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The Swiss Observer

THE OFFICIAL ORGAN OF THE SWISS COLONY IN THE U.K.

Founded in 1919 by Paul F. Boehringer

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NATIONAL DAY CELEBRATED

A simple but moving service in the Eglise Suisse in London was well attended by many members of the Swiss colony and graced by the presence of our Ambassador, Dr Albert Weitnauer.

The service was opened by Father Paul Bossard, our London Swiss's catholic chaplain, after which was sung that, to many people, nostalgic hymn Grosser Gott wir loben Dich.

Protestant Pastor Uli Stefan then read, in German, a brief extract from the Gospel of St John.

For the French speakers, the Reverend Raymond Renou delivered a short prayer in French.

A well received musical interlude was provided by Lennart Rabes who played music by Franz Liszt written while he was sojourning in Switzerland. The works performed were from the first year of Liszt's "Années de Pélerinage".

Dr Weitnauer, in his speech, mentioned with regret that he is to leave us at the end of this year, (*Swiss Observer*, August) but also had a message for all present. It ran as follows:—

My dear compatriots,

It is a good old Swiss tradition to consider the celebration of our national

holiday as an occasion for reflecting a bit on the situation of our own country, the world outside and ourselves as citizens of Switzerland.

This has never prevented us from finishing the day's proceedings in a lighter vein. Our young people will see to that in any event. It is not every day that one meets so many friends, and why, indeed, shouldn't the First of August also have its gay and amusing side? But that the first part should take place this year in the Swiss church lends itself particularly well to some searching of mind and soul beforehand.

As far as I personally am concerned, there is an additional reason why speaking to you today has a special significance. As you may know, I shall be leaving London at the end of this year, after a spell of almost five years as Swiss Ambassador to the United Kingdom, and setting up my headquarters in Berne again.

Looking back, I cannot but feel grateful for all I have experienced during my rather longish stay in this country. I hope I do not sound repetitious when, once more, I start singing the praises of the country in which it has been — and still is — my pleasure to serve.

My admiration for England has not diminished over the years, quite the contrary. Britain and the British people do not reveal their virtues so very easily to the probing foreigner. Being a sentimental people — according to me, there is absolutely nothing wrong with that! — the English are very sensitive to what one might call the atmosphere underlying human relations.

Solid friendships can only grow in the right kind of atmosphere and with the passage of time. Then there comes a moment when, almost suddenly and somewhat to one's surprise, one discovers that one has made many friends, that they are true friends and will remain so

ever after. No wonder, then, that many human ties now link me to Britain, that I am now not only an admirer of this country — which I always was — but also a friend in a very personal sense of the word.

I know full well that England has many problems and is going through a difficult period of her history. But I also feel sure, as I am certain you do, that in the end she will come out on top of it all.

The western family of nations would be the poorer if Britain could not play a full part in shaping the future of our continent and the world as a whole. The quality of life, which, in a way, is so much more important than material wealth, is still highest in this country.

Then there are the British people with their sense of humour, their worldly wisdom, their enthusiasm — if a real need is felt — to do something great and beautiful that they deem worth while. Well, to save the British economy from impending disaster, to set it on a steady course of expansion and, while doing so, to master inflation, is surely a most dramatic task to which England must — and, I am quite certain, will in the end — devote her best energies. Finally, in the field of international relations, firm guidance and true statesmanship should be coming from Britain.

We on the European continent could not think of a better arbiter of our destinies. But let me turn now to the Swiss scene on this anniversary of our country.

For once, Switzerland, too, is labouring under difficult conditions in the economic field. There has been a sudden and almost pathetic break in a development which for almost 30 years now had pointed forwards and upwards.

Throughout those years Switzerland had become one of the richest nations of the world, if not the richest. A whole generation of young Swiss has never, even remotely, experienced anything vaguely resembling an economic downturn or crisis. Now it is there, nobody can overlook it and we have to deal with it and overcome it.

There is now some unemployment in Switzerland but, even more significantly, over a hundred thousand people are on short time. In some particularly vulnerable industries like watches, textiles and some others, production has fallen to about 65 per cent of what it was as recently as last year.

Building activity — always a sure indicator of the shape in which a country finds itself — has gone down to about the same percentage. But if other industries have stood up better under the strain of economic recession, the general impression remains that the times of splendid profits easily arrived at in any field of economic activity whatever are gone, and gone probably for quite some time.

To this new and undoubtedly serious situation, the government as well as the top organisations of our economy have had to respond. In their efforts to

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deal with it, drastic measures have been unavoidable. Like other governments in the west, ours, when it came to act, always had to bear in mind the twin enemies of inflation and recession.

Priority was given and is still being given to the former, although our new Minister of Finance, Federal Councillor Georges-André Chevallaz, already told us in September of last year, when the annual meeting of Swiss Ambassadors was held in Berne, that "nous navigons à vue".

This expression very strongly emphasises the political climate now prevailing in Berne, a climate of vigilance, alertness and quiet determination to do what is good for the country.

In the memorable vote of 8 June this year, the Swiss people went a long way, albeit with some reluctance, towards giving the government what it needed to act. New sources of revenue were made available and the powers to pursue a rather severe monetary policy were renewed. In the private sector management and labour got together and, with great frankness, discussed all aspects of the manifold problems caused by economic recession, entailing the closing down of quite a few factories, the dismissal of a not negligible number of workers and the restructuring of our system of unemployment insurance. All this was done in a true Swiss spirit of mutual understanding and an absolute determination to act together to cope with the crisis. In this respect at least, we may heave a sigh of relief. Switzerland, which has had no major strike over the

last 40 years, will not at present be faced with the unworthy picture of self-seeking discontent and disaffection between the two sides of industry.

Now that the moment of truth is here, they show that they are living up to the expectations of the Swiss people. The worst is not overcome yet and what the future may hold for us is very largely unknown. But what we can now be sure of is that the mentality, the innermost self of the Swiss people, all it stands for and is known for in the world, has not changed.

In conclusion, my dear compatriots, I should like to express my gratitude to all of you for what you have done to make my London years so very fruitful and rewarding. Unfailingly, I have been able to count on you to help me fulfil the numerous and manifold tasks of which an Ambassador's mission consists. From the very beginning I sought your friendship and your trust and I have not done so in vain.

Needless to add, the short service concluded with the singing of the National Anthem.

After the service, a few people followed Father Bossard's invitation to go to Euston Town Hall and enjoy the disco which was to represent the second part of the National Day programme.

This was, after all, a young people's affair. Many of them already thronged the large hall shortly after the opening dance. The great majority of them were young girls aged between 17 and 19, while youths came from the Swiss Mercantile Society's school of English.

Others came from the youth clubs of the churches and others still had been attracted by the publicity for the event at the Swiss Centre and elsewhere.

Having filled the Central Hall in Westminster not so many years ago, and having subsequently moved to Merton Town Hall, Wimbledon, the First August celebrations have this year found far more modest venues with the Swiss church at Endell Street and the Euston Town Hall.

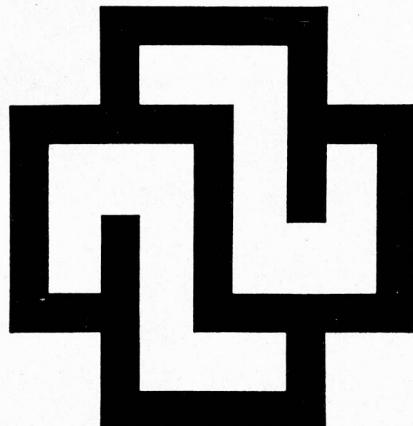
The Euston Town Hall, situated opposite St Pancras Station, contained a separate hall for sustenance and drinks.

The long queues experienced at previous First August functions for a Wienerli and roll seemed to have disappeared. As in previous years, catering was handled by Messrs J. Bartholdi.

These improved facilities added to the success of the evening. To keep costs down, no group from Switzerland was present and the music (an assortment of pop and Swiss folklore) was on records. Girls in Swiss country costumes performed a few dances. The youth club of the French-speaking parish sang "C'est si simple d'aimer" by Jacques Dalcroze and a solitary member of the group then sang "La Rauracienne". Few in the audience were able to follow him in singing this Jura classic.

A Swiss-German entertainer then produced an amusing account of William Tell's adventure which he recited in verse with a great deal of zest and humour.

The evening ended officially at about 11.30 pm.



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AND ON THE ISLE OF WIGHT . . .

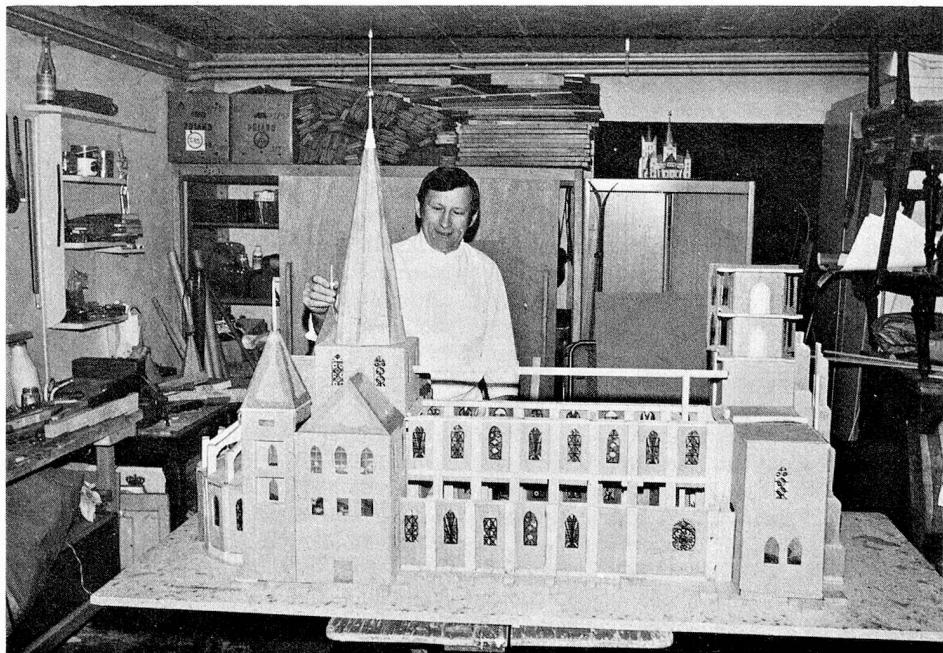
For the first time in 45 years, the First August celebrations on the Isle of Wight were not held at the premises of Mr and Mrs W. Zuber in Ventnor, but on the lawn of Barton Manor Farm, the home of Mr and Mrs Richard Orlick, near Cowes.

Lanterns and candles illuminated the traditional decoration of Swiss cantonal flags and the richly-laden table on which, to our delight, stood Mr Zuber's enormous sponge cake displaying the Swiss flag (spread with raspberries, with a white cross in whipped cream).

Whilst Swiss folk songs were being played on the record player, the 27 guests enjoyed the sandwiches and cakes provided by our hostess. Mr Zuber gave a speech, to remind us all again of the true meaning of the First August. The children walked around with lanterns until fireworks ended our gathering.

We all hope that next year's First August celebration can be held again at Barton Manor Farm and take this opportunity of expressing our sincere thanks to Mr and Mrs Orlick for their kind hospitality.

Hella Büchler



This 150 scale model of Lausanne Cathedral was made from wood by M. Barbate, the chef de cuisine of the Hotel Beau Rivage in Lausanne, to celebrate the Swiss National holiday.

LETTERS FROM SWITZERLAND

by Gottfried Keller

Recession deepens

The Swiss National Bank has made it known that it has started consultations with several of the biggest banking concerns in the country with a view to *abolishing the so-called numbered accounts*. This does not, of course mean, that the banking secret will also be abolished. Numbered accounts, as is well known, have been the cause of a good many unwarranted attacks against Swiss banks in general and the so-called "Gnomes of Zürich" in particular. If the Swiss National Bank would now like to see them abolished, this is because it is felt that they have really outlived their usefulness. They were, it is only fair to recall, first "invented" to protect victims of Nazi prosecution who, by means known only to them, had succeeded in getting sums of money out of Germany and into Swiss banks and who had reasons to fear that ordinary, normal accounts might become known to the Nazi authorities. The motive of their creation was thus, at the time, a very honourable one. But it may also be true that they have, in some cases, been misused for tax evasion and similar purposes at the time when it was much easier to open such a numbered account than it would be today. How the big banks are going to react to the National Banks' initiative to abolish them now, is not, as yet, known. If they are abolished, some of the silly attacks against Swiss banks may now stop.

This letter is being written in the middle of August. The summer is already beginning to give way to autumn, with days getting shorter, and some of the first leaves turning yellow. June was, generally speaking, an exceptionally wet month, while the second half of July and the first of August were characterised by gloriously sunny weather, blue skies and quite high temperatures. *Economically* things are not too bright in Switzerland and there are, as yet, no signs visible anywhere which point to an early end of the present state of economic recession. Again and again one reads about small firms being closed down for good and larger and even very large industrial enterprises introducing shorter working hours and reducing their output. The latest well-known firm to close down is the General Motors Swiss Assembly Plant in Biel (Bienne), which has been assembling — and in many ways smartening up — American General Motors cars which had been imported in a semi-finished condition into Switzerland, ever since 1936, with interruptions during

world war two. Some 1,000 workers and employees have been given a farewell party with beer and sausages and some 150 foreigners amongst them have been handed several 1,000 franc notes and a single ticket to their home countries.

Some of the well-known Swiss newspapers are also in difficulties. Thus the *Nationalzeitung* in Basle has had to give notice to 20 of its staff members, some of them in fairly high executive positions and some from the editorial side. And as regards the *Basler Nachrichten*, its Editor-in-Chief was recently interviewed on the radio. He revealed that he had received strict orders to economise in the editorial budget and that one way in which he could live up to these instructions was to start reducing the high cost of direct messages from abroad. This will inevitably mean more reliance on big news agencies for the coverage of foreign news, and this in turn is bound to lead to a change in the outlay, presentation and character of the paper. One of the main reasons for these