

The first of August Speech : by H. E. The Swiss Ambassador Monsieur Armin Daeniker

Autor(en): **[s.n.]**

Objektyp: **Article**

Zeitschrift: **The Swiss observer : the journal of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK**

Band (Jahr): **- (1961)**

Heft 1391

PDF erstellt am: **29.04.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-690988>

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The Swiss Observer

FOUNDED IN 1919 BY PAUL F. BOEHRINGER.

The Official Organ of the Swiss Colony in Great Britain

Advisory Council: R. DE CINTRA (*Chairman*), O. F. BOEHRINGER, J. EUSEBIO, GOTTFRIED KELLER, R. J. KELLER, A. KUNZ, A. STAUFFER, G. E. SUTER.

EDITED BY P. HOFSTETTER WITH THE CO-OPERATION OF MEMBERS OF THE SWISS COLONY IN GREAT BRITAIN.

Telephone: CLERKENWELL 2321/2.

Published Twice Monthly at 23, LEONARD STREET, E.C.2.

Telegrams: FREPRINCO, LONDON.

Vol. 47. No. 1391

FRIDAY, 11th AUGUST, 1961

PRICE 11d.

THE FIRST OF AUGUST SPEECH

by

H. E. The Swiss Ambassador Monsieur Armin Daeniker

Dear Compatriots and Friends,

It gives me great pleasure to greet such an important and representative gathering of compatriots assembled here to celebrate together, with uplifted spirits, our national day. We are all glad to welcome in our midst His Worship the Mayor of Wimbledon and Mrs. Corbishley, the Deputy Mayor and Mrs. Waller, and we feel most grateful that once again they have been so kind as to lend us their magnificent Town Hall for this patriotic function.

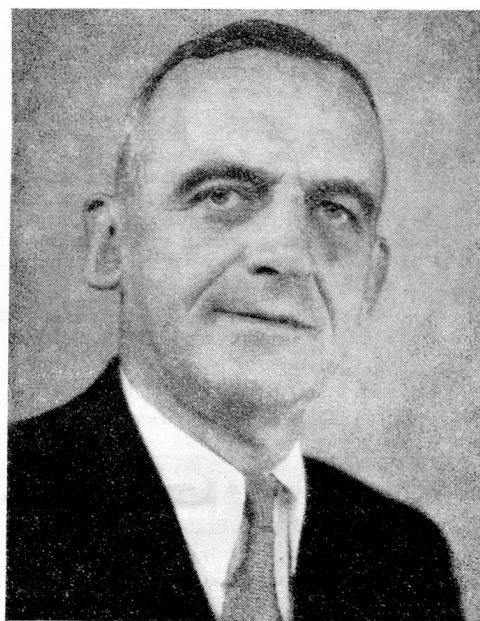
Only a very few days ago I came back from Switzerland, where I was fortunate enough to meet our President. He sends to you all his patriotic greetings and best wishes for the success of our celebration.

The impression of the holidays which I spent in our home country is still fresh, and I have in my mind a vivid picture of those sunny valleys where they are now gathering a rich harvest, and of the thick carpets of lovely Alpine flowers on the mountain slopes. This makes me realize once more what tremendous resources for healthy and invigorating recreation we possess in these mountain regions. Let us hope that the younger generation, too, will be conscious of the treasures which bountiful nature offers to us all, and that the greatest possible number of our compatriots abroad will be able to profit from such unique opportunities.

Our economy at home is still in the middle of a most unprecedented boom, with every prospect of further expansion in all fields. From a purely individual point of view, conditions could not be better. Yet our authorities are fully aware of the perils and risks which such a state of continued prosperity and overstrained employment brings in its train. It is as disquieting to find that industrial expansion is tending to encroach on our agriculture and its manpower, which are so essential for our survival, as to note the ever-increasing influx of foreign workers, whom we shall never be able to assimilate.

There is a further problem, European integration, which — as you know — is causing very great concern to our authorities and to wide circles of the population. A country situated in the heart of the Continent, and so closely linked with its European neighbours, cannot keep indifferent or stand aloof from present endeavours to forge our continent into a more compact unit. An ever-widening rift dividing the western world could have almost fatal

consequences for our economy. As a country which so largely depends on its exports, we have always been in the forefront of those who strive for the liberalization of international trade within the framework of a European Free Trade Area. Whatever may be the ultimate solution of this problem, we could never accept a position which would force us to sacrifice the traditional institutions from which, for centuries, we have drawn our strength: the



H.E. The Swiss Ambassador Monsieur Armin Daeniker

freedom to decide, in complete independence, the questions which we consider vital for our national life, and to follow a strictly neutral course. Thus we shall have to be prepared for any eventuality, ready to take decisions of momentous importance, such as we have hardly ever been called upon to make in normal peace-time; to consider even, if necessary, the possibility of temporary isolation and voluntary recession. But our position in the world is such

that we need not be afraid of the future and shall be able to choose our course with full confidence in our intrinsic strength.

The proceeds of the sale of the badges which we so proudly wear on our breasts on this auspicious day will not this year go towards any form of social work. This time they will quite rightly be reserved for the furtherance of various cultural activities. Among these, the need has been felt for a closer elucidation of the social conditions of the period when the Confederation was founded. A renewed effort will be made to unveil the mystery of the legends surrounding the events of those times, and to throw more light on the way of life of the people; to establish the identity and trace the families of those who swore the original pact or later perished in the battles for the defence of their newly won freedom. Such a gigantic task of historiography cannot be left to private initiative, nor should it be financed from public funds. It is only fitting



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that the Swiss people themselves should provide the means, and these badges will therefore be sold for this worthy cause.

Thus this laudable enterprise links us to those who concluded the first pact 670 years ago. It will give to our younger generation a fuller understanding of their historic deed. At the time they were hardly conscious to what end it would lead. Indeed, it was not the fact alone to rise in defence of their rights and freedoms which gave the pact its importance, but their agreement to found their resistance on a common solidary basis, giving them strength and resolution, and binding the destiny of each partner to the common cause. No future difference was to divide them which could not be solved peacefully, by arbitration. In this way they sowed the seed of an ever-growing and lasting state organization; always ready to sanction and defend their bond with their life-blood, they were not afraid to face isolation, to fight against superior enemies and to consolidate their unity on the battle fields.

If our present times are no less perilous and full of uncertain risks and cunning designs, let us then keep in our minds this glorious example and brave, with confidence, in a spirit of true solidarity and readiness for any sacrifice, whatever the future may have in store for our generation.

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