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COMMENT

Will Article 45-Bis Remain a "Dead Letter"?

It is now six years since the Swiss people voted to enrich the Federal Constitution with an article opening the way for closer participation of the Swiss abroad to the political life of the Motherland. Although there is still some way to go before Article 45-bis will materialise, the various avenues open to its practical implementation have been given serious consideration and the 50th Assembly of the Swiss Abroad in Berne was invited to take stock of the possible solutions.

A great many Swiss abroad would eagerly accept the opportunity to vote on matters concerning their home country. Voting not only confers the dignity of taking an active part in the destiny of one's own country, it is also, as it were, an act of communion with that country. Despite the distance, it can be argued that, given equal voting facilities, the participation of the Swiss abroad at the polls would not be inferior to the pitiful turn-out so often noted at home. But against this legitimate wish to be associated with the

life of the Motherland must be set a series of real practical difficulties. They strongly reduce the scope of application of article 45-bis.

It is known that the French living away from France are allowed to elect their President and take part in Referenda at their consular missions. They are moreover represented in Paris by six senators. The Supreme Council of the French abroad, the equivalent of the Commission for The Swiss Abroad, include officers directly appointed by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. This shows that relations between France and her nationals abroad are firmly established within an official framework. This must explain why of all the Swiss abroad, the Swiss of France are the most vocal advocates of political participation at home.

One may argue that what the French can do, the Swiss should also be able to achieve. However, we have to trust the experts of the Commission of the Swiss abroad who have gone deeply into the matter and reached the conclusion that it is not possible to open polling booths in Swiss embassies or consulates abroad. One of the main obstacles to this eventuality is that of Reciprocity. For example, the Italians would be entitled to ask the right for their nationals to vote on Italian matters. Thus General elections in Italy would entail campaigning among the Italian community in Switzerland, caucuses, political gatherings—all of

which are forbidden by present Federal regulations.

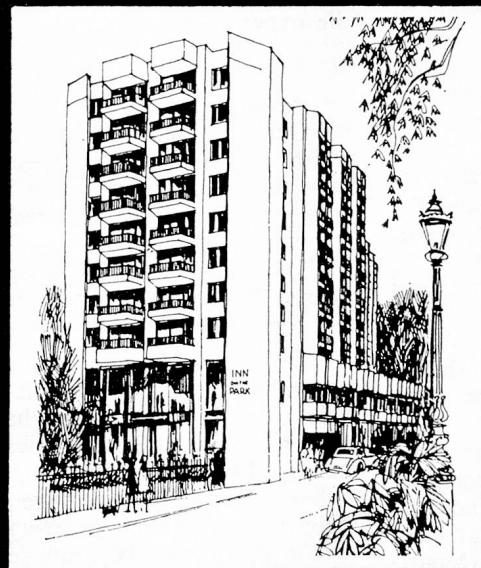
The only possibility left open is to allow Swiss nationals abroad to vote in their commune of origin whenever they happen to be in Switzerland. Voting would be limited to federal matters and candidate voters would have to apply beforehand for the required forms at their consulate, and be registered on their Communal voting roll.

This is obviously a rather disappointing offer although it is the only one possible. The question is: is it worth accepting?

Active members of the Swiss societies in Great Britain decided, when this question was put to them in a questionnaire, that it was not. The most valid arguments were a) how can we vote on Swiss issues if these are not part of our daily lives? b) who can afford to travel five hundred miles for a vote? and c) should we vote when we do not pay Swiss taxes (withholding tax apart)?

Although it would be a great thing for us Swiss abroad to vote, the conditions which are offered for us to exercise our democratic rights appear too costly. Those Swiss abroad who have lived and survived for fifty years without voting will probably have to continue doing so.

(PMB)



Vintage Room

Standing at the Piccadilly end of Park Lane, the Inn on the Park was recently named 'Hotel of the Year' by Egon Ronay. The Vintage Room, on its first floor, could equally be said to be deserving of the title 'Restaurant of the Year'. It specializes in presenting succulent steaks and traditional Ribs of Scotch Beef . . . the meat faultless . . . the service impeccable. Its subdued and intimate decor, continuous dancing from

9-0 until 3-0 a.m., and easy parking, make it an ideal after-theatre rendezvous. While at lunchtime, it is rapidly becoming a 'club' for those who appreciate good food in luxurious surroundings and today's greatest rarity — personal service.

Inn on the Park

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