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The Swiss Observer

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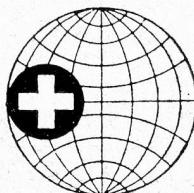
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"FIFTH SWITZERLAND"

Having just written about the "Swiss Observer" 30 years ago, I remember a short note on 17th September 1938 that the Assembly of the Swiss Abroad had met in Schaffhausen a week earlier. Federal Councillor Motta had been prevented from addressing the gathering on account of the precarious political situation, and the President of the Confederation, Federal Councillor Baumann, had sent a telegram of greetings to the Assembly. The President of the Cantonal Government, Mr. Lieb, had received the delegates and visitors, and Prof. Arnold Laett, President of the Commission of the Swiss Abroad, had chaired the meeting. A discussion on Swiss abroad and foreigners in Switzerland had been introduced by Dr. H. Rothmund of the Federal Department of Justice and Police.

That was the sum total of the report appearing, then or later, in the "Swiss Observer" at that time. Comparing it with recent years when extensive reports appeared not only in the S.O. but also in the Press in Switzerland, we realise the growing importance which has been given to the work of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad during the past decades. The change indicates how much more seriously the relationship has been taken between the Swiss at home and their fellow countrymen abroad. Far be it from me to belittle the pioneering work done by the founders of the *Auslandschweizerwerk* of the New Helvetic Society ever since its foundation in 1916. It was largely due to their vision and foresight that the organisation has been able to expand and assume a position of consequence and of considerable influence. Without their sterling work, no Constitutional Article for the Swiss Abroad would ever have been put on the Statute Book.

450 Strong

Not many were in Schaffhausen at the end of August this year who had attended the gathering 30 years ago, although the oldest participant was nearly 98, Mr. C. Grillet from Madrid, a regular visitor to the annual assemblies. But perhaps just because the theme was "The Young Swiss Abroad and their Relationship with the Homeland", the importance of the older generation shone through in a special light, for it will be their responsibility to see that the young compatriots are taken seriously and given a chance to play their part in making Switzerland's presence in the world felt in a suitable manner.

450 Swiss, the large majority from abroad, assembled in a sun-drenched Schaffhausen on 23rd August. They

THE SWISS FROM ABROAD MEET IN SCHAFFHAUSEN

had travelled from as far as Dahomey and Uganda, San Francisco and Lima, New Zealand, Australia and Pakistan. Even Great Britain had a slightly more representative contingent than of late, including two veterans Mr. J. Vogel from Herefordshire and Mr. J. F. Ammann from Halifax. The presence of young participants was much in evidence, not least by nearly 20 *Auslandschweizerrekruten* from many parts of the world, at present doing military service in Switzerland. The members of the Commission of the Swiss Abroad had gladly foregone their usual privilege of a free *Festkarte*, in order to enable some youngsters from abroad to travel to Schaffhausen, who would have been prevented from attending without financial assistance. Now after the event, the general verdict was that it had been well worth it.

Parliament at Work

That was also the considered opinion expressed by some newcomers from this country, who took a fairly active part in the proceedings, i.e. Consul F. Adams, Father P. Bossard and the new deputy delegate to the Commission of the Swiss Abroad, Mr. O. Hartmann from Edinburgh. The latter attended the meeting of the Commission on Friday morning, together with the regular delegates Mrs. Meier (South) and Dr. H. R. Bolliger (North). The main business of the Commission was to receive the reports by the new Director, Mr. M. Ney, from the Jurists' Commission who had finalised the draft to the Government, concerning steps to be undertaken now that the Constitutional Article was well and truly established. Matters of primary importance had been listed as follows: political rights, military duties and welfare assistance. One of the problems discussed at the meeting, was how to facilitate university studies in Switzerland for young Swiss from abroad, and another subject once more up for deliberation was the withholding or anticipatory tax (*Verrechnungssteuer*). So far, the authorities had refused to consider any special treatment of Swiss living abroad, mainly because there was the danger that they might act as *Strohmänner* for foreigners, and because such exemptions might be considered as a violation of double-taxation agreements. A further discussion will take place at the next meeting.

Four new groups were accepted from Tananarive, Lybia, Port Elizabeth and Singapore, and the President, Councillor of States Dr. L. Guisan, reported the resignation of the "Groupe d'Etudes Helvétiques de Paris", a

step regretted as much by the Union of Swiss in France as by the Commission. A specimen constitution for Swiss groups abroad and a prospectus of the Organisation were ready for study.

Visits, Debates and Solidarity

A Press Conference took place prior to a luncheon offered to members of the Commission and the Press with whom the ASO has friendly and active ties.

The first afternoon was devoted to three outings. One was an interesting visit to the works of the Georg Fischer Industries, followed by a trip to the Rhine Falls, and a Reception extended also to the visitors of the Allerheiligen Museum in Schaffhausen. Another party was given a chance of visiting a *Rekrutenschule* in Zurich, an interesting experience for all those taking part. One of the delegates stressed how impressed he had been that after having been shown the latest weapons available to modern infantry, a marksman, with a rifle shot a bull's eye from a considerable distance, thus demonstrating the importance of individual performance. How true — what would the best organisation for our fellow countrymen abroad be if it were not for the painstaking and reliable efforts made by the individual?

In the venerable *Rathauslaube*, one of many beautifully preserved historic buildings which make Schaffhausen so special, the General Assembly was officially opened by the President on Friday evening. Members of the Cantonal and Municipal Governments, of all Federal Departments and of the Federal Chambers, as well as many fraternal delegates from organisations inside Switzerland were welcomed. It was surprising, however, that "Pro Helvetia" and the Swiss National Tourist Office had no representatives there, although they had been invited. Two meetings then took place, one on services of the Secretariat and another on social insurance inasmuch as it affects the Swiss abroad (AHV and Sickness Assurance).

Saturday opened with an early meeting of the Solidarity Fund. The main business was to accept the new Articles of Association, and by doing so, the delegates' meeting was dissolved, to be replaced by a General Meeting. In order to ensure representation from communities abroad, four new members were elected to the Council: Mrs. L. Schaad (Rotterdam), Mr. F. Kuechler (Duesseldorf), Mr. M. Gehrig (Marseille) and Mrs. M. Meier (London). An appeal for a further increase in membership was made both by the President (the former Ambassador Dr. F. Kappeler) and the Administrative Manager, Mr. E. Bruggmann.

That was not the only special meeting held during the Assembly. The presidents and members of the Swiss schools abroad, and various executive committees met, not least the Foundation Council of "Stiftung für die Auslandschweizer".

World Events and a Governmental Speech

The first plenary meeting centred round a panel discussion on the main theme of the Conference, to be followed in the afternoon by separate group discussions and reports to the second plenary meeting. In the morning, it was the President of the N.S.H., Mr. Oscar Reck, who stole the show with his dynamic speech on the events in Czechoslovakia which overshadowed the Assembly, and which was evidenced not least by the absence of most Swiss Ambassadors who usually make it their business to attend.

A separate report on the outcome of the discussions will be published later; suffice it today to say that it was a

rewarding theme and of consequence, provided the older generation of active members of Swiss communities abroad take it seriously. Doubts were unfortunately cast at the last moment by an unwarranted and unsuitable statement by one of the "elder French statesmen" whose attitude was deplored not only by the young Swiss present. It showed that he, at least, had learnt nothing from the discussions, and if that was the case elsewhere, consideration of the young Swiss in the future would not be much better than it has been in the past.

Somewhat disappointing, too, was the speech by the Government's representative, Federal Councillor Celio. The speech contained a lot of information as regards Switzerland's expenditure on education, but it bore the mark of a departmental statement rather than that of the speaker who is respected for his original thinking. His eloquence in three languages was considerable, and the audience was appreciative of his presence, as well as that of the much-revered former Federal Councillor Prof. Wahlen, himself a great champion of the cause of the *Auslandschweizer*.

On with the Motley

The Cantonal and Municipal authorities of Schaffhausen gave a Reception at the *Rathauslaube*, and in the evening, there was the Banquet at the Casino. Entertainment offered included singing by school children and ballet dancing, classical and modern, and the band which provided music for dancing did it with a swing right through to 3 a.m., catering for the lovers of rural as well as for those addicted to beat music. The accent on youth at this year's Assembly was brought to the fore once more when, soon after midnight, the young Swiss from abroad and their local friends arrived for the dance after having taken part in the *Munot* Festival.

Another brilliant day awaited us on Sunday, and at the early hour of 9 a.m., the boat left with nearly 400 aboard for the trip to Stein-am-Rhein. To many, the lovely and peaceful countryside was a surprise, and to most, the picturesque Kloster St. Katharinental near Diessenhofen (Thurgau) was a revelation. And how impressive to have the whole party assemble in the ornate church for an ecumenical and bi-lingual service! Already the day before, a handsome number of delegates and friends had met at an interdenominational luncheon, offered by the Swiss Evangelical Church Federation.

After the service, the party continued their trip up the Rhine to one of the most attractive of Swiss *Städtchen* where yet another reception took place, this time at the St. Georgen Museum. Lunch was a rather hot and crowded affair, but for at least one group from GB and Sweden a very happy and hilarious occasion. And we were not the only ones, to judge from the well-satisfied men, women and children travelling back on a special train and meeting for final farewells at the Hotel Bahnhof. Thank you, Schaffhausen for the warm welcome, thank you, members of the ASK Council and the Secretariat in Berne for the hard work put into organising the Assembly, and thank you, young compatriots for giving us older hands so much food for thought and, we trust, action!

And *au revoir* next year at the Assembly at Montreux, which will take place at the end of August, let us hope in a world less troubled by sad events in Asia, Africa and Central Europe.

MM