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SWISS ABROAD

THE "LITTLE PARLIAMENT" OF THE SWISS ABROAD AT WORK Neuchâtel, 23rd August, 1974

According to tradition, the Commission of the Swiss Abroad meets in Berne in March and in the same town as the Assembly in August. Thus it was that a handsome number of delegates met in the beautiful Council Chamber of the *Hôtel de Ville* in Neuchâtel. Accommodation was somewhat limited, but the fine Louis XVI panelling made up for it, for the *ambiance* was most congenial. That may, of course, have been because meeting old and new friends is always a pleasure, and so is the knowledge that the work done in and by the Commission is so well worthwhile. The President of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad and of the Commission, Councillor of States, Dr. Louis Guisan, was in the chair. There were 17 members from inside Switzerland and 48 delegates from all parts of the world, as well as several other personalities and staff of the Secretariat.

As always, it was amazing to realise just how similar the problems of the Swiss abroad are, and yet how much they differ according to the conditions in the countries in which they live. And then again, representatives from Thailand, South American states, Israel and Senegal, have possibly remained more Swiss than those from Scandinavia, Germany, France, Britain and even USA. This is no criticism, but in the latter countries it is easier in a way to get assimilated.

But there is no doubt that the ties with Switzerland are close, wherever members come from. Great Britain was represented by Dr. Hans Ruedi Bolliger (Manchester) and Dr. Hansjoerg Wirz (Edinburgh) for the north and by Mrs Mariann Meier and Father Paul Bossard for the south. (Here it has to be said that Father Bossard was in the end prevented from taking part due to aircraft trouble).

President's Report

After the President's welcome, he gave a short report of the first part of his extensive visit to Swiss societies in France.

He then informed members of his work on the Federal Commission on the AVS (Old Age and Invalidity Insurance). He regretted that the general feeling in the special commission on the voluntary insurance scheme for the Swiss abroad was not very sympathetic towards *Auslandschweizer* at the moment. He also represents the Swiss abroad on the Co-ordinating Commission for the Swiss "presence" abroad. At the moment, the question is being studied whether a specific office should be created for this or whether it should be left to the

existing organisations, such as "Pro Helvetia", Swiss National Tourist Office, OSEC, etc., to provide the image of Switzerland.

Dr. Guisan also reported that it was being studied whether a Swiss from abroad could be appointed to the Science Council.

Political Rights for the Swiss Abroad

The Director of the Secretariat (ASS), Mr. Marcel Ney, reported that the Federal authorities had not yet received all the answers on the subject from Cantons and political parties in the usual consultative procedure. With a few exceptions, though, most of the answers received to date were favourable and often accompanied by appreciative comments. Only two answers were completely negative. Mr. Ney expressed satisfaction as to the answers received so far and hoped that the outstanding reports would arrive soon so as to make progress in the whole matter which had been hanging fire for years. There followed a discussion in which several opinions were expressed and points raised which one hoped would be taken into account, such as the principle of residence, the rights of dual nationals and several questions of international law.

Double-Taxation Agreements

The Deputy Director of the Secretariat, Mr. Lucien Paillard, told the Commission of the ASS being forever vigilant when new double-taxation agreements were being prepared between countries. At the moment several were pending, such as the one with Italy. The representatives of the Swiss communities in Italy expressed in no uncertain terms their dissatisfaction with the proposed draft agreement. After long discussion, it was agreed that the Commission of the Swiss Abroad should inform the Federal Council that the Swiss abroad feel entitled to attend negotiations, and that, for the moment, those in Italy are of the opinion that no agreement would be preferable, rather than an unsatisfactory one.

Swiss Schools Abroad

Prof. H. Roth, President of the Commission for Swiss Schools Abroad and member of the ASK, told the meeting that there were now 19 schools supported by the Confederation. These were in Italy, Spain, South America, Africa, Singapore and Bangkok. They were much respected by the various countries concerned, but unfortunately lack of funds affected most of them. They played an important part, said Prof. Roth, in presenting the image of Switzerland. He mentioned the fact that 31 teachers had been found in 1973, and that a seminar for school heads had been held at Duerrenesch in July. A Press service had been started at the Secretariat, so that the public in Switzerland should hear more about the valuable work done by the schools. In

1973, the Committee used Fr. 120,000 for the schools, money which had been given from the 1st August Collection. During the discussion, attention was drawn to the training scheme for young Swiss from abroad (*Ausbildungswerk*) which helped young compatriots with schooling and training in Switzerland.

Nationalised Swiss Abroad and their Chances of Compensation

Mr. Ney presented a report on this thorny subject and said that the problem was as old as the Secretariat itself. For the first such repatriates came from Russia in 1919; they received no compensation whatsoever from the new rulers in Russia. In the second world war it was Swiss from Poland, the Baltic States and Indonesia, and later those from East Germany, the Balkans and finally Czechoslovakia and Hungary. In East Germany alone, the applications for compensation received by the authorities in Berne amounted to over 800m Swiss Francs. Later came the nationalising of Swiss property in Egypt, Cuba and North African countries. In black Africa, many Swiss have lost their livelihood during the past decade. Switzerland has agreements with 26 countries regarding the protection of Swiss investments, but they may well be on paper only. The worst cases, incidentally, are by no means in Africa.

The Swiss abroad have two excellent ways of insuring themselves, first by joining the Old Age Insurance (AVS) and above all the **Solidarity Fund** which they can insure themselves against such losses of livelihood and at the same time accumulate savings in Switzerland. The Solidarity Fund has paid out 4½ million Swiss francs in lump sum compensation in the 15 years of its existence. It is in the interest of every Swiss abroad to join.

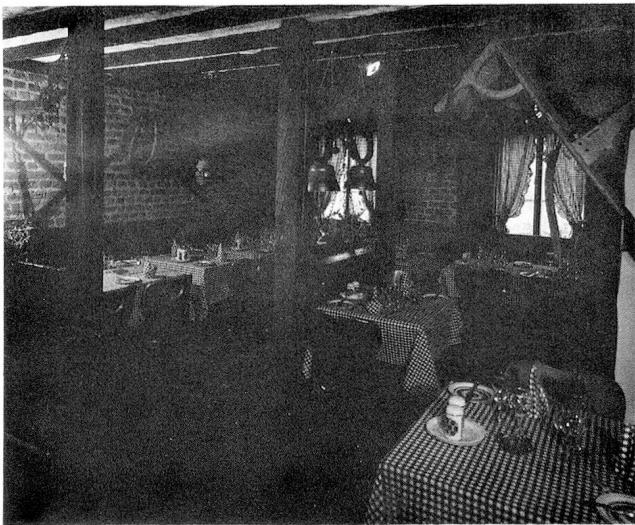
Next the delegates were told that 190 Swiss from abroad attended the special day at the Swiss Industries Fair in Basle in April. The various conferences of Swiss umbrella organisations abroad had been attended by members of the ASK Council and the Secretariat.

Various elections then took place to the Council and other appointments confirmed, such as that of the President (with great acclamation).

Information

Mr. L. Paillard then reported on the progress the information scheme for Swiss abroad had made. The German- and French-speaking communities were now covered almost completely; the first English-speaking countries were being served with the "review" four times a year (see *Swiss Observer* special issue), and first steps with regard to a Spanish edition had been taken. Mr. Paillard also recommended the *Echo* and the *Welt Schweizer* (for young people); an increase in subscribers was necessary if these periodicals were to continue.

The Initiative regarding the



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"over-foreignisation" of Switzerland, to be voted on 20th October, was then brought up, and delegates expressed anxiety should it be accepted. It was to be hoped that the common sense of the electorate would triumph and the Initiative be rejected; otherwise irreparable damage would be done to the country. The Commission's worries were mentioned in the Press communiqué always issued after an ASK meeting.

Next Assembly of the Swiss Abroad

It was announced that the Assembly of 1975 would take place in Basle from 29th to 31st August. The theme would be something like "The Swiss abroad as Ambassadors of Culture".

M.M.

NEWS FROM THE COLONY

Watch Exhibition

The watch group SSIH (UK) Limited, held an exhibition of its collections of Omega, Tissot, Lanco and Audemars Piguet's watches in early September at the London Press Centre. All the exhibits are currently available in this country and will be in the shops in time for the Christmas buying period.

Watches to suit every taste and pocket were exhibited. They ranged from £8.90 for a Lanco man's watch to £3,329 for a white gold hexagonal watch made by Audemars Piguet, which has diamond set hands and a lapis lazuli dial. This exhibition seems to have been the starting signal for a massive advertising campaign by Omega in the national Press. On three occasions at least there has been a double-page spread in the *Daily Telegraph* for Omega's latest innovation, the "Time Computer", a solid-state quartz device accurate to within five seconds a month which lights up the time on the watch-face at the push of a button — thanks to a luminous diode display.

This is but the latest of Omega's electronic innovations. The firm has established a lead in electronic movement as the only manufacturer to produce six calibres encompassing all three types of electronic movement. These types are the tuning-fork, the quartz crystal and the solid-state movements. The tuning fork, which replaces the traditional balance wheel used in conventional watches, is set vibrating by a replaceable aspirin-sized battery which lasts for one year. Instead of the tick of a watch with a conventional movement, these watches emit a slight hum. The f300 collection, which sell at around £61.50, are the most popular quality watches of this kind. Their success is proved by the fact that they took 95.8 per cent of all official Swiss chronometre certificates awarded to electronic watches.

To earn the title of chronometer, each watch undergoes — and must pass — rigorous and intensive testing at the independent Swiss Institute for Official Chronometer Tests. Each chronometer carries its own individual rating certificate of accuracy.

The quartz watch uses an electronic quartz timepiece controlled by a tiny bar of quartz crystal vibrating 8,192 times a second when stimulated by an electric current from its power cell, the Omega

Electroquartz model incorporates a micro-miniaturised integrated circuit. The solid-state "Time Computer" model also relies on a quartz crystal as a timepiece but its vibrations are not linked to a mechanical clockwork movement, but to a digital electronic miniaturised circuit.

Omega Electroquartz movements are used in several models, including an 18 ct. gold watch available on a crocodile strap from £898 and on an 18 ct. gold bracelet at prices from £1,443. Omega's most accurate watch, the Megaquartz 2400, unveiled last year at Basle's Trade Fair, is accurate to a second a month and is believed to be the most accurate watch in the world.

First electronic watches appeared in the 1960s. After some initial reluctance to invest in the new technology, manufacturers are racing to capture a chunk of this new and expanding market, each claiming unique advantages for their own models.

Omega believes it has now established a lead by offering watches of all three electronic types. With a growing consumer awareness of electronics and their advantages over mechanical watches, the company project a rapidly growing demand by the end of this year and estimate that in 1975 one in every four Omega men's models sold will be with electronic movements.



Omega Time Computer

The main advance over mechanical movements is a greater accuracy and reliability. The other advantage to the consumer is that the regular servicing recommended for mechanical movements is not necessary for electronic models besides the yearly change of its battery. This is particularly important in view of the growing scarcity of watch repairers and their rising charges.

Electronic watches must not be confused with electric watches, which employ a conventional hair-spring and a balance wheel as the timing mechanism but are powered by a battery instead of a main spring. Their accuracy is no more than that of a traditional mechanical watch.

Tissot, which is linked with Omega

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