

Nouvelle société helvétique

Objekttyp: **Group**

Zeitschrift: **The Swiss observer : the journal of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK**

Band (Jahr): - **(1975)**

Heft 1705

PDF erstellt am: **26.09.2024**

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NEWS FROM THE COLONY

NOUVELLE SOCIÉTÉ HELVÉTIQUE

The Nouvelle Société Helvétique held its Annual General Meeting and Dinner on Thursday, 20th March, at the Prince of Wales Hotel, Kensington. The proceedings of the A.G.M. were conducted smoothly by the President, Mrs. M. Meier. No particularly new issues were raised and the usual A.G.M. chapters were dealt with speedily. The meeting ended with the election to the Committee of a new member, Mr. Paul André Ramseyer, First Secretary to the Embassy. There followed a period of "socialising" at the bar. This was enjoyed by what seemed to be a record attendance. The dinner was ample and to the honour of Mr. Steven Longhurst, General Manager of the Prince of Wales. It began with prawn cocktail and continued with a sturdy British fare of roast sirloin of beef, Yorkshire pudding, roast potatoes and buttered French beans. This was crowned with cassat Napolitaine and coffee.

These annual dinners offer the President a regular opportunity to welcome distinguished members of the Swiss community and distribute compliments all round. In her after-dinner speech, Mrs. Meier welcomed in particular the new Number Two at the Embassy, Minister Fritschi, and deplored the departure of two *Basler*: Ambassador Juerg Iselin and Consul-General Fritz Adams. She welcomed, among other compatriots, the Rev. Stefan and Mrs. Stefan and Mrs. Languillat as representatives of the Swiss Churches. She expressed appreciation for their valuable work and referred to the close links between them and the Nouvelle Société Helvétique. The Society has used resources inherited from the war days to finance new furnishing and carpeting in the church and instal a grand piano which enabled it to patron concerts and cultural evenings.

The Speaker said she would have liked to welcome Mr. Marcel Ney, Director of the Secretariat of the Swiss Abroad in Berne, but he had been unable to attend. She defended the Federation of Swiss Societies in the U.K. and the Nouvelle Société Helvétique against recent criticisms and pointed out that the Presidents of a good many societies were present at the dinner.

She ended by informing the attendance that the new assembly of the Swiss Abroad, to take place during the third weekend of August, in Basle, would be concerned with the theme: "The Swiss Abroad as ambassadors of culture". Her closing words were: "Let us remember this role and work towards fully earning the title".

Our Ambassador, Dr. Albert Weitnauer, then made a brief address in which he recalled that this was his fifth such annual dinner. Drawing from his historical knowledge, he spoke of an obscure farmer in the Toggenburg who produced a commentary on Shakespeare still of interest today and mentioned in the "Brockhaus". On another subject, he recalled that 30 years ago, Switzerland was considered the poorest country in Europe. Today, it had become the richest in the world.

Mr. Bernhardt Simon, President of the Federation of Swiss Societies, sprinkled his reply for the guests with some pungent remarks. He was followed by Consul-General Fritz Adams, the subject of so much praise during the evening that he could not escape from the duty of standing up. He said that he had performed his task in Zurich to the best of his ability and stressed that whatever success he might have had was "made easy with a community like yours".

P. M. B.

SWISS BENEVOLENT SOCIETY: THE PRESIDENT'S REPORT FOR 1974

Dear Friends and Compatriots,

We have pleasure in presenting the 105th Annual Report on the activities of the Swiss Benevolent Society. During the last year, we have again endeavoured to offer professional and financial help to the Swiss people living in the London Consular District who found themselves facing difficulties which they could not resolve on their own.

The total number of clients has dropped somewhat because, as we shall explain later, we no longer handle the cases of repatriation of young people stranded in London. However, the number of residents with whom we are in touch has gone up; the families have stayed stable at 41 and people living alone now stand at 187, involving altogether 302 persons. As in the past, there are some whom we have known for a long time, others were brought to our notice by the Swiss Embassy, the Swiss Churches and, increasingly, by English social services. Some also approach us directly.

It is worth pointing out in this connection that, over the years, the nature of the work of the Society appears to have changed and we have now reached a point where 50 per cent of our clients receive no financial help from us at all. They approach us for a variety of reasons, either for advice on problems concerning themselves or their families or

for support if life becomes too difficult to cope with alone. Some of them, even after a long time in this country, still feel very lonely and, rightly or wrongly, believe that they are being disliked as foreigners. It is a help to them to appeal to a Swiss organisation. In some cases, we are able to provide all the support they need. In others, with their agreement, we involve local social services and welfare organisations in an endeavour to help them to make their lives more bearable.

This aspect of the work not only tends to be very time-consuming but it is also relatively exhausting. Some people manage to call at our office, but many are unable to do so and have to be seen elsewhere. Thus 219 out of 569 interviews took place in people's homes, hospitals, etc., some of them well out of the London area. Certain clients we see only sporadically, others, during periods of stress, have to be visited at regular intervals, sometimes once a week or occasionally more often. Try as we might, we never manage to make as many calls as we would wish as the amount of administration work is also considerable.

As for the 57 pensioners, they have again received a substantial proportion of our resources, material and otherwise. We continue to distribute at regular intervals the Swiss Old Age Pension to those who prefer to receive it spread evenly over the quarter rather than as a lump sum every three months.

Most of the regular grants made by the Society go to the pensioners, but mainly for reasons of illness, younger people may also be in need of a supplement to their income. This is normally limited by the fact that, like all charities, we must insist that they apply for all benefits that are due to them from official sources. Thus a limit is set to the amount of regular support that we may give.

Both pensioners and other applicants are at times in need of casual grants to meet some heavy expense or to tide them over if some reason prevents them from pursuing their normal activities for any length of time. This help is sometimes given exclusively by the Society but occasionally in conjunction with other organisations. In every case, the Executive Committee takes great care in examining each request and trying to find the solution that is most suitable.

One time when extra help is particularly welcome is Christmas and we have been able to send out 132 parcels for the benefit of over 200 people. Thanks to the generosity of the Frauenverein, the Réunion de Couture, Swiss firms and individuals, the parcels were again most attractive and have given great pleasure. As grocery vouchers have proved very acceptable in the past, we have continued to distribute them to allow people to choose for themselves what they most wanted for their Christmas dinner. The whole operation was ably guided by Mmes. N. Burri and B. Kaluza, helped in the packing and distribution by Mmes. G. Gyssler, M. Harhalakis, W. Reutlinger, P. Whiting,