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FEDERATION OF SWISS SOCIETIES IN THE U.K.

Report by Delegate to the Commission in Berne

The two delegates of the Swiss community in Great Britain attended two meetings of the Commission, often called "the little Parliament of the Swiss Abroad". The first was in August on the occasion of the 50th Assembly of the Swiss Abroad and the other in March, both in Berne. Father Bossard, deputy delegate for the South, also attended the Assembly and meeting in August. He was part of a larger contingent from Britain than in former years. It was a well-organised jubilee, with the exception of a cloudburst of considerable duration at the Sunday outing to Interlaken!

The theme of the Assembly was "The Political Rights and Duties of the Swiss Abroad". Dr. Bolliger's speech against suffrage for the Swiss living outside their homeland made quite an impression. He was also very quick in correcting a representative of the federal authorities who stated that the Swiss in Britain had *recently* changed their minds – it is well known that their view has been held openly for a couple of decades.

The exhibition in the Kramgasse organised on the occasion of the Jubilee was a success. Unfortunately I have been unable to reconstruct the exhibit representing cultural, educational and youth work of the London community, due to the most important parcel being lost in post on the way back.

The delegates reported on their activities to the Swiss Club in Manchester and the Nouvelle Société Helvétique in London. The Ambassador attended the meeting of the NSH at which the three delegates reported and Dr. Bolliger gave an interesting exposé on votes for Swiss Abroad. Dr. Bolliger, incidentally also gave a talk to the City Swiss Club on the same subject.

The work of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad in 1972 was reviewed in the Annual Report which the Commission had to accept at their March meeting.

In its introduction, it gives figures of Swiss registered with Swiss Consulates abroad, which show that the number has gradually gone up. Between 1950 and 1955 numbers rose from 237 to 252,000. In the following five years they went up by another 13,000 and since then by approximately 7,000 a year up to 1968, and after that by 4,000, the next year by 2,000, reaching a total of 313,709, an increase of 76,000 over some 20 years, though with a tendency of slowing down in the 'seventies.

The number of Swiss societies belonging to the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad stood at 622 in 1972 as compared to 563 six years ago. In Britain this would include all active groups from NSH, SMS, the Churches, City Swiss Club to Economic Council and First of August Committee. The increase in numbers could mean two things, a) that more societies have been formed which would be the opposite of what we have experienced in this country, or b) that more societies have registered with the Organisation in Berne. This is the more likely reason and is borne out by the fact that at every meeting of the Commission, a few new societies are admitted and their delegates confirmed or possibly some members co-opted as representatives of certain loose groupings. In March, for instance, we accepted members from Senegal, Portugal, three representatives from USA, who had to be co-opted as there is no Swiss umbrella organisation in America, although there are 34,000 Swiss. The Commission stands at nearly 100 members and proxies, as compared with about 60 when I attended my first meeting 11 years ago as the only woman.

The accounts and the budget were discussed by the Commission. The former showed a deficit of 42,600 francs which, though considerable, is less than half of the budgeted loss for 1972. The budget for 1973 estimates a deficit of 59,700 francs, though already taking into account the new raised subsidy from the Confederation of a quarter of a million francs (the previous federal contribution was 105,000 francs p.a.).

One of the heaviest items was the "Echo" (263,000 francs), a loss to the Organisation. A survey has shown that the largest readership is amongst the 70 to 84 year-age group (32.5%), next that between 55 and 69 years of age. Up to the age of 14 and above 85, the demand is very modest.

May I recommend the "Echo", a really interesting and lavishly illustrated periodical for Swiss abroad.

One way of helping the Organisation is to get friends and companies at home to become members of "Friends of the Swiss Abroad". The minimum contribution for individuals is 20 francs and for firms and organisations 100 francs p.a. Last year their contributions amounted to 54,000 francs. May I ask you to send a list of names to the Secretariat in Berne.

Important subjects under discussion at the Commission meetings were the

federal draft proposals for social welfare for the Swiss abroad. This is to be taken over by the Confederation under the Constitutional Article 45 bis. The proposals were also sent to Swiss welfare organisations abroad for consideration, such as the Swiss Benevolent Society. Since then, both Chambers have accepted the draft, a sign of respect for us Swiss living away from home. Incidentally, with regard to tighter controls about acquiring property in Switzerland by foreigners, the Swiss living abroad remain excluded. This, of course, was one of the notable successes of the Commission at the time.

Next, the Commission has been concerned with a preliminary proposal regarding political rights for the Swiss abroad. A first draft law is now with a specially formed study commission in Berne.

An important subject dealt with is information in co-operation with the Federal Political Department. So far two-thirds of all Swiss living abroad have been reached four times a year by using existing or introducing new colony papers. In January, the first trial number of the *Swiss Observer* special issue was sent out, and once the English text can be used regularly in all English-speaking countries, seven-eighths of all Swiss abroad will have been reached. I attended two meetings of the special commission on information on which I serve *ad personam*.

A thorny subject is the withholding tax (*Verrechnungssteuer, Impôt Anticipé*). Negotiations have been going on with the federal tax authorities to find a possible way by which Swiss living abroad should get preferential treatment with their Swiss investments as compared to foreign nationals.

At the last meeting, discussion took place on the revision of citizenship laws. Whilst some alterations to facilitate nationalisation of Swiss dependents is to be welcomed, the general feeling was that Swiss nationality was something valuable and should not be given away lightly.

The Commission also defended the interests of the Swiss abroad in countries where dual taxation agreements were being made or renewed. Unfortunately, the Swiss in Germany were informed too late of the pending negotiations and were put before a *fait accompli*, a rather disadvantageous agreement for them. This regrettable fact enabled other Swiss communities abroad affected to take preventative action, especially the Swiss in Italy. There is also a revision under way of the

agreement between Switzerland and Great Britain, and a few points have been pointed out to the Commission.

The Commission's representatives also actively participated in the 8th revision of the old age and invalidity insurance, which brings great advantages for the Swiss abroad and a new chance to join. I should like all Presidents to recommend it to their members.

The Commission is looking into the question of certain facilities for Swiss wishing to study at Swiss universities.

A Commission set up by the Federal Council brought out a report on the Swiss schools abroad, which is at present with the Government. Its Chairman, Prof. Roth, reported on the findings of the Commission. There is no doubt that the schools play a valuable part in the *présence de la Suisse* abroad.

The Commission also accepted the reports of the various services of the Secretariat. A special mention should be made of the youth camps in summer and winter. (At this point one should add

that Father Bossard made an additional report on the valuable work done by the youth service of the Secretariat and he thanked Mr. M. Ney, Director, and Mr. Ph. Garraux, inland member of the Commission, both present at the meeting, for their ready help in the interest of the youth work done by the Swiss Churches in London.)

The publication "Weltschweizer" is to be recommended, too. It is an interesting illustrated magazine specially for young people, free of charge.

Furthermore, the tape recordings deserve mention here, a series of topical discussions of problems affecting Switzerland. They are due to the initiative of the Swiss Short Wave Services and are called "Forum Helveticum". So far, the subjects include "Relations between Switzerland and UNO", "Political Rights and Duties for the Swiss Abroad", "Development Aid", "Problem of lack of voting participation", "Total defence" etc. They are to be had free of charge for the use of societies.

At the March meeting, the Commission approved the plans for the 51st Assembly in St. Gall from 17th-19th August. The theme will be "Activities of Swiss Societies Abroad". I have been asked to talk on the London Group of the Nouvelle Société Helvétique. I should like to extend a very warm invitation to all Swiss from the UK to attend this worthwhile event.

Lastly, I should like to say that I attended two meetings of the Council of the Solidarity Fund of the Swiss Abroad, on which I am one of, I believe, four individual members from abroad. Some far-reaching changes in the structure of the Fund have been worked out. It is fair to say that the solidarity aspect of the Fund has not much pull with our compatriots. Therefore, the investment aspect has been strengthened. There is but a modest number of members in Great Britain, and I should like to ask the presidents to encourage their members to join.

MM



VACANCY

at the Swiss Embassy in London

There will be a vacancy for a nightwatchman in the near future. Persons of Swiss nationality, speaking one of our national languages with English, with experience as a watchman or in a similar post, and who think they would be able to fulfil the requirements of such an appointment, are requested to apply to SWISS EMBASSY, 16-18 Montagu Place, London W1H 2BQ

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