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The story of Adrian Keller

ADRIAN KELLER, the son of Swiss parents, was born in Budapest in the year 1918. After his schooling in Hungary he worked in his father's firm — a paper factory. 1948 the Communists gained the upper hand in Hungary and deprived the Kellers of their property. Adrian escaped to Switzerland — penniless — but soon found employment in a shoe shop. 1949 he re-emigrates to Tunisia, where he tries his luck in the dairy business. Our compatriot succeeds. The products of his dairy are in demand and gain a reputation all over Tunisia. 1956 Tunisia becomes independent from France. Many Frenchmen return home and Adrian Keller loses a large part of his customers. To make up for it he has to seek Government contracts. He is again successful. 1959 the Solidarity Fund of the Swiss Abroad is established. Adrian Keller and his wife join it promptly. 1961 the Bizerta crisis breaks out. Keller's dairy has to be closed down for the time being. After the crisis our compatriot tries hard to save his business — but in vain! It is lost. Adrian Keller, now aged 44, has his own family to care for and takes it with him returning to Switzerland. As in 1948 he is penniless, having lost everything. Will he be forced to accept whatever he can find to earn his family's bare keep? To gain a little time and courage for a new start Adrian Keller needs some temporary assistance for himself and his family.

This is how the true story of our compatriot is depicted in a special issue in English of the Echo, the magazine for Swiss abroad published by the Secretariat of the Swiss Abroad in Berne. In this report we also learn that Adrian Keller received help from the

Solidarity Fund of the Swiss Abroad

He and his wife, who is also a member, received F.20,000 — between them (£1666). Thus, a new start was assured. It was not charity; the Kellers had a legitimate claim on the Fund thanks to their foresight in joining it in good time.

The Solidarity Fund was founded in 1958 and began its activities early the following year. In his

Address to the Assembly of the Swiss Abroad

at Sion last August, Dr. E. R. Froelich, the President of the Fund, said that it seemed the Fund had been established "five minutes to zero hour." For no sooner had it begun to function than a great number of compatriots lost their livelihood, and applications began to pour in.

So far the Fund has been able to meet all its commitments out of its own reserves. Dr. Froelich reported that the great event in 1962 was the guarantee the Swiss Confederation gave to the Fund

(Ausfallsgarantie). Not only did the National Council and the Council of States accept the proposals, but in many ways they even improved on them. Both Councils agreed to the guarantee unanimously, surely a clear demonstration of the sense of solidarity of the homeland with us Swiss abroad.

More and more countries get involved in strife and upheavals, and the desire for security grows. This justifiable selfish need for security, Dr. Froelich said, was joined by the nobler altruistic wish to help others. In uncertain times one was more inclined to forgo the interest on savings in order to help compatriots in need. That was the basis on which the Solidarity Fund was founded. He appealed to all Swiss abroad to join before it was too late. It may be later than one thinks, and one must not forget that there is a qualifying time of one year before any payments can be made. Also at Sion, the

Delegates' Meeting

of the Solidarity Fund took place at which some forty members represented several countries. The delegate for Great Britain, Mrs Mariann Meier, had been elected at the Assembly of Presidents of Swiss Societies in Great Britain in March, in succession to her husband, the late Mr Walter Meier. Her deputy is Mr Roland Asch, Hon. Treasurer of the Nouvelle Societe Helvetique (London Group). Great Britain had, up to the end of 1961, only 160 members out of a total of then nearly 4200. This is a minute number considering that there are 8786 Swiss registered at the Swiss Embassy and the Consulates, to which may be added 4540 registered double nationals. 160 out of 13,326 is only 1.2%. Looking at the list of members as it stood at the end of the last year, countries in which trouble has been brewing naturally show the highest percentage. Apart from 100% participation in Mauretania, where there is only one registered Swiss and he belongs to the Fund, Egypt and Tunisia, Bolivia, Mali, East Africa and Algeria show the highest of membership in percentage.

267,628 Swiss are registered at Embassies, Legations and Consulates, and out of these 4191 were members of the Solidarity Fund on 31st December 1961. It stands to reason that many more could and should join. In fact, since the beginning of this year another 900 have joined.

The Director of the Secretariat of the Swiss Abroad, Dr. H. J. Halbheer, who looks after the affairs of the Fund, reported mid-August that 43 applications for compensation had been received during the previous year, of which 31 had been accepted. Nearly all the remaining dozen had to be refused because the qualifying year had not passed between joining the Fund and loss of livelihood. It is not surprising that two-thirds of the members who received a

grant came from Egypt, Algeria and Tunisia. But it was not only from Africa that applications were received — one came from Cuba, one from Eastern Germany and one from Greece.

In an article in the "Neue Zürcher Zeitung" of 17th August, Dr. Halbheer gave several

Typical Examples

of Swiss losing their livelihood through no fault of their own. The picture is a sad one. Many hostess countries suddenly became most inhospitable to foreign residents. In Eastern Germany a Swiss owner of a food shop was sent to prison for selling food to Swiss nationals. His shop had to be closed and he was forced to give up the cattle he owned to an agricultural co-operative society. Having thus lost all his property he returned to Switzerland.

A Swiss in Algiers was fined 10,000 N.F. by the OAS without reason, and after his brother-in-law had been murdered he escaped. In Morocco a publishing firm was closed because the Swiss editor and shareholder had dared to criticise the finance policy of the Government.

Many more examples were given. Dr. Halbheer particularly stressed the difficulties the Swiss experienced on their return to Switzerland. To start afresh when no longer young was particularly hard.

Already a month earlier, the "Neue Zürcher Zeitung" published an article on the Solidarity Fund by Dr. Walter Linsmayer. He called it "Bread also for our Brethren." This title referred to the campaign, "Bread for Brethren," which has been so successfully carried out in Switzerland as a contribution towards the "Free the World from Hunger Year." The author gives a clear picture of the fate of Swiss nationals getting into trouble abroad through no fault of their own. The Confederation alone had paid some 325 million francs for Swiss abroad who had been hit by the two wars. A further 40 million francs or more were given by the Cantons and Communes, and some 12 million from private sources. Yet all this help was not satisfactory, as it looked too much like charity. And now the Swiss abroad themselves had created this Solidarity Fund of which they could be justly proud.

Up to 1st September 1962 Fr.605,000.—have been paid out to suffering compatriots. This represents the effort of solidarity of 5086 members within three years — indeed

A Remarkable Achievement

In the special issue of the Echo the Fund is described as "Co-operative society of Swiss Nationals living abroad for their mutual assistance in cases of loss of livelihood." Every Swiss citizen of twenty and over (no upper age limit), man or woman, can join, but also every Swiss Society abroad and every Swiss firm.

It costs as little as Fr.25.— (just over £2) to buy a share, and you agree to pay an annual savings deposit of between Fr.25.— and 300.—, plus an 8% annual contribution to cover administrative expenses. Thus, the minimum cost of becoming a member is Fr.52.— in the first year and Fr.27.— subsequently. Single life contributions are also possible. This is one of the improvements which have recently been made. Amongst them are collective membership and above all the raising of the annual savings deposit from Fr.100.— to Fr.300.—.

A lump sum of one hundred times the amount of your annual savings deposit would be paid to you if you lost, through no fault of your own, the material basis of your livelihood abroad due to war, internal disorders (such as in Algeria and the Congo) or to the enforcement of measures on general political grounds (such as in Egypt and Cuba). So your compensation according to your annual savings deposit would amount to a minimum of Fr.2,500.— or as much as Fr.30,000.—.

It would not be charity — the compensation would be yours as a matter of right. Your savings deposits are administered by the Swiss Confederation at a fixed rate of interest. At the age of 65 you may demand the return of your deposit or most of it according to the age at which you joined the Fund.

If you joined before age 35 you get your deposits back 100 per cent. If you joined above 35 the refund ranges between 60 and 98 per cent according to a scale based on the duration of your membership.

If you return to Switzerland before age 65 you may also demand an immediate return of a considerable part of your deposits.

Your act of solidarity is that you forgo your interest and that personal sacrifice enables the Fund to help the less fortunate members, farmers, merchants, mechanics, directors, housewives, teachers, scientists, hotel owners and employees, journalists and brokers — all of whom have to rebuild an existence for their families.

The Solidarity Fund is a sound proposition. Its principal virtues are:

- the payment of lump sum compensation fixed in advance;
- no lengthy and complicated examination of damage suffered;
- savings deposits at home in hard Swiss francs;
- solidarity of the Swiss abroad amongst themselves;
- solidarity of the homeland with the Swiss abroad.

We Swiss in New Zealand are lucky enough to live under stable economic and political conditions. But the safer we are the more we should feel compelled to join in the true Swiss tradition of "one for all, all for one."