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housing. The Constitution would not only minister to the needs of human dignity but also to those of the body. The Report contains other suggestions aiming at ensuring that Switzerland's economic growth is harmonious and maintained with stable prices and a balanced foreign trade. To this end, the majority of answers are favourable to statutory worker participation in management and to increased state planning.

Another idea which appears in the report is for a public register of links which members of Parliament might have with interest groups. Although this device appears similar to the register of interests recently instituted for MPs in the Commons, its prime object would not be to fight corruption, but to prevent the setting-up of parliamentary commissions with members tied to similar groups of interests and thus arriving at the same decisions.

All the major aspects of Switzerland's institutional life are covered with practically no modification in regard to the structure and attributions of Parliament, and the Federal Council. The Wahlen Commission admits, with scepticism, that the government could have more than its present seven members but makes no firm recommendations it thus reflects the lack of strong opinion of the Swiss on this often discussed issue.

There should be a fairer deal for conscientious objectors who could serve with a civil organisation. Switzerland's Army should remain a militia army. Independence should not be considered as an absolute concept and the Constitution should recognise that, while neutrality must be kept, Switzerland increasingly depends on the outside world. But the report warns that this dependence must be prevented from becoming excessive.

It can therefore be seen that the results of about five years labour by a team of important personalities hasn't shown a particularly strong desire by the Swiss for a change of their Constitution and hasn't yielded particularly new results. It appears to offer no solution regarding membership to the United Nations and the way in which the electorate should participate in foreign policy-making.

Adding articles on the right to work and the right to a decent home is really more appealing than meaningful. In no way can these rights be absolute. They could conceivably be absolute in a perfect Communist state where social considerations take precedence over all economic ones. But there is no hint in the Wahlen Report about a switch to a Communist constitution. The provisions regarding individual freedom are tailored to the needs of a liberal and market economy in which a certain degree of unemployment is inevitable. Those who answered the questionnaire wished Switzerland to expand economically. This automatically entails the development of new technology and the discarding of old methods, the requirements for new

skills, labour mobility, new demographic concentrations and with them housing problems and a host of social problems which cannot find an absolute answer. In Switzerland, the right to work is almost universally guaranteed today because of an exceptional economic situation. However, this right is not absolute in its application since it is not always possible, even in Switzerland, to find the kind of work one dreams of. The right to work cannot therefore be placed on the same level as the right to be free, and both rights are to some extent contradictory.

The results of the Wahlen enquiry thus show that there is no burning need to revise the Constitution and that the task of the new working commission headed by Mr. Furgler will be difficult for want of definite objectives. Although many authorities are known to urge a renewal of the Federal Constitution and a well known French-speaking journalist wrote recently that such an overhaul of the national rule book was even more necessary than in 1874 because of the "acceleration of history", it is hard to find a really strong case for a revision. One of the main criticisms is that the actual Constitution which has received countless adjunctions over the years as the results of referenda, is an untidy text.

Several articles have four or five separate sub-articles each with their own set of paragraphs. One has no less than seven such sub-articles. The Constitution is thus untidy and not logical. If there is a case for reordering it and rephrasing it, this is a legal clerk's work. It is a matter of handling propositions and not one of fundamental change.

There is indeed no need for fundamental alterations because no one wants Switzerland to be different. The principles of neutrality, federalism, individual freedom, democracy are there to stay and there is little scope for altering the obligations of citizens, communes and cantons towards the preservation of these institutions. Given this, any revision of the Constitution would essentially amount to a streamlining of the existing text. The 1874 revision was necessary because, twenty-five years after the creation of the modern Confederation, Switzerland was still in its infancy and working towards its nationhood. A hundred years later, Switzerland has become an "old" nation and a revision of the Constitution could not have the same bearing as in 1874.

P.M.B.

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## 1974, A CENTENARY YEAR FOR THE COLONY

The Unione Ticinese is celebrating its Centenary this year. A hundred years of eventful history of a leading Swiss society in the United Kingdom was related in a booklet richly illustrated with photographs of by-gone days published by its Committee.

We are told that the Society was constituted on February 8th, 1874, as a mutual aid society by a group of well-meaning immigrants already resident and well established in the capital. Among the Swiss Cantons, the Tessin is probably the one that has brought the most immigrants abroad. A great many came to Britain where the origin of many famous restaurants and hotels are due to the initiative of Ticinese immigrants. Apart from the London restaurants, every major south coast town could boast of a Ticinese establishment. Hastings, Bognor, Bexhill, Worthing, Portsmouth, Southampton, Bournemouth, Folkestone, Margate, Chatham, Plymouth all have, or had, restaurants run by Ticinese families. The last of these to close was the Albertoli Restaurant in Portsmouth, a well known meeting place of actors and celebrities, due to a redevelopment of the centre of Portsmouth.

An important immigration to London during the latter half of the nineteenth century had thus led to a need for giving residents of Ticinese origin an opportunity to meet and help each other in an organised way through this new

society, the Unione Ticinese, whose committee met for the first time on February 12th, 1874, at the house of the Brentini family at 100 The Strand.

That same year, on September 17th, we find an indication of the aims of the Society with the decision to send the sum of £10 to help the victims of the floods in the Tessin. This was the first of many such donations that were to be made by the Committee of the Society over the hundred years.

As early as 1875, after one year of existence, the Society began to celebrate its anniversaries and held the first commemorative dinner at the Panton Hotel, Panton Street, in the presence of the Swiss Consul. In 1878 began the purchase of graves in Kensal Green Cemetery as the Mutual Aid rules gave every member the right of burial in a Society grave. Through the years, many members found their last resting place in Kensal Green and as this became overcrowded, in St. Pancras Cemetery, Finchley.

While the Society was only open to men, the wives of members soon became involved in its activities when three of them, Mesdames Simona, Fascola and Gallizia, were commissioned to prepare a banner having on one side the Swiss flag and on the other the Ticinese flag with the motto "Uno per tutti, tutti per uno". Years later, the ladies formed their own section which was eventually merged with the Mother Society.

The choice of a regular meeting place posed a problem from the earliest days. Dinners were no problem since the Society had many members involved in

the restaurants of the West End, but committee and general meetings were originally restricted to one room in Old Compton Street and the Society was rapidly out-growing this place. Various alternatives were suggested and members offered their own homes on a rota basis. During the 1930s, a time which many readers still remember, the activities of the Society were based largely upon the Swiss Club in Charlotte Street. Later the Society used the premises of Swiss House in Fitzroy Square and met again at Swiss Club shortly before the expiry of its lease at the end of 1961.

In March 1905, the Committee acted upon a circular received from the Swiss Legation concerning the formation of a company to put on a commercial basis the running of *La Casa degli Svizzeri*, one of the first attempts to establish a social base for the whole Colony. The Society decided to support the venture and promised its financial backing, the exact amount to be decided when more was known about the project. This, as many other similar projects since, did not come to fruition.

The Society was by then an important organisation. In 1894, twenty years after its function, it had claimed 315 members and been in a position to raise the amount in the Benevolent Fund from £400 to £600, this being used for the Mutual Aid to members. Membership had suffered some set-backs during the 1880s because the political divisions of the Ticino, still alive in the minds of new immigrants, were making themselves felt within the Society. The auditors of 1885 had deplored the loss of sixty members over two years and urged the Society to stem this heavy loss.

The consequences of the Great War were felt not only in the country as a whole but also in the Society as many members returned to the Tessin for military service. It was at this time that the Tessin was able to supply its first President of Switzerland in the person of Guiseppe Motta. The Unione Ticinese sent him its good wishes in the form of an illuminated address.

On February 14th, 1924, 350 people attended the fiftieth anniversary dinner at the Monico Restaurant. Four ladies of the Society were entrusted by

the organising committee with the preparation of a special banner and flag to mark the anniversary. The fruits of their labour is still in safe keeping to this day and will have a special place at the centenary celebrations. This flag was blessed during a ceremony on April 8th, 1974, conducted by a person who was to appear very frequently in the affairs of the Society in the coming year and hold the positions of Treasurer and President: Mr. Carlo Berti. He concluded his enthusiastic speech with the words "La Bandiera e sacra, rispetatela e difendetela".

The Society continued to prosper during the ensuing years. It played host to federal councillor Guiseppe Motta at the Mayfair Hotel on February 16th, 1930. Its healthy financial situation was shown the following year when Mr. Willie Notari, the President, proposed at the AGM that the sum of £1,000 be donated to the George Dimier Fund for a Swiss Home for the Aged provided that a similar sum was given by other societies. Within a year, the Fund was able to announce donations amounting to £4,000 and the Unione Ticinese paid its share.

Among the Society's regular activities at the time were the Annual Banquet and Ball held at the Pagani Restaurant until its destruction during the war; the Annual Outing, an annual event in aid of the Fonds de Secours and other functions in aid of the Swiss Benevolent Society. The year 1939 saw the creation of the Womens' Sections. Forty founder-members were present at the constituent meeting on June 25th. The Committee met on July 8th and among its first aims was the formation of a *Corale* which was able to give a performance at the 1939 First of August Celebrations at the St. Pancras Town Hall. This choir, which also welcomed men, really began to flower during the last years of the war under its conductor, Carlo Valchera, and appeared at a variety of functions in the London Colony.

The year 1942 saw the first-ever Tea Dance held at the Dorchester Hotel in Park Lane and thus began an association that was to continue in the Society's calendar until 1972, since when rising prices and the introduction of VAT called a halt to this function. Organised

by the two sections working together, these dances were held up to three or four times a year and usually attracted over 500 people.

In 1949 the Ladies' Section celebrated its tenth anniversary with a Festa Familiare at Swiss House and the Unione Ticinese celebrated its Seventy-Fifth Anniversary at the Dorchester Hotel on Sunday, 23rd October of the same year in the presence of the Swiss Minister, Henri de Torrente.

Some years later, while the two sections continued with their own separate committees, there began to be heard various voices urging the amalgamation into one society. Discussions on this matter were pursued throughout 1954 and at the end of that year, it was agreed that a Joint Working Party should prepare a detailed report of the AGM early in 1955. On February 27th, 1955, the two sections met together, amalgamation was agreed and it was resolved that for that year, the two committees would meet as one and prepare the new statutes for an amalgamated Unione Ticinese. A new Committee comprising members of the Committees of the defunct Ladies' Section and the old Unione Ticinese was elected in February 1959.

The Unione Ticinese, which had left Swiss House in 1956 to resume holding meetings at the Swiss Club, was compelled to move elsewhere early in 1962 following the end of the lease on the Charlotte Street premises in December 1961. It chose the Swiss Hostel for Girls and has held many successful functions there since those days. Eventually, the Society proved to be a firm supporter of the idea of a Colony Room in the Swiss Centre at Leicester, a project which unfortunately fell through.

Among the ventures of the Society during these later years one should mention the institution, in 1963, of the Carlo Berti Memorial Fund with the express purpose of helping the sons and daughters of members which enabled a party of twelve children to spend a holiday at Sorrengo, near Lugano, and the introduction of Italian language classes which were for a while regularly attended by twenty members.



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Despite all this work, the shadow of age began to descend on the Society. The loss of many of the older members, the lack of new immigrants and the unwillingness of some of the younger generation to take part in its activities led to a decline in membership during the 1960s until the active membership, i.e. those having Ticinese citizenship, fell to about one hundred. But whatever the future holds in store, the Society can look with justifiable pride on its past, on the help it has given to generations of immigrants and on the many hours of social enjoyment it has offered to its members.

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