

Swiss Mercantile society : the S.K.V. 80 Years Old

Objekttyp: **Group**

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

Band (Jahr): - **(1953)**

Heft 1203

PDF erstellt am: **27.04.2024**

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SWISS MERCANTILE SOCIETY.

The S.K.V. 80 Years Old.

There are many associations, which can look back on 80 and more years of useful existence. And yet one is tempted to say, that none can have had a more noteworthy influence on Swiss commercial achievements, than the "Schweizerischer Kaufmännischer Verein."

The forerunners of this imposing society of 50,000 members were those local associations formed at Zurich, Berne, Basle, St. Gall, in the decade 1860-1870, and named "Verein Junger Kaufleute", by energetic young men anxious to develop and enrich their professional qualifications. The study of foreign languages, and of the intricacies of bookkeeping and of correspondence, formed the mainspring of their activities. Withal they did not neglect the amenities of friendly intercourse and communion. Encouraged by the growing interest in their doings, conscious too of the advantages of extending their field beyond parochial confines, they united in 1873 and formed the association we know today.

It is, perhaps, a platitude to say that, since 1873, the history of the S.K.V. has essentially been the mirror of events in Swiss commercial developments, more particularly in the relationship between unemployed and employer. Expanding business and the growth of limited liability trading (with the real owners not necessarily active in the undertaking) perforce brought to an end the one-time close, often even intimate, contact between master and man. It would have been more than surprising, if this had not led, in the long run, to clashes of interest. No one will pretend, that never was there cause for it, nor that the fault always was on one side only.

These factors brought about a widening of our association's aims from that of purely educational and social activity to those of a "protective umbrella," such as Employment Department, Sickness Insurance, Legal Assistance, Resettlement of elderly Unemployed. Space does not permit to enlarge on the many, often long and difficult, negotiations for standard terms of employment in offices and shops, for regulations governing intake and training of apprentices, assistance to dependants of men mobilised during war, old age and invalidity insurance, etc.

However, the guiding principle throughout has been the realisation, that success and consequent betterment for all depends on quality work, no less on the part of efficient personnel than in the finished product. Hence the persistent efforts to provide efficiency by post-apprenticeship education of our members, by intensive instruction in Organisation, Advertising, Business Research, Preparation for Overseas Employment, Bookkeeping, Correspondance, and other subjects. And, to mention but one, the Federal Diploma for Bookkeepers is a certificate of qualification equal to that of professional bodies in other countries.

Particular attention is at all times paid to the instruction of apprentices. In the course of the years cantonal and federal legislation has regulated their training, and it is not merely by chance that their schooling was entrusted to our Society. In fact, the State found ready to hand the institutions required

to carry out the law, institutions founded years before-hand by our association on a voluntary basis. Much initial work and expenditure was thus saved, and the funds available by the Confederation serve the more advantageous purpose of enlarging and perfecting an already live organisation. Not every employer has the time nor the gift, for teaching those who must follow us and in whose hands the future welfare of our country will lie. Our schools fulfill that task, both as to theory and practice, and the Swiss Authorities seal the contract with substantial subsidies.

And what of the men who, inspired by patriotism and consideration for their fellow-citizens, laid the foundation stone and were succeeded by worthy builders? Among many names, two come immediately to mind: Hofmann of the Employment Department, and Schindler of the Zentralblatt. And who does not remember Fritschi, complete with pipe, always seeking more security for those whom Fate treated unkindly. They have passed on, but they have left their mark.

What of the living ones? No one who has ever heard the fiery eloquence of "Papa" Lutz, for many years Central President, will ever forget the little Appenzeller, whose heart is as big as his stature is small. Then there is Central President Strickler, jovial but firm of purpose. At his side that pillar of strength Philip Schmid-Ruedin, the man who, with consummate skill, steered the S.K.V. boat through the turbulent waters of the revolutionary period in 1918, a start which might have discouraged many others. And Emile Losey, Secrétaire romand, always cheery unequalled as interpreter to his flock at delegates meetings. Finally, for one simply cannot mention them all by name, we have Adolf Galliker, editor of the Zentralblatt, an author of no mean quality and a veritable second Pestalozzi to our K.V. Jungmannschaft. Is it a matter for wonderment, that such men are surrounded by a devoted band of men and women willing and anxious to serve our members?

The world will not erect monuments to these stalwarts, nor will History remember their names. But we will treasure their memory and take pride in the knowledge, that the usefulness and reputation of an association like the S.K.V. is evidenced by the calibre of the men it attracts to its service.

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