

Welfare Office for Swiss girls

Objekttyp: **Group**

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

Band (Jahr): - **(1968)**

Heft 1552

PDF erstellt am: **28.04.2024**

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NEWS FROM THE COLONY

WELFARE OFFICE FOR SWISS GIRLS IN GREAT BRITAIN

The Annual General Meeting of the Committee of the Welfare Office for Swiss Girls in Great Britain took place on Monday, 6th May, at the Swiss Hostel for Girls, 9 Belsize Grove, London N.W.3. Owing to the indisposition of the President, Mrs. M. H. Ellis, Mr. J. Zimmermann, Vice-President, took the Chair.

The following is an extract from the Annual Report of the Committee presented by the Hon. Secretary:

The Committee can look back over the past year with a feeling of satisfaction. There were no Staff crises to interrupt the activity of the Welfare Office. Mr. B. Kind, the Welfare Officer, has worked hard and conscientiously in helping any girl who called on her with a problem or who was merely seeking general information.

It was with sincere regret that the Committee received the resignation from the Staff of Mrs. A. Sharp, who for many years had worked on a part time basis and had replaced the Welfare Officer during holiday periods. She has now joined the Staff of the Swiss Benevolent Society and thus maintains a link with the Welfare Office.

The year under review brought several changes in the composition of the Committee. Madame Long, Hon. President, took leave of the members in January 1968. From the beginning of her stay in London she had shown particular interest in the work of the Welfare Office and when taking leave of the Committee at the beginning of 1968 assured the members of her readiness to be of assistance to them whenever possible. Mrs. A. Zumstein, the representative of "Pro Filia", and Mrs. A. Woods, the representative of the "Amies de la Jeune Fille", both members of the Committee since its reorganisation in 1958, tendered their resignation. The Committee are conscious of the debt of gratitude they owe to these two ladies for the many services they have rendered during their term of office. Mrs. E. Käufeler has kindly consented to replace Mrs. Zumstein on the Committee. A further loss was suffered by the departure of Father Scherer who at all times was extremely helpful, particularly to the Welfare Officer. The members were pleased to welcome his successor, Father Paul Bossard, to the Committee.

Although Consul Tosio was not a member of the Committee he occasionally represented Monsieur Ansermoz at meetings and was at all times most helpful when we sought his advice.

For some time the Committee has been concerned at the absence of any ruling compelling "au pair" girls coming to this country to register with the Swiss Embassy. Experience has shown that a number of young girls accept posts with families and leave after only a short time and subsequently cannot be traced. Steps have been taken through the intermediary of BIGA to induce the Council of Europe to introduce a measure into the "Au Pair Charter" compelling girls to register at the Embassy in the country of destination immediately on arrival and to deposit there at the same time a copy of their working agreement, duly signed by themselves and counter-signed by the employers. In the case of London these documents would be passed to the Welfare Office. So far no support has been received from BIGA, but the Committee will go on working to this end.

There have been no further developments in the proposed scheme for the transfer of the Welfare Office to the Swiss Centre.

The Welfare Office continues to depend for its maintenance on the annual Federal subsidy from Berne, the annual contributions from the "Amies de la Jeune Fille" and "Pro Filia" in Switzerland and the Swiss Benevolent Society. Various sections of the "Schweiz. Verband Evangelischer Frauenhilfe" who are aware of the work of the Welfare Office, send donations.

The report concluded with an appreciation of the assistance given to the Committee by the Swiss Embassy, the Swiss Benevolent Society, the Swiss Clergy and the Swiss Hostel. A tribute was also paid to Mrs. Meier, Editor of the "Swiss Observer" for giving publicity to the Welfare Office, and to the Auditors for their services. Finally, the Committee wished to place on record their appreciation of the splendid leadership of the President, Mrs. Ellis.

Mrs. Kind, the Welfare Officer, presented her report on the activity of the Welfare Office for the year 1967, of which the following is an extract:

During 1967, 593 girls were in touch with the Welfare Office as against 576 in 1966. Of these 268 contacted Mrs. Kind directly, whilst the others were referred to the Welfare Office by parents, friends or organisations in Switzerland, Employment Agencies in London, Police, English authorities and organisations such as the National Council for the Unmarried Mother and her Child, International Travellers Aid, the Swiss Embassy and the Swiss Clergy. Experience has shown that girls have no hesitation in asking for information and advice but lack confidence to ask for direct help.

General information was given also to people other than Swiss girls. Enquiries related to schools, accommodation, travel, church services, leisure activities and above all to regulations and laws for domestic posts and the possibilities of working in England. Although a number of "Au Pair" girls leave families to work without permit in restaurants, shops, hairdressers, etc., the Welfare Officer has not yet been called upon to help any girl in difficulty for not complying with the official rules and regulations. A number of enquiries are made regarding the suitability of families by girls who have found positions through advertisements. Some of these can be passed on to the British Vigilance Association. Several girls had to change their jobs because they had little opportunity to speak English and some sought advice because they were being exploited. Less check visits were made because it was found that employers were embarrassed to have a Welfare Officer calling at the house.

As in the past students were helped to find suitable accommodation and given the names of schools. It now appears that many more girls could make use of their professional training and work as student-employees. Dressmakers, secretaries and soft furnishing makers as well as one technical draughtswoman were put in touch with employers. Others were advised on matters like tax refund, Insurance Cards, etc.

Welfare Cases numbered girls who were physically and mentally ill. Three girls were involved in a motor accident. They were visited in hospital, their compensation claims attended to and later they were repatriated. Among the mental cases 7 were admitted to mental

hospitals. Some were able to stay at the Swiss Hostel until they were well enough to return home. The Welfare Office providing the ticket and making the necessary travel arrangements. There were a few cases of pregnancy and most of the girls were helped to return to Switzerland. Parents and Swiss authorities sometimes have difficulty in accepting the underprivileged situation of young foreign girls who become pregnant in England. The chances for any unmarried mothers to get help from the putative father are very slight in this country, but the foreign girl who has to leave England because she is pregnant has no possibility whatsoever of taking action. Claims can be brought only if a girl is domiciled in England and only after the child is born. By then, most girls have left the country.

Ten Swiss girls were refused permission to land and these were helped by Mrs. Ellis. Seven girls were caught shop-lifting and had to pay heavy fines. Five girls found to be in moral danger agreed to return to Switzerland. As in 1966 there was no evidence of drugs being a specific danger to Swiss girls.

Financial assistance was given to 42 girls but repayment was very good.

Several journalists wrote articles about Swiss girls in Great Britain and gave short reports on the activities of the Welfare Office. The "Télévision Suisse" in Geneva made another film on Au Pairs and the BBC showed part of the film made earlier by a Swiss German team and interviewed the social worker on this subject.

The report concluded with an expression of gratitude for their assistance and co-operation to the Swiss Embassy, particularly to Consul E. Tosio and Vice-Consul Ch. Abegglen, to Miss H. Siegrist who welcomed the girls at the Swiss Hostel, and looked after them, the Ministers of the Swiss Churches in London, the Swiss Benevolent Society, the aforementioned English organisations i.e. the British Vigilance Association, the National Council for the Unmarried Mother and her Child, the Aliens Police Registration Office, the Immigration Officers, Police Inspectors, social workers, doctors and nurses, understanding employers and friendly families who came to the rescue of stranded Swiss girls, as well as to the many Swiss girls who were such good friends and went to great lengths to help other girls in need.

* * *

The Committee of the Welfare Office for 1968 consists of the following members:

Mrs. M. H. Ellis, M.B.E., President; Mr. J. Zimmermann, Vice-President, representing Swiss Benevolent Society; Mrs. O. Grob, Vice-President; Mrs. R. Thomas, Hon. Treasurer; Mrs. H. Knoll, Hon. Secretary; Mrs. E. Käufeler, representing "Pro Filia"; Mrs. E. Cottet, representing Swiss Hostel; Monsieur F. Ansermoz, Swiss Embassy; The Rev. Father P. Bossard, Swiss Catholic Mission; Pfarrer M. Dietler, Swiss Church; Pasteur A. Nicod, Swiss Church.

WELFARE OFFICE FOR SWISS GIRLS IN GREAT BRITAIN

(For Information, Advice or Help)

11 Belsize Grove, London N.W.3.

(Nearest Underground Station: Belsize Park)

Telephone: PRImrose 4260

RECEPTION HOURS

Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday

2 p.m. to 5 p.m. or by appointment.

ANGLO-SWISS SOCIETY IN GREAT BRITAIN

Annual Meeting and Reception for Swiss Parliamentary Delegation :

The President of the Anglo-Swiss Society, Lord Selkirk, chaired it's Annual General Meeting on 22nd July, at the Dorchester Hotel. The usual business was transacted. The fact that membership had increased, was commented on favourably, and the Officers and Executive Committee would continue their efforts in this direction. The Rt. Hon. The Earl of Selkirk, P.C., G.C.M.G., G.B.E., A.F.C., Q.C., is supported by Sir Clifford Norton, K.C.M.G., C.V.O., at Vice-President, by Captain T. D. R. Richardson, O.B.E., as Hon. Treasurer, and by Col. H. S. Townend, O.B.E., and Monsieur P. Stauffer as Hon. Secretaries.

Following the A.G.M., the Society gave a Reception in honour of the Swiss Parliamentary Delegation in London from 16th to 24th July. A British Delegation had been in Switzerland in 1955, and this was the return visit at the invitation of the Speaker of the House of Commons and the Lord Chancellor. Apart from visits to both Chambers, the Swiss parliamentarians were shown an agricultural research establishment, a R.A.F. station and an atomic research centre.

The delegation was headed by the President of the National Council, Dr. H. Conzett (BGB, Zurich). The other members were National Councillors Dr. P. Freymond (Rad. Vaud), W. Hagmann (K.Chr. St. Gall), Dr. A. Muheim (Soc. Lucerne), and the Councillors of States Dr. E. Amstad (K.Chr. Nidwalden) and W. Jauslin (Rad. Baselland).

Some 80 members and friends attended the party, among them the Swiss Ambassador and Madame R. Keller, as well as Consul F. Adams.

MM.

OBITUARY

It is with deep regret that we announce the death of Mr. Charles Baerlocher of 9 Perryn Road, East Acton, W.3. His death at the age of 90, took place in May, and belatedly, but sincerely, we extend our sympathy to Mrs. Baerlocher. She and her husband would have had their 56th wedding anniversary on 14th August. Mr. Baerlocher had been a staunch supporter of the N.S.H.

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Another faithful old reader would have had his 78th birthday this month, Mr. Siro Alberti, of 15 Spring Gardens, Malvern Link, Worcs. It is with deep regret that we have to announce his death on 27th July after a long and painful illness. He had been a member of the Unione Ticinese when living in London. We send our sincere condolences to Mrs. Dorothy Alberti in her bereavement.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

We wish to thank the following subscribers for sending donations in addition to their subscriptions and/or for taking out or renewing gift subscriptions for friends or old-age pensioners:

Mrs. E. Cottet, Mrs. M. M. England, Miss D. Gerber (St. Imier), Mrs. F. Jones, Miss E. Stamm, Mrs. M. G. Wix, Monsieur R. Zellweger (Kinshasa, Congo), and Messrs. E. P. Banderet, V. L. Bataillart, R. E. Baumann, M. Merian, G. N. Ross, E. Schaerer, F. E. Zollinger.

We are most grateful for their kind and welcome support.