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NEWS FROM THE COLONY

SWISS BENEVOLENT SOCIETY

Report for the Year 1966

We are presenting the 97th Annual Report of our activity for the relief of compatriots in need in the consular district of London, the area laid down in our Statutes and covering all South England and parts of the Midlands.

In the first place, we wish to record our very sincere gratitude to our former Ambassador, Monsieur Béat de Fischer, our Honorary President, who retired at the end of 1966 and who, during his all too brief three years in London, had shown the friendliest interest in our society's work and given it every support. With much regret we took leave from him officially when he paid us the compliment of a farewell visit at our Quarterly Meeting in November.

We count ourselves fortunate in having had successive Swiss Ministers and Ambassadors in London heading our organisation and lending it their high and encouraging patronage. We were therefore very pleased indeed to have the opportunity of welcoming our new Ambassador, Monsieur Olivier Long, at our Annual General Meeting in April this year and, with his consent, to elect him as our new Honorary President.

Once again we have to deplore the loss of a member of our General Committee through the death last September of Mrs. Rose Ziereisen, née Raccoursier, who for many years had, with selfless devotion, rendered very valuable services in a variety of ways for the good of our cause.

In our annual reviews of our activity, we have quoted the number of cases we have dealt with, the money involved, and we have offered general or special comments on our financial position, but we have tended to omit another but not less important side of our work, which cannot be expressed in figures. Problems are constantly brought to us calling for advice, guidance and action where the mutual confidence, grown out of long personal contacts between our 'protégés' and the known and trusted friends in our office, plays an essential part. No statistics are drawn up of the number of visits paid and letters written to those in need of special help or sympathetic understanding, nor of the patience exercised in listening to pathetic stories from mentally troubled callers, nor of the number of forms of every kind which we help to fill or are asked to witness, etc., etc. It would not do to go here into details, but, like all the others, such cases are time absorbing. However, they are all in the day's work and we are always very glad to be able to help.

The number of people assisted by us in 1966 was 283, made up of 29 couples with 34 children, 58 widows and widowers with 8 children, 79 lone women and 46 lone men, compared with a total of 290 in 1965. We gave 354 interviews and dealt with 2,450 applications, an increase of 8 and 25 respectively over the previous year.

Regular weekly-based allowances were paid to 67 pensioners aged between 63 and 95. Scale rates of assistance for essential living expenses, not including rent which is allowed in full in addition, were maintained at the levels of 78/6 per week for a single person and 128/- per week for a couple, to which they had been raised on the 5th April, 1965. Recently, however, the Ministry of Social Security — which took over the National Assistance Board last November — increased their scale rates by 5/- a week

for a single person and 7/6 a week for a couple and we have, in accordance with our practice, raised ours by the same amounts as from the 7th March, 1967, making our new rates 83/6 and 135/6 respectively. In this connection, it may be of interest to add that our grants, like those made by the Ministry of Social Security out of public funds, are fixed after taking into account any income our compatriots may have from earnings, retirement and/or other pensions, or other sources. However, by long tradition of our society, our scale rates are a fraction above the official ones and are applied with certain discretion as befits each case. Furthermore, successive increases in Swiss old-age pension benefits (AHV/AVS) drawn by a number of our pensioners have been disregarded by us in view of their purpose as a betterment of the conditions of all recipients of this measure of providence.

Besides our allowances to pensioners, four of whom we helped to maintain in Homes, we have given casual grants to needy compatriots in temporary difficulties, we have provided the fares for three children going on holiday to Switzerland under the "Pro Juventute" scheme, we have made it possible for six aged compatriots to enjoy a holiday at the seaside or in the country, we have helped seventeen cases of repatriation, and have as usual made a contribution to the Welfare Office for Swiss Girls in Great Britain. We have also given pocket money to patients of Swiss nationality in homes for nervous diseases in England.

Total Relief paid amounted to £6,135 against £6,199 in 1965.

Administrative expenses and the outlays for our premises at 31 Conway Street show only a small increase over the previous year's figures, and as to the cost of maintenance of the buildings at 9-11 Belsize Grove, leased by us to the Swiss Hostel for Girls since 1957, we are happy to say that it dropped to less than a quarter of the amount in recent years when major repairs had to be carried out.

All in all, unlike the previous four years when our accounts ended in successive deficits of £2,949, £4,440, £4,971 and £4,373, 1966 saw a welcome return to a more balanced financial position, more in keeping with our traditional work of assistance to the needy. But even so, we still ended the year in the red, as the following figures show and as we have, very unfortunately, done almost uninterruptedly since 1951: PAYMENTS of £10,717, RECEIPTS of £9,797, leaves a DEFICIT of £920.

This continuous deficiency of income against payments, grievously aggravated for a time by the heavy maintenance outlays for 9-11 Belsize Grove, has brought about a drop in our assets from close on £128,000 in 1954 to below £102,000 now. This is causing us increasing and alarming concern. Committed as we are to the regular payment of fixed allowances to our pensioners and with the yield from investments slowly but steadily dwindling, dare we face the necessity of reducing our financial support somewhere and cutting down on our administration? The question begs the answer and the answer, as we see it, is for the Swiss community here to rise realistically to the needs of the times and of our cause, in the spirit of our national motto.

The Swiss federal and cantonal authorities have again maintained their annual subsidy for 1966 at 9,000 Swiss Francs and we are, as always, most grateful to them for this welcome help.

Our present arrangements with the Swiss Hostel for Girls, which provide for the payment to us of an annual rent of £2,000 plus supplement depending on certain contingencies, will expire on the 29th September, 1967. Progress has been made on a renewal lease for seven years, on revised terms more in keeping with reality, but still representing an appreciable subsidy on our part in support of this very worthy enterprise.

We handle the Swiss Old-Age Pension (AHV/AVS) for a number of our compatriots, who prefer to receive it through us on a pro-rata weekly basis in advance, along with our regular allowances, rather than in a lump sum near the end of the quarter.

Our Clothing Department has continued to dispense wearing apparel, also household goods as well as food, during the course of the year. 115 parcels were distributed under our Christmas Action, which benefited 130 people. And here we wish to express our very sincere gratitude to all individual donors, to the "Frauenverein", the "Réunion de Couture", the firms, who have so helpfully and generously contributed to this annual event in our activity. Mr. Ziereisen's very efficient handling of this exacting work and the kind co-operation by Mrs. Raulin, Mrs. Tosio and Mrs. Bachofen are gratefully acknowledged here too.

The Guaranteed Contributions under Deed of Covenant dropped by £12 to £805 in 1966, mainly through death, but the higher standard rate of income tax resulted in an increase of £69 to £568 of the refund to us by the Inland Revenue. As so often before, we again commend this form of subscription for its additional benefit to us, at no extra cost to the donor. For example, an annual subscription of £5 5s. paid by the donor is worth £8 11s. 5d. to us at the present standard rate of income tax, the difference of £3 6s. 5d. coming to us from the Inland Revenue as a refund on the tax paid by the donor.

Our Administration is vested in the Executive Committee elected annually by our General Committee. The Executive meets normally on the second and fourth Monday of every month at 31 Conway Street to hear the secretary's report on the day-to-day business and to take decisions on all matters of importance. Our thanks are due to our secretary, Mr. Jules Zimmermann, and to our assistant secretary, Mr. Walter Ziereisen, for their faithful services.

We are indebted to Monsieur F. Ansermoz, Social Counsellor of the Swiss Embassy, and to Consul E. Tosio for their regular and welcome attendance in turn at our Monday meetings, ensuring as it does a very helpful contact for us with the Embassy.

One of our Hon. Joint Auditors, Mr. J. Koch, of the Swiss Embassy, has left London and Mr. Jean-Marie DéBoeuf, also of the Swiss Embassy, has been elected Hon. Joint Auditor in his place. We are grateful to those gentlemen and to our other Hon. Joint Auditor, Mr. J. Katz, of the Swiss Bank Corporation, for giving us their time and experience in carrying out their voluntary duties.

We continued to be represented on the committee of the Welfare Office for Swiss Girls in Great Britain by our secretary, Mr. Jules Zimmermann, who is one of their two Vice-Presidents.

In conclusion, it remains for us to repeat that our society's purpose is to assist Swiss citizens, temporarily or permanently resident here, who may be in need of help. All cases brought to our notice are considered with every sympathy.

Our grateful thanks go to the federal, cantonal and municipal authorities at home, to the Swiss Embassy in

London and its officials, to the Swiss churches, the Swiss societies and to all our subscribers, firms and individuals, who have so kindly and generously sustained our efforts. We hope that we may count on their continued practical goodwill and, where possible, on their increasing material support. The need, as we have shown in these pages, is greater than ever.

We also wish to record our appreciation of the help of the "Swiss Observer" in giving free publicity to our reports and appeals.

Finally, we wish to express thanks to the British authorities for the kind hospitality we enjoy in this country.

On behalf of the Committee:

X. SPECKERT,

President.

Honorary President: Monsieur Olivier Long, Swiss Ambassador; Honorary Vice-President: Mr. F. G. Sommer. Executive Committee: Mr. X. Speckert (President), Messrs. J. Oertli, M. A. Rothlisberger, M. Schneebeli (Vice-Presidents), Mr. M. A. Rothlisberger (Hon. Treasurer), Mr. D. E. Bonnet (Hon. Assistant Treasurer), Mr. J. Zimmermann (Secretary).

SWISS MERCANTILE SOCIETY

The Monthly Meeting of the Society, held at Swiss House on Wednesday, 11th October, was well attended. Among those present, the Chairman, Mr. A. Jaccard, particularly welcomed two members who recently completed 50 years' membership viz. Mr. F. G. Sommer, Trustee and Hon. Member, and Mr. F. Streit, a member of the Council. Unfortunately, the other two veterans, Messrs. W. Jent and O. Gasser, were unable to be present.

In offering congratulations and thanks on behalf of the London Section to them for their long and faithful support, the Chairman paid a special tribute to the great and unselfish services rendered to the Colony by both Mr. Sommer and Mr. Streit, who in their various spheres of activity had devoted a great deal of time and energy to the causes they had long espoused. The Chairman also extended very best wishes to Mr. F. Streit, who on this very day was celebrating his 40th wedding anniversary.

Following the meeting, Mr. G. Hediger showed a colour film compiled from the Society's summer outings back to 1958, when a party of members and delegates from Switzerland visited Cambridge on the occasion of the Society's 70th anniversary. These outings have since become a popular annual feature and included venues such as Woburn Abbey, Luton Hoo, St. Albans and Hatfield House, Rye and Winchelsea, Hever Castle, Waddesdon Manor, etc. The film brought back memories of sunny days spent in beautiful surroundings and the congenial company of friends, some of whom, alas, are no longer with us. Interspersed with these familiar scenes were extracts from films of Continental holidays, a journey along the Rhine Valley and the Black Forest, as well as some nostalgic Swiss scenery, including very fine shots of the Rhine Falls in all their majestic glory.

Holidays of a different kind, but obviously very popular these days with the masses in search of the often too elusive sun in these climes, were portrayed in a very colourful film of the Costa Brava, taken and shown by the Principal of the College, Mr. C. Slade.

To the background accompaniment of Spanish tunes, we saw much of this picturesque coast, with its numerous sandy beaches bathed in glorious sunshine. There were