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JOURNEE DES SUISSES A L'ETRANGER.

Locarno, 24 — 26 August, 1956.

This year's conference of delegates from the Swiss Colonies all over the world, organised as usual by the "Auslandschweizerwerk" of the N.S.H., was held most successfully at Locarno towards the end of August. The chief speech by Federal Councillor Monsieur Max Petitpierre has already been published in a previous issue of the S.O. Following is a report of the proceedings by one of the delegates from England. Our colony was again represented by far too few participants, namely Dr. H. W. Egli, Mr. F. Suter and Mrs. G. Suter from London, Mr. H. Monney from Manchester and Prof. J. Inebnit and Mrs. L. Inebnit from Leeds.

It can be said without exaggeration that this year's Auslandschweizertagung brought the Swiss Colonies more positive results than any previous meeting since these annual "Parliaments of the Swiss abroad", as they have been aptly named in the Swiss Press, have been held. The results are of course due to the pleadings for various reforms and innovations heard at so many previous journées. The great value of these meetings lies in the fact that the Federal Government sends every year its most important departmental officials and specialists who are concerned with our problems in the course of their duties. In this year's list of high officials attending the meeting figure no fewer than 26 names, apart from M. Petitpierre, the President of the Ständerat Rudolf Weber, the Vice-President of the Nationalrat Joseph Condrau, two other members of Parliament, 8 ministers and consuls from abroad. Strongly represented were also the Auslandschweizerkommission, the Stiftung für Auslandschweizer, the Kommission der N.H.G. für Rückwandererfragen, the Kommission der N.H.G. für einen Solidaritätsfonds, the Stiftungen Pro Helvetia and Pro Juventute, the Bundesfeierkommitte, the Schweizerische Rundfunkgesellschaft, the Office d'Expansion Commerciale, the Comité International de la Croix Rouge and the N.S.H. mother society. This representation of all official and semi-official circles in Switzerland interested in our problems is typical for all journées. It stands to reason that their presence guarantees a most attentive hearing to all the representations and wishes pronounced by the speakers from our Colonies. For this reason it is a pity that not more use is being made by the many Swiss societies in our Colony of this unique annual opportunity to make their needs and desires attended to.

As we already mentioned, a whole crop of concessions to the views expressed at previous meetings on behalf of various Colonies regarding several most important questions has been garnered in at Locarno. The question of granting the older Swiss beyond the age of contributing to the A.H.V. ex gratia so called *Uebergangsrenten*, for which we have been pleading ever since the start of the scheme, has now been settled entirely in favour of the Swiss abroad. Our older folk will soon be able to obtain exactly the same ex gratia payments as the same age group in Switzerland. Full details will be published in due course when the necessary legislation has been passed by Parliament. The decision of the Federal Council to propose this generous gesture in our favour is to be welcomed with

profound gratitude. A special expression of thanks is due to the director of the Bundesamt für Sozialversicherung; Dr. Arnold Sixer, whom we have had the privilege to hear at the meeting of the S.M.S. some years ago.

A further concession to facilitate the re-instatement of former Swiss women in their *Swiss nationality* has been decided on. The existing law gave this right only to Swiss-born women, of which over 32,000 have so far availed themselves. The privilege to be received again into Swiss citizenship is now extended also to women who have become Swiss only after their birth, be it by naturalisation or marriage. Nearly a thousand worthy applicants have so far had to be refused, but will soon be able to renew their applications with a fair certainty of success.

Regarding the hoary question of the *military tax* very great progress in the intentions of the Government and Parliament may be recorded. The project for remodelling the military tax submitted two years ago for discussion, which provoked so much criticism and alarm, has been entirely shelved. Its main feature was to double the tax on income to 3 per cent as a quid pro quo for abolishing the archaic tax on expected inheritance. The latter concession is now to be granted unconditionally, while the remaining tax will be levied in accordance with modern ideas of justice. The personal tax is to be raised from 6 to 15 francs, but beyond that considerable deductions can be made from the income according to the size of the family.



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before further tax is payable. Most important for the Swiss abroad is the proposal to relieve them of all military taxation after 10 years spent abroad or 5 years in the case of older emigrants. Swiss children brought up abroad will be entirely exempted from the tax. Many of our countrymen in England and elsewhere will thus be completely freed from this vexatious tax and others much reduced, when these understanding reforms have passed into law. A parliamentary commission has already approved these proposals which testify to the benevolent consideration of the views of the Swiss abroad on this matter on the part of the Federal Council.

The equally irritating question of *compensation for war damage* suffered by Swiss citizens in countries where no adequate compensation could be obtained is once again the subject of a proposal by the Government to utilise the 121 million Swiss francs previously offered for a most generous form of help to all those in need. Not only would it assure their living in adequate comfort according to their previous mode of life, but also the education and training of their children for corresponding professions and setting them up in business. The London Group of the N.S.H. had instructed its delegates to press for a strict restriction of such help to the limit of necessity, but they used their discretion to be silent on this point as there is a good chance of an agreed settlement with the concurrence of the N.S.H. at home.

Sympathetic consideration has been promised for the urgent need of *Swiss schools abroad* (Italy, Spain and Latin America) for much increased grants in aid, which has heartened those responsible for these schools, on behalf of which many of our Colonies make very great annual sacrifices.

In the very happy atmosphere created by the announcement of these valuable improvements the project for the formation of a *Solidaritätsfonds* of the Swiss abroad has this year kindled considerable enthusiasm and hope for carrying it out at an early date. With infinite care a draft statute has been elaborated for this scheme which amounts to a co-operative collective insurance on a mutual basis against future war damage and other catastrophic losses. The solidarity fund is to be set up and contributed to in the first place by the Swiss abroad themselves who may wish to participate, but it is hoped that the Government, the Cantons and various organisations and friends in Switzerland may be stimulated to help financially in carrying out this noble project, when it is seen that it fills a real need for which the Swiss abroad are willing to make their own sacrifices. Full details of the scheme will be given in one of the next issues of the S.O.

The *social* aspect of these gatherings was cared for by the organisers at Locarno as imaginatively as on previous occasions. On the eve of the *journée* the participants were received and regaled in state by the Cantonal and Municipal Authorities in the Palazzo Municipale at Bellinzona. At the end of the main day of the conference the town council of Locarno offered the delegates a generous aperitif in the Castello. Afterwards a boat took us across the lake to Magadino for a pleasant ticinese meal of soup, ravioli and Nostrano. On the Sunday the wonderful hydroelectric Maggia-works were visited, followed by a trip to the isle of Brissago for a last and most enjoyable farewell lunch. May this account of the inspiring happenings at Locarno encourage our readers to resolve themselves to take part at the next *journée des suisses a l'étranger*.

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