

Switzerland's Short-Wave Voice of Democracy

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A PROMOTION AT THE SWISS LEGATION.

We are delighted to hear, that Dr. V. Umbricht, Commercial Attaché at the Swiss Legation, has recently been promoted to the rank of Counsellor of Legation and we are extending to him our heartiest congratulations.

Since his arrival in London, Dr. Umbricht has taken a great interest in the life of the Colony, and his frequent and always interesting addresses to the members of the Swiss Economic Council and the Swiss Mercantile Society have been greatly appreciated.

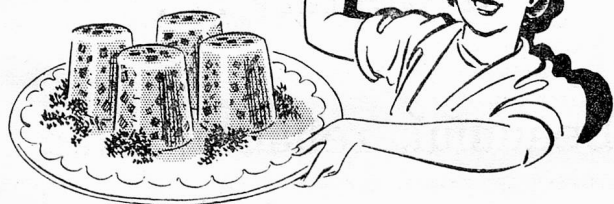
Dr. Umbricht, who hails from the canton of Aargau, studied juris prudence at the Universities of Berne, Paris and Lausanne and took his doctor's degree at the University of Berne. Having acquired the patent as an advocate he received an appointment as clerk of the court (Gerichtsschreiber) at the Tribunal in Baden.

In 1941, M. Umbricht entered the Diplomatic Service, and was sent to Ankara in the capacity of Commercial Attaché for the Middle East. He was transferred to London in March, 1946, where for the last five years he has been in charge of financial affairs. In this office, he took part in all negotiations concerning the Anglo-Swiss Trade agreements and in addition he has attended a number of International Conferences both in this country and abroad.

We take this opportunity to mention, that Dr. Umbricht won an International Scholarship for a dissertation on International Law.

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SWITZERLAND'S SHORT-WAVE VOICE OF DEMOCRACY.

(This article is reproduced from the December 28th, 1951, issue of the "European Radio" by courtesy of the Editor.)

Switzerland, whose neutrality is historically recognised, perhaps because of that very fact, is attracting an increasing number of listeners to the work being done by a handful of Swiss in a business building in the old, arcaded Neuengasse in Berne, capital of the Swiss Confederation.

This group comprises the short-wave service of the Swiss radio system. Unlike the British Broadcasting Corporation and the Voice of America, Switzerland's busy Kurzwellendienst is neither Government-owned or Government-sponsored. No directive reaches it from the green-domed Parliament Building just across town. Yet Swiss short-wave is to-day one of the most important of the voices of democracy — in some ways more important than those emanating from the United States of Great Britain. For Switzerland publicly proclaims that she has no political axe to grind, that she seeks neither war nor gain and that, because of fear that her neutrality might be impinged upon, has even refused up to now to consider joining the United Nations.

The impartial observer is always respected, and the growing success of Swiss short-wave radio in its self-appointed task of "telling the story of Switzerland to the world" is proof enough that Switzerland's traditional dislike of the melodramatic approach can pay off.

For Switzerland's voice, if quietly pitched is strong and penetrating. Nowadays, SBC broadcasts to the majority of the world's peoples twenty-four hours a day in seven languages. In addition, the regular medium-wave Swiss broadcasts are picked up throughout Europe as well as in the British Isles.

Characteristically, the voice of Switzerland started out not in any sense as a propaganda venture but solely to be of assistance to Swiss living abroad. During World War Two when Swiss abroad including Swiss official personnel were cut off from their homeland, the fledgling short-wave service in Berne decided to set up a radio link. Broadcasts of news and music were beamed at any part of the globe where Swiss were known to be living.

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On lonely Pacific islands, Swiss consuls or business men could turn on their radio and hear the voice of home in French, German or Italian, for all three are Switzerland's official tongues.

As it became apparent that others as well as native-born Swiss were listening to SBC's short-wave service, the members of the Berne staff became aware of their increasingly important task, and the service was increased to its present intensity to become an accepted neutral voice among all the discordant voices of the world.

The story told to the globe's radio-listeners remains simple; that Switzerland is one of Europe's oldest democracies, that voting is free and without intimidation that there is neither religious nor racial persecution, that Switzerland has shared in most non-political international agencies aimed at helping mankind, that Switzerland works hard for a living, takes no foreign aid, maintains one of the world's two hardest currencies, lives in the shadow of a permanent export drive, is the homeland of one of the world's most precise crafts, that of making watches.

But the radio technicians in the Neuengasse do more than that; interspersed are Swiss songs and dances, reports of Swiss events in the fields of sport, art and human progress, descriptions of some of the great scenic vistas comprised within the nation's narrow boundaries.

To Birmingham and Bangkok, to Sacramento and Saskatchewan, to Trieste and Turkey go anecdotes of the great Parsenn run for skiers at Davos; of the lofty Matterhorn; of the tiny Italianate villages of the Ticino and the watchmaking communities of the long Jura range.

The only connection the Swiss Government has with radio is that the Department of Post, Telephone and Telegraph undertakes to collect the licence fees and turn them over to the Swiss Broadcasting Corporation. At that point governmental interference ends. Theoretically anyone else could set up a similar system in competition and it is not legally impossible, if they wish for the Swiss to have the original Government concession changed and to embrace sponsored radio on the American pattern.

Swiss broadcasting on a national scale dates back to 1931 when the Swiss Broadcasting Company was founded. Seven separate organizations combined to form the company; Radio Geneva, Radio Lausanne, Radio Zurich, Radio Basel, Radio Berne, The Eastern

Swiss Radio Society in St. Gall and the Co-operative Society for Radio Broadcasting at Bellinzona in the Italian-speaking canton of Ticino.

These various associations were representative of given regions and, in forming the Swiss Broadcasting Corporation, they all brought their own operating rules into conformity with the Corporation's agreement with the Government which had granted it its original licence to operate.

The result is that Swiss radio for home listeners now broadcasts regularly every day, in all three official languages as well as, less frequently, in the little-known tongue, Romansch, which is spoken in the Grisons. A separate transmitter serves each language group; for the French the transmitter at Sottens, for the German-speaking group that of Beromunster and for the Ticinesi the transmitter of Monte Ceneri on the southern slope of the Alps. Because Monte Ceneri is separated from the rest of the nation by the great Alpine massif, it is sometimes said that it can be picked up more easily in Africa than in Berne.

Broadcasting itself is done by six studios located in Geneva, Lausanne, Berne, Zurich, Basel and Lugano. Because the transmitters are powerful, these local broadcasts are widely heard beyond Switzerland's frontiers.

Swiss radio has few taboos, but those which exist, carefully established in the original government concession, are enlightening for non-Swiss to contemplate. They are but two: Swiss radio may not carry either religious or political propaganda. That is to say, Swiss radio may remain a forum for learning, a means of hearing good music, a channel for receiving light entertainment or unslanted news broadcasts. But no politician can advocate over Swiss airwaves his political panacea.

Though radio in Switzerland is not an agency of the government, it is regarded as a national responsibility. Its true masters are the people themselves who pay twenty Swiss francs (about thirty-five shillings) per year for the privilege of maintaining it.

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