

Zeitschrift: Helvetia : magazine of the Swiss Society of New Zealand
Herausgeber: Swiss Society of New Zealand
Band: 70 (2004)
Heft: [1]

Artikel: News from New Glarus, America's little Switzerland
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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-945156>

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News from New Glarus, America's little Switzerland

In June, New Glarus hosted Sangerfest 2003, the 37th triennial festival of the North American Swiss Singing Alliance (NASSA). If New Glarus' forefathers and foremothers were roaming village streets during this time, they would believe they were back in Canton Glarus as crowds of Swiss people swirled around them!!!

Entertainment was provided by a variety of groups during and after a Swiss Cookout, including the New Glarus Kinderchor, Monroe Swiss Singers, Mannerchor New Glarus and the New Glarus Yodel Club, together with guest Swiss singers Regelchorli.

On Thursday night many of the meals were provided by the New Glarus Hotel and the Chalet Landhaus, and a night of dancing rounded off the opening day of Sangerfest. On Friday morning a "Breakfast on the Farm" was held, with the rest of the day being filled with shopping, tours and festival entertainment. On the Saturday morning the 12 choirs competed for the NASSA Prize Singing Concert (the choirs performed a prepared piece of music), with a grand concert held on the Saturday night with an audience of more than 1,000. There were 325 singers providing the musical entertainment!!!

On Sunday morning an ecumenical service was held at the Swiss United Church of Christ followed by a parade through downtown New Glarus.

The next Sangerfest will be held in Toledo, Ohio in 2006.

Swiss federal elections

Is this the end of the proverbial Swiss political cosiness? It's getting cold in Switzerland, not because of the rapidly approaching winter, but rather as a result of the outcome of the recent elections. The erstwhile model country of economic prosperity and cosy democracy has now been turned into a place of merciless fight for political distribution. For the next four years two distinct blocks will face off and so reshape the political landscape. Whether it involves the social services - health or unemployment - the now stronger left versus the ever more popular Swiss people's party (SVP) they will both be relentlessly at each other's throats. The until-now almost legendary readiness for compromise will surely become a rarity, not least because the two middle parties (CVP and FDP) have hardly enough strength left to mediate. Indeed, they will have to decide which of the two blocks they will support or even join. Yet it is not too hard to expect that they will be trying to position themselves further to the right, not least because both parties have exchanged their liberal-social exponents for neo-liberal hardliners!

Without question the SVP must have a second seat in the Federal Government (Cabinet) and this seat should - must - go to none other than Christoph Blocher. Anyone else will simply not wash with an expectant electorate. The CVP knows it must give up a seat but at this point continues to play for time. Unfortunately the ultimate tone the SVP has been using is not normally part of federal politics, yet a quarter of the electorate preferred just such a tone. The SVP, for decades the political underdog, has in only 10 years risen to the forefront.

The Swiss people's party has had the knack of developing the art of provocation into a form of championship, thereby degrading the other two centre parties to hangers-on. Yet, empty promises don't win three elections in a row. No product can last long term just because the wrapping looks attractive!!! The secret rather lies in the fact that the SVP offers orientation and exudes the sex-appeal of a winner and the leading light in a world that is becoming ever more complex and uncertain.

The party now has to transform its politics into a workable Government programme. But when one listens to the differing opinions uttered lately by Christoph Blocher and Ueli Maurer (Party President) they will have a very hard road to hoe. How can Blocher (a very successful entrepreneur) as a Federal Councillor, who hates the so called "classe politique", revive the "Switzerland Ltd". He will have to reshape the federal finances - an undertaking that last fell to a liberal ex-entrepreneur, who failed. But even a Blocher with all the know-how in the world can't work wonders! He will not only have to transform his political aspirations into a presentable and therefore acceptable option to collegiate he will also have to take into account the renewed force of the Left-Green parties. Whether he, a man used to getting his way, the gulf between claim and reality may well be too wide, is very much in doubt.

The remaining question is whether the Socialist Party (SP) will continue in Government in which now more than ever, it has less than ever, to contribute. Well one thing is certain - ONLY TIME WILL TELL!!!

*Contributed by
Heinz Leuenberger*

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News from the Embassy

Swiss artist in Wellington

The work of one of Switzerland's leading photographers **Reto Camenisch**, will be included in the biennial New Zealand International Arts Festival, taking place from February 27 - March 21, 2004. The exhibition will be opened on **Thursday, March 4 at 5.30pm at Shed 11 (Queens Wharf, Wellington)** by the Swiss Ambassador, H E Mrs Sylvie Matteucci.

This is Reto Camenisch's first New Zealand exhibition, and the images shown will include recent works taken in Europe, the USA and New Zealand, including images from an ongoing project on tattooing. While in New Zealand, he plans to base himself - and work on his photography - for a short while in the South Island.

**The exhibition is open to the public from
March 5-21, 2004.**