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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. J. KELLER (Chairman), GOTTFRIED KELLER (Vice-Chairman), O. F. BOEHRINGER, J. EUSEBIO, A. KUNZ, G. E. SUTER

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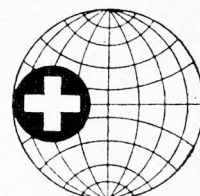
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1966 THE YEAR OF "FIFTH SWITZERLAND"

THE BEGINNINGS OF THE LONDON GROUP OF THE N.S.H.



June 1916 — the great powers were engaged in a ghastly war: the Germans had made the offensive at Verdun, the Allies were on the point of taking the initiative in the first Battle of the Somme. The great, but indecisive battle of Jutland had just been fought, the Italian Army had brought to a halt the Austro-Hungarian attack on the Tyrol, and the Russians under Brussiloff had begun their offensive on the Eastern front. The British mourned Lord Kitchener who had lost his life when the cruiser "Hampshire" sank off the Orkneys. In England, the coalition government was rapidly sinking in public esteem, and in a few months Lloyd George was to be Prime Minister.

That then was the background against which the London Group of the Nouvelle Société Helvétique was brought into being.

Life had been easy and pleasant for the Swiss living in Great Britain during the Victorian and Edwardian eras. There was plenty of work for anyone who cared to settle here, and the relationship between the two countries was one of friendship and mutual respect. During the war, the attitude changed. An ever-influential press became hostile towards aliens. The reputation of the Swiss underwent a change, and many were suspected of being pro-German. This attitude caused alarm in the Colony as well as to the authorities at home.

Already on 17th February 1915, Mr. Jean Baer, President of the Consistoire of the Eglise Suisse wrote a letter to the President of the City Swiss Club, in which he suggested a new organisation which would work for "une meilleure entente" between the Swiss and the British. The Swiss name had to be defended against suspicion and injurious attacks, and it was necessary to collaborate in order to re-gain the precious friendship of the Anglo-Saxon peoples.

In other societies, such as the Union Helvetia and the Swiss Mercantile Society, similar proposals were formulated. There were at that time already fourteen Swiss organisations in London.

And then when tension was at its highest, one of the founders of the Nouvelle Société Helvétique in Switzerland in 1914, Prof. Dr. Georges Bonnard of Lausanne came to London on a study tour. He gave a talk at the Swiss Institute at Ashburton Hall, Red Lion Square on 12th May 1916, at which the Swiss Minister Monsieur Carlin was present. His address on "La Nouvelle Société Helvétique, son but et son œuvre" stirred his audience to such an extent that a "Comité d'Initiative" was formed the

same day, and about 200 Swiss citizens put their names on the list. The assembly entrusted nineteen delegates with the preparatory work for the foundation of a London Group of the N.S.H.

The nineteen names included the presidents of ten Swiss organisations (Société de Secours Mutuels, City Swiss Club, Schweizerbund, Unione Ticinese, Union Helvetia, Swiss Mercantile Society, Swiss Gymnastic Society, Swiss Institute, Swiss Bible Class and the Eglise Suisse) and nine individuals, amongst them A. Baume, H. Joss, Theo Ritter, Pastor Hoffmann and Jack Pfaendler.

On 23rd May, the determination to found the group was re-affirmed at another meeting. The committee sent a printed circular to all Swiss in Great Britain.

On 8th June, the "Comité d'Initiative" under the chairmanship of Mr. Baer and with Mr. C. Campart acting as Honorary Secretary, declared as founded the London Group of the New Helvetic Society. A general assembly was called for 7th July, which elected Mr. Baer President. The constitution was accepted, and a programme of action and the employment of a permanent secretary decided upon.

The first lecture in November that year was delivered by Monsieur le pasteur René Hoffmann-de Visme on "La Réformation et l'Idée de la Liberté". Other talks followed on topics like "The Neutrality of Switzerland", "Pour l'Indépendance Intellectuelle Suisse", "Nationality and Naturalisation according to British and Swiss Law", "Historic Relations between Switzerland and Great Britain", "Défense Economique Suisse", etc. Members of the N.S.H. also gave talks to other Swiss and many British organisations.

Dr. Arnold Laett became the first full-time paid secretary on 5th May 1917. The first office was at 28 Red Lion Square, W.C.1. At that time, there were 266 members. Already two years later, membership reached 600, not counting provincial groups.

In two years, the committee held forty meetings, the Council (which included a delegate from each society) met once a month. During the same period, members gathered for seven discussions and twenty-five lectures, as well as for the annual general meetings. The first two discussions were attended by a dozen members, but already for the third and fourth, the large hall at Ashburton House was needed, and later the meetings took place in the Steinway Hall which had room for 500 people.

A first typist was engaged in 1917, a second one a year later, and a second secretary was contemplated inspite

of over forty voluntary helpers. Some sixty articles were written for the Swiss press, and records reveal that over 200 articles, communiqués, corrections, etc., were sent to the British press during the first two years. The Group subscribed to sixteen periodicals and was sent free of charge another twenty-five. Within the two years, the library grew to over 300 volumes.

The Group worked in close co-operation with the authorities at home and the Swiss organisations in the United Kingdom. The British Government gave them all facilities with regard to censorship, war time travelling and documentation, and invited members to join journalists in their visits to the industrial front, internment camps, etc. Amongst the records of the N.S.H. is a letter from John Buchan at the Foreign Office, in which he says "I am particularly glad to see that while your Society wishes to cultivate a strong national Swiss spirit, it also intends to do all that is possible to bring about a complete understanding between the British and Swiss peoples".

Activities of the Group included efforts in favour of University Exchanges, finding Swiss correspondents for English papers, the formation of a study commission on economic and commercial questions (in conjunction with the S.M.S.), of founding other N.S.H. Groups, etc. And finally, it was instrumental in creating in Switzerland the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad.

The work done in those early years was of vital importance for Switzerland. To what extent the authorities in Switzerland appreciated the activities of the London Group of the N.S.H. and its Secretary was reflected in the fact that the Federal Military Department in Berne granted Dr. Laett exemption from military service, an unusual concession at that time.

In 1919, a few influential members of the N.S.H. and the City Swiss Club gathered round Mr. Paul F. Boehringer of the Frederick Printing Company and launched the project of a new paper for the whole Swiss Colony in Great Britain. The "Swiss Observer" came into being, and Dr. Laett was invited to be the first Editor, an honorary office which he could combine with his work as Secretary of the N.S.H.

That then was the beginning of the London Group of the Nouvelle Société Helvétique. Its founders were united by "la malice du temps". They left a great and solid foundation which, though shaken during a difficult period after the last war, was strong enough to survive. For the founders, the group's activities were a means of growing closer to the national, cultural, moral and intellectual life of Switzerland, of strengthening the image of the homeland in the British Isles.

The Society today is different as are the circumstances in which its work is being carried on. In many ways it is more difficult, but the ideals are the same.

PRO HELVETICA DIGNITATE AC SECURITATE MM

We have since been informed by Mr. J. Zimmermann that the above-mentioned study group on economic questions was started by the Swiss Mercantile Society in conjunction with the City Swiss Club already in 1915. Later, the N.S.H. took an active part in the Commission's work which was mainly to study the desirability of a Swiss Chamber of Commerce. The outcome was the appointment of a Commercial Attaché at the Swiss Legation.

The Commission carried on until 1918. Mr. Zimmermann was its Secretary and a founder member of the N.S.H. We should be glad to hear from any other founder members still alive.

APPOINTMENTS

The Federal Council has appointed Minister Dr. Paul Jolles, Delegate for Trade Agreements, as Director of the *Eidgenössische Handelsabteilung*;

Minister Dr. iur. Albert Weitnauer as Delegate for Trade Agreements and Special Missions, with the title of Ambassador;

Ambassador Anton Ganz (USSR) as Ambassador to Algeria;

Dr. August Lindt (Delegate for Technical Co-operation) as Ambassador to USSR;

Ambassador Marcuard (Algeria) as Delegate for Technical Co-operation at the Federal Political Department;

Monsieur Henri Monfrini (Regional Representative for UNO Development Programme in Gabon and Central African Republic) as Ambassador to the Ivory Coast;

Ambassador Jean Humbert (Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Salvador) has also been accredited to Panama;

Consul-General Othmar Rist (Istanbul) as Consul-General in Bombay;

Consul Fritz Albrecht (Bregenz) as Consul-General in Istanbul;

Dr. Georg Stucki (resident in Libya) as Honorary Consul at the new Swiss Consulate in Tripolis;

Federal Judge André Panchaud as Swiss representative at the International Court in the Hague, in succession to Prof. Georges Sauserhall;

Dipl. Ing. agr. Friedrich Friedli, Schaffhausen, as new Director of the Trafipro Co-operative Society in Rwanda;

Charles Hummel as General-Secretary of the Swiss UNESCO Commission at the EPD.

The new American Ambassador to Switzerland is Mr. John S. Hayes (O.B.E. and other war decorations), journalist by profession, President of the Executive Committee of "Washington Post".

Hans Haeberli, Herzogenbuchsee well-known aviation pioneer has been made a General of the Bolivian Air Force. [A.T.S.]

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

Among many distinguished visitors to Switzerland during the past couple of months were the President of the Republic of Liberia, Mr. Tubman, and the Israeli President of State Mr. Salman Shasar. Various Ministers also visited Switzerland, the Israeli Foreign and PTT Ministers, the Under Secretary of State of the Italian Foreign Ministry and the Danish Minister of Culture. The British Minister of State Roy Mason visited the Nuclex Exhibition in Basle and the British Carpet Exhibition in Zurich. The Secretary-General of the Council of Europe Mr. Peter Smithers paid an official visit to Berne, and the Mayor of Rotterdam honoured Basle with a visit. Parliamentary delegations of the German *Bundestag*, the Bavarian *Landtag* and 175 Mayors from Baden went to Switzerland, the latter group to the Thurgau.

Two high dignitaries of the German Church spent a holiday at Pontresina, Cardinal Frings, Archbishop of Cologne, and *Weihbischof* Cleven from Cologne. Cardinal Beran, Archbishop of Prague, visited several Swiss towns, whilst the Archbishop of Tripolis and the Lebanon spent a short visit at Crans. The Italian philanthropist and social reformer Danilo Dolci visited Switzerland earlier in the summer. Thirty-five sons and daughters of Japanese hotel owners have spent three months as *stagiaires* in Swiss hotels. [A.T.S.]