

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: - (1949)
Heft: 1113

Rubrik: Swiss Mercantile Society

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SWISS MERCANTILE SOCIETY.

The Society held its Monthly Meeting at Swiss House on Wednesday, May 11th, with Mr. W. Meier, President, in the Chair.

In a letter from Bienne, Mr. J. J. Boos, briefly reported on the Delegates' Meeting of the S.K.V., held on May 7th and 8th, which he had attended together with Mr. O. Grob, representing the London Section. A detailed report will be given at the next Monthly Meeting.

A telegram, as well as a letter of good wishes signed by all present, was sent to National Councillor Ph. Schmid-Ruedin, General Secretary of the S.K.V., who, it was learnt, had just celebrated his 60th birthday.

The Chairman gave an interesting account of the visit to the College of the Swiss Parliamentary Delegation on the afternoon of the meeting. This memorable occasion is fully reported in another column of the S.O.

As a most fitting sequel, Mr. H. Marfurt, Chef de Cours, addressed the meeting on:— *The College and its Place in the Swiss System of Professional Training.*

Mr. Marfurt said that as was generally known, the main task of the College was to teach English to young Swiss. Its usefulness to Swiss commerce and industry had repeatedly been acknowledged by the competent authorities, or more precisely the "Bundesamt für Industrie, Gewerbe und Arbeit, Sektion für berufliche Ausbildung," popularly known as BIGA.

In order to qualify for the Federal subsidy granted by BIGA, the College had to comply with the requirements laid down for Swiss establishments for professional education. It was not being subsidised as a general language school, but as a continuation school for Swiss who had had commercial training and required a good knowledge of English. It was not, however, a sufficient qualification merely to be engaged in commerce, but successful applicants had to be in possession either of the "Fähigkeitszeugnis für Kaufleute" or of the diploma of a recognised commercial school in Switzerland. Applicants not thus qualified could be admitted if accommodation permitted.

To enable members more fully to appreciate the educational background of the students, Mr. Marfurt continued by giving a general outline of the Swiss system of education as it exists to-day.

The Swiss Constitution leaves elementary and practically also secondary education, on which he dwelt at some length, to the Cantons. The Confederation, he stated, however, had a great deal to say in professional education. Whilst it took no part in the actual training, it laid down the guiding principles and candidates in most professions were required to pass a State examination of a very high standard before being able to practice.

The Federal authorities, he said, had always taken a keen interest in commercial education, due to the immense importance which commerce played in the national economy. For its export and import trade, Switzerland required highly qualified people to go all over the world. For this purpose, it was essential for them to possess a sound general education as well as a good commercial training to enable them to compete successfully with representatives of other nations.

Turning to the S.K.V., Mr. Marfurt stated that it was one of the first bodies to take up professional

education when it started to open continuation schools all over Switzerland towards the end of the last century. At first, these had been supported out of the funds of the various Sections, but in due course the Confederation had been approached for subsidies. Realising the immense importance of professional training, the Confederation reserved the right of exercising a certain amount of control in the training and examining of young *commerçants*. It conferred, however, the honour of examining young people on behalf of the Confederation to the various examining bodies of the S.K.V., the signature of a representative of the Confederation being added to the "Fähigkeitszeugnis," thus giving it official standing.

The S.K.V., he went on, did not stop at that stage. Their members first, and commercially minded people in general, were being given an opportunity of further professional training in languages, accountancy, correspondence, shorthand, etc., for which examinations of a high standard were being held.

This was where the College in London came into the picture. The same authorities which controlled professional education in Switzerland, took an interest in the College in London, through their acquired right of exercising control over the professional training of commercial students by granting a Federal subsidy.

The large majority of students, Mr. Marfurt stated, were keen on learning and eager for a successful business career. They had a certain interest which tended in one direction, a homogeneous group for whom it was not so difficult to cater. There were at present 136 students in attendance, grouped in six classes, the youngest being 19 years of age and the oldest 43. He went on to give details of the syllabus, the qualifications and specialised knowledge and experience of the teaching staff and the subjects they taught. He had distributed among those present a specimen time-table and explained its special features, the latest innovation being tutorial lessons for students who had particular difficulties in one or other subject.

Finally he spoke of the diploma examination, which was only open to students who had reached a certain standard. It was intended to be a severe test so that prospective employers could rely on those possessing a diploma of the S.M.S. to have a thorough knowledge of English.

In conclusion, the Chairman, on behalf of all present, expressed warm thanks to Mr. Marfurt for his most interesting and instructive address, which was endorsed by the meeting with a cordial ovation.

W.B.

