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THE SWISS "PRESENCE" AND THE STATE OF THE SWISS COLONY IN THE UNITED KINGDOM IN 1968

Survey by the Swiss Ambassador, Monsieur René Keller

The Swiss Ambassador and Madame Keller gave a Reception to Members of the Swiss Colony on 26th February, at their Residence in Upper Brook Street. The following survey was made available on that occasion.

PART I

1. Structure of the Swiss Colony in Great Britain.

At the end of 1968 the Swiss Colony in Great Britain numbered 14,480, of whom 12,527 were living in the London consular district (about 8,000 in the Greater London area) and 1,953 in the district of the Consulate in Manchester. Compared with the 1965 figure (13,885), the increase amounts to about 600.

The number of dual nationals included in the above-mentioned figures has again increased from 5,300 in 1965 to about 5,800.

About one-third of the Colony is made up of those young people who traditionally come to the United Kingdom for about a year to study the language or to work in families. Because of its transitory nature this group, the size of which can only be roughly estimated, cannot be reckoned as part of our established Colony, which numbers about eight to nine thousand.

2. At the beginning of 1968 there were 297,500 Swiss established abroad (1965 275,648). 136,531 (1965 119,668) were dual nationals. The Swiss Colony in the United Kingdom is the sixth largest Swiss Community outside Switzerland. The relevant figures were as follows: France 92,874 (90,517), Germany (Fed. Rep.) 33,811 (31,542), U.S.A. 30,080 (24,471), Italy 18,873 (18,803) Canada 17,322 (13,042), U.K. 14,480 (13,885).

Departures and arrivals in the London consular district are more frequent, in relation to the size of the Colony, than in any of the other countries (about 3,600 p.a.).

Among the foreign Colonies in Britain — Commonwealth countries not included — Switzerland occupies the sixth place. Per head of its own population, Switzerland has by far the biggest community in the United Kingdom.

3. In the survey for 1964, the average age of the members of the Colony was given at 37. It has not been possible this year to check that estimate. Presumably there has been no appreciable alteration; the change, if any, would be to a slightly higher age.

In 1968 2,821 men were liable for military service (1965 3,129), of whom 1,285 were still subject to military tax (1965 1,689). This brought in about 106,000 francs (1964 150,000 francs).

The 710 persons entitled to pensions under the old-age and survivors insurance scheme received a total of 1.8 million francs, the amount of contributions from 795 members amounting to about 273,000 francs (London consular district only).

4. Adolescents still come in great numbers to learn English. Many seek the Embassy's advice; others need official support when applying for admission to institutions of higher education. Close contact is maintained with the College of the Swiss Mercantile Society, where the demand for places remains very keen indeed.

5. As in other years, between 4,000 and 5,000 work permits were granted to Swiss nationals ("au pair girls" not included). Swiss students also have the opportunity of

obtaining short-term holiday permits allowing them to work in hotels; they are employed mainly in seaside resorts.

6. French-speaking Protestants can join the ancient Swiss Church in Endell Street, which was founded as long ago as 1762, while German-speaking Protestants have the Church of St. Mary-le-Bow in the City. Both these Churches are in the charge of Swiss pastors (the Rev. Nicod and the Rev. Dietler). Catholic compatriots attend St. Ann's Church in Abbey Orchard Street, where they are under the care of Father Bossard. The Ministers of the Swiss Churches also take a great interest in the young people who are temporarily in London, and they have established close and fruitful co-operation.

7. Welfare work among compatriots is carried out by the Swiss Benevolent Society, the Welfare Office for Swiss Girls in Great Britain and the three Swiss Churches. The Labour and Welfare Section of the Embassy works in close collaboration with all three organisations and with the Swiss Hostel for Girls, which is occasionally called upon to help in emergencies. In 1968 the Swiss Benevolent Society and the Welfare Office, whose headquarters are in London but which also has a representative in Folkestone, again received the annual subsidy from the Confederation. The same applies to the International Travellers' Aid Association, which helps young girls arriving at railway stations. Kiosks where they can apply for assistance and information are operated at Victoria and Liverpool Street Stations.

In London, Manchester and Scotland friendly societies organise mutual aid among Swiss nationals. They receive subscriptions and donations from their members.

Sick compatriots can make use of the National Health Service. In London the French Dispensary and the Italian Hospital (both private institutions) are also open to them.

8. The Solidarity Fund of the Swiss living abroad now numbers 14,260 members (June 1965 7,350) and has up to now paid out 3,572,500 francs in relief to some 330 nationals who have been deprived of their means of livelihood through no fault of their own.

A new appeal addressed to compatriots in the London consular district has brought the number of members to 342 (about 200 in 1964). The consular district of Manchester has about 150 members of the Solidarity Fund.

9. Activities and social life of the numerous Swiss societies and other organisations have been reported throughout the year by "The Swiss Observer". This publication, which has supplied the Colony since 1919 with any information likely to be of interest to it, continues its excellent work under the editorship of Mrs. Mariann Meier. The constructive and fruitful work of the Swiss institutions, performed with so much devotion, deserves great appreciation.

The Swiss organisations constitute the Federation of Swiss Societies in the United Kingdom, which, in close co-operation with the Embassy, co-ordinates the activities of the societies and elects the representatives on the Commission of the Swiss Abroad. Efforts are still continuing to provide the Colony with a social and cultural centre at the "Swiss Centre" in Leicester Square.

10. The legal basis for the presence of the Swiss in Britain, permitting them to settle and work here and safeguarding their interests, consists of about 15 agreements concluded between Switzerland and the United Kingdom since 1855. These deal mainly with questions of establishment, inheritance, double taxation, social insurance, civil proceedings and sequestration disputes.

A new Anglo-Swiss Convention on Social Security, which had been under negotiation since 1965, was signed in Berne in February of last year. It provides for the highest possible degree of equal treatment of the nationals of the two countries in that field and takes into account the most

recent developments in social legislation in Switzerland and in Britain.

When it comes into force, on 1st April 1969, it will replace the existing Convention of 1953 and the Supplementary Convention of 1959.

(To be continued.)

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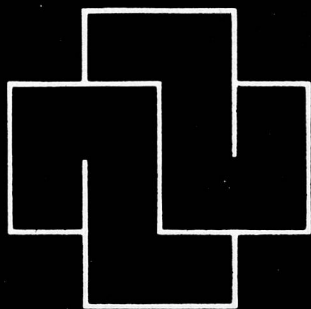
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