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LETTER FROM SWITZERLAND

By
Gottfried
Keller

DOES ANTI-SEMITISM EXIST IN SWITZERLAND?

According to the last census of 1970 the figure of Jews living in Switzerland amounted to 20,744 or 0.33% of the country's total population. They live in approximately 5,200 households, which are mainly concentrated in the larger towns of Zürich, Basle, Geneva, Berne, St. Gall. Out of these roughly 20,000 Jews 58% are Swiss citizens. That many of the Jews tend to live in towns is explained by the fact that during centuries past any possession of land was prohibited for them.

It was only in 1866 that a partial revision of the Federal Constitution ended this discrimination and gave the

Jews the same rights as those guaranteed for the Christian Swiss in the 1848 Constitution. However, according to Professor Kurt Mayer, writing in the Swiss Periodical for Sociology, a certain amount of discrimination or anti-semitism still exists today: Jews from India, Iran and "farther east" have to wait between 15 and 18 years until they can apply for naturalisation, whereas "ordinary aliens" can do so after 12 years residence!

Although many of the Jews in Switzerland are totally integrated into Swiss life and have high positions in its various branches — law, banking, trade, medicine, the army, etc. — they have nevertheless a certain tendency to exclusivity on their own. Thus the Zürich telephone directory — to quote an example — lists a Jewish cemetery, a Jewish library, Jewish clubs, a Jewish publisher's firm, a Jewish children's nursery, a Jewish religious society, a youth club, a Jewish weekly paper, a kosher butcher, a Jewish national fund, a school, an organisation for aid to refugees — to name but some of the many

institutions and organisations which the Jews of Zürich and the town's surroundings have brought into being for themselves.

Whereas it was said at one time that no Jew would stand a chance to reach a higher rank in the army than captain, this has certainly not been true any more during and after World War II: the late Corps Commander Constam and the former Corps Commander Annasohn can be quoted as proof.

As a kind of curiosity it should be recorded that two villages in the Canton Aargau, namely Lengnau and Oberendingen are still mainly populated by Jews, where their ancestors were, in the 17th century, given letters of protection by the authorities of the county of Baden.

At that time co-habitation between Christian and Jew under one and the same roof was prohibited and the two Jewish boroughs were given the status of autonomous corporations. But, these two historic village relics apart, the Jews in Switzerland tend, as already mentioned, to live mainly in or very near the largest towns.

Forthcoming Events

Thursday, 28th April, 7 p.m. Swiss Embassy. Nouvelle Société Helvétique, Lecture (illustrated by slides) by Dr. Verena Bodmer (Zürich) on "Swiss Women through the Centuries".

Wednesday, 11th May, at 7 p.m. Swiss Mercantile Society. Monthly Meeting at 34/35 Fitzroy Square, W.1. Non-members welcome.

City Swiss Club. A.G.M., 10th May at 7 p.m. followed by Dinner at 8.15 p.m. Dorchester Hotel (Stanhope Suite).

Federation of Swiss Societies in the U.K. Annual General Meeting on 24th June, 1977 at Swiss Embassy, London.

Saturday, 23rd July, Jass Competition for Swiss Abroad within the Swiss Jass Championships. Please apply to OK SJM, Post Box 860, 8401 Winterthur.

Saturday, 13th August, Fête des Vignerons Vevey, Special Day for the Swiss Abroad.

19th-21st August, Assembly of the Swiss Abroad, Lausanne.

SWISS WINTER AID

The Foundation "Schweizerische Winterhilfe" ("Secours suisse d'hiver") celebrated its 40th anniversary last year. Forty years of work and goodwill in the service of people in need either temporarily or permanently. 17 million francs has been spent on needy families and individuals. All helpers give their services free.

The Foundation was created in 1936, a time of crisis and unemployment. At that time there were 124,000 people out of work, 3% of the total population which, in 1936, stood at 4.168 million.

In winter, unemployment usually increased, and the cost of living was rising at that time. Soon retraining and housekeeping courses were organised. During the war, there was no unemployment, and the organisation looked after people getting into difficulties owing to wartime conditions. Of great value were the clothing centres where second-hand clothes were available. Fruit and potatoes could be had cheaper, and many mountain dwellers received food free of charge. The Foundation received a subsidy from the Confederation. Every year, up to a quarter of a million people received aid, in some Cantons as much as 20% of the population.

After the war, economic affluence meant a change in the type of people who needed assistance, especially families with large numbers of children. The stress was put on helping them to help themselves. At that time, 7,000 beds were missing, and a campaign was started "A bed for every Swiss". It was a huge success, and the appeal brought in 3.7 million francs.

In 1976, the aim was to help 23,000 compatriots who suffered from ill-health and the recession. The organisation spent 5.3 million in its anniversary year.

The Foundation must remain flexible. Its roughly 2,500 voluntary helpers must be able to act quickly and rationally, as well as economically. Its activities show that the State cannot and should not take on all such human duties — only through personal effort can they be carried out most effectively.

M.M.
(By courtesy "Echo")

Is Mr. Wildi our OU first?

Mr. Leo Oscar Wildi, manager of Lloyds Bank Limited, Swiss Cottage, and a citizen of Wohlen, Aargau, has successfully completed a degree course with the Open University.

The subjects studied were all related to man and the environment, and in the course of his studies he gained distinction in: The Earth's Physical Resources and Geophysics; Environmental Control and Public Health; Man Made Futures: Design and Technology.

Other courses included: Geology and Environment; Statistics; Personality Growth and Learning; foundation courses in (a) Science, (b) Technology.

Is Mr. Wildi the first Swiss to graduate from the O.U.?

LONDON SWISS PHILATELIC SOCIETY

Wednesday, 25th May, 1977

Annual General Meeting and Quiz

Wednesday, 29th June, 1977

Members' display, Letter "E"