

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: - (1981)

Heft: 1779

Rubrik: Letter from Switzerland

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Once a gentleman, always a gentleman

UNDER the title "Account" ("Rechenschaft" in German) a book about "Four decades in the service of the Swiss State" has just come on to the market. It has been written by the former Swiss Delegate for Trade Negotiations, former Ambassador in London and former Secretary of State, Ambassador Dr. Albert Weitnauer.

The sudden and abrupt end of his distinguished career, caused in a shabby manner by Federal Councillor Pierre Aubert – and afterwards inexplicably sanctioned by the whole Federal Council – will, no doubt, be remembered by all those readers of the Swiss Observer who knew Dr. Weitnauer as the first hospitable landlord in the newly built Embassy in Bryanston Square.

It was, incidentally, in 1974 in the Embassy in London that Dr. Weitnauer dictated the first of the 367 pages of this "Statement of account."

Several chapters of the book have interesting and revealing titles – "The art of negotiation," "The pleasure of learning," "Power" – and it goes without saying that much space is taken up by a fascinating account of the author's 12 years as the Federal Council's Delegate for Trade Agreements.

The end of the Kennedy round in 1967, which, as one knows, was favourable for Switzerland, was one of the culminating highlights in Dr. Weitnauer's career.

Among the prominent Swiss personalities whom Weitnauer specially admired he mentions the former Federal Chancellor Hans Schaffner (his "Master," as

he calls him) and the two former prominent diplomats Walter Stucky and Henry de Torrenté – the latter a former Swiss Minister in London just before the Swiss Chefs de Mission were given the rank of Ambassadors.

About the differences with Federal Councillor Aubert, Dr. Weitnauer has hitherto remained nobly silent. Now, however, he talks in a very dignified manner about the whole affair.

"In my innermost feelings I look on the last years of my career as on a test of endurance of a special kind imposed on me by fate," he writes.

There exists, Dr. Weitnauer reveals, a total incompatibility of character between the Federal Councillor and his former highest functionary, as well as a fundamental difference in style and in judging values.

As he puts it: "The lucky chance of spontaneous harmony has not fallen to the lot of Federal Councillor Aubert or myself."

But during the whole of 1979 not one word of criticism about Weitnauer's conduct of affairs was uttered by Aubert. All the more total was the surprise with which Aubert took Weitnauer unawares on January 18, 1980, at 4.30pm. Aubert told his second in command that from the beginning of autumn onward he would no longer be Political Director and Secretary of State and that Raymond Probst – at that time Swiss Ambassador in Washington – would be his successor.

As for Weitnauer, Aubert offered him "an office and a secretary" somewhere in the Department, where during the remaining months before his being pensioned he could write a paper on "Switzerland and Europe."

This Weitnauer refused point-blank, as he considered it an insult to be asked to write a paper "which obviously nobody would read."

It was only later – and this constitutes a grave charge against Federal Councillor Aubert – that Dr. Weitnauer learnt that Aubert had carefully prepared all this six weeks before without informing either the Federal Council or Dr.

Weitnauer, but taking into his confidence a number of his special cronies!

"If Federal Councillor Aubert had spoken to me as one man to another – and to me first! – there would have been no need for an 'affair Weitnauer' at all," he writes.

And Dr. Weitnauer – once a gentleman, always a gentleman – ends with the words: "I bear no grudge against him, although it is due to him that my career has ended – undeservedly as I believe – with a shrill discord."

"I am certain that in his way and with the means at his disposal he is trying to give his best for the country."

Payment that is long overdue

WILL Mitterrand settle Napoleon's debts?

In May, 1800, Napoleon Bonaparte, then First Consul at the Head of the French State – he crowned himself as Emperor four years later – accompanied by 40,000 men and 5,000 horses went to the aid of part of his army, which was fighting the Austrians in what is today upper Italy. On June 14 a fierce battle raged near the village of Marengo, in the plain of the river Po, which the French won.

Napoleon, to reach upper Italy from France, took the route across the Grand Saint Bernhard pass in Switzerland and it is said that without the active help and support of the people in the Swiss village of Bourg-Saint-Pierre the French First Consul and his troops would never have mastered this difficult passage.

The peasants of Bourg-Saint-Pierre, with their mules, acted as pathfinders and carriers. At the same time they emptied stables to house Napoleon's soldiers and they also fed them to the best of their ability.

Napoleon promised to pay three francs per man per day for these services, and six francs per mule. The sum total due amounted to 45,000 francs and would amount today to some

where between Sfr 150 and 200 million.

A document signed "Bonaparte" acknowledging this debt exists to this day. On it Napoleon added the sentence: "I shall indemnify you for everything, which is right and proper, and in addition I would like to render your borough a kindness." The document was dated "Aosta, fourth Prairial, eighth year of the Republic."

But after the battle of Marengo other historic events, not least the Coronation as Emperor, followed and Napoleon apparently forgot all about his promise. Ever since then various lawyers from the region of Bourg-Saint-Pierre have tried to claim what they thought was due to the village from various French presidents and governments.

It seems that Giscard d'Estaing, while he was President of the Republic, once asked the French Consul in Lausanne to look into the matter and to clear it up, if possible.

But now, with Giscard d'Estaing having lost his high office, the question arises whether François Mitterrand will, at last, come to some kind of terms with Bourg-Saint-Pierre.

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