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Autor: Imhoof, Werner
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SWITZERLAND'S GOOD SERVICES IN THE CARIBBEAN

By WERNER IMHOOF

The following is one of the despatches of the *Neue Zuercher Zeitung's* correspondent in Washington wrote during a recent visit to Havana to observe the airlifting of Cuban refugees to the United States in action.

SWITZERLAND'S representation of American interests in Cuba was dramatised by the part Ambassador Emil Stadelhofer and his team played in the Varadero-Miami airlift. The task confronting the Swiss mission in Havana certainly exceeds the ordinary, not only with respect with quantity, but also with respect to quality. Its very special character is due to the special relationship between the United States and Cuba which, against the background of geology and history, manifests itself in a pronounced ambivalence of feelings on both sides. Be it positively or negatively—the one has always regarded the other with the liveliest interest. The ties linking the two are far stronger than merely economic, even though these are the most evident, at present above all in the discontinuation of the supply of parts for long-worn out products of American industry in Cuba—cars, industrial machinery, household appliances. They encompass, rather the entire Cuban system of values which is basically North American, at least as regards civilisation and technology—though not, of course, politics at the present moment. Every day the visitor here is confronted with fresh proof of the fact that the Cubans are pursuing aims and emulating examples set “over there,” now as before.

Tasks Large and Small

The special role played by Switzerland in representing American interests therefore consists in a thousand larger and smaller services whose purpose it is to bridge the unnatural gap that now exists between the two countries. Aside from the United States, Switzerland here also represents Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Columbia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras and Venezuela, whose interests in Cuba may be called “normal.” The “American sector” accounts for ninety per cent of the work done by the team which consists of five Swiss officials in addition to the Cuban office workers, under the direction of Councillor of Embassy Arthur Monnier on the fifth floor of the American Embassy building in the Malecon. The work ranges from the issue of thousands

of notary documents to the care of American prisoners in Cuban jails to the organisation of the large-scale exodus to the United States taking place at this time. American fishermen, yachtsmen or divers who have suffered damage at sea. pilots and passengers of planes which were forced to make emergency landings because they had lost their way, must be sent back to the north. A hospital patient in Havana seriously ill may need medicines that can come only from the United States (and is delivered the next day by air lift).

Each of these tasks calls for a number of frequently delicate interventions, quite often by night. The Swiss team is therefore kept extremely busy. The only satisfaction it can derive from this work is the feeling that it is helping effectively and that this will reflect well on the country back home.

The organisation of the air lift has added enormously to the task of the Swiss team. Five additional officials had to be moved to Cuba from the Swiss diplomatic corps in San Francisco, Los Angeles, Mexico City and Lima; they are under the direction of Consul Edwin Steiner of Tangier. Their work does not consist merely in receiving and transmitting lists of people willing to emigrate, but quite often also in humanitarian services. More is involved here than acting the part of a letter-box—or a buffer. Above all the mission calls for a clear concept of the actions and the attitude needed, firmness coupled with flexibility, tact and savoirfaire.

Helvetian Myths in a Latin Country

In Fidel Castro's country Switzerland has become a symbol of freedom. The premier himself is known to be extremely interested in Switzerland and its history. Enormously popular in Cuban television this year has been the programme *Gillermo Tell de la Montana*, an adaptation of Schiller's play which ran five times a week for half an hour, from March to December. Even though it came closer to the American good-guy-bad-guy productions on the Robin Hood or *El Zorro* pattern than Schiller might have wished, at least it did not deal with the Kronstadt uprising or Mao Tse-tung's long march. Actually the soldiers of the Sierra Maestra regard the Swiss Confederates' fight for freedom as a parallel to Cuba's fight against "imperialism." In the new Cuban mythology *la Montana* plays an important role. Perhaps this also explains the personal nature of the remarkable relationship between Fidel Castro and Ambassador Stadelhofer, who is known as *El Suizo* and as such enjoys high standing. That Switzerland should play this role in Havana between two countries of the Western hemisphere is unusual. But it proves that the "special case" of Switzerland can be of benefit in the service of humanity beyond the confines of Europe.