

**Zeitschrift:** The Swiss observer : the journal of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK  
**Herausgeber:** Federation of Swiss Societies in the United Kingdom  
**Band:** - (1973)  
**Heft:** 1666

**Artikel:** Experiences of a Swiss in Vietnam  
**Autor:** [s.n.]  
**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-690293>

### **Nutzungsbedingungen**

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

### **Conditions d'utilisation**

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

### **Terms of use**

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

**Download PDF:** 04.12.2025

**ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>**

# EXPERIENCES OF A SWISS IN VIETNAM

*The following is the exposé presented during the June meeting of the Nouvelle Société Helvétique by Dr. Carlo Jagmetti, Press Attaché at the Embassy, following a two-month replacement at the Swiss diplomatic mission in South Vietnam.*

## Madam Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a great pleasure for me to address you here tonight and to say a few words about the short experience of Vietnam I had last year. I naturally feel greatly honoured to be your speaker for the second time in four years. As a matter of fact, it was announced in June 1969 that a certain Carlo Jagmetti, newly arrived from Switzerland, would give a talk on 26th June 1969 at 7.45 p.m. at the Swiss Hostel for Girls. So I more or less began my London duties with an appearance in this very distinguished society. I am sorry to say that today's talk is going to mark the end of my London term, as we shall be leaving in about two months' time. Whereas four years ago I was, although reluctantly, allowed to speak German, your President thought that would be not suitable this time. She is probably right in supposing that after four years one should be able to say a few words in English. So this is going to be a sort of examination, which worries me very much, as I am well aware both of my deficiencies and of the outstanding quality of the jury. I shall try very hard and hope that you will be reasonably indulgent.

As this talk is meant to be a chat rather than a lecture, I am not going to penetrate deeply into the masses of problems Vietnam has to face. I intend to give you a brief introduction about the history and the geography of the country and then to tell you why I went to Saigon, how I went there and came home again, what I did there and how I lived there. I should also like to tell you about the aspects of life in and around Saigon which most impressed me. At the end I'll quickly show a few slides.

I hope you will excuse me for not being more scientific and not giving you more substantial information. But I have to make it very clear right from the beginning that before my trip to Vietnam I had never been to Asia, that I was only in Saigon for a short term of two months and that I did practically no travelling in the country. I am therefore by no means a specialist and I dare not pretend to be one.

Now — what is this Vietnam everybody talks about, nearly everybody has an opinion about and only very few people outside Asia may know about? You all know the geography of South-East Asia so I need not go into detail. May I just refresh your memory by saying that Vietnam forms the eastern part of the Indo-Chinese peninsula. It measures nearly 2000 km from north to south, but from east to west is very small, being only about 60 km at the narrowest part.

Vietnam is basically formed by the delta of the Red River in the North, the delta of the Mekong in the south, and by a long strip connecting both deltas and formed by the coast and the mountains behind it. Formerly, the North was called Tongking, the South Cochinchina and the middle part Annam. The climate is marked by the monsoon, so the vegetation is extremely rich. The main agricultural products are: rice, rubber, bananas, sugar, maize, cotton, etc. The area of North Vietnam is about 155,000 square km and that of South Vietnam is 170,000 square km. North Vietnam has about 22 million inhabitants, of whom 800,000 live in the capital Hanoi, and South Vietnam has 17.5 million inhabitants, with 3 million living in the capital Saigon.

## Potted History

Now a quick word about ethnology: the deltas and the coastal areas are populated by Vietnamese who emerged in the Bronze Age as a mixture of Chinese and Indonesians. In the central mountain areas there are mainly Khmers (Cambodians), and a small group called the "Montagnards", who have their origins in Malaya and Polynesia. Finally, there are many Chinese, the biggest concentration of them being in Cholon, the Chinese part of Saigon.

The main religions of both Vietnams are Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism. About 1.7 million Catholics are to be found mainly in South Vietnam, where there are also two important politico-religious sects: the Cao Dai and the Hoa Hao.

Let me remind you of a few historical facts: until the year 939 Vietnam was under Chinese control and then became an independent country but still very much under Chinese influence. In the 16th century Vietnam was divided into two realms, one in the north and one in the south, with the famous city of Hue as the capital of the south. Also in the 16th century the first contacts with Europe took place, when Portuguese,

Spanish, Dutch and English missionaries and tradesmen went to Indo-China. In the 18th century Vietnam was reunited in one kingdom, which later became an empire and lasted until 1883, when the French obtained control over the whole area. They divided Vietnam into two protectorates, Tongking and Annam, and the colony Cochinchina. In 1899 these three territories were brought together with Laos and Cambodia to form the "Union indochinoise". Under the French régime nationalist movements developed early in the 20th century. In 1925 Ho Chi Minh founded the first communist organization, and in 1927 a nationalist party similar to the Kuo Min Tang was founded in Tongking.

During the second world war the French had to accept the presence of Japanese troops in Vietnam. In 1941 Ho Chi Minh founded the Viet Minh Movement and got important assistance from the USA. After the war the French re-established their authority but had to give in to the communists in the North in 1954 after the tragic defeat at Dien Bien Phu. The Vietnam Conference which took place in Geneva in 1954 agreed on a cease-fire and thus confirmed the partition of Vietnam along the 17th parallel. In 1955 the US assumed responsibility for helping to build up the defence of South Vietnam. In 1960 the National Liberation Front was formed. In 1963 President Diem was assassinated. In 1964 there was the famous incident in the Gulf of Tongking, where North Vietnamese torpedo boats attacked the American ship "Maddox". As a consequence of that incidence the American Congress authorised the President to bomb North Vietnam and to take other military measures. In 1965 the United States began to send combat troops and consequently built up the American forces until 1969, when the so-called Vietnamization and the withdrawal of American troops was started. As you all know, on 27th January 1973 a cease-fire was agreed and the military involvement of the United States in Vietnam was terminated.

I should like to end these very brief introductory remarks by emphasizing that Vietnam is a very old country with its own people, its own history, its own culture and language, a country which has often been torn by wars and political conflicts and which has been at war for the last 30 years. Its history shows that Vietnam was several times divided and again reunited and that the country has very rarely had long periods of relative stability and calm.

Now to the question why I went there. The answer is very plain. It was

simply to stand in for our Chargé d'Affaires, who had planned his home-leave a long time before. The political and military situation being what it was, the Federal Political Department in Berne thought it was necessary to have him replaced during his absence. Why they took somebody from the London embassy instead of picking a man in Berne is simply due to the shortage of labour in Switzerland and to the considerable amount of unemployment in Britain. Such arrangements, of course, only need to be made for very small diplomatic missions, where the absence of one person can upset the whole organization. And our Embassy in Saigon is a very small one. The real Head of the Mission is the Ambassador, who resides in Jakarta. So there has to be an acting Head of Mission on the spot, that is to say, a Chargé d'Affaires. The staff consists of the Chancellor, who is a young consular officer, a Swiss lady as secretary and factotum, and a Vietnamese lady as second factotum and three male assistants for office and postal work, driving, etc.

The question how I went there can also be answered very quickly: when I left by beloved wife and children in London on the 24th October I felt a little like that famous chap in Swiss history, except that I was a little more hopeful about my chances of survival. I flew to Zurich, said goodbye to my mother, gave my military testament to my second-in-command and then took off from Kloten in a DC-8 of Swissair full to bursting, sitting on the most enviable middle seat between a Swiss tourist and an Indian nun. Needless to say, such a journey is extremely enjoyable. The main

thing is to arrive safely. And this I did the next morning in Bangkok. After a quick meeting at the Embassy I went on to Saigon by Air-France Jumbo Jet. The plane flew through one of those tropical thunderstorms and was shaken like a one-seater. My thoughts went back again to Sempach, but luckily there was a happy landing in the end. So there I was, exhausted after more than 20 hours of flying, in a war torn country, just after dusk, in heavy rain, all very encouraging. But then I was met by the chap I had come to replace and by his colleague. They took me to the Hotel Continentale, where I was to stay for the whole time. This is an old-fashioned palace in French-colonial style, slightly decaying but in a way very charming. The other hotel guests were diplomats, journalists, reporters from all over the world, a few businessmen and a few quite eccentric tourists.

### Tasks of the Saigon Embassy

The next morning I began my new work, which, I must confess, I at once liked very much and also enjoyed. So what does one do at such an Embassy? First of all, I must make it clear that the Embassy does not correspond at all to the idea of marvellous and luxurious premises one might have. The offices are in a big old French-colonial office building, on an upper floor one could sometimes reach by a lift which one always boarded with a certain feeling of adventurous apprehension. On the Embassy premises there is a small entrance hall with the inevitable counter that gives the person

approaching it a disagreeable feeling of inferiority but on the other hand is a well proved instrument for boosting the self-confidence of the people behind it. Then there are three offices, one for the Chargé d'Affaires, one for the Chancellor and one for the two ladies. The telecommunication system includes a telephone and a teleprinter and both surprised me very much by working remarkably well. In this very simple setting the staff try to fulfil their tasks, which can be enumerated according to priority as follows:

- Looking after the Swiss Colony, the visitors from Switzerland (especially journalists and reporters) and keeping in touch with the Red Cross delegates
- Intervention with the Vietnamese authorities
- Political observation
- Economic observation and commercial
- Dealing with requests and inquiries from the Vietnamese public, such as issuing visas, giving information about schools, advising students who want to go to Swiss universities, etc.
- Representation, that is to say, taking part in official and social functions.

I considered the Swiss Colony and the political observations as my two main tasks and organized my activities accordingly. Being yourselves members of a Swiss Colony abroad, you might be interested to hear about our compatriots in Vietnam. There are about 80 of them in South Vietnam, who can be put in the categories of missionaries, medical and Red Cross people and businessman. I met the most extraordinary missionaries, who live in completely secluded areas in the mountains looking after all the needs of whole tribes of montagnards and thus giving the best possible example of human care for others and of self-denial. I met the now quite famous soeur Rose, who is head of a home for about 1,000 people from the age of a few hours to about 100 years, dealing every hour of the day with all the problems of human misery that can assemble in such a place. There was recently an article about her in the *Schweizer Illustrierte* and she really deserves the general admiration for her extremely courageous work. Among the businessmen there are equally fascinating personalities. I take the example of a young Swiss who is manager of a French rubber plantation and has been living in the most tense way for the last 10 years going from the Saigon headquarters every day to the plantations about a hundred kilometres outside Saigon, normally by car; when there was too much fighting on the ground he took a small company aircraft, landing and taking off somewhere on a little strip in the bush. There are representatives of big Swiss firms like Nestlé, Hoffman-La Roche and big export-import firms. There are also Swiss businessmen in international companies like Shell, etc. To these people, who live mainly in Saigon with their families and lead a more or less normal life, one has to add all those who



### TRAVEL TWICE MONTHLY TO AND FROM SWITZERLAND AND ENGLAND

Providing DOOR TO DOOR SERVICES

with vans specially equipped to carry

- Household Removals. — Exhibition Goods..
- Works of Art. — Machinery.

For full information contact

#### In Switzerland

KEHRLI + OELER LTD.,  
3001 Berne,  
Bubenberplatz 9.  
Tel. 031 22 00 22.  
Telex. 32414 Kerolch

#### In England

LEP PACKING LTD.  
Corney Road,  
Chiswick,  
London, W.4.  
Tel: 01-995 1300



# The extra ten per cent



## Cantilever shelving system

Acrow Cantilever Shelving is designed to save you a great deal of space and then some. An extra 10%. A bonus you get because we've cleverly eliminated the need for frontal supports! So you get one tenth more stock in the same space.

We studied stockrooms a long

time before we came up with Cantilever Shelving. And it's very good. Strong. Stable. Miserly with your precious space. Yet no Shelving System could be simpler. Or easier to erect. Or more variable and accommodating to your stock. Which are more accessible and visible to your Stores Personnel.

Shelf brackets are assembled to tubular steel uprights and are infinitely adjustable. There's nothing loose to go amiss. And 'Cantilever' is clean of line and functional.

Clip the coupon today for details. You'll get them by return (and a 10% space bonus when you buy!)

**Acrow (Automation) Limited,**  
Moorhall Road, Harefield, Uxbridge, Middlesex  
Tel: Harefield 2411 Telex: 22851

A Division of

# ACROW



**'PEOPLE WORK WITH ACROW SYSTEMS'**

Please send me details on the Cantilever Shelving System.  
**Acrow (Automation) Ltd., Moorhall Road, Harefield, Uxbridge, Middlesex**

NAME .....

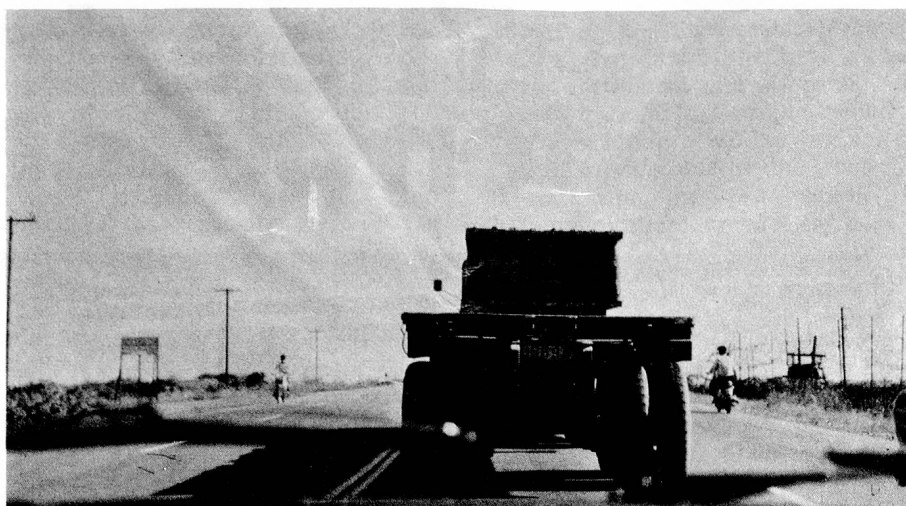
COMPANY .....

ADDRESS .....

come only for short terms, like the Red Cross delegates, and visitors who come for a few days only, like newspaper correspondents and reporters. I tried to meet as many compatriots as possible and to learn about their lives and experiences. It was absolutely fascinating to listen to them, and to be in close human contact with these people was a memorable experience. As there was not so much to do in Saigon in the evening and at weekends, there were constantly all sorts of Swiss gatherings with lovely meals, drinks and Jass which brought people very close together. On the other hand, the Swiss in Vietnam cause quite an amount of work. Naturally, there is the normal daily routine like registration, issuing passports, writing about old age pensions and the solidarity fund, etc. But life is not as easy as in Great Britain or in Switzerland. For quite normal things like leaving the country for a holiday or obtaining any sort of answer from an authority there had to be an intervention by the Embassy. So quite normal day-to-day activity sometimes takes the shape of state business, and the Embassy is thus involved in a kind of work for compatriots we are fortunate enough to know nothing about here in London for example. Then all the representatives of the news media need a considerable amount of recommendations to the Vietnamese and the American authorities in order to be able to carry on their activities. One of the main pre-occupations of the Embassy was to keep the plan for a possible evacuation of the colony up-to-date and to remain in touch with those who might help us with these arrangements.

#### Political observation

Now a word about political observation: to be completely ignorant of Asian matters, and on Vietnam in particular was in a way quite a help to me. I was confronted with a totally new situation with few or no prejudices or preconceptions and I tried to penetrate slowly into the realities starting from a position which can be called one of complete political virginity. Reading can help in such a situation, but when there is nothing to be read except unreadable and heavily censored newspapers in Vietnamese or one local newspaper in French and one in English, both censored and totally insignificant, then it becomes more difficult to be well informed. So I



*A huge truck loaded with 155 mm shells rumbling towards the battle zone north of Saigon. A typical scene photographed by Mr. Jagmetti on the highway from Saigon to Bienhoa.*

had to rely on what I could see and what I could hear personally. Therefore, personal contacts became eminently important and consequently I tried to meet as many people as possible. I began by calling on the heads of foreign diplomatic missions and other diplomats. I naturally called on many people at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, who were always extremely kind but for obvious reasons seldom expressed very strong political opinions. At official functions I met many more Vietnamese from other ministries, from parliament and also from the army. As I happened to be in Saigon for the National Day I even shook hands with the President and his personal entourage.

As you will remember, at the end of October speculation about a cease-fire agreement reached incredible heights, especially in view of the forthcoming election of the President of the United States. Because of this general excitement journalists and reporters flew in to Saigon from all over the world. The best place to meet them was the bar at the Continentale Hotel, where, surrounded by more or less attractive girls, shoe-cleaners and traders in all kinds of things, one could indulge in the most extraordinary discussions and speculations. The correspondents of papers like the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, the *Spiegel*, *Corriere della Sera* etc., were, of course, excellent discussion partners. But by far the most realistic reports could be heard from compatriots who lived somewhere in the country or went there often

enough to be in constant touch with the local population and with the different factions of it. From all I heard from these various sources and from my personal impressions I got quite an interesting picture of the situation in the country. But the most discouraging aspect of this activity was, that the more one believed one had learned the more one realized how complex the situation was and how totally different things can be in Asia from what we Europeans think they are. I can only quote Ambassador Bunker, who told me what seems to be a truism but in fact is a very important point: the Americans and Europeans made and are still making the fundamental error of thinking about Asia, and Vietnam in particular, in their own terms and of applying their own standards instead of trying to learn to penetrate into the Asian perspective and to find really Asian solutions to Asian problems.

#### Impressions

May I now give you a few personal impressions on life as it was 6 months ago and probably still is today in Saigon? The first thing that struck me when I arrived was the omnipresence of war, mixed with apparently normal day-to-day life. Here I had to fill in an incredible number of forms for the customs and immigration authorities, who had an exceedingly bureaucratic attitude. A few hundred yards away the fighter planes took off for their deadly mission. Here the buses, taxis and all sorts of extraordinary means of civil transport – there the armoured cars patrolling along the roads. Here masses of friendly people minding their own normal business – there innumerable soldiers and policemen all armed with automatic weapons, proudly showing their belts loaded with live rounds and with hand-grenades dangling at their belts. I had a strange feeling in the stomach and thought I'd better not imagine what would happen if those chaps went berserk for one reason or another. But one became used to that picture and I was very impressed by the general discipline

*Buffet Zürich B*

**THE MAIN STATION and  
AIRLINES TERMINAL  
RESTAURANT**

*...in a class of its own*

R.Candrian, prop.



of the armed forces and the police. There were rarely any incidents and the military police, organized in American style, were extremely tough.

### A war-time capital

Throughout the day Saigon was a normal-looking, very busy place with the most incredible traffic consisting mainly of motor-cycles on which the Vietnamese girls looked particularly elegant and attractive. The offices and shops opened at eight, closed at 12, and were open again from about three to six. In the very picturesque official market in Saigon, in the fascinating Chinese market in Cholon and on the black market in the centre of the city one could find practically every imaginable thing. The shops were loaded with goods and food and there was practically no shortage of anything, at least for those who had the money to pay for it. In the evening there were the normal leisure activities, people gathering in the streets, eating their simple food at the stalls on the sidewalks, eating and drinking in restaurants and going to the cinema. Only the whole business of bars had been closed down a few months before by the government as an austerity measure. At 10.45 in the evening the sirens went off all over Saigon. This was a warning signal and everybody rushed home. At 11 O'clock the sirens roared again to mark the beginning of the curfew, which lasted until 6 in the morning. Suddenly there was an incredible and ghostly silence, no people and no vehicles in the streets apart from police patrols and their cars. Then suddenly one could hear the practically continuous artillery barrage outside Saigon, and when the windows were shaking more heavily at certain intervals, it meant that the B 52's were bombing targets near Saigon. From time to time single shots could be heard, but probably in most cases they were only warning shots. I was quite impressed by all these noises and only got some consolation from the even more terrifying noise of the air-conditioning in my room which nearly drowned all the rest.

### Fertility replaces war toll

Living conditions in Saigon were apparently not too bad. But according to an assessment by local people, 10% of the population of South Vietnam live in luxury, 30% are reasonably well off and 60% are poor. So, in spite of a superficial first impression, one has to realize that there is great misery. The fighting, the bombing and acts of terrorism have caused innumerable casualties. There is certainly not one family in the country that has not lost at least one relative through the war. In addition to the hundreds of thousands of fatal casualties, there are hundreds of thousands of crippled people, there are innumerable orphans and sick children who simply cannot be looked after properly because

there are too many of them. If on the one hand there have been terrible losses, on the other hand there is an incredible population explosion. The Vietnamese seem to be extremely fertile and families of five to 12 children are quite usual. I can give you the example of our three office helpers; the youngest, who was about 30, had four children, the two others who were in their 40s had eight and nine children. So the population is increasing rapidly and the situation is made even worse by the presence of several 100,000 refugees from the North. The government is therefore facing the most difficult social problem, in particular concerning education, housing and employment.

### Stormy future

From here we could now well begin a political discussion, but I don't think this would be useful as it would only lead to hazardous speculations. To cut it very short, I would rather like to tell you just what was the most often heard assessment before I left. According to this, the present regime would last for a period of one to about four years. The communists would come into the government first by coalition arrangements and then take full control. This would be the more or less peaceful solution. Should there be resistance against the ambitions of the communists, then a new outbreak of fighting would be inevitable and could again last for years.

This is a very worrying outlook but regrettably it is probably not too unrealistic. Developments since the signing of the cease-fire agreement really have not been very encouraging and might prove that the pessimists are right. This is particularly tragic because the Vietnamese have suffered extreme hardship for many years and are really longing for peace. One can only hope for that very likeable people, the Vietnamese, and for their beautiful country that the future will look much brighter than the forecasters expect.



### "INTRODUCING SWITZERLAND"

*A new book in English by  
Olivier Reverdin*

The title of this latest publication on Switzerland is most modest and barely hints at the fascinating manner in which the eminent Swiss journalist and author, historian and Greek scholar (one-time President of the Commission of the Swiss Abroad) has tackled the subject. Prof. Reverdin presents his book in three parts: SWITZERLAND in the LIGHT of her HISTORY, ASPECTS of CONTEMPORARY SWITZERLAND and POSTSCRIPT.

He leads us shortly from pre-historic times – we are told that the earliest evidence of man belongs to the Lower Palaeolithic – through the various

Ages. He tells us where Switzerland's four linguistic communities originated and how the pact of 1291 has survived for seven centuries. The author describes how Switzerland passed through Renaissance and the Reformation, resulting in a land of mixed denominations. We are told how the old order collapsed and the Confederation of States became a Federative State. He finishes the chapter by referring to the century of peace, concord and prosperity, how the country was able to stand firm as a supernational State, Prof. Reverdin describes Switzerland's contribution to civilisation in the field of education and philanthropic institutions. He reminds us of Swiss artists and great scholars and the fact that no fewer than 16 Nobel prizes have been awarded to Swiss scientists, men of letters, pacifists and institutions.

The second part of the book shows aspects of contemporary Switzerland, her direct democracy and collegiate Government. He stresses that the secret of Switzerland's political stability and the proper working of her institutions is compromise in itself, a higher form of tolerance and respect for minorities. In a very lucid way, Olivier Reverdin describes Swiss federalism. He mentions the militia army, agriculture and tourism, banking and insurance, Swiss industry and foreign trade, but in the most easily understandable manner and not drily as these subjects are so often presented. The last two chapters in this part cover social peace, science and education.

To my mind, the most interesting part of the book is the last, called Postscript. It bears on future prospects: the threat of technocratic tyranny and the problem of the foreign labour force. He gives pertinent examples of how Switzerland's face is changing in economy and finance, education and research, social insurance and institutions.

Changes there are, but Switzerland adapts herself with prudence, and the Swiss, the author suggests, "*gathers only the fruit that are ripe. He patiently awaits the ripening of those which still seem to be too green*".

The book would not be complete without touching on Switzerland's position in the world. Her negotiation for admission not to the European Community, but for a close, evolving form of co-operation shows that she is willing to play her part within the European group of nations, but unwilling to renounce her neutrality and independence. It is possible that Switzerland will become a full member of the United Nations, but "*as she is, with her neutrality and her readiness to act as an arbiter and mediator*." Switzerland's commitment to the Third World and the problems of territorial planning are mentioned, and the author finishes the book on "loyalty to Tradition" without which Switzerland cannot survive.

"Introducing Switzerland" is not an ordinary historic survey, a list of achievements, institutions and problems facing the world today. It is an admirably

written account by a thinking patriot, a man who not only knows his country intimately, but who loves it despite its foibles and idiosyncracies or perhaps just because of them.

The book is richly illustrated partly in colour and shows pictures not only of landscapes and buildings, but also of industry and includes reproductions of Swiss art.

The work has been adapted into

English by Douglas J. Gillam, M.A., F.I.L., La Chaux-de-Fonds. The publishers are the SWISS OFFICE for the DEVELOPMENT of TRADE, 1001 Lausanne.

It makes an excellent present for young and old Swiss living abroad as well as for English-speaking friends. It is also a most useful book for any Swiss anxious to improve his knowledge of his own country. M.M.

# Mass Media and Public Relations

*A panel discussion on public opinion at the Nouvelle Société Helvétique*

On Thursday, 19th July, the London Group of the Nouvelle Société Helvétique held an open meeting at the Swiss Embassy at which nearly 60 members and friends were present. The subject was treated by three speakers by way of a panel discussion, with the President, Mrs. Mariann Meier in the chair.

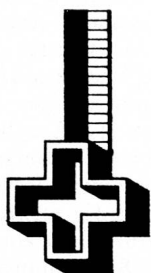
The London Correspondent of the *Tagesanzeiger*, Mr. Samuel Plattner, President of the Foreign Press Association, opened the discussion with a short exposé on changes in the development of newspapers in Switzerland, the concentration of dailies, the distribution of papers free of charge, and the difficulties in getting well-trained staff.

The Deputy-Director of the Radio and Television Services of the Suisse Romande (who had taken the place of another speaker at the last minute), Mr. Bernard Béguin, spoke on the new charter for radio and TV and the change of putting both media under the same management. He spoke of the mistakes that had been made due to the fact that recruitment had been rather too fast. The Federal Government, he explained, would be responsible for legislation — the charter was not as strict as Parliament would be. He talked of "internal censorship" by the TV team itself.

Dr. Peter Kaefer, Press Officer of the Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich (ETH), teacher of business economics, introduced the question of public relations. He said it was a profession today, and the Swiss Public Relations Society had 400 members. He pointed out the difference between good and bad public relations, the difference between information and planted information. Unfortunately, by the time Dr. Kaefer's subject was introduced, the hour was getting late as questions had been plentiful. Dr. Kaefer preferred not to go into details, especially as public relations had in fact been discussed right through the evening without specific mention.

The discussion was lively, and many aspects were raised. It became evident that it all boiled down to the problem of communication. There are also differences from country to country. No Swiss newspaper, for instance, could be prevented from publishing an article on thalidomide as the *Sunday Times* had been in Great Britain. The presentation of TV programmes is not nearly as critical in Switzerland as British Television which differentiates between "disturbing and offending". M.M.

## NEWS from the COLONY



### CULTURAL SELF-RELIANCE

If one were to say that Switzerland is fighting for her existence, it would hardly find credence and provoke a lot of contradiction. How and why? The country's affluence has become almost proverbial, public expenditure for old-age pensions, for invalids, the sick and handicapped, for health, education, vocational training, scientific research, the construction of hospitals, schools and roads indicate a thriving nation. Switzerland plays her part as an industrial, financial and insurance-minded nation. Her tourism is alive and her army prepared. How could one even mention any threat to her existence?

The danger facing Switzerland is neither economic, political nor military. Yet the spiritual values of freedom, independence and self-reliance will have to be fought for continually, whatever the state of the world is and however high the Swiss standard of living. Especially Switzerland with her four languages and two denominations, her 25 Cantons, her diversities, can only remain the nation presented in the Federal Constitution if she retains and preserves her creative self-reliance.

A most vulnerable sphere is the cultural one. It is under daily bombardment by the mass media, influenced by new writings and criticism from within and without Switzerland. In this field in particular Switzerland must demonstrate that she exists not on her material power, but on an idea, an ideal. The spirit finally decides whether Switzerland is to be or not to be.

This criterion has influenced the Swiss National Day Collection (*Bundesfeierspende, Don National*) to

devote this year's sale of badges and stamps to cultural works, to the preservation of Switzerland's historic and cultural heritage.

This year's badge is particularly dignified: a gold cross, its sides carrying the cantonal coats-of-arms, the whole emblem hanging from a red and white ribbon.

Please take any opportunity of buying it and thus supporting Switzerland's fight for cultural self-reliance. The badges are on sale at the Swiss Embassy and Consulates, at societies' meetings, at the Swiss Churches and, of course, the First of August Celebrations themselves.

Over three million francs was distributed to the Swiss abroad from last year's collection. Let us be equally generous in supporting this year's effort. M.M.

### BIRTHDAYS AND ANNIVERSARIES

The following couples will be celebrating their wedding anniversaries: *Mr. & Mrs. W. Pellet*, 30 Cheyne Walk, Hendon, on 16th July — 55 years of married life. *Mr. & Mrs. Kaluza*, 14 Amberley Court, Christchurch Park, Sutton, Surrey, will celebrate their Silver Wedding on 5th August. *Mr. & Mrs. W. Schedler* will have their 38th wedding anniversary on 18th July, and *Mr. & Mrs. F. Delaloye* their 61st on 27th July. *Mr. & Mrs. A. V. Bataillard* will have been married 54 years on 11th August.

Father Bossard will have his birthday on 19th and Mr. J. Zimmermann on 21st July. Ambassador H. B. de Fischer (Berne) will be 72 on 22nd and Mr. A. Boog 91 on the same day. Mr. J. Vogel will be 92 on 28th July and Mr. V. Bataillard the same age on 2nd August.

Mr. B. Truninger (Zurich) will be 66 on 4th August and Dr. H. Rast 82 on 6th of the month, the same day as Mrs. A. Schmid (Glendower) will have her birthday. Mrs. A. Bachofen will be 73 on 10th August.

Best wishes and many happy returns!