthening the colonies abroad* the main contribution from England was the declaration of our President's Assembly culminating in an appeal to all Swiss firms, organisations and authorities to take every opportunity for putting Swiss into positions abroad, especially also in the higher posts where the employment of other Swiss can best be ensured. The text of this, as well as the financial declaration of our Presidents Assembly has previously been released and widely published in Switzerland. It was commended by speakers from other colonies as pointing to the most essential prerequisite for the rejuvenation of the older colonies. Practical results, however, will be slow in maturing and require continued reiteration of the appeal.

In introducing the subject of this declaration Dr. Egli took the opportunity to express a long felt disapproval among delegates from England and other countries of the perennial demands of our *repatriated compatriots from Germany* for reparation of their losses as a matter of right. We Swiss abroad have no such claim against our homeland, he maintained, but only an exception that those in distress may be helped adequately to make a modest living. This demand should be entirely dissociated from the mythical "Washington millions".

Unfortunately the Chairman did not call up a seconder to follow up the exposition of our general declaration — the first speaker having inadvertently

gone too much into details — but Prof. Inebnit gained a chance to plead for a more understanding and even more modest and polite *attitude of the Swiss at home* towards the less fortunate or merely different visitor from other countries, for reciprocity in granting labour permits and also for a less materialist attitude amongst emigrants or would-be-emigrants, who should be prepared to give as well as to take. This gentle admonition in terms of Prof. Inebnit's masterly and good-humoured, but always thoughtful oratory was taken in good stead and specially noticed in the press reports. His opposition in a special session for French-speaking Swiss to the idea of a *mutual fund of insurance* against losses in war, on the ground that such insurance might weaken the determination to safeguard the peace, left his hearers more bewildered. The suggestion for an insurance finds, of course, more favour in Colonies where the problem of war damage has remained unsolved. It will be further pursued by them, without much chance of realisation.

All speakers were unanimous in praising the work of the Commission of experts with its wealth of useful recommendations based on the expressed views of the Swiss abroad and not least of our own Colony.

Warm thanks for the increasing success of these conferences are due, of course, in the first place to the indefatigable Chairman, Dr. Zschokke, and the splendid work of the *Secrétariat des Suisses à l'Etranger*, under the direction of Melle Briod and Dr. Mörgeli, whom we were delighted to see so well restored from his serious accident last winter. Our gratitude should also be expressed to the authorities at Basle for their hospitality at the Rathaus and the Ratskeller, to the Council of Basle-land for the contribution of some Kirsch at the farewell dinner, which was fittingly concluded by a charming and warm-hearted speech of greeting to the Colonies by our old friend General Guisan.

Dr. E.

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