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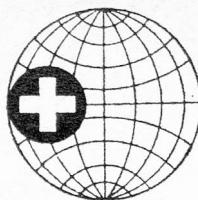
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Nothing could daunt our optimism when we arrived at Montreux on the grey Thursday afternoon of 28th August. Grey — did I say? One could not really see anything as the rain came down in the best Manchester tradition and was hardly *de rigueur* for the beautiful tourist town on the *Léman*'s unrivalled shores. But we knew from past experience that however bad the weather on arrival, it is always fine at least on the Sunday. And sure enough, all ready that evening we were able to explore the town, eagerly looking out for old friends who might have arrived early and were about with the same purpose.

#### The Commission at work

On Friday morning at 8.30, the "Parliament" of the Swiss Abroad, the Commission, met at the Montreux Palace Hotel. The Commission is the body where the real spade work is being done, and as always, the 60 members took their task very seriously. There were about a dozen from inside Switzerland and the rest consisted of delegates or proxies from Swiss communities abroad. G.B. was represented by Mrs. Mariann Meier from the South (London) and Vice-Consul Otto Hartmann (Edinburgh) for the North. The whole complement of the Commission stands at over 90 now, including three women, one from Belgium, one from inside Switzerland (Miss A. Weitzel, Chief of the Women's Auxiliary Forces and President of the Geneva Group of the Nouvelle Société Helvétique), and yours truly.

The Chairman of the Commission, Councillor of States Dr. Louis Guisan, welcomed the delegates who sat at severe, modern tables in strange contrast to the splendid Victorian ceiling and elaborate chandeliers. Among the items on the agenda was a summary of the report by the Chairman of his recent extensive tour of South America where he visited Swiss communities far removed from the home-land, and whose difficulties are often much more pronounced than in countries nearer Switzerland.

On 31st July last year, the Commission sent a letter to the Head of the Federal Political Department, setting out the most urgent juridical questions which might require legislation under the new Constitutional Article for the Swiss Abroad — political rights, military obligations and welfare assistance. Monsieur Guisan informed the meeting that so far no answer had been received. But preliminary work at the Federal Political Department was in progress; the

Cantons had been consulted, and varying reactions had been shown. In any case, the Commission's letter had set the ball rolling.

On the subject of information, members were told that the special commission which had been formed to study the two-way flow of information, i.e. from Switzerland to the Swiss abroad and from Swiss communities to the people at home, would be called again presently to continue its work.

A new Swiss group in Bombay was co-opted, and the planned prospectus on the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad was promised for the near future. As to financing the work of the Organisation and the Secretariat, it was stated that additional means should be sought. At the moment, revenue came from a federal subsidy, from friends—both individuals as well as business firms and other organisations — and from a large sum of money the National Day Fund donated to the ASO every few years. The suggestion put forward by the Swiss in Austria that societies should contribute 35 cts per member was discussed, but no conclusive opinion was arrived at. It is a fact that so far the societies have never been asked for financial contributions; many of them pay for their delegates to attend the Commission meetings twice a year, and as the President of the *Bundesfeierspende* pointed out, they also contribute by buying National Day badges every year. Figures are not known as to how many Swiss abroad belong to societies; estimates are 50,000 out of the 300,000. But it is certain that the so-called "isolated" Swiss, too, play an important part in the "presence" of Switzerland in the world, and it is imperative that with the help of the Swiss at home, the image of Helvetia should be improved.

The next Commission meeting will be in Berne on 7th March. The next Assembly will be held at Zofingen from 28th to 30th August. Its theme will be the total revision of the Federal Constitution, a subject of great interest to many.

#### The Assembly begins

In the afternoon of 29th August, four outings took place, one to the "Ateliers de Constructions Mécaniques de Vevey S.A.", one to Chillon Castle, the third to the highly interesting Thermic Power Station of Chavalon and the fourth to the spectacular section Puidoux-Chexbres-Villeneuve of the Motorway. By all accounts, the visits were successful, even though one

of the coaches to the motorway broke down. The visitors to Chavalon were given an extra treat by a call at the famous wine cellars of Badoux at Aigle — *dégustation* included.

At 6.30 p.m. the Assembly was officially opened. The authorities of the Canton of Vaud and the Municipality of Montreux gave a reception at the Palace Hotel. At 8.30, three separate meetings started, one of the Solidarity Fund Council, and two open meetings on problems of the young and the Swiss schools abroad and on general questions. The latter was well-attended, but unfortunately the chairman was also the person who had to answer most of the questions, and that meant a certain disruption. The meeting over, the late hour did not prevent anyone from spending a few happy moments with friends even though Saturday would be a long day of many meetings. After all, the social side of the Annual Assembly is a very important one.

#### The Swiss Abroad and Swiss Economy

Saturday began with the General Meeting of the Solidarity Fund. A special report will appear at a later date. At 9.30, the first part of the plenary session opened at the Casino Theatre. Several hundred compatriots gathered. High above the largest Swiss flag I have ever seen, flanked by the colours of Vaud and Montreux, hung the blue emblem of the Swiss abroad. The President, Dr. Guisan welcomed Federal Councillor Schaffner, the former Federal Councillor Wahlen, members of the Cantonal Government and municipal authorities, Miss Alice Briod, former Director of the Secretariat, nearly forty Ambassadors (including Monsieur Keller), Consuls-General and Consuls (Monsieur and Madame Adams among them), and a host of important personalities from all walks of life.

The President of the Nouvelle Société Helvétique, Mr. J.-C. Nicole, gave an address on the relations between "mother and daughter", i.e. the N.S.H. and its offspring, the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad. In his opinion, the latter was far better organised than the mother society. The ASO's scope was bigger, too. As an example he gave development aid; surely, the Swiss abroad were in a much better position than the N.S.H. would ever be to help in this sphere. He felt there was much constructive co-operation amongst the Swiss abroad, and he would use his efforts to model the mother much more on the daughter than hitherto.

The main address was delivered by Federal Councillor Schaffner who spoke on "Emigration: Benefit or Loss for Switzerland?" His speech will be summarised in the next issue of the "Swiss Observer", as will be the outcome of the round-table discussion on how to use the potential represented in the Swiss abroad for the benefit of Swiss economy, taking into consideration wishes on both sides. It was an interesting debate under the capable chairmanship of Dr. Rolf Buehler, President of the Union of Swiss Chambers of Commerce outside Switzerland and member of the Commission of the Swiss Abroad.

The by now traditional ecumenical luncheon took place on Saturday at the ultra-modern Eurotel. The meal was generously offered by the Swiss Evangelical Church Federation and the sweet by the Commune of Montreux. The afternoon was dedicated to four group discussions on integration problems of the repatriated Swiss and one on training possibilities in Swiss companies for young compatriots living abroad. These discussions are of questionable value. Unless a chairman is experienced enough to get the best out of his particular group and then to report the findings or have them reported skilfully by an adroit rapporteur to the plenary meeting, any important contribution to the discussion will bypass the assembly and not even be recorded in the minutes. As has happened before, a lively discussion with excellent individual contributions was badly reported and made an indifferent impression, whereas a mediocre group debate was cleverly reported and accepted with interest by the general assembly. Of course, such discussions provide a vent for many people to let off steam, and as such

they are not to be despised, but in order to have some lasting effect, far more care should be used in finding the right rapporteurs.

Following the reports to the plenary session, the President of the Solidarity Fund, Dr. F. Kappeler, gave a short picture of the present state of the Solidarity Fund of the Swiss Abroad. That brought the business part of the assembly to a close, except perhaps for a press conference at the Casino.

#### Let's be merry and gay

The evening, as usual, was given over to entertainment. A banquet and dance took place at the "Sablier" (Casino). An excellent meal in the best Vaudois style was enjoyed by a happy and carefree gathering. Dancing was brisk, interrupted only by folk dancing and singing presented by the "Chanson de Montreux", and by a choir of young people who had done their practising during the camp for young Swiss from abroad. Both performances were much appreciated, though the former might have been even more impressive if it had not been quite so long.

In spite of a short night, nearly 400 participants embarked early on Sunday morning for the trip on the lake. Brilliant sunshine favoured the outing — as expected. Along the peaceful shores of the Léman the boat glided from one lovely place to another. At Morges, the trip was interrupted for a bilingual ecumenical service at the "Temple", with sermons in French (Protestant) and German (R.C.) and the Lessons read by two *Auslandschweizer*, one from overseas and the other from London (the Colony's representative). As in previous years, the singing was tremendously im-

pressive, and there was a marked feeling of true participation, of a genuine "one for all, all for one".

#### Value for effort and money

Luncheon was served on the boat to the strains of a small Vaudois band. Sweet and coffee were offered at the Castle of Coppet by the firm of Nestlé's. The choice of this particular place for the Sunday outing was not made haphazardly, for the "Château de Coppet" is the home of the Museum of the Swiss Abroad, a comparatively recent, but extremely interesting creation, to be further helped by the new Foundation of the Friends of the Swiss Abroad, a worthwhile effort undertaken by the former Swiss Ambassador in London, Monsieur B. de Fischer. This is another subject which deserves a special mention in the S.O. on a future occasion.

The visit over, it was time to leave for Montreux by special train. All too soon we were back at the Palace Hotel for a last get-together, this year a rather poorly attended do, a meagre remnant only of the handsome number of people who had travelled from every Continent to attend the 47th Assembly of the Swiss Abroad. But all said and done, it was a well-organised and well-run conference, perhaps less valuable as a forum than as a meeting ground for compatriots from in and outside of Switzerland, where views are exchanged, problems discussed by individuals from vastly differing communities, and where old friendships are renewed and new ones forged. Far too few take the opportunity; but to those who attend, it is an unforgettable experience. Thank you for providing it for us!

MM

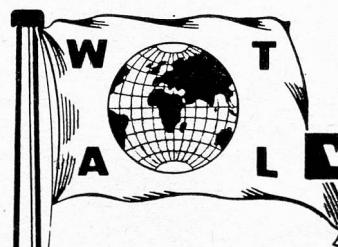
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