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: - (1966)

Heft: 1510

Rubrik: Nouvelle société helvétique

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NEWS FROM THE COLONY

1966 THE YEAR OF "FIFTH SWITZERLAND"

Nouvelle Société Helvétique

GOLDEN JUBILEE CELEBRATION

26th September 1966

Many are the ways in which a society can celebrate a jubilee. When it became known earlier in the year that the London Group of the Nouvelle Société Helvétique would reach its half century, speculation arose as to the manner in which the organisation was going to mark its Golden Jubilee. Now that it is over, the verdict is that it could not have been done in any more suitable or appropriate way. The organisers refrained from making a big splash which would have cost members, as well as the society as such, a lot of money. They chose instead their usual venue, the Swiss Hostel for Girls in Hampstead, in whose homely rooms members and friends were able to gather for a reception, an excellent dinner, the celebration speechmaking and a piano recital.

Monday, 26th September, ended in one of those serene evenings which an Indian summer can provide nowhere more beautifully than in England. The Hostel garden was full of a warm fragrance, and the last of summer's own flowers belied the fact that autumn had arrived in the calendar. The President and Council members welcomed guests, members and friends over a glass of sherry and then adjourned to the dining room. Management and staff of the Hostel lived up fully to their reputation of first class hospitality. The choice dishes, expeditiously served, were accompanied by good Swiss wines.

As a gesture to loyal members who for reasons of economy or time were unable to attend the dinner, all speechmaking was left until afterwards when the whole party assembled in the lounge for the celebration proper.

The hardworking and congenial President, Dr. H. W. Egli, welcomed Monsieur de Fischer, the Consul, the two Vice-Consuls and other members of the Embassy. He expressed the society's gratitude for the steadfast support the Swiss Ambassador and his collaborators gave to the N.S.H. without fail. He welcomed the Presidents and representatives of sister societies and the Churches, amongst them Mr. E. Bonvin (City Swiss Club), Mr. V. Berti (Unione Ticinese), Mr. O. Grob, K.S.G. (Swiss Catholics), Monsieur le pasteur Ducommun (Swiss Church), Dr. H. B. Knuchel representing the Midlands, and Mrs. Mariann Meier, Editor of the " Swiss Observer ". As it happened, those mentioned included three of the four delegates for G.B. on the Commission of the Swiss Abroad (Mrs. Meier and Messrs. Bonvin and Knuchel). The fourth, Mr. J. P. Christen, had sent his apologies, also as President of the Swiss Economic Council.

Dr. Egli mentioned the presence of some members of the Swiss Press and had a special word for Mrs. R. Weist and Mrs. A. Stauffer whose late husbands had both been such staunch supporters of the N.S.H. On the other hand, he regretted the unavoidable absence of Madame de Fischer. Apologies had also been received by Monsieur Grandjean, First Counsellor of Embassy, Monsieur Ansermoz, Mr. P. Bessire, Mr. R. E. Baumann (Vice-President), Mr. E. Berner (President of Manchester Swiss Club) and their ladies. Best wishes were sent to the President's wife who was prevented by illness from attending.

Amongst those present was one of the founder members, Mr. J. Zimmermann. He, together with Messrs. Oertli and Rothlisberger, also represented the Swiss Benevolent Society. A past President of the Group and Mrs. W. Renz were also of the party. Dr. Egli paid tribute to Miss R. Preiswerk, former Warden of the Hostel and Council member, now retired in Switzerland. Her colleague of the early Hostel days, Miss C. Hagenbach, was present, as was the new Warden, Miss H. Siegrist, and her assistant, Miss Schwarz.

In particular, the Chairman welcomed the chief guest, Dr. G. Schuerch, President of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad and Chairman of the Commission, who had specially flown from Switzerland to be with this, the first group abroad of the Nouvelle Société Helvétique, at its Golden Jubilee.

The first speaker was the Swiss Ambassador who began his address by expressing his personal and official satisfaction at being present at this 50th anniversary, and to bring, in the presence of the distinguished President of the ASO, Dr. Schuerch, the good wishes of the federal authorities and to state their high appreciation of the work done. He sincerely thanked all those who were responsible and had collaborated faithfully in the great task the Society had set itself. Monsieur de Fischer said that the spirit in which the London Group of the N.S.H. went about its activities and the values it defended were of great importance for the Colony. He continued:

" La Société Helvétique a été fondée en 1761, à un moment où le concept de la nation comme communauté de citoyens conscients de s'organiser politiquement, dans un cadre donné par la géographie, l'économie et l'histoire et sous l'égide d'idéals communs, s'affaiblissait sous le coup de fortes influences étrangères. Des hommes, se sentant les guardiens des constantes qui ont déterminé notre évolution, se sont alors unis pour essayer de rejénerer notre vie politique intérieure et exterieure. Il me sera peut-être permi de rappeler ici que plusieurs d'entre eux, tels que Jean de Muller, Charles-Victor de Bonstetten, ou Philip-Albert Stapfer, ont renouvelé leurs idées à des sources anglaises où un grand mouvement en faveur de la digneté de l'homme, de ses responsibilités à l'égard de la chose publique et de son devoir de contribuer au progrès de la société étaient alors à l'ordre du jour.

" En 1914, une situation analogue provoqua la renaissance de la Société Helvétique et la création d'une organisation adaptée aux temps nouveaux. Peu après, au milieu de la première guerre mondiale, naquît l'idée, sensationelle au moment, d'associer les Suisses à l'étranger à notre vie nationale par des sections de la Nouvelle Société Helvétique, créées sur place, et de leur demander de con-

tribuer à la défense de notre patrimoine patriotique et spirituelle, ainsi que celle de notre position dans le monde. La première section fut significativement celle de Londres, soit dans un pays dont les principes éthiques sont si proches des nôtres. Ce que le Professeur Lätt fit à cette époque est bien dans l'esprit de la NSH: il essaya de rattacher la colonie suisse d'Angleterre aux traditions de leurs devanciers et les invita à suivre leur exemple. Il redécouvrit alors, par de patients recherches historiques, la superbe activité des Suisses en Angleterre, dont les tombes dans les pantéons de Westminster et de St. Paul parlent toujours, dont nous retrouverons les traces dans la vie de différentes églises du Royaume-Uni, dans les livres de science, de droit ou de philosophie, dans les merveilles des musées ou enfin dans certaines grandes entreprises du pays. Je ne crois pas qu'il y ait un pays en Europe où les parts que deux nations se sont donnés mutuellement soient mieux équilibrés que ce ne fut le cas de la Suisse et de l'Angleterre."

* * *

" Aujourd'hui nous nous trouvons au moment où les liens entre les Suisses à l'étranger et le pays vont être, nous l'espérons tous, institutionalisés par un article de la Constitution, et une nouvelle tâche se trouvera devant nous.

" Ce sera le moment où nous devrons bien nous rappeler de ce qui fait la valeur de notre pays dans le monde, position que nous serons appelée à soutenir plus activement.

" Comme vous le savez, notre contribution à la paix, à l'ordre et au progrès de notre globe est certes tout d'abord la mise hors de la guerre de notre sol et de ses cols stratégiques par notre neutralité permanente, défendue par une armée capable de rendre une attaque non payante, et vous savez tous l'effort considérable que nous faisons dans ce sens; c'est certes aussi une collaboration ininterrompue aux efforts de faire reigner le droit sur la force, et notre attitude prise aujourd'hui à l'égard de la délicate question rhodésienne en est un exemple; c'est certes enfin une contribution constante et multiple au progrès des sciences, de l'éducation et de la lutte contre la faim, ainsi que le démontre notre participation active aux organisations spécialisées de l'ONU et les efforts accomplis par notre gouvernment et par quelques'uns de nos grandes entreprises en faveur de pays en voie de développement.

" Mais c'est surtout ceci: le maintien d'un Etat qui repose essentiellement sur la liberté, la digneté et le droit au développement de la personalité humaine individuelle arrondie, que nous savons être la seule et unique source de la création et du bonheur; du fédéralisme, ensuite, principe où chacun considère ce qui est différent de lui non pas comme une valeur à tolérer simplement, main comme un enrichissement possible; la neutralité permanente, enfin, comme un renoncement volontaire à se mêler de différents d'autrui pour des raisons de puissance ou d'intérêts, afin de pouvoir mettre à la disposition de la société internationale un concours basé sur les critères de la personalité humaine.

" Vous voyez que ce programme représente une tâche considérable à l'intérieur du pays comme à l'exterieur. Mais c'est aussi une mission dont nous ne pouvons pas nous dispenser comme membre solidaire du bien-être de la famille des nations, mission spéciale d'autant plus lourde que notre petit pays est, avec quelque peu d'autres, un des seuls à être capable de l'accomplir dans un monde dominé de plus en plus par le collectif. Mais nous pouvons l'accomplir en vivant et en agissant dans notre vie de tous les jours selon l'esprit de notre Constitution et les leçons de notre histoire, dont celle des Suisses en Angleterre est certes une des plus fières.

" La mission de la Section de la NSH à Londres est, sans aucun doute, de nous aider à agir ainsi et c'est la raison pour laquelle nous attachons tous tant de valeur à son existence, à son experte direction, à l'esprit qui l'inspire, aux collaborations qu'elle provoque, et à la bienveillance du destin, sans laquelle rien ne se fait."

The Ambassador's speech was warmly applauded. The Chairman then called on Dr. Schuerch to address the gathering in German. He said that it was both an honour and a pleasure for him as President of the Commission of the Swiss Abroad to be at this jubilee and to bring greetings and good wishes from the *Auslandschweizerorganisation.*

Dr. Schuerch referred to the importance of the foundation of the London Group in June 1916, which was the first realisation of the great idea of men like Gonzague de Reynold and Robert de Traz. The first conception was to have a universal Helvetic federation. But it happened differently, and individual groups abroad were formed. They acted like "the yeast in the dough". An incubation period was needed to bring together the groups which had elite character. After London, branches were founded in Paris, Berlin, Athens, Cairo, Rio de Janeiro, Buenos Aires and Melbourne. England, however, was the most fertile ground which carried the most fruit. It was not until the end of the 'twenties that the original idea of a universal organisation was accepted by forming a fully comprehensive ASO, and today, 525 groups all over the world are part of it. In 1959, another step forward was taken, by having members of the Commission elected by their own communities.

Dr. Schuerch stressed that even the handsome figure of over 500 groups did not include *all* the Swiss abroad, and as an example he gave France, the largest Swiss community abroad, whose 90,000 members were estimated to be merely 25% of all Swiss resident there.

The speaker then talked about the year of "Fifth Switzerland" devoted to his compatriots abroad. When reviewing the fifty years of ASO and ASK, it was only right to sacrifice a minute to remember the faithful secretaries, a dozen of them, who have been in charge of the Secretariat in Berne, from Robert de Traz to H. J. Halbheer and the present man at the helm, Dr. E. Muller, not forgetting the great woman amongst them, Miss Alice Briod. The men in charge of the Organisation, beginning with Gonzague de Reynold himself, deserved mention on such an occasion. They included the speaker's father, H. P. Zschokke, Olivier Reverdin and Dr. Arnold Laett who had played such an important part in the early years of the London Group.

Dr. Schuerch then enumerated the ways in which *das Jahr der Fünften Schweiz* was being celebrated. It began with the official ceremony in Basle in April, where the London Group had been singled out by having one of their members (Mrs. Mariann Meier) as speaker on behalf of the Swiss abroad. A special stamp was issued, a souvenir number of the "Echo" and the booklet "Die Fünfte Schweiz" were published. The Assembly in Berne was of longer duration than usual, there was a concert arranged by the Geneva N.S.H. Group in September, and finally, there would be a large meeting in Zurich early in October, prior to the vote on the 16th. The speaker displayed the striking poster which was ready for distribution "Die Fünfte Schweiz verdient unsere Stimme".

Dr. Schuerch explained that with the publicity for the proposed Constitutional Article for the Swiss Abroad, the Swiss people should be made aware of the Swiss outside the mother country as a whole body, as an important factor in forming the Swiss image abroad. *Politische Willensbildung,* Dr. Schuerch referred to next. He confessed that he was sceptical as to the granting of full political rights as yet, though that was certainly a possibility at a later date. He was also aware that not all Swiss communities abroad held the same views in this respect, and he thought that the less militant attitude of a Colony such as that in G.B. would prevail, at any rate at first. But the Article and the efforts made in connection with it would certainly mean more consultation. The Swiss community in the United Kingdom had already been of help in strengthening the whole Organisation of the Swiss Abroad by forming themselves into a Federation.

Dr. Schuerch then read the legend of the Bernese Ritter von Straettligen who had done a great service to the King of England during the Hundred-Years War, and he presented a book of chronicles to the London Group on behalf of the town of Berne.

The speaker closed his address by reiterating that the Year of "Fifth Switzerland" was not that of the Fifth Column, nor were the Swiss abroad the "fifth wheel on the chariot", but, in the words of Alice Briod, the spare wheel which today had become indispensable.

When the applause had died down, the Chairman called on Monsieur Tosio to say a few words in Italian. He was proud to have been made the spokesman for the Italian and Romansh-speaking Swiss resident in the British Isles. He praised the work done by the N.S.H. and gave *"gli auguri piu sinceri e piu fervidi per un avvenire prosperoso e pieno di soddisfazioni, ringraziando i responsabili per la loro instancabile attività nel seno della colonia svizzera." And he finished with a few Romansh words "Nus congratulains alla Nova Sozietät Elvetica, e tschi-avusains bgers ans da activität nell'interesch dals Schvizzer all'Ester".*

The next speaker, Mrs. Mariann Meier, member of the Council, gave a short survey of the months prior to the actual foundation of the London Group in 1916 and of the first few years of its history. The full text is published separately.

Dr. H. B. Knuchel then brought greetings from the Swiss in Manchester. He reminded the audience of the saying "What Manchester thinks today, the rest of the world thinks tomorrow". With Swiss affairs, however, it was the other way round, for what the London Group of the N.S.H. thought today, the rest of the Swiss Colony would think tomorrow. He said that all the important qualities beginning with "I" were part of the N.S.H.'s make-up, ideas, ideals, initiative, imagination and inspiration. The Presidents' Assembly, the Federation of Swiss Societies and the Swiss Forum to be, all originated in the N.S.H.

The last part of the celebration was taken up by a piano recital by the eminent artist and compatriot Albert Ferber. He began with a brilliant Smetana Concert Study, followed by "L'Alouette" (Glinka-Balakireff). Two pieces by Debussy preceded the main work, five superb and stirring Preludes by the Swiss composer Frank Martin. Mr. Ferber finished his recital by delighting the audience with four Chopin-Liszt compositions.

Though the hour was getting late, there was no fading of interest, a tribute to the gifted artist and to the great occasion. Even for those to whom Mr. Ferber's admirable play was not sheer enjoyment, it was more than just polite listening to an expert performance. It was not just respect for the works of a Swiss composer, specially requested by the organisers to underline the society's cultural mission. It was far more than that. Thoughts went back over the past, for the older members over decades. Unseen they were with us, men and women who had devoted years of loyal work to the ideas and ideals of the London Group. Some had been mentioned, but others were present just the same, to single out just one now, Fred Suter, whose attachment to the N.S.H. has left its indelible mark.

Dr. Egli who has himself carried much of the burden over a number of years, closed the celebration with a sincere vote of thanks to all who had helped make the occasion unforgettable. He appealed to members and friends to go on supporting the Group's activities, so that it could carry high the banner and proceed successfully on the path mapped out by the founders fifty years ago.

The President and Council wish to express sincere thanks to an anonymous friend for a gift of beautiful flowers sent on the occasion of the Jubilee.

MM

SWISS DELEGATIONS IN LONDON

Amongst the 3,000 delegates to the Fifth Congress of the International Road Federation in London in September, was a strong Swiss group. Switzerland was also represented at the Annual General Meeting of the International Federation of Cotton and Allied Textile Industries, held about the same time.

The Swiss Ambassador and Madame de Fischer entertained the Swiss delegates, as well as some of the British personalities, at the Residence.

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