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JOURNÉE DES SUISSES à L'ETRANGER 1950.

Lausanne, September 1st — 3rd.

It was an interesting, stimulating and useful meeting of about 250 delegates from Swiss Colonies abroad, with their proven friends of the Nouvelle Société Helvétique, the Secrétariat des Suisses à l'étranger and other organisations in the home country, as well as numerous representatives of the Federal Authorities, our legations and consulates abroad. The Swiss press also followed the discussions closely and reported on them extensively with much evident sympathy and understanding.

Thanks to the patient endeavours of our friends in Switzerland ever since the first world war, these annual conferences are followed more and more intently at home as the platform par excellence for the Swiss abroad, enabling their problems being freely discussed, their views being brought together and clarified, their wishes, suggestions and complaints being answered on the spot by the heads or experts of the departments concerned.

The journées are rightly considered more and more as the annual parliament of the Swiss abroad. Last year Monsieur Petitpierre, this year Monsieur Rubattel personally followed a good part of the meetings, thus demonstrating the Federal Council's very active interest in our problems. Our Minister, Monsieur Henry de Torrenté also attended part of the journée, interrupting his holidays in the Valais. With particular pleasure, however, was greeted General Guisan who followed the conference from the beginning with close attention and honoured the company on its outing on Sunday to Château Chillon with a moving oration full of understanding for our problems, based on his personal visits to a number of Colonies, including our own.

From the Swiss Colony in the United Kingdom the following took part at the conference : Dr. H. W. Egli and Miss Gretener (N.S.H. London Group), Mr. C. Chapuis (Comité de la Fête Suisse), Mr. A. Renou (Confrérie Vaudoise); Mr. J. Huber, vice-consul, Manchester, and Mr. Merian for the Swiss Club Manchester, and Prof. J. Inebnit for the Swiss Club Leeds and Bradford. Though small in number compared with the delegations from France, Germany and Italy, and lacking cohesion the Swiss from England contributed considerably to the interest of the discussion — not least by taking up opposing views on occasions!

SWISS CITIZENSHIP.

A long debate was devoted to the draft bill for the revision of the law of Swiss citizenship. The first time in our history the Swiss abroad have had an opportunity to take a direct share in influencing a legislative work in the making. Already two years ago the Colonies were invited to make their views known on the subject. The present draft is largely based on the results of this enquiry. It has been sent to all Swiss societies abroad for study and discussion.

It was considered at a recent meeting of the Assembly of Presidents of Swiss Societies in the United Kingdom. The views of the Assembly were communicated officially to the Secrétariat at Berne and repre-

sented at the Journée by Dr. Egli. They were broadly that the Presidents' Assembly was in general satisfied with the changes proposed in the draft, and, though differing from some provisions in détail, it did not wish to make alternative proposals. Unfortunately neither Prof. Inebnit nor Mr. Renou, who spoke later, had attended the Presidents' meeting or informed themselves of its decisions. Both took strong exception to the proposed maintenance of the rule that Swiss women lose their nationality on marriage to a foreigner. At least an option to remain Swiss should be granted, a suggestion which has been made from many other quarters, and which in fact proved to be supported by a large majority of the conference.

Dr. Egli was fortunately in a position to state that the contradiction to the attitude of the Presidents' Assembly was more apparent than real, as the London meeting clearly favoured a most generous and lenient treatment of this as of all other questions, making it for example as easy as possible for the Swiss-born woman to regain Swiss citizenship. The plea advanced by Messieurs Inebnit and Renou was only another, perhaps more decided application of the same principle. If it had been made at the Presidents' meeting in London, Dr. Egli thought, it might even conceivably have prevailed.

There was a fairly general agreement also on the termination of the automatic inheritance of Swiss citizenship with the first generation born abroad. In the second generation some act showing the wish to remain Swiss should be required. Dr. Egli suggested

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that this should be open to the young man or woman beyond the 20th year of age. A plea brought forward by him that appeals against deprivation of Swiss Citizenship should be dealt with, not by the Federal Council, but by the Federal Court of Justice met with general agreement.

OLD AGE INSURANCE.

The other most important matter discussed was again the application of the Old Age and Dependents Insurance to the Swiss abroad. Dr. Egli again insisted that the conditions of insurance for the Swiss abroad should be eased or varied to attract the 90 per cent. who have not joined the scheme. If the premium of 4 per cent. could not be reduced generally to take account of the high taxation abroad, because this branch of the insurance is run at a loss already, why not enable those who stand aloof to join at a specified annual premium, say 350 francs, graduated according to age, which covers the actuarial risks and costs plus a small social contribution to the general fund, no questions being asked about income! It would cost the insurance nothing, it would further the aim of giving every Swiss a nest-egg for old age in Switzerland, it would offer the advantage of low administrative cost along with the ordinary insurance and of transferability of premiums being arranged officially. A first revision of the Insurance Scheme is already under way, it would be simple to add a provision in this sense. The suggestion met with instant interest. Though it was provisionally turned down by a spokesman from Berne, it should be worth while to pursue it further.

OTHER QUESTIONS.

Dr. Egli also reiterated an urgent *appeal to Swiss firms* to use all opportunities to appoint Swiss nationals in their undertakings abroad and as their representatives. A little more courage in this respect should prove to the advantage in the long run to the firms themselves, our country and the Colonies. This plea was supported by Mr. Renou and other speakers and has been echoed in the press.

Our proposal, brought forward two or three years ago, for *voting rights for the Swiss abroad* when on visit in the home-country was again discussed at some length. Though the question has been taken up sympathetically in the Swiss Parliament and recommended to the attention of the Government by both chambers, Mr. Renou who had three years ago warmly supported the idea at a previous journée, took the initiative in disparaging it this time. Dr. Egli made it clear once more that the suggestion merely aimed at a token of confidence being shown the Swiss abroad and at stimulating their interest in following political discussion in Switzerland, not at the exercise of political power. He was the first to recognise that close consultation of the views of the Swiss abroad on questions affecting their interests, such as the law of Citizenship and Old Age Insurance, is far more important for us from the point of view of influencing decisions.

As regards the hoary question of the *military tax* Dr. Egli pleaded that its long reform should be proceeded with independently from the reform of the Federal financial system, which promises to remain in the stage of temporary makeshifts forever. The attention of the conference was drawn to the fact that

the reform in the minds of the Government would bring a doubling or trebling of the rate of tax, though forsaking the crazy tax on expected inheritance. It would be an ironic response to the old plea for modernising the tax. The president of the "Auslandschweizerwerk", Dr. Zschokke, once again advocated courageously the complete exemption of the Swiss abroad from this tax which causes more harm than the returns justify. The demand, again brought forward by several delegations, to allow the Swiss abroad to deduct the "Verrechnungssteuer" from military tax, etc., was supported by Dr. Egli, who also pleaded for special consideration being given to the *transfer of savings and old age pensions* for retirement in the home-country, without being subjected to penal double taxation as unearned income! He also expressed thanks for the help of the organisations in Switzerland in sending *speakers and films* to the Colonies. More films especially, however, should be made available. Mr. Renou thought that more orators of the highest class, such as the General or from Parliament, should be encouraged to go out to the Colonies with their stimulating rhetoric. Finally a suggestion was put forward by several Colonies that Legations and Consulates everywhere should be encouraged to hold annually ceremonial receptions for all young Swiss reaching their majority, welcoming them into the community of responsible citizens, explaining their new rights and duties, and presenting them with some suitable literature. This was supported by Dr. Egli, the N.S.H. having recommended a similar suggestion, brought forward here by Pasteur Reverdin. In reply it was put to us, that the Colonies or societies themselves could organise such ceremonies quite well, where for one reason or another such as distance, the legations or consulates did not do it. Not a bad idea either!

The conference was royally entertained on Saturday evening by the La Chanson de Lausanne known to us from their visit to London a year ago. On Sunday the whole company went on a boat trip to Chillon and the state cellars of Lausanne; They are happy memories. If next year it should prove possible to organise a little more co-operation among the delegates from this country, as has proved possible with the much bigger contingents from other Colonies, then the progressive and idealist views we all share might leave an even deeper impression on our compatriotes at home.

Dr. E.

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