

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

**Herausgeber:** Federation of Swiss Societies in the United Kingdom

**Band:** - (1977)

**Heft:** 1733

**Rubrik:** Nouvelle société helvétique

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# 'PROBLEMS IN SWISS POLITICS'

This was the title of a talk given to the London Group of the Nouvelle Société Helvétique by Monsieur le Ministre Maurice Jaccard, Head of the Service for the Swiss Abroad of the Federal Political Department in Berne. The meeting took place at the Swiss Embassy Lecture Hall on Thursday, 23rd June.

Monsieur Jaccard spoke in English and briefly also in German and French. He began by mentioning the fact that Switzerland had to deal with many and complicated problems which touched many aspects of Swiss national life, often interrelated and at times difficult to grasp. Very often there were contradictions and contrasts. Switzerland, said the speaker, wanted to keep her individuality, but wished to come to grips with her surroundings and their equally diverse characteristics. The Swiss, he said, was proud of his individual freedom and was apt to reject state interference. On the other side, he had asked for the Confederation's help more and more, especially since the end of the Second World War, and had given the state more and more tasks.

"In the centre of Swiss political discussion today is finance. It has never been simple to solve financial problems in our complicated Confederate State. Above all, this is due to the fact that financial sovereignty is distributed between Communes, Cantons and

Confederation. Decisions regarding expenditure are usually made by Government or Parliament, whereas questions of taxation are almost always decided by the electorate. It is well known that it is easier to decide on spending money than it is to effect the raising of taxes. Since the end of the war, we have gone on increasing expenditure. Income from taxation has not kept pace, and thus we have to face grave deficits today."

Monsieur Jaccard mentioned the draft law on which the electorate had to vote on 12th June 1977. It proposed to get the federal finances balanced again through the introduction of V.A.T. The proposal was rejected by a decisive majority, also by all the Cantons except the Grisons. Thus Federal Council and Parliament would have to examine new measures to balance the federal budget in the near future. Amongst other expedients, a reduction in expenditure was inevitable. "As far as the financial position of our State is concerned, we have difficult times ahead. But this should not fill us with pessimism. Now as much as ever, it is true to say that though the Government is poor, the country is rich."

The next subject the speaker dealt with was the Jura problem. For the first time since the creation of the Swiss Confederate State in 1848, a new Canton is to be created. The problem is

extremely complex, since according to the Federal Constitution, the Confederation has to Guarantee the territory of each Canton, and the Government is of opinion that this is not possible with regard to the new Canton. In any case, there would have to be constitutional changes. A plebiscite regarding the Revision of the Federal Constitution could not take place before the middle of 1978 at the earliest.

Monsieur Jaccard then referred to the study of the question of a total revision of the Federal Constitution. He said that even with a good many changes there would hardly be anything fundamentally new. But the fact that citizens and authorities had to engage in the study of the fundamental laws characterising our country was gratifying.

Next Minister Jaccard referred to questions specifically concerning the Swiss living abroad. He mentioned the Constitutional Article accepted by the electorate 11 years ago, which enabled the Confederation to settle such questions as social welfare and military service duties affecting the Swiss citizen resident outside Switzerland. He then spoke of the difficulties regarding political rights which the Swiss abroad were now able to carry out. He stressed that in order to take part in federal plebiscites, a Swiss resident abroad had to register at his Embassy or Consulate.

Finally, the speaker mentioned the

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"Swiss Observer" special issues in which regular information on questions of interest were given, and he stressed the importance of reading such news most carefully. If often had to do with matters of social insurance (AHV), the Solidarity Fund of the Swiss Abroad, citizenship etc.

The large audience showed its appreciation of Monsieur Jaccard's informative talk by lively applause. The President, Mrs. Mariann Meier, then opened a long and interesting discussion during which questions of citizenship, insurance, taxation, etc., were raised. Minister Jaccard's answers revealed that the deplorable delay in the payment of old-age pensions was being shortened, and it was hoped that there would soon be no more reason for complaint. With regard to the nationality of children born to Swiss mothers and foreign fathers abroad, he warned that it would of necessity take a long time to solve the question, and that aspects of international law would have to be considered, too.

And so a most interesting and instructive evening came to a close after the President had thanked Monsieur Jaccard for addressing the Society's members and friends.

MM.

## Miscellaneous advertisement

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## Switzerland in Britain's cultural life

August 21 to September 10 — Edinburgh International Festival — Performances by the mime *Amiel* included in the Fringe programme (details from Box EP, Festival Fringe Society, Royal Mile Centre, Edinburgh EH1 1RB).

Monday, August 22, and Tuesday, August 23 — Usher Hall, Edinburgh, 8 p.m. — The soprano *Edith Mathis* is one of the soloists in two performances of Mozart's *Requiem* given by the New Philharmonia Orchestra and the Edinburgh Festival Chorus, conducted by Carlo Maria Giulini (the programme also includes the Linz Symphony).

London Festival Ballet's Summer Season at the Royal Festival Hall, 7.30 p.m. — *Manola Asensio* dances leading roles in *Les Sylphides* (Aug. 29, 30 and Sept. 3), *Prince Igor* (Sept. 1 and 2), *The Sanguine Fan* (Sept. 6, 8 and 9),

*Scheherazade* (Sept. 7 and 10) and *Giselle* (Sept. 13 and 15).

Thursday, September 19 — Queen Elizabeth Hall, 7.45 p.m. — Piano Recital by *Nikita Magaloff* (Schubert: Sonata in B flat; Chopin: Twenty-four Preludes Op. 28).

October 1 to 15 — City of Birmingham Polytechnic — Award-Winning Books and Posters from Switzerland.

## Swiss Club Manchester 1977-78

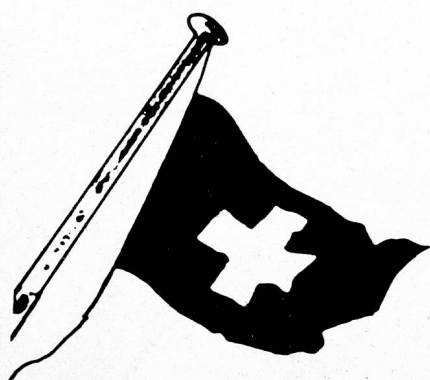
Thursday, 20th October: Games and Film Evening. Ciba Geigy (U.K.) Ltd., Heald Green.

Friday, 11th November 1977: Annual Dinner-Dance. Excelsior Hotel.

Saturday, 10th December 1977: Children's Christmas Party. Ciba Geigy (U.K.) Ltd., Heald Green.

Thursday, 26th January 1978: Raclette Party. Cottons Hotel, near Knutsford.

Thursday, 2nd March 1978: Annual General Meeting. Ciba Geigy (U.K.) Ltd., Heald Green.



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