

The "Swiss Observer" thirty Years ago

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THE "SWISS OBSERVER" THIRTY YEARS AGO

In the issue of 5th May 1934, a report appeared on the Diamond Jubilee of the Unione Ticinese. A Banquet and Ball had been held at Pagani's, with an attendance of 180. The next issue brought an article called "Switzerland asserts herself as the World's Playground". In Switzerland there was a surplus milk problem.

On 19th September, the success was reported of the Swiss film "Rapt" based on the novel by C. F. Ramuz "La séparation des Races". The *première* had been given at the London Curzon Cinema. The Soirée Familiale (with dancing) of the City Swiss Club had been attended by 140 members and friends, the great attraction being a talk by the Swiss explorer A. F. Tschiffely, whose famous trip from Argentina to Washington — 10,000 miles in two and a half years with his two horses "Mancha" and "Gato" — had made history. The last issue in May 1934 reported the Annual Concert given by the Swiss Choral Society and the Swiss Institute-Orchestral Society.

The first issue in June carried an announcement that Dr. G. Schuerch had been appointed one of the Secretaries of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad in Berne. To-day, of course, Dr. Schuerch is the President of the Organisation and the Chairman of the Commission of the Swiss Abroad.

The issue of 9th June published the deficit of Fr.72,300,000.— in the federal accounts. That was Fr.48,000,000.— worse than the previous year — a gloomy picture indeed. Activities of the "National Front" were reported; clashes at meetings occurred repeatedly. The Municipal Theatre of Zurich had celebrated its centenary, and new buildings of the League of Nations had been inaugurated in Geneva. The "Goetheanum" at Dornach was hailed as a great cultural centre.

The issue of 16th June carried news of interest to sport lovers. Mademoiselle Payot was to play at Wimbledon, and the Swiss gymnasts had achieved victory in Budapest. Economic news from Switzerland was better; there had been a marked improvement in unemployment.

"WHERE ARE YOU GOING TODAY? TO HERNE HILL FOR THE SWISS SPORTS, OF COURSE" was splashed across the front page of the S.O. on 23rd June. Those were the days, no doubt! News from Switzerland included reports that Swiss financial interests were considered affected by Germany's declaration of a moratorium, that the Prefect of Porrentruy, Monsieur Victor Henry, had been appointed as one of three members of the League of Nations Committee to handle the organisation and supervision of the Saar Plebiscite, that the embroidery trade was depressed, and that Sulzer Brothers had reached their centenary. Colony news included the announcement of the death of Mr. Aldo Jacomelli.

The last issue in June was the fifteenth anniversary number of the "Swiss Observer", and it reported the tenth anniversary of the "Schweizerkirche" in London. The Swiss Minister Monsieur Paravicini had been at the General Meeting of the Foyer Suisse, and the new President of the Union Helvetia was Mr. P. Lehrian. In Switzerland, there had been commemorations of the "Grenzbesetzung" of 1914/18. The Editor of the S.O., Mr. A. Stauffer, reminisced in "How I got into the Sergeant's Good Books". The report of the 65th Fête Suisse appeared, and there were pictures of buildings in

Switzerland, Johannesburg and London designed by the famous Swiss architect Mr. Theophil Scherrer.

All the issues carried a great many advertisements, forthcoming events, and the Swiss Churches gave details of all births, christenings, confirmations, weddings and deaths.

Articles on special subjects included "Les Grands Hommes de la Révolution: Danton", "The Peace Army" by Henry P. Compton (International Civil Service founded by Pierre Cérésolle), Arnold Dolmetsch on the tenth Haslemere Festival, and "Swiss Observer's Journey to Italy" by Mariann.

Reading through the old issues gives plenty of food for thought. On the one hand, we gratefully compare the present affluence at home with the economic difficulties of the early thirties. On the other hand, we can't help growing somewhat nostalgic when we realise that so many of the activities flourishing in the Swiss Colony in Great Britain thirty years ago have ceased, no more orchestra, no more choral society, male choir, gymnastic society, Union Helvetia, Swiss sports, etc. What will the shape of the Swiss Community be like in thirty years? Will there be a "Swiss Observer" to recall our activities of 1964? *On verra.*

THERE REALLY IS A SWISS NAVY!

Today thirty-two modern ships flying the Swiss flag and registered with the Swiss Shipping Office sail the seven seas. The oldest was built in 1947. Their total tonnage is 165,595 gross. They are variously owned by thirteen Swiss companies with headquarters in Switzerland. Twelve of these ships are tramp steamers and the others operate on regular runs. The crews total 988 persons, of whom 605 are Swiss. Eight of the thirty-two captains, twenty of the eighty-eight deck officers, sixty-one of the 119 engine room officers, and sixteen of the twenty-seven radio operators are Swiss. More than half the deck and engine room crew are Swiss.

The Swiss high seas fleet was created during World War II to ensure national supplies. At the beginning of the war, Switzerland chartered Greek ships; subsequently the Confederation acquired four and Swiss firms seven vessels. Four ships were lost during the war. Since there were very few sailors of Swiss nationality at that time, the crews had to be recruited from foreign nationals and were often heterogeneous in the extreme. To complicate matters more, only nationals of neutral or at least non-belligerent nations were eligible. The difficulties the captain had in maintaining discipline under such conditions may be imagined. To give young Swiss an opportunity to learn seamanship, two or three of them were posted to each ship. This was the beginning of the "helvetisation" of the crews which is still continuing today, not for any nationalistic reasons but simply because a growing number of Swiss boys are answering the call of the sea.

It must be remembered that Switzerland had links with marine traffic long before she had any ships of her own. As early as last century Swiss industry was making engines or engine components. The arrival of the diesel engine put Switzerland in the forefront of marine engineering. Today Sulzer of Winterthur, together with the firms manufacturing under a Sulzer licence, are in the front rank of the thirty-six world-class firms making diesel engines for ocean-going ships. Last year 121 ships were fitted out with Sulzer engines.

[S.N.T.O.]