

# Federation of Swiss societies in the UK

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negotiations were already under way with eastern countries. Negotiating teams, including our Economics Minister, had made the journey to Moscow. The snag was that the Russians had less to sell than the west could offer. The inability shown by eastern European industries to produce

goods of high technological standards was a hindrance to trade.

Before Dinner, the Society's AGM was expeditiously dealt with by the President, Lord Selkirk, in the ante-room of the Orchid Suite. It was a routine operation.

## ***Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK***

The Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK held its Annual General Meeting at the Embassy on 27th April. Representatives from the societies present were kindly invited to drinks and dinner by the Embassy. In the absence of the Ambassador, Dr. Jurg Iselin, Charge d'Affaires, acted as host to the meeting, which was chaired by Dr. H. Egli. Dr. Marcel Ney, Director of the Secretariat of the Swiss Abroad and Dr. Philippe Garraux, member of the Commission of the Swiss Abroad, honoured the Federation by being present at its AGM. Nearly all the societies of the London area were represented, but none from the North and Scotland had managed to delegate members. For the first time, the Swiss of Guernsey (six hairdressers I understand) were represented by Mr. C. A. Aeschmann (who isn't a hairdresser).

We had been told by the President in a three-paragraph Annual Report that there was no business to attend to relating to the accounting period, apart from the problem of refunding expenses to the Federation's delegate and deputy to the Commission of the Swiss Abroad in Berne. The only new item announced was the use to be made of a sum of about £300 left over from the Forum of Switzerland Foundation. The Embassy had decided to entrust these remnants of the funds which had originally been collected to finance a Colony Room at the Leicester Square Swiss Centre to the Federation for "cultural, social and economic events".

Following a brief examination of the accounts, which showed that nearly all societies had paid their dues to the Federation, Delegates heard Mrs. Mariann Meier's report on her activities during the past year as delegate for the South of England at the Commission of the Swiss Abroad.

She enumerated the many items discussed by the 34 delegates and proxies coming from all over the world (including, for the first time, Senegal and Portugal) at their last meeting. These issues included social welfare for Swiss abroad, withholding tax, dual taxation, facilities for study in Switzerland to young Swiss abroad, support to Swiss schools abroad and information.

At the beginning of her Report, Mrs. Meier briefly outlined the vital statistics of "Fifth Switzerland": There were 313,709 registered Swiss abroad

last year as compared with about 237,000 twenty years ago. Swiss population abroad has thus leapt forward during the past two decades, particularly during the fifties, but is now tending to stabilise. The number of Swiss societies is increasing faster than new arrivals of Swiss nationals. It has grown from 553 to 622 during the past five years. This occurrence could partially be explained by the fact that many old societies only recently decided to register with the Secretariat of the Swiss Abroad. Mrs. Meier also made a brief reference on the accounts of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad and its losses of over 40,000 francs — mainly due to the cost of publishing the "Echo", the monthly magazine of the Swiss Abroad.

A long discussion followed on the means of publicising the debates of the Commission of the Swiss Abroad. It was stressed that these were of particular interest to Swiss living in this country. A suggestion to publish a special leaflet on this matter was turned down in favour of giving it dominance in future special issues of the prominence.

The Meeting then agreed to take care of the residue of funds from the Swiss Forum Foundation. Before the end of the session, the question of handing the funds of the defunct Swiss Sports Society to the Federation was also raised and it was decided to initiate the necessary formalities.

Finally, a problem which was discussed at length — although it bore little relevance to Swiss living abroad — was that of speeding up the naturalisation procedure. It is difficult to become Swiss. This not only costs about 10,000 francs, but also requires 12 years of residence and the authorisation of Communal, Cantonal and Federal authorities.

Dr. Philippe Garraux outlined progress achieved towards a new bill which would put an end to many abnormalities. Many children of resident families now remain Aliens all their lives. When a foreigner marries a Swiss girl and lives in Switzerland (or abroad) his children remain foreign and the families are split by nationality. Lengthy arguments followed over the "unfairness" of giving Swiss men, and not their foreign wives, the right to register their children as Swiss, and a discussion ensued as to the real time officially required for Swiss naturalisation. One person argued that 12 years of residence were compulsory, another mentioned cases where naturali-

sation was given almost immediately (particularly as regards refugees) but the discussion was purely academic as the problem of naturalisation, which is primarily a Communal issue, does not affect the Swiss living abroad.



**COMPATRIOT HAS HERE FIRST ENGLISH EXPERIENCES TOLD BY THE DAILY TELEGRAPH**

We were more than surprised to come across a feature in the *Daily Telegraph* of 13th April, on the new life of Mrs. Mercedes Buehlmann, who came to England about ten months ago with her husband, Eddy and her two children, Thomas, 8, and Christian 6. Mr. Eddy Buehlmann, who has come at least once to the City Swiss Club, is presently chief of the American Express in London and is responsible for all the European operations of this company. He is in fact the first non-American ever to hold the post.

The Buehlmann family moved from Zurich to Rickmansworth, where they have now become part of the local scenery. Mrs. Buehlmann was quoted by the *Daily Telegraph* as saying that she had at first been reluctant to leave Zurich, and had been daunted by the problems of living in an unknown country, particularly for the children.

Now she is very glad she came. She said she was puzzled by the reputation of the British, who are believed abroad to suffer from abominable weather, and very bad cooking. "How did that reputation grow up? It isn't true", she said.

Mrs. Buehlmann is delighted to enjoy a garden for the first time and to own a house, something which is prohibitively expensive in Zurich. She is loud in praise of the British education system.

"In Switzerland the schools are good, but all the pressure is on the academic side. There's no room for things like music. Here you allow a child to develop his own interests. My children have opened up like flowers in water, in spite of not speaking any English when they started".

Mrs. Buehlmann is also ready to praise English friendliness — and insists that anyone who calls the English unfriendly doesn't know the Swiss!

"Complete strangers have come round and offered to drive the children to school", she said.

Mrs. Mercedes Buehlmann hasn't much trouble with the English sense of humour. "With a name like Mercedes, you get used to any kind of joking. We drive a Volkswagen, but my husband says that that's the car he keeps in the garage; he's got a Mercedes in the house".

P.M.B.