

Swiss National Day celebration : at teh Central Hall, Westminster, S.W.

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SWISS NATIONAL DAY CELEBRATION

1291



1953

at the CENTRAL HALL, WESTMINSTER, S.W.

on SATURDAY, AUGUST 1st, 1953

On some former occasions the anniversary of our country's independence was celebrated by the London Swiss Colony one or two days ahead, in order to make it coincide with a Saturday, so as to give as many as possible a chance to attend.

This year it happily fell on the same day, when our brethren at home were commemorating this important historic event, and many a thought, no doubt, went back to our dear one's at home, who, at the same hour, were gathering together to pay a tribute to our ancestors, who 662 years ago, on the sacred soil of the Rütli, took the solemn oath to stand together in peace and war, in life and death to defend our country's independence if need be with the last drop of their blood.

Last year's celebration was held at a time when the international situation was still a precarious one. In many parts of the world, war was still waging, mistrust, bitterness and hatred cast a deep gloom over mankind.

The dream, that one day we might be able to live our lives in the short span allotted to us, in peace and quietness, and to work together to heal the wounds which two devastating wars have inflicted on us, seemed to be further away than ever.

This year, the position is slightly easier. One war, at least, seems to have come to an end, common sense seems to have prevailed and taught us the lesson, that war with its untold miseries, sacrifices and destruction, is no solution to our troubles, and that Peace alone can bring to this poor world of ours its salvation.

A Peace in which mankind can work together in perfect harmony to better the economic and social conditions and deliver us from constant fear.

This might of course, still be an Utopian dream, time after time we have thought we could see the "silver lining," time after time our hope, that the madness with which some of the statesmen have been imbued with, would come to a close, were dashed.

Humbly today we cast again our eyes heavenwards to seek guidance and enlightenment, and like our forefathers centuries ago, we will bend our knees and fold our hands to ask God Almighty to inspire us with that love towards each other which passes all understanding. He alone can give us that Peace which millions of our fellowmen all over the globe so ardently desire.

* * *

The programme of this year's 1st of August celebration varied little from those presented in the post war period. The attendance which was in the neighbourhood of 1,700 can be called satisfactory.

In more affluent days we were lucky enough to possess an orchestra, which was a great asset to the Colony, and which brought a welcome diversion to a performance which has become a little drab and monotonous. This is, of course, not the fault of the organisers. Professional Swiss artists who have in the past generously given their support, have either left us, or can not afford anymore to give their services free of charge. More and more we are getting dependant on "imported" help, which, although appreciated means additional expenses. Considering that no entrance fee is charged, and that all the costs are to be met by voluntary contributions, I can not see how a more varied, and perhaps more interesting programme could be presented under these circumstances.

And does it really matter so much? The main object of a 1st of August celebration is not to make a big "show", but to present to the audience a bill of fare which enables them to feel "at home" and to awaken in them memories of a time when they too were living in that country which we so proudly call "Our Homeland".

I venture to say, that the organisers were successful in creating such an atmosphere, and the applause with which every item on the programme was acknowledged proves it.

The flower decoration in front of the platform was, this year, especially impressive, and the display of all the cantonal escutcheons, — some of which could do with a little bit of cleaning, — always lends colour to a Hall, which is otherwise of rather an austere appearance.

The programme and badges sellers were mostly dressed in national costume, and from what I am told, did "good business". (The proceeds from the sale of this year's badges is earmarked for the benefit of the Swiss living abroad.)

Shortly before the start of the performance, the Swiss Minister, and Madame de Torrenté arrived and were accompanied by his collaborators at the Legation and their wives. Two little girls curtseying prettily presented Madame de Torrenté with a lovely bouquet of flowers, in the national colours, and Madame Dupraz, the wife of the President of the 1st of August Committee with a bouquet of roses.

On the platform were seated all the participants in the programme, numbering, about 70, and as many were dressed in Swiss costume, they presented a colourful picture.

The programme started with a March by members of the Swiss Accordeon Club, unfortunately, owing to the holiday season, their number was reduced to three,

but what they lacked in numbers they tried valiantly to make up in sound.

After this appropriate introduction, the Rev. Claude Reverdin of the Eglise Suisse rendered prayer, thanking God Almighty for having guided so kindly the destiny of our little country.

The Swiss Pact was first read in Italian by the Rev. Father A. Lanfranchi, and finally in German by the Rev. A. von Fischer.

The reading of this historical document, which contains words of significant sagacity and political precepts always creates a deep impression amongst its listeners. If all countries, large and small, would try to live up to its ideals, they would not be in the sorry strait in which they find themselves today.

Then followed the patriotic address of the Swiss Minister, a part of which we reproduce herewith for the benefit of those who were unable to be present.

He said :

“ My dear compatriots,

662 years ago, the representatives of Uri, Schwyz and Unterwalden met at the Ruetli. To-day, the world over, Swiss are forgathered, in order to commemorate this meeting and the conclusion of the Pact, which we all regard as the most significant deed in our country's history.

The men of Uri, the men of Schwyz and those of Unterwalden were already known before that date to the peoples who lived North and South of the Alps; until that day they were known but as separate entities. From the 1st of August 1291 onward, the World took cognizance of them as a new unit in the family of men. The Pact, which you have just heard, and even more the spirit in which it was carried out

through the centuries, brought us the respect of our neighbours.

This is a specially happy year, because it is the anniversary of seven cantons joining the Confederation. In 1353 Berne became a member and in 1803 the Grisons, St. Gallen, Thurgau, Aargau, Vaud and Tessin who, of course, had been closely connected for many centuries formerly joined the Confederation.”

The Minister then read out the message addressed to the Swiss abroad, which was published in the last issue of the “ Swiss Observer,” and after a speech in Italian and German continued by saying :

“ Mes chers compatriotes,

Pour la sixième fois l'honneur m'échoit de présider la Fête du 1er Août de la Colonie suisse de Londres.

Au cours de ces cinq années, nous avons, les uns et les autres, passé par des alternatives d'angoisse et d'espoir. La guerre froide étendait son emprise sur l'Europe. En Extrême Orient, elle s'était même traduite en une agression sanglante et avait nécessité l'intervention armée des Nations-Unies.

Après cette longue période d'inquiétude, l'horizon semble s'éclaircir. L'armistice vient d'être signé en Corée. L'espoir renaît; Un pâle rayon perce le ciel assombri. Mais les peuples ont été si souvent trompés par de fallacieux apaisements qu'ils hésitent à croire à une détente qui devrait assurer la paix à une Europe encore toute meurtrie de la dernière guerre.

Notre petite Patrie a conservé sa position privilégiée. Sans se lier aux deux puissants blocs qui se partagent le monde, sans pression de quiconque, elle est restée sur le qui-vive, prête à toute éventualité, poursuivant son effort de réarmement, afin d'être à même de défendre contre toute agression l'intégrité de

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son territoire. En dépit d'invites prometteuses et de suggestions attrayantes, elle a maintenu contre vents et marées sa politique de neutralité, non pas une fin en soi, mais le moyen le plus éprouvé de conserver son indépendance. A en croire certains, cette politique de neutralité était une notion périmée, vide de sens dans les circonstances actuelles. Instituée pour une situation donnée, elle n'était plus aujourd'hui à la mesure des événements et, singulièrement, du caractère mondiale des problèmes internationaux. D'autres prétendaient que cette neutralité, généralement incomprise, était mise en doute même par les Puissances signataires des Traités de 1815 et de 1919.

Ni le Gouvernement, ni le Peuple suisse n'ont voulu prêter l'oreille à ces chants de sirènes. Notre robuste bon sens nous enseignait que non seulement il ne pouvait être question d'abandonner la seule politique qui ait assuré notre indépendance, mais qu'en le faisant nous ne rendrions service à personne. On se demande, en effet, en quoi cette renonciation pourrait servir la cause de la paix.

Les événements viennent de mettre en relief la sagesse de cette ferme attitude.

Le 8 juin, avant la signature de l'accord sur l'échange des prisonniers de guerre en Corée, le Conseil fédéral fit connaître aux Gouvernements américain et chinois que la Suisse était disposée, dans l'intérêt de la paix, à se faire représenter au sein de la Commission des Etats neutres, "mais, ajoutait-il," elle ne saurait accepter ce mandat qu'à des conditions compatibles avec son statut de neutralité perpétuelle et avec la politique qui en découle pour elle". "Ce statut et cette politique", disait le Conseil fédéral, "ne sont pas seulement l'expression de la volonté de la Confédération de renoncer à toute politique d'expansion et à la guerre comme moyen de régler les différends internationaux, mais comportent aussi des principes fondamentaux que le Conseil fédéral a constamment appliqués depuis plus d'un siècle, lorsqu'il s'est agi pour la Suisse de remplir à l'égard des Etats tiers les devoirs découlant pour elle de sa neutralité. Un de ces principes est l'impartialité et la Suisse ne saurait accepter aucune mission qui l'obligerait à s'en départir. . ."

Ainsi la Suisse refusait d'être "le neutre de quelqu'un"; elle affirmait le caractère absolu de sa neutralité. Cette haute conception de notre rôle fut entièrement reconnue par le Gouvernement américain.

Le Département d'Etat déclara en effet "qu'il avait pleine compréhension pour le désir du Gouvernement suisse de maintenir sa politique de neutralité et d'impartialité". "C'est certainement", ajoutait-il, "à cause de cette politique bien connue que la Suisse figure parmi les cinq pays dont le rôle est prévu dans le cadre de l'armistice en Corée."

and he added:

"Le Gouvernement et le Peuple des Etats-Unis ainsi que maints Gouvernements et Peuples dans le monde considèrent depuis longtemps la Suisse comme le pays auquel on peut faire appel lorsqu'il s'agit de prêter les services impartiaux qui sont souvent si essentiels pour le règlement de guerres ou de différends internationaux".

Les deux documents que je viens de citer revêtent, à mon avis, une importance historique. D'une part, le Conseil fédéral a défini à nouveau, avec toute la clarté désirable, la neutralité permanente de la

Suisse. D'autre part, les Etats-Unis, qui ne furent signataires ni du Traité de 1815, ni de ceux de 1919, ont reconnu explicitement le rôle précieux qu'en vertu de sa neutralité et de son impartialité la Suisse peut jouer dans les conflits internationaux.

1953, est spécialement riche en fêtes commémoratives.

Berne vient de célébrer fastueusement ses six cents ans d'appartenance à la Confédération.

"La grande, forte et puissante Berne", disait dans son appel du jour de l'an le Président de la Confédération, "dont l'adhésion nous valut un solide rempart contre l'Ouest; c'est elle qui, avec l'aide de Fribourg, nous ouvrit plus tard une porte du côté de la Suisse romande, permettant de la sorte à la Confédération de trouver dans notre communauté de langues différentes son âme et sa mission."

Cette année également, Grisons, St.-Gall, Thurgovie, Argovie, Vaud et Tessin commémorent le 150ème anniversaire de leur accession à la Confédération.

Ces six nouveaux Etats devaient donner à la Suisse son vrai visage, en dessinant ses frontières et en accentuant les caractéristiques de sa structure fédéraliste: réunion de peuples de races, de langues et de religions différentes.

Neutralité et fédéralisme, tels sont les principes fondamentaux essentiels auxquels nous devons rester fidèles. Le fédéralisme permet un règlement harmonieux et judicieux des rapports de la Confédération et des cantons et des cantons entre eux.

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Quant à la neutralité, si elle nous a quelque peu écartés et même déshabitués de certains grands problèmes politiques, elle nous permet en revanche, en nous élevant au dessus des préoccupations journalières d'un nationalisme naturellement limité et partial, d'acquérir une vue plus objective et plus vaste des problèmes humains et de mettre ainsi une expérience précieuse au service de la paix."

The Swiss Minister's oration was loudly cheered, and then the "Schweizerpsalm", "Trittst im Morgenrot daher" was sung with the organ accompaniment played by Mr. E. P. Dick.

When the mighty sounds of this very impressive Hymn had ceased, our artist visitors from Switzerland appeared. Amidst much cheering Heidi Sommer, dressed in her becoming Bernese costume was especially warmly greeted, not only because of her sweet smile, but because she is no newcomer to the Colony; two years ago, at the 1st of August celebration, she sang at the Central Hall, under the name of Heidi Ammann with Ernst Sommer, who meanwhile has made her his life's partner. If their family life is as harmonious as their singing, then indeed it must be an ideal partnership. To complete the family ensemble, E. Sommer, father, joined forces with them, and together they gave a most enjoyable performance of yodelling and singing. E. Sommer, sen., gave as a solo "Le Ranz des Vaches"; being the possessor of a fine voice he literally brought the "house down", whilst Heidi and Ernst Sommer by

their rendering of two songs "Muess wieder einisch jutze", and "Mi schöni Schwyz" had an equally great success. A storm of applause greeted each item.

The Swiss Male Choir, although much reduced in number, owing to the absence of a good many members on holiday, sang two songs, the first one being "Bald prangt, den Morgen zu verkünden" from Mozart's "Die Zauberflöte", and "Notre Valais" by F. O. Wolf, both of which were well rendered, especially the last one, which earned the conductor a handshake from our Minister, who, as a Valaisan, must have been deeply touched by this performance. The conductor of this choir, Mr. E. P. Dick, which has given us so much pleasure in the past, can rightly put another feather in his cap, if there is still some room left.

Again the Sommer family appeared, singing Duets' and Trios', some in French and others in "Schwyzerdütsch", and again they were greatly applauded.

To conclude the first part of the programme, our old friends from the "Corale" of the Unione Ticinese, made their appearance; dressed in Ticinese costume, they received an ovation which is always accorded to old and trusted friends. Their vivacious singing of the "Canzonette" is always pleasant to listen to, and the audience showed their appreciation of a fine performance by asking for more and more. The conductor of the "Corale", Mr. P. De Maria, too, can adorn his bonnet with a special feather.

After a short interval the second part of the programme started with four Ländler Melodies, executed by members of the Swiss Accordion Club.

More yodelling by the Sommer Yodelling Trio, and songs by the Swiss Male Choir followed, all of which were greatly cheered.

All of us know "Cochrane's Young Ladies" or the "Tiller girls," but not many have heard of the Silvia Morosi girls, who with some trepidation made their entry. Well they were not all girls, in fact there was one boy amongst them, who, however seemed to feel quite at home amongst "the girls."

They were very young, and therefore somewhat shy, it is no mean feat for children of that age to appear before an audience of several hundred spectators, but, I am glad to say, they danced nicely and gracefully, and I should not be surprised if one little girl, the smallest of the lot, will not one day become a famous ballerina. Miss Morosi, who trained them is to be congratulated on her achievements.

The programme was concluded by a short address by Mr. R. Dupraz, President of the 1st of August Committee, who rendered thanks to the audience for having attended in such numbers, to the artistes, for their clever performance, and to all those who, had so generously made donations so that this entertainment could be given.

The singing of our National Anthem brought this year's 1st of August Celebration to a close.

May I be allowed, on my part, to express, on behalf of all those who spent such an enjoyable afternoon at the Central Hall, Westminster hearty thanks, especially to Mr. Dupraz, Miss Morosi, Mr. Dick, and Mr. Streit, who worked so hard to make this celebration a success.



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