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NEWS FROM THE COLONY

30 YEARS AGO

"The Swiss Observer" volume for 1942 is unusually thin. Reduced issues appeared once a month only because of the difficulties of the war and the Colony had to accept shortened versions of Swiss news and local events.

The first Colony event recorded in the Volume was the 26th AGM of the Nouvelle Société Helvétique which took place on 17th January, 1942. It was attended by 82 members who enjoyed the hospitality of Mr. Anton Bon at the Dorchester Hotel. Presenting the Annual Report, the President, Mr. Fred Suter, passed under review the 12 meetings held during the year 1941 which had been the first full war year in Great Britain. He noted with satisfaction that the Group's membership had grown by 13 members to 182 members, and recalled that the year had been the Society's 25th. He urged his listeners to heed the words of Federal President Wetter, who had said that Swiss neutrality imposed "caution in critique and charity towards humanity". He concluded his address by saying: "so let our good resolutions be few and restricted, so that they will stand a better chance of being carried out".

Guests of Honour at that meeting were the Minister Walter Thurnheer and Mrs. Thurnheer. Also present were Pastor Pradervand and Father Lafranchi, of the Swiss Catholic Mission. In his after-dinner speech, Mini-

ster Thurnheer described conditions in Switzerland and referred to the rationing of all consume goods, the deficit of the Swiss federal budget and the problems of keeping the nation's trade going in a world at war. He referred to the initiative, which was to be turned down by the Swiss people on 25th January, 1942, calling for more Federal Councillors and their election by the people. These demands have sporadically been voiced in the recent past.

On 24th January, the Swiss Mercantile Society held its first monthly meeting of the year and heard a talk with film by Mr. A. Kern, Export Manager of the American firm Standard Brands Ltd. on his Mediterranean journeys.

A full page in the February issue was devoted to the obituary of Mr. Arturo Meschini, who had died on 12th February. Son of Mr. Carlo Meschini, the deceased had managed Paganini's Restaurant at Portland Street. Paganini's had been the venue of innumerable Swiss functions and was celebrated for its "Artist Room", whose walls were decorated by signatures and caricatures of celebrities of song and music. The restaurant had been destroyed in a bomb raid in October 1940. A numerous congregation gathered at the Church of St. Charles, Ogle Street, on 17th February, for a Requiem Mass. A second ceremony later took place at the deceased's parish church, St. Edward the Confessor,

at Golders Green.

Three days earlier, on 14th February, the Swiss Mercantile Society had held its AGM with Mr. Boos in the chair. Among items raised were the continued suspension of educational activities, the continuing work of the Employment Department under Mr. J. J. Pfaendler (the S.M.S., it was recorded, had placed over 20,000 applicants), and the renewal of the lease for Swiss House. It was also stated in the Annual Report that the London Society had kept in close contact with the central headquarters in Zurich, despite difficult communications.

On 7th February a meeting of the responsible members of the "Sick Society Schweizerbund" and the Société des Secours Mutuels met at 74 Charlotte Street, premises of the Swiss Club, and finalised the merger of their two societies. The S.S.S. had been in existence for 60 years, the membership of the merged societies was increased to 117. On the same day, the City Swiss Club held its Monthly Meeting at Brown's Hotel and heard a talk by the Military Attaché at the Legation on conditions prevailing in Switzerland.

The next meeting of the City Swiss Club was held at the Dorchester in the afternoon of 7th March, with Minister Walter Thurnheer in the chair. It was the third occasion since the beginning of the war to which wives had been invited. They heard a talk by Mr. Lawrence Howard, a

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British film authority who had spoken to the Club before. He argued, in a most complimentary way for Switzerland, that the Swiss should develop their film industry and bring to the world on celluloid the civilising message of their glorious history and institutions. He was loudly cheered.

On 6th March, the Committee of the Fete Suisse decided to cancel the 1942 meeting. The Fete Suisse had been staged regularly since 1864.

On the last day of the month, the Swiss Benevolent Society held its AGM at Brown's Hotel. Mr. Anton Bon, the President, was in the chair and the meeting was attended by the Swiss Minister, Mr. Thurnheer, Honorary President, by Mrs. Thurnheer, Patron of the Home for Aged Swiss, by Mr. F. M. Gamper, Chairman of the Committee of the Swiss Relief Centre, and by some 30 members. The President said that the Society's disbursement had increased during the year, rising from £5,150 in 1940 to £5,886 in 1941.

The April Meeting of the City Swiss Club was a highlight. Not far from 200 members heard a three man official delegation which had come to Britain to ask for an easing of the Navy blockade on European ports so as to let through overseas commodities to Switzerland. The three were Mr. Hans Sulzer, Chairman of Sulzer Brothers; Mr. William Rappard, former Harvard lecturer and professor in history at Geneva University and

Swiss delegate to the League of Nations; and Professor Paul Keller, teacher of Economics at the Commercial University of St. Gall.

The visit of the three men had prompted the *Daily Mail* to write a searing article on Swiss industrial and economic co-operation with the Germans. The *Daily Mail* alleged that Swiss factories were working full blast for the Nazis and questioned the grounds for offering them special treatment. An outraged "Swiss Observer" reader sent a letter suggesting that the Legation should make a reply publicly

to this image-destroying article—which had contained several erroneous statements.

The Swiss Mercantile Society heard in July a long expose by Mr. G. Keller, President of the Foreign Press Association, on the work of a neutral journalist in war time and described the way British censorship operated. He made particular reference on the difference between "newsmen" and "viewsmen", representing two vital and complementary aspects of journalism.

NATIONAL DAY CELEBRATIONS IN LONDON

The Swiss National Day was celebrated on Tuesday, 1st August at its usual venue, the Wimbledon Town Hall, in the presence of a smaller audience than usual. The ceremonial part unfolded smoothly and rapidly. It was opened on time by the Church youth group, who sang the Negro spiritual "Cum by Ya" under the guidance of

Father Bossard. The singing was interspersed by invocations by the Swiss Catholic Chaplain, who ended the "religious" element of the evening by saying the Lord's Prayer. He was echoed by the youths behind him and the attendance praying each one in his own language: German, French and Italian. This turned out to be the only prayer. It was a circumstantial prayer, but a short and fitting one which found no objections among the audience.

The federal pact was read in German by Pastor Uli Stefan before the turn of our Ambassador, Dr. Albert Weitnauer, who was introduced on the stage by Mr. Virgil Berti, President of the 1st August Committee, came to make his customary speech.

"I see three main reasons why, not as a Swiss Ambassador, but as a citizen of our country, I am thrilled and truly elated to speak to you on our national holiday" said Dr. Weitnauer. "Firstly, I am convinced that the set of values Switzerland stood for, and stands for, in the world are still valid today" he added. Dr. Weitnauer then went on to say that first and foremost among the many points, good and bad, which made Switzerland stand out in the family of nations was the Swiss State itself and "the opportunities it provides for its citizens to lead a really full life, to develop their personalities completely, unhampered by any traditional loves or hatred, and to enjoy fully—if they set their minds to it—all the treasures of civilisation".

The second point was that, despite their well-sheltered existence, the Swiss were faced today with "very



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