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SWISS BENEVOLENT SOCIETY'S AGM

The Swiss Benevolent Society held its 107th annual general meeting at Swiss House on 4th April. The meeting was honoured by the presence of the Society's honorary President our Ambassador Dr. E. Thalmann and Mr. Charles Slauser, also from the Embassy.

Chairman Mr. Schneebeli welcomed all those present. After reading the chairman's report (see below) Mr. Schneebeli called on our Ambassador to say a few words.

Commenting on the fact that the Confederation had been forced to withdraw financial help to the Swiss Benevolent Society Mr. Thalmann stressed the critical state of Federal finances. He said that despite the generally held view that Switzerland was a rich country, this year's budget deficit may be as high as Sw.Fr. 1 billion and could double next year. The Government would like to introduce Value Added Tax but Mr. Thalmann strongly suspects that the result of the forthcoming referendum on the subject will produce an emphatic "No". If this is the case, said Mr. Thalmann, there will have to be DRASTIC cuts in public expenditure including the subsidies for the Swiss abroad. "We must face the fact that the situation could worsen further" concluded Mr. Thalmann.

Next Treasurer Mr. Asch read the accounts which were unanimously

accepted. He also thanked the finance committee and the auditors for all their sterling work.

Mr. Schneebeli then thanked everyone for all their work and offered himself for re-election which was accepted unanimously. The members of the other committee also offered themselves for re-election and here again this was accepted unanimously except that Mr. Buol will be returning to Switzerland this summer. His place on the general committee will be taken by Mr. Glarner. The Hon. auditors were also re-elected but here again there is a minor change. Mr. Mathys, of the Embassy, is also leaving soon. His place will be taken by another Embassy colleague, Mr. Hagmann.

PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS

Dear Friends and Compatriots,

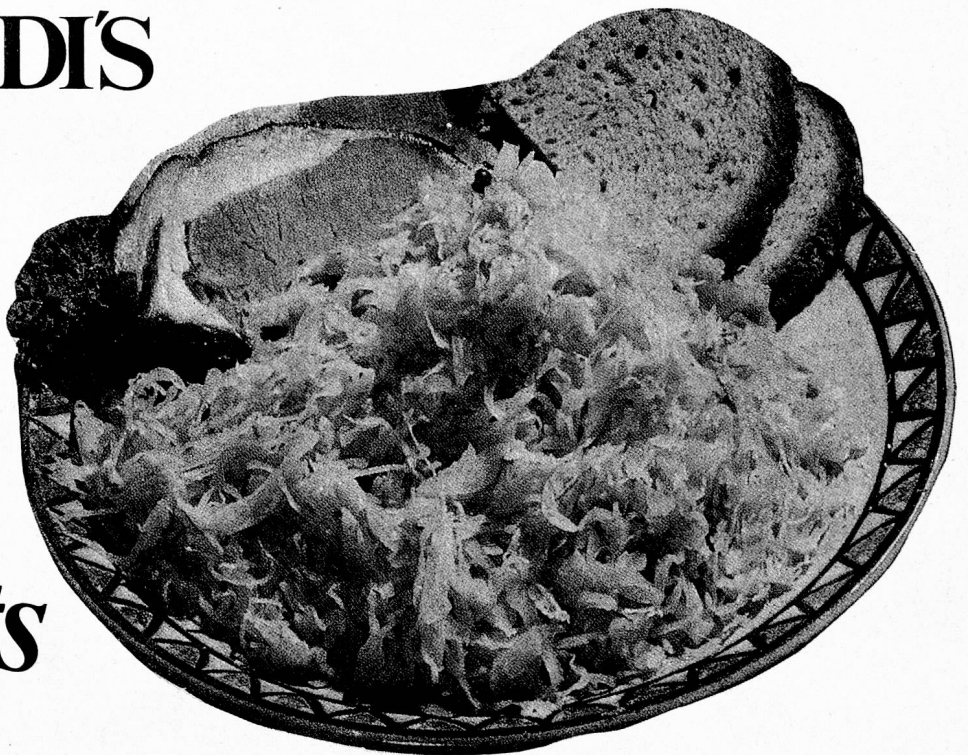
It is our pleasure to present the 107th Annual Report on the activities of the Swiss Benevolent Society. As in past years, it has been our aim to come to the assistance of Swiss people living in the London Consular District, and we hope that we have, in some measure, been able to make life easier for some of them who were faced with various problems and difficulties.

NEWS FROM THE COLONY

As you will see from the accounts, it has been a year of considerable financial strain, and we ended up with a substantial deficit. The causes for this were multiple: increased financial help to needy compatriots, large expenses on both properties and, unfortunately, the cessation of the subsidy received hitherto from the Swiss Confederation. In the wake of their economy measures, the authorities decided to cease all financial support of our activities. In this context, we would like to appeal to our many generous friends, individuals and firms alike, to consider, yet again, if they are not already using this method, whether their contributions to our funds could not take the form of a covenanted subscription. This gives very substantial financial advantages to us through refund of income tax and occasions no extra cost to the donor. The Secretary will gladly give further information or supply a Covenant form.

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The number of clients with whom we were in touch last year has gone up by about 10 per cent to a total of 330, although our pensioners stayed on much the same level with 51 as against 50 the previous year. This seems to confirm the trend noticed in the past few years that there are proportionately fewer people in need of constant financial support and more who require either no material aid at all or occasional grants to help them over a difficult period.

Contact was maintained, as in the past, by receptions at the office, visits to homes, correspondence and the telephone. In this context, it may be interesting to note that over the past few years, there has been a steady increase in both receptions and visits. Thus last year, we received 595 people as opposed to 388 in 1969 and made 271 visits as against 94 in that year. These figures are explained, at least in part, by the fact that now 55 per cent of applicants need no financial support, and that very often problems other than shortage of money take a lot longer to resolve than the allocation of a pension or a casual grant.

Also, our pensioners tend to come to us increasingly with all sorts of queries beyond material help, which affect their lives in some way. We try, wherever possible, to assist them in finding a solution or we direct them to the appropriate agency which can deal with their specific need. In such cases, it can happen that one particular person or family requires at some stage what could seem a disproportionate amount of our time, whilst we endeavour to help them create conditions

in which they can live as harmoniously and independently as possible afterwards. In the long term, we are convinced that these efforts are preferable to easier palliative measures.

We have continued to distribute to some of our pensioners their Swiss Old Age Pensions at regular intervals during the year, if this was easier for them than receiving quarterly cheques.

The decrease in grants for holidays is due mainly to the fact that most of our pensioners are getting very elderly and more invalid and are less attracted by the thought of having a break from their routine.

A record number of 23 children took advantage of the Pro Juventute scheme, either to stay with host families in Switzerland or by joining the group for the journey to go on holiday with relatives or friends. Apart from one or two small problems and the odd child suffering from home-sickness, they all appeared to have had a happy and interesting time.

Mmes. Burri and Kaluza presided over the usual burst of activities before Christmas. A total of 145 parcels going to 226 persons were sent out. We received much appreciated help from the Réunion de Couture, the Frauenverein, Swiss firms and many individuals. Our particular thanks go to Mmes. G. Gyssler and M. Hill, Mr. and Mrs. W. Buol, Mr. and Mrs. R. Glarner, Mr. and Mrs. E. Tangemann and Messrs. E. Huber, M. Rothlisberger, W. Lockyer and L. Smith.

As previously mentioned, the two properties at 31 Conway Street and

9-11 Belsize Grove needed considerable repairs during the year, occasioning great expense and taking up a good deal of the House Committee's and the Secretary's time. A new lease was negotiated with the Swiss Hostel for Girls Ltd. based on an economic rent but granting a rebate on beds occupied by Swiss girls. This formula was adopted because it was felt that it was not right for our Society to subsidise foreign nationals who represent the majority of guests.

At Conway Street, the rooms reserved for young Swiss men were well occupied and the presence of the youngsters brought quite a bit of life into the house, accompanied by all the problems which can arise when people of varying temperaments live in close proximity.

We also had considerable difficulties over the change of caretakers. A very pleasant solution has now been found and the flat is occupied by a young medical student and his Swiss wife, who between them, have a very happy influence on the general atmosphere in the house.

The collaboration with the Swiss Welfare Office for young people was again very pleasant and proved valuable to both organisations. We particularly wish to thank Mrs. U. McCarthy, Social Worker, for her help and understanding. During the year, a new secretary was found who works for both organisations and Miss M. Räss has been a great help to us, freeing the social workers for more personal contacts with clients.

The co-operation with the Swiss Churches continues to be strengthened and the exchange of experiences and ideas



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is not only stimulating to us but, above all, we believe it to be beneficial to the people we are trying to serve in our several functions.

The Committee held its regular monthly meetings to deal with the various matters that were brought to its notice. At the meetings, the Embassy was represented by Consul M. Ch. Glauser and following one of them, the Executive and the Finance Committees were invited by him and Madame Glauser to a memorable and pleasant dinner at the Post Office Tower Restaurant. We wish to record our thanks for this enjoyable evening to Consul and Madame Glauser.

As in past years, Mrs. M. Lyster, Social Worker, stood in for Mrs. Sharp during her holidays and we are indeed grateful to her for her keen involvement in our activities and her splendid co-operation.

At the last Annual General Meeting, His Excellency the Swiss Ambassador, Dr. E. Thalmann was elected Honorary

President and we are grateful to him for the interest he takes in our work; interest demonstrated by his attendance at one of the monthly meetings of the Executive Committee.

We wish to express gratitude to all the individuals and institutions whose support we enjoyed again during the year: the Swiss Embassy in London, the Swiss Churches, the *Swiss Observer*, English social services and their representatives and above all our individual friends on whose interest and donations we depend so very much. Our appreciation also goes to the British Authorities for their hospitality and assistance.

Finally, we should like to thank our Secretary, Mrs. A.-R. Sharp, Social Worker, for carrying out her varied tasks with great skill and never failing enthusiasm.

On behalf of the Executive Committee

M. Schneebeli
President

FEDERAL COUNCILLOR VISITS LONDON

Federal Councillor Ernst Brugger, Head of the Federal Department of Economy was in London recently at the invitation of Mr. Edmund Dell, Secretary of State for Trade.

During his visit Councillor Brugger had a series of exchanges of views on matters of mutual interest with Mr. Dell, Chancellor Denis Healey, Dr. David Owen, Foreign Secretary and Sir Geoffrey Howe, Opposition spokesman on Treasury and Economic Affairs.

At a press conference at the Swiss Embassy shortly before his departure Councillor Brugger was kind enough to outline the theme of these important talks.

First and foremost said Mr. Brugger, there had been a large measure of agreement between the two parties on the problems facing both countries.

The Swiss delegation, which also included Ambassador Paul Rudolf Jolles, Ambassador Fritz Rothenbühler, Mr. Milan Lusser and Mr. P. L. Girard, explained Switzerland's economic policies and was also informed about Britain's policies.

Britain, said Mr. Brugger, envied Switzerland's economic situation but we were able to explain that the situation is not always as rosy as it seems because of the high value of the Swiss Franc abroad.

Some 300,000 jobs had been lost, but unemployment had perhaps been artificially kept at a low level because 200,000 foreign workers had left Switzerland.

The Swiss delegation was also well aware of Britain's problems and of her endeavours to reduce inflation, curb production costs and unemployment.

There was optimism among British Ministers on questions of reducing in-

flation and the balance of payments deficit, particularly in view of the North Sea oil which is now beginning to come ashore.

The Swiss delegation, added Councillor Brugger, was more optimistic than its British friends on world trade problems, European integration and further co-operation between EFTA and the EEC. But progress there must be.

Switzerland's action in floating the Franc had done much to help Britain by contributing in a large part to an international adjustment process. As a result Switzerland's imports had been increasing sharply. Another important Swiss contribution is her large exports of capital to other countries.

Mr. Healey, said Councillor Brugger, has expressed particular gratitude for Switzerland's participation in World Bank stand-by credits, the Sterling "safety net".

All in all, summarized Councillor Brugger, our visit to our British friends and counterparts had been as fruitful as ever. Relations between the two countries are excellent, a fact which greatly pleases both parties.

Unfortunately, Councillor Brugger and his party had not been able to meet Industry Secretary Mr. Eric Varley as planned due to Mr. Varley's illness. His place was taken by Secretary of State, Mr. Alan Williams.

Councillor Brugger thanked the British Government for their hospitality and assured all present that the good bilateral work will continue.

Mr. Dell has been invited to visit Berne, an invitation which to Councillor Brugger's obvious delight, has been accepted.

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