

# The work of the Secretariat for the Swiss abroad

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ishments to prisoners, in that the hard smack is a frequent habit in Swiss prisons. Experience has proved that the "Dunkelarrest" never achieved its role of deterrent and was dangerous for the physical and spiritual well-being of those it afflicted.

Prisoners have to work and it is sought to "re-educate them through work". But they are made to weave, make baskets, mend shoes and work in the fields—all jobs which nowadays belong to the most poorly paid cate-

gories. Prisons afford no possibilities of practising and continuing one's training in a normal modern trade.

There are other aspects with glaring shortcomings in the Swiss penitentiary system. One of them is that prisons are girdled with barbed wires. These are usually useless from the security point of view as prison ramparts are high enough, but they serve the purpose of maintaining a lurid and creeping picture of what a prison is, and, for that matter, of the evil nature of those whom they keep in chains.

## THE WORK OF THE SECRETARIAT FOR THE SWISS ABROAD

The Secretariat for the Swiss Abroad in Berne has sent its 51st Annual Report to the Swiss Observer. This report discloses its particularly numerous and fruitful 1969 activities and shows that the Secretariat really has the interests and the welfare of the Swiss disseminated across the world at heart. Although the impression derived from a prolonged residency in Great Britain would rather be that the population of *Fifth Switzerland* is dwindling, the figures contradict that notion. At the beginning of the year covered by the report, 163,685 pure Swiss and 140,829 double-nationals were registered at foreign consulates, a total of 304,514 persons. The corresponding figure for 1950 was 237,443.

The Secretariat pursues various activities which can be described under the headings: Commission for the Swiss Abroad; Care of the Swiss Societies Abroad; Information for the Swiss Abroad; Advice, Social Security and Insurance for the Benefit of Elderly Swiss Abroad needing help from the Motherland; Attendance to Swiss Youth and Education Abroad.

### The Commission for the Swiss Abroad

This Commission is a "legislative" body and is distinct from the 12 full-time employees of the Secretariat in Berne. Its members are Swiss citizens living across the world and concerned with the problems of the Swiss abroad. They met twice in 1969, successively in Berne and Montreux. They are mainly concerned with *general* problems such as the introduction of Constitutional provision for the Swiss abroad, the principle of choosing cantonal or federal welfare services for the Swiss abroad, the adoption of voting rights for the Swiss abroad and the refund of capital tax to Swiss abroad. The Commission is the senate of the Swiss abroad and their antenna in Berne.

### The care of the Swiss societies abroad

The Secretariat files the addresses of and maintains regular relations with the 550 Swiss Societies abroad. Not all

these societies are found in the Nouvelle Société Helvétique's list of recognised societies abroad. Four new societies have been entered in that register last year. They are the *Société Suisse de Tirs Anvers*, the *Canberra Swiss Society*, the *Sociedade Suica de Beneficencia Bahia*, and the *Sociedad Suiza de Beneficencia y Socorros mutuos Helvetia Valparaiso, Chile*. The greatest number of Swiss societies are to be found in America and Europe. However, quite apart from a growing disinterest for organised activities, they suffer from the ageing process. On the other hand, Swiss societies are springing up and prospering wherever the distance from home is acutely felt, either because of a totally different cultural environment (Africa and Asia), or because of failing entertainments (certain parts of Canada, South America, Australia and New Zealand). The Secretariat not only endeavours to foster the activities of these 550 cited associations, but also those of Swiss cultural, economic, linguistic, choral, sports and marksmanship associations.

The practical support afforded by the Secretariat is given in the form of *films* lent and circulated among the societies, in the form of *grants* to help restore Swiss club buildings, in the form of *personal presence* at the conferences of the various federations of societies (last year, the Secretariat sent a man to Swiss meetings in Amsterdam, Darmstadt, Epinal, Innsbruck, Lyon, Manchester, Naples and Oslo). The Secretariat furthermore issues the *Pestalozzi Calendar* and sends out the Presidential greetings and distinguished speakers on the occasion of the *National Day Celebration*.

Last year's highlight was a round-tour of South America by *Ständerat* Dr. Louis Guisan, President of the Commission for the Swiss Abroad. With the help and information supplied to him by the Political Department and the Swiss Latin-American consulates, he was able to visit 70 Swiss associations in two months and prepare an exhaustive report which will serve as a basis for future policy.

### Information

The Secretariat is best known to many for *ECHO*, its monthly publication. The Secretariat also co-operates closely with the Swiss short-wave services and a useful outcome of Dr. Guisan's Latin-American tour was a welcome publicity in the Press on the work and usefulness of the Swiss Short-Wave Radio Services. An indication of its hearing was the success of the Radio "Worldshoot" last year.

### Advice, social security, insurance

This is perhaps the lesser known but most important field of activity of the Secretariat. The Secretariat must come in with the ready answer to innumerable legal enquiries pertaining to problems of citizenship, inheritance and taxation. Compatriots from abroad write for information on old-time relatives who have remained at home, for indications of university programmes, for legal facilities and even ask for commodities unavailable at their foreign domicile. Vice-versa, innumerable Swiss of all ages setting out for a temporary or lasting stay abroad seek information on working possibilities, on addresses, on pen friends, on exhibitions and cultural events.

The Secretariat has sought to alleviate a limited number of cases where elderly Swiss abroad wishing to spend the remaining part of their lives in Switzerland, had fallen into financial difficulties for failing to have subscribed to Swiss Old Age Pension, or others who had been forbidden to return for lack of a necessary medical insurance. The Secretariat is not usually in a position to give *direct* help, but it can bring together the people and institutions who are in a position to help. The Secretariat has assisted many elderly Swiss abroad either wishing to return home or to reach their elected country in this way.

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