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NATIONAL DAY CELEBRATED 'COMME IL FAUT'

Once again London's Swiss community gathered together in the Swiss Church in Endell Street to pray and offer thanks for the establishment of our country.

The evening was graced by the presence of our Ambassador and Mme. Thalmann who was fittingly presented with a bouquet of red and white roses by one of the youngest members of the congregation.

The evening began with an address of welcome by Mr. Virgil Berthi (Unione Ticinesi and Schweizerbund). This was followed by a solemn reading of the Swiss Pact by the Rev. Paul Bossard, chaplain to London's Swiss catholics. In the name of God, Amen.

As has now become customary our Ambassador then read an address, abstracts of which are reproduced below.

Those few observers who noticed that Geneva's flag was missing from the decorations couldn't help a little smile when Dr. Thalmann welcomed the new canton Jura into the Confederation.

ADDRESS GIVEN BY DR. ERNESTO THALMANN, SWISS AMBASSADOR, ON 1ST AUGUST, 1977

My dear compatriots,

During the 12 months since our last National Day we have encountered a number of difficult problems, particularly

on the financial front. Although, like all of you, I am deeply concerned at their serious impact on our country, its institutions and reputation, I do believe that our system is healthy enough to find ways of correcting its shortcomings.

My purpose today is to touch upon some fundamental aspects of our national life, underlining their importance for the survival of what we cherish most in our fatherland: our democratic institutions based on the freedom of the individual.

You will have heard or read a number of statements by politicians of both East and West on the human rights issue. This concern about respect for individual liberties is neither new nor foreign to us Swiss. Our forefathers struggled hard to obtain them, and these general principles and major concepts have all been enshrined in our constitution for a long time.

Although the Federal Council has not been indifferent when breaches of human rights have been deliberately committed by foreign powers, it has always endeavoured not to become involved in the internal problems of other nations. The Federal Council rightly believes that it is not by discussing these issues in the market place that one can best help those who suffer under repressive regimes. On the contrary, it is by quiet and subtle diplomacy, by long

and often laborious parleys that the lot of the inhabitants of certain countries may one day be improved.

We Swiss should not forget that we still have to strengthen the legal protection of the citizen while we are in the process of developing the Confederation into an advanced welfare state with its inevitable growth of state power and bureaucracy. We must consolidate and extend individual liberties in order to ensure that our system is fully adapted to the present and to the predictable future of the country. This task of putting our own house in order has been tackled by a commission whose aim is to prepare a detailed draft for a new constitution.

Next year the Federal Council will examine the commission's proposals and decide on the procedure it wishes to see adopted. You may be sure that this total revision is not being carried out in order to change the existing general set-up — we shall respect our traditions and lasting values.

But the purpose of the revision is to improve, among other things, our federal structure in all its diversity, to co-ordinate better the relationship between the Confederation and the cantons, to rationalize the process of political decision making and to re-define the respective duties of Government and Parliament. Because we are a direct democracy, such revision requires the approval of the electors. The Swiss have always been sensible and they know well that to carry through reforms needs time and patience . . .

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Next year will also witness the birth of a new canton; it will be the first time since 1815 that we have welcomed in our midst a new entity: the Jura, achieving its independence from Berne after many years of often painful and violent demonstrations. The problem is not yet completely solved because the new canton is claiming what it believes to be its rights to some parts of the Southern Jura which have decided to stay Bernese.

We can only hope that the people of this region will be wise enough to find a solution without adopting extreme political attitudes which are not akin to our tradition of compromises and our federalism.

My dear compatriots, I am sure that, like me, you are often puzzled when you realize how quickly things have changed — and are constantly changing — within our own country and around us. In the complex world in which we live, no one — and we Swiss less than any other people — can afford to develop his country in a vacuum. In order to maintain our way of life, to foster our traditions, we have to know what others are doing and collaborate with them in building a more sensible world.

You, Swiss abroad, who have chosen these wonderful British Isles, which have shown all their traditional splendour during this Silver Jubilee year, know just how important it is to understand others and work with them if one wishes to improve and to forge ahead.

The service concluded with a special treat — eleven delightfully presented and executed songs by the New London Singers. The programme included songs by Mendelssohn, Arbeau, Gibbons, Debussy, Dvorak, and a traditional Austrian song and arrangements of sacred songs by the contemporary French organist Durufle.

The New London Singers, an entirely amateur, non-profit-making group, were founded in 1963 and have since established a considerable reputation for themselves in this country and abroad for their distinctive and original a capella programmes.

The choir gives concerts in London and in the provinces. It also undertakes visits to foreign countries and has visited France, Germany, Hungary and Jugoslavia in recent years.

In 1974 they competed in the Rencontres Internationales de Chant Choral in Tours and were successful in winning the three main prizes in competition against choral groups from all over Europe. An immediate result of this success in France was the distinction of being invited to take part in concerts at the American Embassy in London in connection with the Charles Ives' centenary. Subsequently the New London Singers were invited back to France to give concerts in Strasbourg and Selestat in April, 1975.

Last month the Singers won this year's trophy for the best United Kingdom choir in the annual competition

for amateur choirs organised by the BBC Radio Three "Let the People Sing". We were indeed fortunate to be allowed to listen.

To end what was a most enjoyable evening a goodly number of people, most of them young, which is an encouraging sign, went on to the John Southwark Centre. All present were delighted by the fact that the choir was there as well and performed again, much to everybody's delight.

Efficiently organised bars once again served cervelas, Swiss veal sausages and raclette while dancing continued non-stop until 11 pm with Father Bossard performing his disc jockey act.

For those of a less energetic disposition a bar was set aside to allow people to meet, have a drink and a chat.

Although there were comparatively few resident Swiss present at this part of the celebrations the evening was considered a resounding success.

FAREWELL TO THE REUTLINGERS

A reception was held in the Swiss Embassy in June to say farewell to Consul and Mrs. Reutlinger. Both will be sadly missed by the many friends they made during their stay in these islands.

Mr. Werner Reutlinger arrived in London in November 1971; he retired on 30th June 1977 at the age of 65 and has taken up residence in Basle, his city of birth and origin.

He entered the service of the Federal Political Department in 1942 and was later transferred to Bregenz and Cincinnati.

In 1956 he returned to Berne from where he was sent abroad in 1960; since, he has served in Pretoria, Montreal, Freiburg in Breisgau. Mr. Reutlinger was appointed to the rank of Consul in 1973.

Mr. and Mrs. Reutlinger took an active part in the life of the Swiss colony in London and Mr Reutlinger was serving on the Committee of the Swiss Catholics in London and of the Unione Ticinese.

We all wish them both a long and happy retirement.



Mr. Werner Reutlinger who retired recently from service with Switzerland's diplomatic service after six years in London. We all wish him and Mrs. Reutlinger a long and happy retirement.

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