

**Zeitschrift:** The Swiss observer : the journal of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK  
**Herausgeber:** Federation of Swiss Societies in the United Kingdom  
**Band:** - (1934)  
**Heft:** 675  
  
**Artikel:** The League of Nations which really works  
**Autor:** [s.n.]  
**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-693521>

### **Nutzungsbedingungen**

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

### **Conditions d'utilisation**

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

### **Terms of use**

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

**Download PDF:** 05.02.2026

**ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>**

## THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS WHICH REALLY WORKS.

If the world needs an example of how it is possible for all countries to work together in harmony for the common good of all, let it look to a little "bureau" in Berne, Switzerland, which controls the international communications of the world.

Here is a League of Nations that really works — that has, in fact, been working quietly and efficiently for over sixty years.

No better illustration of the benefits to be gained from international co-operation could be found. It stands to-day, the one great sane institution in a world of chaos.

The world control of communications began with the formation of the International Postal Union at the Congress of Berne which met in September, 1874.

Before this the dispatch and delivery of mails between foreign countries was a colossal muddle.

The cost of sending letters was high. The charges varied with each country. So did the weights. If you wanted to send a letter from England to Belgrade via France it cost you 5s. per oz. To California via Panama it was 4s. 8d. per half oz.

In some countries, too, the person receiving the letter had to pay an additional charge when it was delivered. So that an Englishman sending a letter to Spain paid 2s. 6d. per half oz., and on top of that the man receiving it had to pay a delivery charge.

To our modern ears, accustomed to cheap postage and reliable and quick deliveries, all this sounds fantastic. And the International Postal Union has brought about the change.

It was in 1874 that the Swiss Government, urged on by Germany, invited the world to send delegates to a conference at Berne to consider postal matters and to form a general postal union of all countries.

The response showed that the world was eager for some kind of reform. Twenty-two countries sent delegates, and these included all the countries of Europe, the United States of America, and Egypt.

At this meeting there was drawn up the first International Postal Convention, which has remained the foundation of the "Union" ever since, with comparatively little alteration.

The world agreed that for "postal" purposes the most sensible and convenient thing to do was to regard all countries as a single territory. This was, and still is, the main principle of the Union, to which every country agrees when it becomes a member.

### Frontiers Ignored.

Nationalities and frontiers have been swept aside. Only one thing matters, the speed and efficiency with which communication services are maintained. When one country is in difficulties through a serious breakdown another country steps in to help.

An instance of that occurred only last June. The submarine cable which carries the telephone lines from London across the North Sea to Holland became damaged. Until it could be repaired "traffic" to Holland was at a standstill.

Belgium was notified, and immediately arrangements were made for all calls to Holland to be diverted via that country. The ordinary submarine cable to Belgium was used for this purpose and from Belgium the calls travelled by land line into Holland.

The service was thus maintained until the repairs were executed — a matter of some days — and maintained so well that telephone subscribers knew nothing of the breakdown.

A second point of agreement is that every member of the Union will transmit the mails of every other member by the best means of transport which it uses for its own letters.

What is even more important because it simplifies postage so much, is that they have fixed the rates to be the same all over the world. So that when you post a letter to any country outside the British Empire you pay the same rate, no matter what part of the world you are sending it to. It costs no more to send a letter to China or Tibet than it does to Paris.

This uniform rate of postage for letters does not apply to air mails, partly because air mails are still in their infancy, partly because the air services which are utilised for mail carrying are privately owned. There is little doubt, however, that a uniform rate will come eventually, just as it has with ordinary mails.

What is more, since the Union has simplified things, the number of letters delivered has increased enormously.

Between them, members of the International Postal Union (and it includes now every country in the world except Albania, Muscat in Arabia, and one or two other small and unimportant states) now deliver some 40 thousand million letters a year.

### Very Few Disputes.

Laws, agreed upon by common consent, have been formulated to cover every other phase of post office work, including the sending of money orders, the registration of letters and parcels, and the size and weight of parcels which may be dispatched by parcel post.

Most questions which arise between any two countries are settled by the countries themselves. But when serious disputes arise which cannot be settled amicably they are referred to an arbitration court. Such disputes, however, seldom occur.

One of the greatest lessons this organisation has to teach the world, is how easily men can carry on international business satisfactorily, efficiently, and without friction, when they are all genuinely interested in a common aim.

The headquarters at Berne, presided over by M. E. Garbani-Nerini, the secretary, deals with all matters affecting all countries. It is constantly in touch with what is happening in the postal world. For instance, if a breakdown occurs in telegraph or telephone cables in, say, Hungary, the Hungarian authorities notify Berne, and Berne notifies the rest of the world.

If a breakdown occurs which will affect the carrying of regular mails, then Berne is told immediately and straight away the Bureau distributes the information.

The Union keeps its members supplied with other information of interest to postal authorities. It keeps statistics and publishes returns. It publishes a monthly magazine which gives the postal news of the world. It supplies lists of steamships for mail carrying purposes, and lists of air services.

When commercial flying began the Postal Union drew up new agreements to cover the new method of transport just as the old agreements covered the carrying of mails by rail, road and steamship.

### They Trust One Another.

Because of the agreements already in existence, as soon as a new air service is opened in any part of any country of the world, it automatically becomes available for carrying the mails of the rest of the world.

As with all other forms of communication, with air mails nationalities and frontiers have no significance. A British letter going by air mail to Batavia in the East Indies, is carried by a Dutch plane from Amsterdam.

Certain charges are made for transport by each country. These charges are fixed by the Union. And the Bureau acts as a clearing house for accounts.

But members of the Union trust each other so well that they only bother to settle their accounts once every five years.

To cover the cost of maintaining the bureau, each member of the Union pays a yearly subscription which varies from £15 to £350, according to the size and importance of the country. The Post Office of Great Britain, as one of the most important countries, contributes the maximum.

The convenience to be gained from being members of the Postal Union was obvious from the start. It began with 22 members. Ten years later, that is, in 1884, 86 countries had joined. By 1900 there were 113, and when China "came in" in 1914 she was the last big country.

As soon as any improved method of transport is adopted by a country, it automatically becomes available for all the letters of the world.

### Businesslike "Parliament"

The Postal Union is run on lines and with a smoothness that might make the League of Nations envious. Its "parliament" meets once every five or six years. The sitting lasts for three or four weeks and is held in the capital of a different country each time. The last one was held in Cairo early this year, the one before that in London in 1929.

Delegates come to it from every member country. They discuss and draw up working plans for every new development in the carrying of mails. They settle scales of charges and the weights for letters, newspapers, and parcels.

The bulk of business they manage to get through is very large. In 1929, 1,800 amendments were considered by the Congress. It is as if the British House of Commons considering 1,800 new bills in a month. The existing "laws" of the Union, too, are always being revised to keep pace with the changing conditions of postal requirements.

The system of international agreement had worked so satisfactorily with mails that when telegrams came the same machinery was used to draw up agreements controlling and developing their international use.

There is a separate bureau to deal with telegraph matters — a younger brother of the Postal Union, housed in the same building at Berne, and founded on the same lines. The last International Telegraph Conference met at Madrid in 1932. It passed new regulations which came into force at the beginning of 1934, reducing the rates of "code" and "urgent" telegrams.

Later when telephones came into general use a bureau was established to deal with telephone matters. All inventions and improvements are pooled for the benefit of the world.

The same thing happened with wireless, but here there was a slight break-away. The International Broadcasting Union decided to have its headquarters in Geneva and not in Berne. It is, however, patterned on the older Postal Union and is inspired by the same ideals.

I have said elsewhere that serious disputes seldom arise in connection with the bureaux which control the communications of the world. This is true. But an interesting case of it is that of Luxembourg over the new wavelengths introduced at the beginning of this year.

The International Broadcasting Union had decided that for the benefit of clear reception all over the world certain changes should be made in the existing wavelengths. All the world abided by the decision except Luxembourg.

### Friendly Help.

The result is that Luxembourg has been outlawed, and in good time the rest of the world will decide how the outlaw shall be dealt with.

It is largely, one might almost say entirely, by the friendly help the postal people give each other in every country that the amazing developments in rapid communication since the war have been made possible.

When you speak on the telephone to Budapest, for example, think of the number of countries your voice has to pass through, the number of exchanges in each country, the number of times the voice must be amplified for it to travel so far, the maintenance of all the lines, exchanges, and equipment in perfect working condition. And then remember that for the call you get in about a quarter of an hour, you must thank the good work of that little bureau in Berne.

### The Passing Show.

## LONDON CHILDREN IN SWITZERLAND. (Notes from my Diary).

The last week at the "Châlet Switzerland" Gwatt.

Sunday, 2nd Sept., 1934. — At Home.

Tempus fugit! I am aware of the fact, of course, but never before have I realised the full significance of the Latin tag. It's true meaning suddenly flashed into my mind early this morning, when I realised that two-thirds of our holiday had sped away. It seemed incredible to me, but the calendar verified the fact, and I knew that calendars never lied — at least not up-to-date ones.

We had Sunday-School by the lake-side this morning, and we were all filled with the peace and calm. We have reason to be thankful for every bit of this truly glorious holiday, and it is a wonderful fact that the Lord does provide in response to prayer and faith.

On Sunday afternoon our visitors arrived. I believe they came from almost every corner of Switzerland, by car and by train. They were relatives who had never seen us children before, and they were interested, of course, to know how we looked. On both sides efforts were made, by speech and gestures, to understand each other.

Monday 3 Sept. — Berne.

The weather was truly glorious and so we set out on our long-deferred visit to Berne. A very smart party we looked. Our berets with the Swiss Cross attracted everybody's attention. We first went by cable-railway to the Gurten, and found it a novel experience. Ahead, the track appeared like a thread of silver climbing the hill-side, while behind the slope almost took our breath away. From the top we had a lovely view of the hills and snow-topped mountains, and in the foreground all Bern was spread out for our inspection. With the unaided eye we could easily distinguish the domed Parliamentary building and the tall spire of the Cathedral.

After a picnic we carried on sightseeing in Berne. Time indeed flies when pleasantly spent! Incidentally, money does too, as the souvenirs we bought testified. We were impressed by many things, but mostly by the bears. To see them stand up with crossed forepaws and beg for carrots surprised and amused everyone. A visit to the chocolate factory, Tobler, made us realize the extensive machinery required for the food which children like most. The fountains in the middle of the streets in Berne, struck my fancy. Each one had a different figure on top. In the Federal Palace we admired to the full the wonderful carvings and the beautiful paintings. The proprietor of the Kornhauskeller had kindly invited us to tea. The band played "Tipperary." By the way, we composed the following wording to this song:

It's a long way back to London,  
It's a long way, to go.  
It's a long way back to London,  
To the sweetest home I know.  
Goodbye! all you mountains,  
Farewell lake so blue.  
It's a long way back to dear old London,  
But we must leave you."