

Federal news

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some time been without a director, which has been found little satisfactory, especially by some of the more active communities abroad, whilst fully appreciating the valuable work done by the staff. The Commission was informed that a suitable candidate was on the point of being engaged. Members left the appointment in the hands of the Executive Committee of the Commission, trusting that the right choice would be made, which would relieve the President of some of the work.

The Solidarity Fund and its desirable and much-needed expansion were debated. More will be said about it in future issues of the "Swiss Observer". In order to remain independent, it needs more members to spread the risks more evenly.

The spring meeting of the Commission was fixed for 9th March in Berne. The next Assembly of the Swiss Abroad should take place in either Schaffhausen or Vevey/Montreux at the end of August 1968. The theme suggested is "The Young Swiss Abroad and their Relationship with Switzerland". The Youth Service has done some excellent work, especially with their summer and winter camps, and it is felt that the young Swiss have a valuable contribution to make.

Two pleas voiced at the end of the meeting were for more consideration to be given to the Italian language (by a French-speaking member) and for records of Swiss church bells and of the National Anthem, both to be available for First of August Celebrations.

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FEDERAL NEWS

China protests

On 5th August, the Embassy of the People's Republic of China protested to the Federal Council with unusual vehemence. The subject was the Tibetans living in Switzerland, "rebellious bandits" and "members of the former exploiter class". The protest note demanded a change of attitude and to "stop serving American and British Imperial and Indian reactionaries".

The Federal Political Department rejected the protest note whose tone and contents were unacceptable. There was considerable objection to the protest in the Press, and the Federal Council, too, approved the attitude of the Department. It then transpired that a first note of protest had already been received on 30th June but had been kept secret.

The "Schweizerische Tibethilfe" is based on private initiative, and 90% of its funds are used to help Tibetan refugees in Asiatic countries, over 1 million francs in 1965. The whole scheme has an entirely private character and is very much according to Swiss tradition to help wherever there is suffering, regardless of race, political opinions or religion. There is a Tibet Institute at Rikon (Toesstal), and this organisation, too, declared its opposition to China's interference. They say that the deliberate effort by the Chinese to destroy a great culture is going on, and that a great deal more assistance is needed by the unfortunate victims. In Asia alone, there are some 80,000 refugees. The Indian Government has given valuable help, also international organisations like the Red Cross, but there are still some 20,000 refugees in camps. The Swiss organisation was founded in 1960, and amongst its activities is the construction of children's homes in Western India and trying to bring together separated families. North of New Delhi, a village and artisan centre was built for 500 refugees, and two projects under way are for a poultry farm and a cloth factory.

In Switzerland there are at present 377 Tibetan Red Cross refugees, living in twelve different centres, a number of children at the Pestalozzi Village at Trogen and a good few adopted by Swiss families — a total of about 570.

In July, five Tibetan Lamas arrived in Switzerland, especially chosen by the Dalai Lama to look after the spiritual welfare of their countrymen. They will teach the Tibetan language at the Tibet Institute at Rikon and watch that Tibetan culture and religion will be kept up.

Later in August, the Chinese protested once more and called Switzerland a "centre of Anti-Chinese activities". That note was handed to the Swiss Ambassador Dr. Rossetti in Peking. Federal Councillor Spuehler said that the Swiss Government had "had enough" and that no more notice would be taken of any further protests which would be treated with the contempt they deserved. The Swiss Confederation want to entertain normal relations with China but are not prepared to discuss the affairs of a private organisation.

Federal Councillors travel far

Federal Councillor Spuehler in the Far East, Federal Councillor Gnaegi in Moscow, Monsieur Spuehler in Canada and U.S.A., Monsieur Schaffner in Paris and Stockholm . . . There has been some protest about such travelling, although the advantages are recognised, especially a certain relief for Swiss diplomatic missions. The main criticism concerns the cost of so many journeys at a time when the federal budget is not exactly favourable.

But there is no doubt as to the value of such high representation. Federal Councillor Spuehler officially represented Switzerland at the Centenary Celebration of Canada, and he was present at the official Swiss Day at the World Exhibition. The Swiss delegation consisted of a number of personalities deliberately chosen by the Federal Council to represent the four languages and cultures of Switzerland. He also attended the Swiss National Day Celebration in Washington where he had talks with Secretary of State Rusk. On his return to Switzerland, he said that he and his delegation had been able to help the Swiss *présence*, that Swiss capital would be welcome in Canada, that the example of Switzerland's four languages and cultures living peacefully together was making a deep impression in Quebec, and that Switzerland's participation at the World Exhibition was of considerable value. He also stated that Switzerland's neutrality was well understood in Washington, and that her services, especially in Cuba, were much appreciated. The question of calling up Swiss residents in U.S.A. was also discussed, and assurances given that such call ups would be deferred as long as possible, and that a new *visum* type was being considered for young Swiss students. Finally, the question of import duty on watches: The efforts at Congress level to reintroduce the escape clause regulations are of greatest importance to Switzerland. President Johnson had abolished the clause as from 1st January last, with the result that duty sank from 65 to 40%. This had been mainly thanks to determined action by Swiss representatives in U.S.A. and the Kennedy Round.

On 17th August, a Swissair "Caravelle" left Zurich on its first inaugural flight Zurich-Moscow-Zurich. The official delegation of 29 people included Federal Councillor Gnaegi, Head of the Department of Transport and Communication. It was stressed that it was not an official State Visit but a good-will tour. A return visit of similar kind took place to Switzerland on 27th August. The Russian delegation of 30 people was received by the

Federal Authorities, and they visited the Sulzer Brothers' Works, the town Rapperswil, made a tour of the Lake of Lucerne, a visit to Muerren and the Schilthorn, Heimiswil, Interlaken, Bienne, Moutier, Basle and Zurich.

The Federal Council at Work

Early in August, the Federal Council published a message to Parliament asking for a loan of 52 million francs (50 years) to the International Development Association. On 9th August, President Bonvin received a group of the American Civil Air Patrol, who had been initiated in Switzerland into Alpine gliding.

On the advice of the relevant body, the General Management of the PTT, the Federal Council has declared to be in favour of the German Pal-System in coloured television. One of the most important considerations was that the 800'000 TV receivers at present used in Switzerland would not become redundant on the introduction of colour television.

On 21st August, the Government visited the Nuclear Power Research Station at Lucens and, next day, considered pay increases for federal personnel. This will be as little popular with the public as the five-day week proposals. The Federal Council also announced that a contribution would be paid to the Foundation for Federal Co-operation which is being created in Switzerland. The Annual Ambassadors' Conference took place in Berne at the end of August under the chairmanship of Monsieur Spuehler.

The new Swiss Cardinal, His Eminence Benno Gut, was received by members of the Federal Council and entertained to a luncheon attended by personalities from all denominational groups in Switzerland. On 29th August, the Government decided to reject a request by the South Vietnamese Foreign Ministry to send Swiss observers to the South Vietnamese general elections; the reason for not accepting was that the matter was one of purely internal concern. The Federal Council also decided to confiscate Communist propaganda material which had been sent from various countries and which was mainly destined for foreign workers.

It was also decided to take immediate steps to lower the price of butter and Gruyère cheese. The ratification documents concerning the French-Swiss double taxation agreement have been exchanged; the agreement will be retrospective to 1st January. "Die Volkswirtschaft", a monthly periodical issued by the Federal Department of Public Economy since 1932 (edited by BIGA), has been modernised; it is expected to be used more for specialised articles.

The Parliamentary Commissions have taken up their work again after the summer vacations. An interesting clarification has been given of a point brought up by National Councillor Breitenmoser (Basle) regarding the eligibility of women to the Council of States or rather whether they would be admitted to sessions of the Federal Assembly. The answer is "Yes", and it applies to the Cantons of Baselstadt, Vaud, Neuchâtel and Geneva where women can be elected to the Council of States.

(Compiled from news items received by courtesy of Agence Télégraphique Suisse.)

SWITZERLAND AND THE NEAR EAST

More help has been given by Switzerland to the victims and refugees in the Near East. 3,500 blankets were sent to Arab refugees early in July, and Swiss Red Cross Delegates work in Arab countries occupied by Israeli; the Committee has also formed a group to take care of repatriations; delegates have stated that Israel is giving every assistance. By the end of August, already over 200,000 messages to and from separated families were passed on by the International Committee of the Red Cross. The federal authorities have given further assistance, and the Federal Council have agreed to put Col. Zuest, medical practitioner at Frauenfeld, at the disposal of UNO for supervising the cease fire. Ambassador Ernesto Thalmann, Head of the Section for International Organisations of the Federal Political Department, has been lent by the Federal Council, to collect information about the conditions in Jerusalem, needed by U Thant for a report to the UNO Security Council.

News of help campaigns from Switzerland include a collection started by a reader of the "Gazette de Lausanne" (nearly 17,000 francs), an auction of valuables, mainly antiques, in Geneva and in aid of Jerusalem (over half a million francs), a charity concert at the Tonhalle in Zurich (Fr.22,500.—) and the Zurich "Pro Israel" drive (well over 600,000 francs). The Swiss Red Cross collected a similar amount by 1st August. Some of this money has been used for the purchase of blankets, condensed milk, soup powder, soap, clothing and blood plasma.

The Swiss Zionist Federation officially thanked the Swiss people for their spontaneous help. Swiss Jewry collected 36m. francs.

Invited by the organisation "Experiment in International Living" (recognised by UNESCO) a group of young Israeli spent some time in Switzerland in August; the Swiss group sent to Israel had to return prematurely on account of the war. [A.T.S.]

