

Society and social scene : A novel approach to a topical question : A personality sadly missed

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A novel approach to a topical question

AT a joint meeting of the NSH and the Swiss Mercantile Society on November 13 Mr Theodor Haller, London correspondent of Swiss Radio and the Basler Zeitung, gave a talk entitled "Do newspapers tell the truth?"

In view of the recent UK publicity about bugging in the steel industry and the harrying of Lady Diana Spencer, there is wide public interest in the question of Press freedom. Even the Royal family has tackled the subject.

Listening to Mr Haller's talk, however, one felt that the question is approached from the wrong angle. Indeed Mr Haller implied that it might be a futile undertaking to search for the absolute truth in the newspapers.

"Producing a newspaper is a chain of subjective decisions however objectively the people involved try to report," he said.

The average reader expects an expression of views from his paper and it is not always easy to find the right balance between

mere reporting of facts and interpretation of events.

Mr Haller has been a journalist for a very long time and has always conscientiously tried to keep a firm check on expression of his personal views.

A new breed of "committed" ("engagierte") Swiss journalists would like greater freedom of expression. This frequently meets with little sympathy from the management, the establishment or the advertisers, as recent developments in the Swiss Press show, such as abrupt changes in the editorship of the "Thurgauer Tagblatt" and the "Luzerner Neuste Nachrichten."

The freedom of the Press has been long established in Switzerland but it would seem to have a rather more theoretical meaning than, for instance, in

Britain.

Later on this year Mr Haller will officially retire. He rather looks forward to writing for a new column called "off-side" and might then just possibly allow himself the luxury of expressing a more personal view from time to time.

MHM

Alfred Sommer — a man of many interests

ALFRED Sommer, a long-standing member of the Swiss community in London, died suddenly in London on November 30, two days before his 82nd birthday.

Two of his three children were with him at the time of his death, which came at the end of a day spent with his family to celebrate his forthcoming birthday.

Alfred Sommer was born in Basle, the second of four children. He spent his childhood mainly in Seuzach and Winterthur.

In the early 1920s he went to the Far East as an employee of a Swiss import-export firm. In Japan he married Mary Bishop, an Englishwoman, with whom he returned to London in 1928.

Since then he spent most of his working life building up an electrical and toy business in Kingsbury assisted by his wife.

Mary Sommer died in 1975. Alfred, who sold his own business in 1973, continued working full-time at a London store until 1978. In the last years of his life he worked at his memoirs, finishing them shortly before he died.

Each year he travelled abroad. He delighted being with his family.

He was dogged by a continual heart complaint.

He will be sadly missed by his brother and two sisters, his children and grandchildren and by his many friends in North West London, in the Kingsbury Swimming Club, in the Wembley Philharmonic Society with whom he sang for many years, by his former fellow members of the Swiss Mercantile Society, by his colleagues in the Catenians and by members of the All Saints Church in Kenton.

A funeral service was held at All Saints on December 5 followed by cremation at Golders Green.

A personality sadly missed

AS was announced in the December issue, we mourn the loss of one of the best known personalities in the London Swiss community: Maurice Rothlisberger, of 89 Lawrie Park Gardens, Sydenham, London, who died on October 16 after a short illness. He was 81.

Maurice Rothlisberger was born in London but brought up in Switzerland from the age of three. He went to school at Aubonne, canton of Vaud, and after an apprenticeship and six years of employment, both with the Union Bank of Switzerland, he moved to London.

A year after joining the Ionian Bank in Coleman Street he was sent to Greece, but returned to England in 1928. Mr Rothlisberger was appointed accountant in 1950, assistant manager seven years later and manager in May 1960. He retired at the end of September 1965 after 41 years with the bank.

He was a member of several Swiss societies — the Swiss Philatelic Society, of which he was a founder member and honorary treasurer, the Swiss

Club, the Nouvelle Société Helvétique and the Swiss Mercantile Society where he held office in the education committee.

He became assistant honorary treasurer of the Swiss Benevolent Society in 1931 and honorary treasurer in August 1937, an office he held for 33 years. In 1961 he became vice-president of the SBS and as such remained on the committee up to his death.

The Swiss Benevolent Society in particular and the Swiss community in general owe Maurice Rothlisberger a great debt of gratitude for much unselfish and devoted work.

In his many activities he was staunchly supported by his wife, Helen, and it is to her above all that we express our deep sympathy in her bereavement. It must have been gratifying to see so many friends at the funeral at Beckenham Crematorium on October 22.

It was my privilege to have known Maurice and Helen for 45 years and more, and to write

up Maurice's 70th and 80th birthdays. Both times I mentioned how well and happy he was in his retirement, although it could hardly be called that for he remained so very active.

And he was that right to the end. His ever-friendly and charming personality will be greatly missed but we whose friend he was are the richer for having known him.

Mariann Meier

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