

International Education at Geneva

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

Objekttyp: **Article**

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

Band (Jahr): **- (1930)**

Heft 429

PDF erstellt am: **28.04.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-686279>

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International Education at Geneva

The Geneva School of International Studies consists of a university without a faculty. It requires no study but a study by the students of each other and of their lecturers. For, of course, in the absence of a faculty there must be transient lecturers. These lecturers come to the school each summer from many countries. During the last session the students listened to lectures by men from France, Germany, Belgium, England, the United States, Switzerland, Ireland, Sweden, Norway, Estonia, Yugoslavia, India, Finland, Czechoslovakia and Italy.

There are no examinations, a prerequisite to entrance is 15 years of study and examinations. You must be a college graduate to be admitted. Every student in the advanced course of the school must understand and speak French as well as English. If he is from a country other than England and its dominions, the United States or France, that means he must speak at least three languages. That is, of course, essential in a university comprised of students from 36 nations, and where lectures and discussions are conducted, both in French and in English.

This school was begun in 1924 by Prof. Alfred Zimmermann, who is its present director. He started it in September of that year simply as a series of daily lectures on the work of the Council and Assembly of the League of Nations, and in response to the urgent need of guidance for the students and visitors who were wandering aimlessly about the League precincts trying to find out what was going on. The idea proved so popular, 150 students attending this first series of lectures, that Professor Zimmermann decided to organize an eight weeks' school preceding the Assembly. Securing the necessary financial support in the United States he opened the school on this basis in July, 1925. Two hundred students from 10 different nations attended. In 1926 300 students came. In 1927 the students were for the first time divided into two groups, the preparatory and the advanced courses. The advanced course students were required to stay at least a month. About 350 students were enrolled, over 50 per cent. of them being of graduate rank.

In 1929 for the first time the advanced course students were required to stay the full eight weeks and were all of graduate rank. Its enrollment was limited to 125. This number was made up by students from 32 nations. The school became a veritable university by the division of its work into eight weekly periods devoted to these fields: Economic geography, history, economics, law, literature and art, sociology, philosophy and political science. The preparatory course reached its largest enrollment, numbering 325, its work being divided into four two-week periods each of which was a distinct unit of work. A good many of these students stayed for the full eight weeks.

It is a very striking fact that of this total of 450 students, 243 were furnished by the United States. Americans have been in the majority of students in the school from its beginning. This is somewhat paradoxical to the other nationalities represented. They cannot reconcile this intense interest of Americans in international affairs with the foreign policy of the United States. They will tell you quite frankly that Americans are much more energetic in studying these problems than students or peoples from most of the European nations.

A French tutor in the school told me that the French people in general read little about the League and were quite ignorant of its general work. He said there were many nations in Europe where not a tenth as much reading in proportion was done on international affairs as in the United States. The quota of the United States in the advanced course is 30. The other large nations, such as England, Germany, Italy, France, are allowed 10 each, and most of the smaller nations are assigned two to five each. The purpose is to get a representative group of as many nationalities as possible. A majority of the nationalities still come from Europe, but in the past session students came also from Australia, Canada, Chile, China, Egypt, Iraq, India, Palestine, Turkey and the United States. The aim of the school is to get more students from South America and from Asia as soon as possible.

"The school is a laboratory in problems and peoples," says Professor Zimmermann. "We bring the students together to overcome the inhibition they feel in meeting foreigners. Here they come to see that foreigners are merely natural human beings like themselves. The result of this we hope will be the production of a generation of leaders more intelligent and more adaptable than our national leaders have been in the past.

"By understanding each other the students come to understand the points of view and the culture of other nations. Out of such understanding, and out of the training in adapting themselves to the conflicting views of other nationalities, comes the atmosphere in which international negotiation can be successfully con-

ducted. The chief need of modern international education is not more 'good will.' It is the creation of a better understanding of the national mentality and psychology of other peoples, and the development of the ability to adapt concrete situations to those differences.

"It is the almost unanimous opinion of the students that the school is meeting this problem. Before a speaking knowledge of two languages was required, the school tended to break up into national and linguistic groups. With the institution of the rigid language requirement of the past year, national lines were almost completely broken down in the formation of groups and of friendships. But wherever a language weakness appeared national 'clannishness' re-appeared. The intimate intermixture of contacts and friendships is stimulated by the grouping of different nationalities to live together in pensions.

"In the group discussions which are held every afternoon under the guidance of tutors and lecturers, the nationalities are mixed as much as possible. Problems that are loaded with national passions and emotions, and which could not be discussed elsewhere save with heat and rancor, are here discussed with good nature and the bluntest frankness. Professors and other lecturers are constantly amazed at the nature of the problems openly discussed without ill will by nationalities that would be more likely to fight about them elsewhere. Minorities, boundaries, Fascism (there were 10 Fascists in the school last summer), reparations, war guilt, etc.

"Our problem," says Professor Zimmermann, "is to develop leaders who can train peoples in larger groups to discuss in a spirit of friendly co-operation the 'dynamite' problems which we discuss here in perfect friendliness and with complete intellectual honesty in a smaller group. The difficulty of international politics is not insoluble problems. It is impenetrable minds, and one of the greatest factors contributing to the impenetrable minds of to-day is an ignorance of the minds of other peoples. We believe that by furnishing the opportunity for the future negotiations of the world to come into close and intimate contact with other nationalities our school is helping to produce the penetrable minds so necessary for successful international co-operation."

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