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The Swiss Observer

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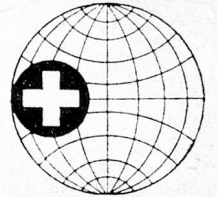
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THE "FIFTH SWITZERLAND" A LIVING REALITY?



Safely Anchored

On 16th October last year, the electorate in Switzerland accepted the Constitutional Article for the Swiss Abroad. The Federal Council, assisted by the Commission of the Swiss Abroad, had prepared the draft which was then passed unanimously by the two Chambers. The reason for some majorities against the Article of 45% and more in some of the Cantons may have been certain misgivings about the idea of political participation of the Swiss living outside the homeland. Though this thought is only vaguely hinted at in the Article and has not been expressed in any concrete form, some of the citizens at home dislike the prospects of having the Swiss abroad "meddle in their affairs", as one worthy confederate expressed himself. This is not the place to discuss the validity of such arguments. Though whilst the Article has been firmly anchored in the Swiss Constitution, the legislators will have to bear in mind that there is some opposition.

On the other hand, the fact that all Cantons accepted the Article and that in well-populated Cantons like Zurich and Berne and some of the frontier Cantons (Geneva 10:1) the majorities were considerable, may be looked upon as a testimony in favour of "Fifth Switzerland" and as encouragement to those working in the interest of their compatriots outside the country's boundaries. It may also be taken as a mandate to the federal authorities for a strong *Auslandschweizerpolitik* in the interest of Switzerland's image in the world. The homeland has become more aware of the value of Swiss citizens playing an important part in an ever more integrated world.

Now that the Swiss living abroad, by being put on the Statute Book, have become the object of political care and legislative measures, the question arises how their new status can be put to best use in the interest of the country as a whole. Within the federal administration, ways and means have to be examined how to activate the *Auslandschweizerpolitik* and to start the ball rolling with regard to *Ausführungsgesetzgebung*. So far, "Fifth Switzerland" is more of an idea than a reality. There is the network of diplomatic and consular services and the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad. There are several semi-official and private bodies available which work in economic or cultural fields. But the Confederation and these groups must cooperate to a much larger extent in order to strengthen not only their activities inside Switzerland, but to consolidate

the structure of "Fifth Switzerland". Like that, the Swiss communities abroad will become a *living* "Fifth Switzerland", capable of action and able to play a worthy part as a constitutional ingredient in the Swiss body politic.

Change at the Helm

These thoughts have been taken from an *exposé* by Dr. G. Schuerch, President of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad and Chairman of the Commission until his retirement early in April. He is a man who grew up with the *Auslandschweizerwerk*, for his father, Dr. h.c. Ernst Schuerch, Editor-in-Chief of the "Bund", was President of the Commission of the Swiss Abroad twice and belonged to it until 1948. He first entrusted his young son with editing the columns of reports from Swiss communities abroad, and later he was happy to see Gerhart appointed Secretary at the *Auslandschweizersekretariat* in 1934, the same year as Prof. Dr. A. Laett became President.

At that time, the colonies and the Secretariat suffered from the economic crisis, and it needed a lot of idealism to give up a promising legal career and to take over the affairs of the Swiss abroad. For seven years Dr. Schuerch did valuable work, but when he left the Secretariat, he remained in the service of his countrymen outside Switzerland. As Chairman of many Commissions and Committees, as legal adviser, as examiner of Swiss war victim cases (which he still does today) and in many other capacities he has served the cause of the *Auslandschweizer*. He was also President of the New Helvetic Society from 1949 to 1951, and he became Chairman of the Commission of the Swiss Abroad in 1957. Space is too restricted in this paper to enlarge on all that Dr. Schuerch has done for the Swiss abroad. (For a full appreciation we refer to the "Echo".) We know that he will continue to work in our interest as much as his busy political life (he is Commune Councillor and Minister of Finance of Berne) allows. He will remain a member of the Commission of the Swiss Abroad where his wise counsel will be much appreciated.

At the same meeting early in April at which the Commission regretfully accepted Dr. Schuerch's resignation, a new Chairman was elected in the person of Councillor of States Louis Guisan. He is no newcomer to the organisation, and he will continue the sterling work of his predecessor with the same energy and responsibility. He

was born in 1911 in Lausanne and studied law in several countries. He has played an active part as a politician (Liberal Democrat), was elected Vaudois Councillor of State in 1954 and in turn National Councillor and finally Councillor of States. He is a Director of the "Gazette de Lausanne" and a Lieutenant-Colonel in the Swiss General Staff. Under his able guidance, the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad and its Commission should go on growing and expanding and continuing to work usefully in the interest of "Fifth Switzerland" and the home country.

Improving the Means

In order to make the "Fifth Switzerland" a living reality, the Swiss communities abroad themselves have to organise their resources more effectively. The Swiss in Great Britain have made a good start by changing their rather loosely organised Presidents' Assembly into a more close-knit Federation of Swiss Societies in Great Britain. But that in itself is not enough. There are many Swiss who would like to join societies but who have not been contacted. This is one of the most difficult problems in any of the Swiss communities abroad, how to reach the "isolated". The existing societies should inform their members to a much larger degree of matters discussed and decided at Presidents' (Federation) meetings. Members should be invited more frequently to voice their opinions, their wishes. There are some laudable examples, the New Helvetic Society in London arrange for regular discussions, and the Swiss Club Manchester have recently circularised members' regarding important questions of policy, representation and information. The columns of this paper carry as much information as possible, but there is not enough exchange of views, not enough constructive criticism. The ideal state would be a continuous *two-way traffic* of information not only *to* our compatriots, but also *from* them.

Information about Switzerland is needed by the Swiss living abroad, and information is badly wanted in Switzerland *about* the Swiss resident outside the country. Again two-way traffic. For this purpose, the Secretariat of the Swiss Abroad in Berne have compiled a

Questionnaire

regarding information. They want to know how well the Swiss abroad are informed, what their wishes for better information are, whether and how existing means should and could be altered or improved. The societies have been given a supply of these questionnaires, and members will no doubt be able to collect them at their next meetings. If anybody else wishes to have a copy, in German or French, he or she can apply to the Editor of the "Swiss Observer" (*enclosing a stamped/addressed envelope, please*). The questions may not be very well formulated, but there are some which can be answered easily and where the replies are most important to the Secretariat. This is specially the case regarding the "Echo". Subscribers have dropped considerably, and the publishers want to know how to improve this unique monthly publication in three of our national languages. If not all the questions can be answered, a letter may be enclosed stating wishes and opinions not catered for in the questionnaire. The answers will also serve as the basis of one of the addresses at the

Assembly of the Swiss Abroad in Lugano

at the end of August. It is there that the problem will be discussed of how the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad can be strengthened. For this purpose, the communities are asked to nominate speakers, and a representative for the Swiss in the U.K. will be chosen presently. In order that he should be well briefed and that he should really be aware of the wishes of the Swiss in these islands, an invitation to our compatriots will be issued shortly, asking them for their views. The next issue of the "Swiss Observer" will have particulars regarding this matter.

For the first time in the history of the Swiss Confederation, an Article has been put in the Federal Constitution concerning *people* and not things. It is a great privilege that the people concerned should be the Swiss living abroad. The acceptance by the Swiss electorate was the crowning of much hard work and years of effort. We have been granted a special status which gives us not only rights, but also duties. It is up to us now to show our willingness to accept both.

MM

A HAPPY AND PEACEFUL WHITSUNTIDE TO ALL OUR READERS

The World stands out on either side
No wider than the Heart is wide
Above the World is stretched the Sky
No higher than the Soul is high
The Heart can push the Sea and Land
Farther away on either hand
The Soul can split the Sky in two
And let the Face of God shine through

(EDNA ST. VINCENT MILLAY)