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Autor: Celio, Nello

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FRIDAY, 22nd SEPTEMBER, 1972

MR. NELLO CELIO SPEAKS TO THE SWISS ABROAD IN BERNE

Speech by the President of the Confederation delivered at the
Kursaal, Berne, on Sunday 27th August.

The Beginnings of an Annual Event

When the Swiss abroad met for their first Annual Assembly in Basle in April 1918, the Federal Council asked to be excused with the explanation that the burden of office did not allow it to send a representative. As you can see, this is not the case today—although the work of the Federal Council has by no means been reduced.

Giuseppe Motta was the first federal councillor to address the Swiss Abroad. That was in 1930.

I am grateful for the honour bestowed upon me, his successor and close compatriot, of conveying to you, at this memorable Jubilee event, the greetings of the Federal Council and of the Swiss people. Their behalf, I should like to welcome you and thank you for coming from every part of the world to take part in this Assembly and thus demonstrate your faithful attachment to the Motherland. I should also like to greet and thank the Commission of the Swiss Abroad and its President, State Councillor Louis Guisan, as well as the Secretariat of the Swiss Abroad and all the organisers who have prepared this Congress.

Finally, I should like to thank the official delegates from the Confederation, the Canton and the City of Berne. It is thanks to their co-operation that the federal capital has lent this year's Assembly all the trappings of a festive celebration, rich in artistic and social events, and offering a popular fete in the world's most

beautiful street (*ed. the Kramgasse*).

The story of the Swiss abroad is as old as that of Switzerland itself. But we have not gathered here today in remembrance of generations of mercenaries in foreign service and of the famed pioneers of the Old and the New World. Let us rather turn our attention to the early days of the association of Swiss abroad that sprang from a need of solving together their common problems and reasserting their ties with their native country.

We should not forget that these ties, as well as emigration, are closely related to the circumstances prevailing in Switzerland at any given time. To take stock of what has been achieved over these years of annual contact (with the exception of those five years when the Congress was not held) we should recall the first of these reunions.

We are thus brought back to 1918, last year of the First World War. Our country had been spared the devastation of war, but was torn by serious social conflict. This conflict led to the General Strike of November. Although it lasted only three days, it shook and divided the nation. Considerable perseverance and a strong spirit of conciliation were necessary to overcome deep-rooted resistance. Several demands were met at that time, such as proportional representation at the National Council. Other reforms required more time. Such was the case of Old Age Pension, which could not be instituted until after the Second World War. On the other hand, dozens of years proved

necessary for establishing Swiss women in their full political rights.

The Swiss abroad help solve unemployment

But let us turn back to the end of the First World War. The hardship which this universal conflict had caused didn't spare our country—and there were 67,000 unemployed in Switzerland fifty years ago. The Federal Labour Office resolved to appeal to the Swiss abroad, and asked them "to resort to their relations and experience to help find opportunities abroad for their many compatriots at home without employment". I leave it to you to compare that situation with the one prevailing today.

It is interesting to note that it is since those days that the Political Department has kept a register of the Swiss abroad. At the first count, about 40,000 of them were registered. But it is estimated that their true number surpassed by about 50,000 the 313,000 Swiss abroad registered today. Owing to the favourable economic situation of our country and other circumstances, emigration stands today at about 15,000 per annum and is practically compensated by the reflow of Swiss nationals from abroad. Nevertheless, the tally of emigrants is slightly higher than that of immigrants. The reasons behind emigration have obviously changed over the years. A study made at the end of the 40's concluded as follows: "Emigration

(continued on page 2, column 3)