

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

Herausgeber: Federation of Swiss Societies in the United Kingdom

Band: - (1965)

Heft: 1488

Artikel: The noble art of steel engraving

Autor: [s.n.]

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-695927>

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MEETING OF THE COMMISSION OF THE SWISS ABROAD

The Commission of the Swiss Abroad met in Solothurn on 27th August. The President of the "Auslandschweizerorganisation", Dr. G. Schürch, opened the meeting at the Hotel Krone at the early hour of 8.30 a.m. Some forty members were present from many parts of the world. They represented Swiss communities as far apart as Madrid and Norrköping (Sweden), Casablanca and Berlin, Haifa and Harrogate. The Commission, our own "Parliament", counts eighteen members from inside Switzerland, two dozen members representing fifteen countries and as many proxies. The six co-opted members are from U.S.A., Mexico, Australia and New Zealand. There is also a movement in Canada, and soon, it is hoped, the continents further away from Switzerland will also be strongly represented on the Commission.

The Chairman welcomed the members present who included Mrs. Mariann Meier (representing the Southern half of the British Isles) and Mr. J. P. Christen (for the Midlands and the North of Great Britain). Tribute was paid to the former member of the Commission and founder member of the Solidarity Fund, Dr. Wolf, whose death had been announced.

The President then gave notice of several changes in the membership; three inland members had resigned, and the Central Council of the Nouvelle Société Helvétique had elected five new ones, amongst them Councillor of States Louis Guisan who will increase the parliamentary strength. Six members from abroad had retired and had been replaced by others.

The next item on the agenda concerned the proposed Constitutional Article for the Swiss Abroad. The President recalled that, also in Solothurn, the basic discussions had taken place two years before, between representatives of the Commission and of the Federal Political Department. Preliminary work, however, had started already in 1960. The Message by the Federal Council to Parliament had been published earlier than expected, and one could now hope that by the next Assembly of the Swiss Abroad, the plebiscite would either already have taken place or would be imminent.

Dr. Schürch emphasised the importance of purposeful campaigning in order to get a favourable and impressive plebiscite. The Swiss abroad enjoyed a great deal of sympathy in Parliament. The people, however, still had some prejudices.

As regards the text issued by the Federal Council, it did not completely correspond to that proposed by the Commission. It was decided to accept the proposition with gratitude, but at the same time to approach the authorities once more in the matter and to repeat the wish of the Commission that the Article should have a more imperative form.

The Commission next discussed ways and means of improving the image of the Swiss abroad inside Switzerland. The Secretary-General, Dr. Müller, suggested that 1966 should be "The Year of the Swiss Abroad". This would mean intensive study and preparation, but it was deemed an excellent idea, especially in connection with the theme of the next Assembly, proposed by the President, "L'Oeuvre des Suisses à l'étranger et son avenir", (achievements and future development of the Swiss abroad). This would need the co-operation of the Swiss Communities abroad. It was left to the Executive to work out details.

Another important item on the agenda was the permission required by Swiss abroad to purchase land in Switzerland. Thanks to a new and lone effort by Councilor of States Zellweger, member of the Commission, the Federal decree will in future no longer affect Swiss living abroad. With it, a bone of contention with many Swiss living outside Switzerland will disappear, and the determined protests against the discrimination made by the Swiss community in Italy will have been rewarded.

The President informed the meeting that the Secretary-General René Bovey was giving up his work with the Secretariat of the Swiss Abroad after nine years of devoted service. Though Mr. Bovey would be leaving the ASS, he would continue to work in the interest of the Swiss abroad.

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THE NOBLE ART OF STEEL ENGRAVING

The philatelic department of the general management of the Swiss General Post Office (PTT) in Berne (Parkstrasse 10) has just placed on sale a booklet edited by Mr. Hans E. Gaudard, Head of the Postage Stamps and Printing Division of the general management of the Swiss General Post Office, and entitled "The noble art of engraving"; its forty-four pages contain 398 reproductions of a selection of studies, projects and designs chosen for four current issues of Swiss postage stamps. This booklet will be of great interest not only to philatelists but to all those concerned in one way or another with the art of engraving on steel.

[O.S.E.C.]

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