

# News from the colony

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# NEWS FROM THE COLONY

## SWISS BENEVOLENT SOCIETY

### CENTENARY APPEAL FUND

At the close of the Centenary Appeal Fund, a total of £1,710. 17. 5 had been reached. This is a most satisfactory result and the Executive Committee would like to express their warm thanks to all contributors on their own behalf and on behalf of the beneficiaries of this fund.

The whole amount has been distributed to our Pensioners as a gesture to celebrate our Centenary Year. It has been an unexpected, and in a year of inflation, a very specially welcome additional support.

Thank you all for having made this possible through your generosity.

SWISS BENEVOLENT SOCIETY

The Executive Committee

### THE SWISS NATIONAL SERVICE AND THE OSWALD REPORT

The Oswald Report, I believe, has met with the general approval of the Swiss Press. Society is constantly changing in order to adapt itself to a new environment which alters with alarming speed. It follows that changes in many fields are not only inevitable but desirable, and if these changes are based on mutual understanding and respect, nothing serious is likely to go wrong.

To suggest that National Service is nothing more than instruction in the art of killing is surely naive. Whilst admitting that the most satisfactory way of achieving military objectives is to slaughter the enemy, this does not mean that the combatants desire their deaths as such, and no respectable and responsible government would tolerate indiscriminate slaughter. National Service at its best can foster both individual responsibility and a spirit of comradeship, and without doubt also does much to develop the element of discipline which is notoriously lacking today. Reverence for life can also be upheld by participation in peace keeping forces and assisting with emergency aid in disaster areas, a combat unit ready to fight and ready to succour. In my view, the philosophy of pacifism is as untenable as a philosophy of total aggression and we should beware of the danger of sweeping generalisations.

Traditional attitudes and old ways of thinking, however, tend to persist much longer, largely because they are identified with values which are very deep rooted and any attempts to modify them is likely to be described as "a lowering of statutes of long standing", or in such terms as "the moral crisis of our time". Unless social change is smooth, the persistence of traditional

against a new background may have dangerous results.

The social structure of modern society is much more complex due to the existence of class difference, regional groupings, and different racial, religious or political groups within the national boundaries. Thus, though all Swiss share some attitudes in common and which can be described as the national character, there are, nevertheless, divergences of public opinion, of language and established customs.

Many people are thrust in positions of leadership by reason of their wealth or social standing. Oddly enough, the capability of leadership is most frequently found in those who have had a good home, college or university education. But leadership in the Army, which of its very nature is authoritarian, is to select the best man for the job, which is within any one possessed with the ability to be a leader in a given situation, and able to make himself acceptable with confidence and respect to his subordinates whose individual responsibilities must still play a part.

The astounding military achievements of our ancestors for liberty won for the Swiss the regard and admiration of all Europe. Morgarten, Laupeu, Sempach, Naefels, Morat, Grandson, are the hallmarks of battles that built the unity of Switzerland.

History has proved the inborn love of the Swiss people for freedom, and one of the strongest bonds that unite all Swiss is the Army, and the venerable White Cross on a red field that inversion of colours makes the emblem of universal charity.

*Pierre Savoie*

### RACLETTE PARTY IN KNUTSFORD

Members of the Swiss Club, Manchester, and their many friends met on the evening of Thursday, 11th February, 1971, at the Cotton Hotel, near Knutsford, for an eminently social function, exquisitely Swiss in character. It was the yearly "Raclette" always well attended and this year was no exception. More than 160 people were present, many of the young with the middle-aged and elderly giving a good show of themselves and fitting in very nicely as it should be on such an occasion.

People gradually gathered at the Hotel and on arrival were immediately enveloped by the warm friendly atmosphere, then took full advantage of the well-stocked bar, and were soon chatting with their friends and acquaintances—topics for discussion certainly not lacking, they were just there for the picking; the Rolls Royce affair, the postal strike, and other so-called com-

forts of every day life, and then, of course, there was the "Frauenstimmrecht" at home which according to some of our British friends has allowed Switzerland to enter the ring of "the highly civilised and sophisticated Nations". We also had time to look at the raclette arrangement consisting of five unities and to get a glimpse of the general table plan, securing (if in time) strategic advantages. Strangely enough most of us got what we wanted in spite of the last minute rush.

Whilst the raclette machines were warming up our President, Mr. Bernhard Simon, welcomed us with his special brand of warmth and wit, making us feel comfortable and happy. Amongst the people present we were delighted to see our Consul and Madame Born, some other prominent visitors, and veteran members and friends of our Club. Discreet background music, consisting mainly of laendlers and yodlers, gave a special touch to the evening.

Soon the long, patient, disciplined trek towards the food centres started and lasted for a good part of the evening. It was all a first class work of organisation, speed and good quality, with a variety of titbits accompanying the processed Oberwalliser Gomsers Kaese. Everyone was full of admiration for the unceasing work of our "Racletteurs", led by our popular President and manned by some of the "top brass" in our Club. Later on in the evening they were duly singled out and thanked by Mr. Simon.

The excellent "Féchy" of the caves of our Vice-President Dr. H. R. Bolliger, contributed greatly to the success of the evening and this was unmistakably expressed to him by everyone present. It was also explained to us

## The Institute for Swiss Trade Promotion

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that due to the postal strike we might have been faced with a raclette without cheese, at least of the quality "Gomser", but (as on many other occasions) it was the "Swissair", space heroes to our liking, who saved the situation and due thanks were expressed to the manager who was amongst us.

One of the young ladies entertained us with a combination of "Mundharmonika" and guitar. She was able to play many popular songs and was well supported (at least in the more well known verses) resulting eventually in a true community sing-song. She must have been delighted with her audience and with the way we expressed our appreciation to her.

Gradually the music warmed up in intensity and speed and soon the dancing started, quite often the Swiss version of it for which sometimes great personal stamina and physical exertion is required. Regretfully the writer had too soon to take his leave, à l'anglaise, on his way back to the Yorkshire hills and unfortunately did not see the end of the party. However, there was no doubt in his mind that the evening had been very well organised, a really happy and enjoyable affair and the Committee can be well satisfied and proud with the way everyone responded to their call and their efforts.

"A bientot" dear compatriots and friends.

*Ermanno Berner*

## MR. E. BERNER'S RETIREMENT

Mr. Ermanno Berner, whom every reader of our paper and of "Echo" knows through his inspired reports on the life of the Swiss of the North, has retired from the general management of the factory which he founded 34 years ago, *Giron Frères*, Accrington. His 130 workers organised a little celebration at the town hall in Accrington to mark this occasion, and I can say that there are few "bosses" nowadays who can have the pride and the gratification of being honoured in such a way upon their retirement from business.

Not that Mr. Berner is really going to abandon his factory! His retirement is all but nominal and we can be sure that he will continue to take an active part in the destiny of *Giron Frères* of Accrington and place his vast experience at the disposal of his son Willy, who succeeds him as General Manager. Mr. Berner firmly intends remaining at "Bernerhouse", his isolated property in the Pennines near to the small town of Clitheroe. He remains a "Swiss Abroad" and moreover a Swiss of the North, however attached he may be to his native land. We and all who know him therefore have the pleasure and the relief of knowing that he will continue to remain among us.

Mr. Berner was born at Cene, near Bergamo, Italy, in 1903. He went to a Swiss private school in that town organised and financed by the resident Swiss families. His father was consul in Bergamo. Mr. Berner then pursued his education at the Bezirks-Schule at Aarau, then at the Kantons-Schule and finally at the Ecole Supérieure de Commerce at Neuchatel. He was only eighteen when good fortune brought him into contact with a German textiles industrialist who saw in him the mettle of an entrepreneur and who furthermore found a quality which he had been seeking for a long time—the fluent knowledge of both German and Italian. He offered him the job of managing the "Società Italiana Industrie

management of *Giron Frères*, which is still the same today, and was told that his task would be to set up a new *Giron* subsidiary at Accrington. Mr. Berner inspired the necessary confidence to be taken on for the job immediately.

He left for Britain with his young wife (a Swiss abroad from Milan, hailing from Graubünden and still as young as ever today!), not speaking a word of English.

For the 34 ensuing years, Mr. Berner devoted his energies to the progress of his high-quality velvet factory. The enterprise had hardly become airborne when the war came along and its premises had to be converted into Army warehouses and its production



*Mr. and Mrs. Berner surrounded by Giron employees.  
(by courtesy of the Accrington Observer)*

Velluti" in Bergamo, a subsidiary of his enterprise. But first Mr. Berner had to be trained for the job. He thus packed his bags and left for Germany, where he obtained the necessary qualifications at the Prussian specialised school for textiles in Krefeld. He followed this up with several years of practical training and work in a number of factories in Italy, Germany and Czechoslovakia. He successively worked in Bergamo, in Fahrna (Germany), in the factories of his patron at Oedt and Grefrath, in Lobberich (Germany), in Graslitz (Czechoslovakia) and finally in Cologne. His training and experience encompassed the many branches of the textile trade, and in particular the science of velvet, plush, dyeing and finishing.

With this formation he was well equipped to take on the management of the Bergamo subsidiary of the group at the age of 22. He was Managing Director and later member of the Board of Directors of the "Società" until 1936, a year of crisis when the firm had to be sold, its Manager included in the package.

Unsatisfied with this arrangement, Mr. Berner decided to look for a job elsewhere. He saw a position advertised by the old established velvet firm of *Giron Frères* at Saint Etienne. Mr. Berner replied at once and crossed a border once again. He met the young

shared with two other firms in the region. When the war was over, everything had to be started almost from scratch. Mr. Berner planned the factory, tooled the workshop, and schooled his labour so that *Giron Frères* of Accrington became, to quote its sales manager, a "good and compact firm". It outlived the decline of the Lancashire cotton industry and is today the only textile firm left in Accrington, a town which once thrived on textiles.

Accrington is not a postcard locality. It has been twinned with Bergamo thanks to the initiative of Mr. Berner, but never have twins been more dissimilar! Like its neighbours Blackburn and Burnley, it is outwardly bleak and smoky. But its population works well and lives well. There are few unemployed. General Electric have a large plant there, and so have Platt, makers of textile machines. Accrington is furthermore endowed with a majestic town hall which looks like a Greek temple. It is well maintained and modern inside, and its spacious hall is lushly decorated with Victorian mouldings.

It was bustling with a good two hundred workpeople and their wives dancing to the tune of a brass band and a pianist when Mr. Berner and his collaborators at *Giron Frères* arrived from a small reception held down-



stairs in the town hall lounge. We were then entertained by a singer who had plenty of wind but whose voice seemed to be jammed between her tonsils. Dancing got under way again and lasted until it was time for a buffet, which turned out to be much better than a buffet and was sprinkled with champagne.

When we came back to the main hall again, chairs had been placed before the stage for Mr. Berner, Mrs. Berner, Mr. Willy Berner and the plant's weaving manager. Mr. "Berner Junior" rose and welcomed everybody present, making special mention of his guests, who were the legal advisors of the firm, its chartered accountant, its agents in London, your Editor, and its former weaving manager. This man had been forced to interrupt his work, having been struck down by Parkinsons disease. He had been carried in a wheel chair to the evening and was loudly applauded by all the staff present. Mr. Willy Berner then made a brief portrait of his father's career. He told his workers that they should still be seeing very much of Mr. Berner Senior at the plant, as he had consented to continue working in a purely advisory capacity. As Willy Berner aptly put it, "so far his main concession to retirement has been to come to work at quarter to eight in the morning, and having worked all his life for love and money, he is now working for love alone".

The present weaving manager then paid a warm tribute to his former boss, expressing the affection felt for him by all the workers, who liked to know him as "Father Berner".

Mr. and Mrs. Berner were then presented with a glittering pair of silver candelabra as a gift from the workers of Giron Frère. Mr. Berner arose, and with a broad smile, expressed his happiness to be among his workers on this evening and the emotion felt at the wonderful piece of silverware he had just received. He expressed his pleasure at seeing also many veteran workers, those who had been with him since the beginning, 34 years ago. "What overwhelms me this evening", he said, "is that you give us the happiness of being surrounded by so many friends, and all of you have a great place in my heart!"

Speaking of the firm and its prospects he continued: "I saw our factories growing over a great many years. We can look at ourselves as a great family, and indeed a family business it is! How gratifying to have with us a Giron of the 5th generation (referring to young Patrice Giron, the future manager of the Saint Etienne principal factory and now training under the good care of Mr. Berner). May I also say that all these years it has been a great privilege for me to be allowed to conduct this undertaking, and some of you may well have looked at me as the boss, but as far as I am concerned, you

were always my partners and still are! You see, we must get used to a boss, I had plenty of them. In my young years it was my parents, gentle bosses indeed, then for the larger part of my life it was my wife (cheers and laughter) and may I say a lovable boss, and then for over 34 years I was bossed by you . . . It is my most sincere wish, he continued, that we work together for many more years in harmony and peace, that we shall try at all times to understand each other's problems and work all close together for the good of us all. It is with the help of you all that we can produce these lovely fabrics which have created for us a good name, not only in this country but also abroad. We are inventive, enterprising and your new management is doing sterling work, never sparing itself continuous worry, continuous sacrifice and a never ending toil."

What a wonderful way to address the men with whom one has worked for half a life-time! Mr. Berner continued by relating his arrival in England and his early adventures in this country. He frequently referred to his wife, seated next to him, demonstrating by his attention how well he recognised the role she had played in his life and his success. And indeed she knew for all these 34 years that being married to Mr. Berner meant being married to the factory as well! This was most eloquently and spontaneously testified by a woman employee at

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Giron's, who beckoned me to tell it to all my readers!

Mr. Berner finished his speech and was loudly applauded. The photographer snapped away and asked all the factory employees to cluster round Mr. Berner in front of the stage for a glorious family picture. Then the dancing was resumed. There was more singing and more crooning by male and female local artists. We danced an exhilarating "slop" (which is far from a sloppy dance) and ended the day when the first chimes of the coming morning had rung.

Giron Frères of Accrington have had good and bad times. Two years ago, I was told, the situation was far from encouraging. Today, business is booming again thanks to a surge in the popularity of velvet. "Hot pants" in velvet have created such a strong demand that the firm will have more than enough to cope with on the British market alone. It traditionally exports to EFTA countries, and in particular to Scandinavia. The Fins, I was told, were very good customers (perhaps because it is cold in Finland). A new trend has now started to use velvet for shirts and trousers. Giron Frères of Accrington beat their only British competitors, "Martin" of Blackburn, in developing adequate velvet for trousers first. So the situation for the coming year looks very promising and it is our greatest wish that this should continue. I also hope that Mr. Willy Berner will have every success in continuing to uphold the prosperity and the traditions of quality of his firm. Up with velvet and long live Giron Frères!

(PMB)

## BIRTHDAYS AND ANNIVERSARIES

Due to the postal strike, our birthday and anniversary announcements did not appear on time.

Belatedly, we send best wishes to Mrs. E. Jamieson who was 71 on February 20th, and Monsieur Armin Daeniker, Berne, who was 73 on 24th February. On 26th, Mr. Oscar Grob, KSG, was 71. Mr. F. Gerber is in the odd position of only having a birthday every four years—he was born on 29th February, 1892—so he missed out this year.

On 1st March, Mr. F. G. Sommer was 79, and on the same day Mr. and Mrs. A. Boog celebrated their 54th wedding anniversary. Mr. E. Hardmeier was 73 on 3rd March. Mrs. L. Gradmann was 73 and Mr. R. Marchand (Bienne) 79 on 9th March. Mrs. A. Streit had her birthday on 13th March, and Mr. F. Conrad was 75 on 15th March. Dr. Hans Egli was 72 on 17th and Mr. R. Chappuis 75 on 17th March.

Best wishes also to Mrs. N. Pfändler who was 83 on 29th March, Mr. Albert Ferber was 60 on the same day. Mr. J. F. J. Ammann was 85 and

Mr. R. H. Senn 60 on 30th March. Mr. F. E. Brunner was 79 on 31st. 1st April was the birthday of Mrs. M. R. Lang (82), the 2nd of Mr. F. Streit (73) and of Mr. P. Lerch (71). On the same day, Mr. and Mrs. G. Keller celebrated their 33rd wedding anniversary. Mrs. H. Kriesi was 79 on 5th April.

The former Federal Councillor Prof. Dr. F. T. Wahlen (Berne) will be 72 on 10th April, and Mrs. Ch. Rabes will have her birthday on 11th April. Dr. Theo. H. C. William Preiswerk, CBE (Basle), and Mr. L. Portmann will both be 78 on 13th April. Mrs. W. Schedler will have her birthday on the 20th of the month, and Mr. E. Zwicky will be 74 on 22nd April. On 23rd, Mr. G. Keller will be 66 and Mr. J. B. Brutsch 82. On the same day, Mr. and Mrs. G. Bouverat will celebrate their 52nd wedding anniversary.

Best wishes and many happy returns to all these readers and to any others who will celebrate their birthdays soon.

## FORTHCOMING EVENTS

### Annual General Meetings:

The Swiss Rifle Association, Wednesday, 31st March, at the Glendower Hotel at 6.30 p.m. sharp.

The Swiss Mercantile Society, Wednesday, 7th April at 7.15 p.m. at 35 Fitzroy Square.

The Swiss Benevolent Society, Monday, 19th April at 6.30 p.m. at 35 Fitzroy Square.

The Anglo-Swiss Society, Thursday, 22nd April, Dorchester Hotel at 6.45 p.m.

The Swiss Club Manchester, Grand Hotel, Monday, 26th April, at 8.15 p.m.

The City Swiss Club, Tuesday, 27th April at the Dorchester Hotel, 6.30 p.m.

The Federation of Swiss Societies, Friday, 30th April (time and place indicated in next issue).

## SWISS CULTURAL EVENTS

Sunday, 4th April. Recital by the Turkish violinist Ayla Erduran and the Swiss pianist Roger Aubert at the Queen Elizabeth Hall, 7.15 p.m.

Tuesday, 6th April. The Legend of the Eiger's Evil North Face presented with film and slides by Leo Dickinson at the Queen Elizabeth Hall at 7.45 p.m.

Tuesday, 13th April. Piano recital by Albert Felber at the Queen Elizabeth Hall at 7.45 p.m.

Sunday, 18th April. Stravinsky's "The Soldier's Tale" with libretto by C. F. Ramuz at the Playhouse Theatre in Oxford, 8 p.m.

## SWISS CHURCH

**SERVICES EN FRANÇAIS:** à l'Eglise Suisse, 79 Endell Street, W.C.2, tous les dimanches à 11h15 et 19h00.

**SAINTE-CENE:** le premier et troisième dimanche du mois, matin et soir.

**PERMANENCE:** chaque jeudi de 15h00 à 18h00.

**REUNION DE QUARTIER:** huit veillées en automne et au printemps: voir "Le Messager"

**CLUB DES JEUNES:** tous les dimanches de 12h00 à 22h30, tous les jeudis de 15h00 à 22h30.

**REUNION DE COUTURE:** le 2<sup>e</sup> mardi du mois.

**LUNCH:** tous les dimanches à 13h00.

**VISITES:** sur demande.

**PASTEUR:** A. Nicod, 7 Park View Road, London N.3. Téléphone 01-346 5281.

\* \* \*

**SERVICES IN GERMAN:** at Eglise Suisse, 79 Endell Street, W.C.2, at 10 a.m. At St. Ann's Church, Abbey Orchard Street, S.W.1. at 7.30 p.m.

**HOLY COMMUNION:** every first Sunday of the month at evening service only. On major feasts at morning and evening services.

**CONSULTATIONS:** every Wednesday 4-6 p.m. at Eglise Suisse.

**DISTRICT GROUPS (W.4 and S.E.21) and SERVICES OUTSIDE LONDON:** see "Gemeindebote".

**SERVICES IN ENGLISH:** every fourth Sunday at 7.30 p.m.

**"KONTAKT" (Youth Group):** every Wednesday 4-10 p.m. at Eglise Suisse. Supper at 6.30 p.m. Programme at 8 p.m.

**SWISS Y.M.C.A.:** see Forthcoming Events.

**WOMEN'S CIRCLE:** every first Tuesday of the Month.

**MOTHERS' REUNION:** 1st Wednesday in the Month, 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.

**VISITS:** by request.

**MINISTER:** Pfr. M. Dietler, 1. Womersley Road, N.8. Telephone 01-340 6018.

**SWISS CATHOLIC MISSION:** at St. Ann's Church, Abbey Orchard Street (off No. 25 Victoria Street), S.W.1.

**SATURDAYS:** Ecumenical Service at 6.30 p.m.

**SUNDAYS:** Holy Mass at 9 and 11 a.m. (in English). At 6.30 p.m. (mostly in German).

**CONSULTATIONS AND CONFESSIONS:** preferably on Wednesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays in the afternoon or by appointment.

**SERVICES EN FRANCAIS:** Notre Dame de France, 5 Leicester Place, W.C.2. on Suns. at 9, 10, 11 a.m. 12.15, 6, 7 p.m.

**SWISS CATHOLIC YOUTH CLUB —** Meeting every Sunday after Evening Mass (8-11 p.m.) at Westminster Ball Room, 30 Strutton Ground, S.W.1.

**CHAPLAIN:** Paul Bossard, St. Ann's Church, Abbey Orchard Street, S.W.1. Tel.: 01-222 2895.