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increase over the previous year amounts to 12.9 per cent; in actual value, that is to say at constant prices, it works out at 4.3 per cent as opposed to 5.8 per cent in 1972. The economic growth has fallen off accordingly. Per head of the population, the gross national product worked out last year at Fr.20,332; this corresponds to an effective growth of over 3 per cent, which reflects a corresponding improvement in the standard of living. In 1972, this rate of growth was still higher than 4 per cent.

SWITZERLAND: 81 UNEMPLOYED IN 1973

Swiss statistics for the labour market showed that in 1973 there were on an average 81 fully unemployed persons entered in the books of labour offices. Their number is therefore lower than the average for the two previous years, which amounted to 100 and 104. In other words, for every million gainfully employed persons, there are 27 without regular employment. This figure represents less than 0.003 per thousand of the total number of employed persons,

which constitutes the lowest level of unemployment not only on the national but also on the international level. Last year, many other countries experienced rates of unemployment of as much as one or several per cent.

ECONOMIC GROWTH IN SWITZERLAND AND THE WORLD

In real value, that is to say with prices kept constant, Switzerland's gross national product, which represents the total value of goods and services produced by the national economy, increased by 4.7% in 1972 compared with the figure for the previous year. This result places Switzerland in a position somewhere about the middle on the international level; according to statistics drawn up by the International Settlements Bank, Switzerland in fact comes 8th among industrialized countries under consideration. Over a longer period, i.e. from 1961 to 1970, Switzerland is only 13th, with a real annual rate of growth of the gross national product averaging 4.5%.

Children's Xmas Party loses money

The annual Christmas Party organised for the children of the Colony is a loss-making venture. For the third successive year, the cost of staging the party, hiring a film, preparing tea and buying presents for the children, finding a conjurer (£14) and letting Queen Mary Hall at the YMCA surpassed the income derived from various donations and the little 'Black Book' circulated at Christmas time among Swiss societies. Income for last February's children's "do" amounted to £127.46 while expenditure totalled £181.70. At this rate, the balance at bank and in hand, now standing at £114, will be used up by the next party. Unless more income is forthcoming, it will be difficult to continue these parties on the same lines as before.

NOUVELLE SOCIÉTÉ HELVÉTIQUE ANNUAL DINNER

About fifty members of the London Group of the Nouvelle Société Helvétique were present for the Society's Annual Dinner at the Prince of Wales Hotel on Friday, 28th March. Grace having been said by the President, Mrs. Mariann Meier, they were treated to a simple fare consisting of asparagus soup, coq au vin with creamed potatoes and peas, and a cassata. The relatively small room in which this dinner was being enjoyed no doubt enhanced the proximity of its participants to one another and hence their animated conversation and merriment.

Dr. Albert Weitnauer, our Ambassador, and Dr. Jurg Iselin and Mrs. Iselin, Plenipotentiary Minister, were among the distinguished members in attendance. But these were by no means the only persons singled out by the President in her post-prandial welcome to the guests. It is customary for the NSH President to make a fairly complete introduction of the guests at Annual Dinners. But this time she made an exceptionally thorough job of it, since she singled *everyone* by name starting from the person to her right — the Ambassador — and moving further to the right until all the tables had been scanned in an anti-clockwise direction.

Mrs. Meier asked each person to stand up when his or her turn for introduction had come so as to allow everyone a chance to be known.

Each of these persons was gratified by an individual introduction and a clatter of applause. Laughter was produced when many members were described as *Baslers* because the Rhine port and its neighbourhood, homeland of the President, Dr. Weitnauer and Dr. Iselin and countless other guests, had really sent a high-powered delegation to the Dinner. This presentation was done proficiently because it was carried out fast enough not to become tedious (and to deprive those at the end of the list of a clap) but slow enough for everyone to get a word of introduction. It took exactly eighteen minutes for Mrs. Meier to dwell

NEWS FROM THE COLONY

wished to thank again our Consul-General, Mr. R. Born, for all he has done for us and to wish him and his wife the best of luck. He thanked also Messrs. Ciba-Geigy Ltd. for the use of the room and Messrs. Clayton Aniline Co., Ltd., for the free printing of our accounts.

The previous Committee having been re-elected, the meeting was declared closed and we could now retire to what was to be a most excellent buffet, looking forward to the second part of the evening, the General Meeting of the Swiss Club Manchester.

E.B.

CITY SWISS CLUB FAMILY EVENING

This year's Family Evening was a highly intimate gathering. About forty people enjoyed the warm atmosphere of the Dorchester's Park Suite, which had been partitioned in view of the relatively small attendance. For the first time in our experience of City Swiss Club functions, pop music was played on records. A "disc jockey" played modern hits and also some older ones, such as "Locomotion" by Little Eva which set the middle-aged Swiss attendance jiving and twisting merrily. A set of lamps flashing coloured light lent an appropriate discotheque atmosphere, attuned to the music, to the usually more formal climate of the Park Suite. An excellent dinner was provided for. The Embassy was represented by Dr. Jurg Iselin.

IN MEMORIAM

Robert Lehner, FHCI, FCFA
12th August, 1892–22nd April, 1967
St. Gall; Zürich; Goring-by-Sea.

Swiss Relief Society Manchester

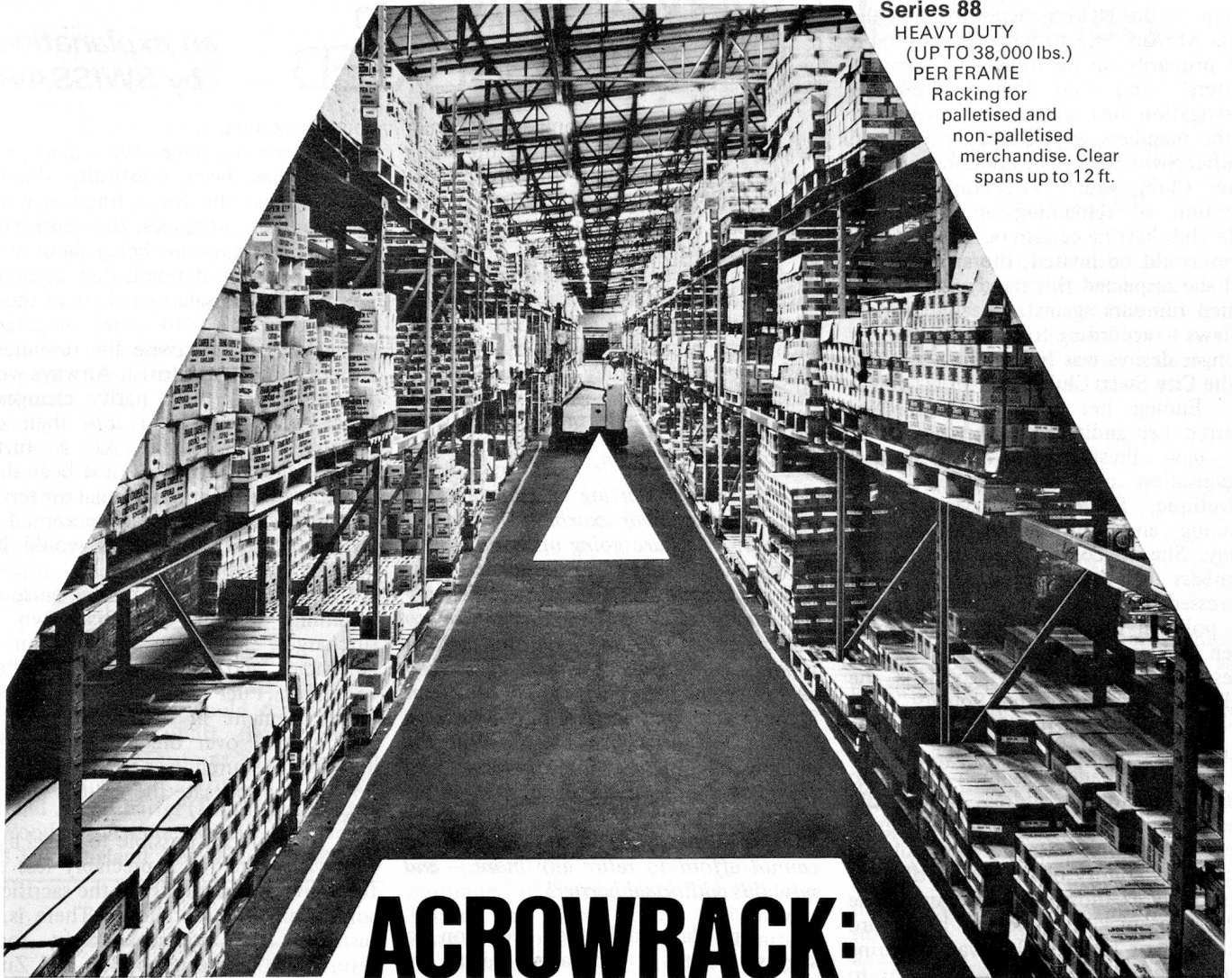
This year's general meeting was held at the premises of Messrs. Ciba-Geigy Ltd., Simonsway, Manchester, and we are most grateful to this firm for having extended to us once again their generous hospitality and the same feelings go towards the Swiss Club Manchester who asked us to start our proceedings ahead of their own general meeting.

Well supported by the usual faithful friends the meeting was opened by our Honorary Secretary, Mr. Laurence Themans, in the absence of the President who was on the Continent. The President had sent his good wishes for a happy and successful evening and his apologies to everybody present.

The accounts, showing the usual good results and nothing controversial emerging, were read and accepted. Our chairman then appealed for an increased effort in the recruitment of new members and it is for all of us to act for the best in this direction.

In his concluding remarks he

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on everyone present before saying a few words on the importance of the London Group of the NHS as a platform of the Swiss Abroad. She strongly denied that it was primarily an institution of "women knitters" and said that a thorough investigation had shown that two-thirds of the members were male. Referring to another Swiss society in London, the City Swiss Club, which had confirmed its intention of remaining an exclusively male club barring certain occasions where wives could be invited, the speaker said that she respected this stand and strongly denied rumours against a background of guffaws – according to which one of her stronger desires was to become a member of the City Swiss Club.

Ending her address, Mrs. Meier referred her audience to the sayings of the new President of the Central Organisation of the Nouvelle Société Helvétique, Dr. Hans Basler, on its meaning and purpose in Switzerland today. She welcomed the fact that the members of the London Group, had expressed their wish not to be involved in the political life of their home country when they answered the Wahlen Questionnaire three years ago. This, she said, had prevented the Society from becoming a "battlefield of power politics".

Dr. Weitnauer was then invited to make his customary address. This he did briefly and astutely, meandering unexpectedly from Hamlet's Monologue to the past enmity of the people of Basle Land towards those of Basle Town. The ability to pick completely haphazard anecdotes or facts, find a way to string them together to make a point or to produce an entertaining effect is the secret of the good after-dinner speaker. The Ambassador placed himself squarely in that category by relating Hamlet's "pangs of unrequited love" to these past frictions, and by noting that he came from Basle Town while the President came from Liestal, which is practically in Basle Land. This enmity, which led Canton Basle to split into two half-Cantons in 1833, actually moved Basle Land to oppose for a time the construction of a railway to Basle. Dr. Weitnauer recalled that the *Landschaftlers* would not allow the railway to cross their land and would only accept it to reach a new city to be called *Basletröst*. But the irate *Landschaftlers* were eventually brought to reason.

The last speaker was Dr. Hans Ruedi Bolliger from Manchester, and representative for the Swiss of the North at the Commission of the Swiss Abroad. In a few words, he impressed on members that the London Group of the Nouvelle Société Helvétique was an organisation considered with the highest regard by the authorities in Berne.

The evening lasted for perhaps another half-hour before members began looking for their coats and took leave of one another in a long series of hand-shaking exchanges.

P.M.B.

WHY AIR FARES HAVE ESCALATED

*an explanation
by SWISSAIR*

More and more compatriots living in this country are affected by the rising cost of a journey back to Switzerland. This is particularly true of retired people with fixed incomes in an inflationary period. We've had occasional letters by readers asking for an explanation to this nasty trend and wondering why Old Age Pensioners do not get reductions. The last such letter was sent to me by Mr. Paul Haberstich, of Henley-on-Thames, who expressed the following points on 16th March:

Dear Mr. Béguin,

I intend starting a campaign to protest against the exorbitant prices of Swissair. They are going up again on 1st April when a ticket to Zurich (return) will be £82.30. For health reasons, my wife and I have to go every year to Switzerland for a cure and the cost is simply too much. I know that they simply convert the Swiss prices into £s at 7 Sw.fr. a pound sterling in conjunction with BEA. But when you look at the prices to New York, Singapore and Hongkong, then there is something wrong.

It's bad enough that we old Swiss cannot afford to retire any more – and now this additional barrier!

Mr. Haberstich then went on to suggest that a campaign might be launched by sending strong letters to the Swiss Press or the authorities, and offered to pay his part in this endeavour.

With Mr. Haberstich's permission, I submitted his letter to Swissair's Press and Public Relations Officer in London, Mr. John Elliot asking him for a reply which might satisfy Mr. Haberstich and other readers concerned with this problem.

This is what Mr. Elliot had to say:

As many of the readers of the *Swiss Observer* will be aware, international air fares are agreed by the International Air Transport Association and have to be approved by the governments of the individual countries in which they are applied. As such, the level of scheduled air fares between the UK and Switzerland is not simply a matter for Swissair or British Airways.

Air fares are agreed within IATA for approval by governments for all routes in US dollars and pounds Sterling. It is therefore a misconception to suppose that the current normal economy class round trip fare between London and Zurich of £82.30 is in any way due to the conversion of a Swiss franc fare into pounds Sterling at an arbitrary rate. The position is in fact the reverse – the Swiss franc fares as applied in Switzerland are based on the fares originally agreed in

pounds Sterling.

However, since 1967 the pound Sterling has been drastically devalued twice against the Swiss franc as well as against other currencies, the depreciation against the Swiss franc being about 40 per cent. The fares denominated in pounds Sterling for the sale of tickets in the UK had therefore to be surcharged repeatedly, as otherwise the revenues of airlines other than British Airways would have reflected these parity changes as losses when converted into their own countries' currencies. As a further consequence, if this had not been done, the operation of international air services on the basis of universally accepted and interchangeable air tickets would have become impossible.

In addition, we have since the beginning of this year had two fuel surcharges, affecting tickets in all currencies, and adding some 13 per cent to prices. Fuel costs to the airlines, a major element in their cost structure, have trebled over the past few months and the fuel surcharges so far imposed in no way compensate the airlines fully for this increase.

It is indeed possible to travel by air to Switzerland for appreciably less than the above, but naturally at the sacrifice of some flexibility or choice. There is, for instance, the midweek night tourist return fare between London and Zurich of £51.75 or the weekend excursion fare of £51.50. Special spouse fares are available for short stays, under which either husband or wife pays the normal return fare, the other only 50 per cent. In addition a large selection of inclusive holidays are available from travel agents, reducing the air fare element still further, but they obviously limit passengers to certain flights and oblige them to stay in Switzerland for at least six nights. When inclusive tours are arranged by tour operators based on charter flights, the economics of the operation assume very high load factors for the aircraft and each seat, available only together with the land arrangements, comes that much cheaper again. Once more, however, the limitations are that the passenger has to travel strictly on the designated flights, on the specified dates, and could incur heavy costs in case of cancellation. Last minute changes of booking or cancellations can, on the other hand, be made free of charge on all scheduled services. Clearly, it is the availability of a high frequency of scheduled services to the public that determines the cost, and this is in turn reflected in the price of normal air tickets.

Mr. Haberstich refers in his letter to low air fares to New York, Singapore and Hong Kong. In the case of the first two, there are on the market various charter flight arrangements, basically subject to