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Assembly at Solothurn

THE Assembly of Swiss Residents Abroad, which met this year in Solothurn, is in the first place a gathering where compatriots from many parts of the world want information and discussion of many problems.

The most important body is the Commission of Swiss Residents Abroad, which meets twice a year and is the elected "Parliament" representing the Swiss communities abroad. The delegates for Great Britain – Dr. Alex Lang (Manchester), his deputy Dr. Hans-Joerg Wirz (Edinburgh), and Mrs Mariann Meier (London) – were joined by a newcomer, Mr Giuseppe Broggin, who was elected Mrs Meier's deputy by the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK last June.

The meeting of the Commission took place on Friday morning, August 21, in the beautiful hall of the cantonal parliament in the Rathaus in Solothurn.

The president of the organisation, Dr. Alfred Weber, welcomed the delegates and in particular the new members. There are now 23 members from inside Switzerland (including three women) and 85 delegates and deputies from abroad (including nine women).

It was a very heavy agenda. There were long discussions on the voluntary old-age insurance for Swiss abroad and the recently discovered discrimination against wives of compulsorily insured Swiss working abroad for Swiss firms, who are not insured unless they applied individually; on the Swiss schools abroad, three of which are to be closed because the Confederation wants to withdraw its subsidy; on political rights for Swiss abroad and the first results of the questionnaire; on a possible contribution of Swiss living abroad towards the upkeep of the Secretariat in Berne.

Three meetings were attended by Mrs Meier on Thursday and Friday – the Commission on Information and both the Council meeting and the AGM of the

solidarity fund.

The first dealt with the difficulties of producing the "Review" in the various countries, especially in view of the savings campaign of the Confederation.

The Solidarity Fund meetings were concerned with the state of its finances (which was good) and the still comparatively small membership.

Other meetings which took place were those of the Society of Friends of Swiss Abroad (an excellent institution for all those people in Switzerland who want to support their compatriots abroad at only Sfr.20 a year) and the well-attended question time of the Secretariat.

The official opening took place at the Concert Hall. Dr. Weber thanked the Canton and the town of Solothurn and reminded the audience of the previous Assembly in Solothurn in 1965.

Representatives of the cantonal and municipal governments welcomed the participants. The speakers – in three languages – were joined by the Swiss pianist Vogel, who performed music by Swiss composers.

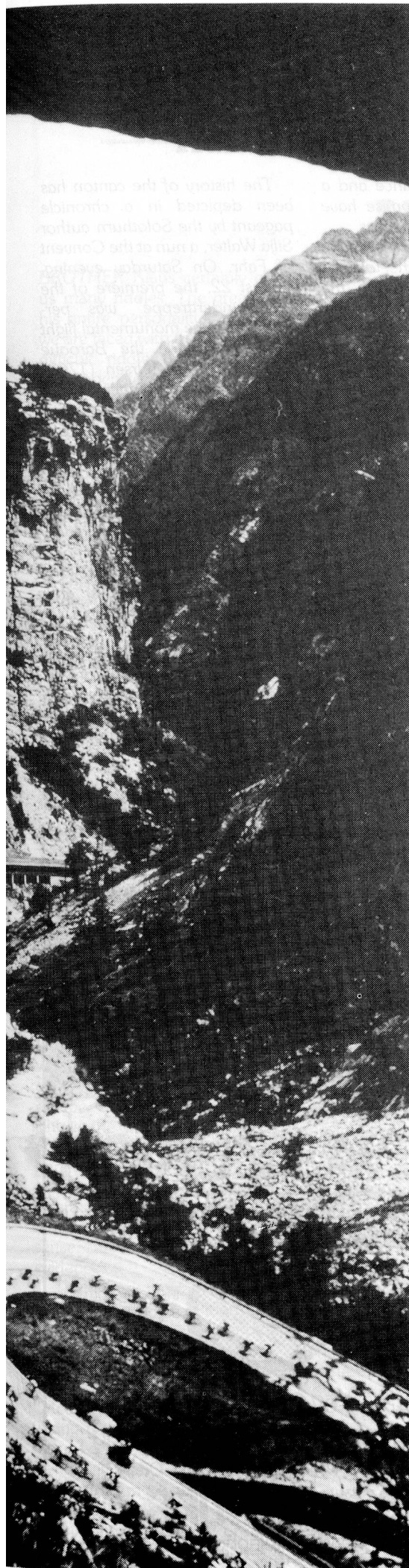
The president opened the plenary session on Saturday morning – again in three Swiss official languages. He greeted the guests from Confederation, Parliament, canton, town and church.

The president of the mother society, Dr. Paul Schaffroth, spoke of the great work of the Organisation of Swiss Residents Abroad of which the Nouvelle Société Helvétique was justly proud. As Editor of the "Bund," he recalled that it was in 1847 in London's Regent Street, when the first discussions took place with Mr von Planta, which, after the Sonderbundkrieg, led to the first issue of the "Bund" in Berne in 1850.

Then, and again now, there was a lack of unity, an estrangement between citizen and state, which the NSH tried to remedy –



Turn to Page 8



The grand tour . .

IT was in 1933 that the SRB, the Swiss association of cyclists and motorcyclists decided to organise a tour of the country to mark its fiftieth anniversary. This big sporting event with all its concomitant noise and excitement was meant from the first to be fun for everybody, and it has lost none of its popularity in the intervening years.

This year the Tour de Suisse took place with a record international field of 13 teams, each comprising eight men.

It was a formidable sporting performance for every participant, and at the same time a demonstration of how one can take a trip round Switzerland – though the riders themselves have little time to admire the view.

On the left they are seen riding through the Gondo Gorge, and above they are climbing the Lucomagno Pass.

Below shows how it was in the old days – by penny-farthing.



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The spirit of Solothurn

a very slow process. He said the Swiss abroad showed more solidarity, and their work should produce the light in the darkness so that the malaise would not become a state crisis.

Dr. Weber introduced the main theme, the "New Structure of Swiss Emigration." The whole morning and part of the afternoon were devoted to the change in the way Swiss settled abroad, not for good any more, but for just a definite period.

The advantages and disadvantages of this new development were shown by a series of talks in which Mr Marcel Ney, director of the secretariat, and his deputy, Mr Lucien Paillard, took part.

Minister Maurice Jaccard of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, and Mr Peter Fuhrer, BIGA (Department for Emigration), made a contribution. The material was informative, but the presentation, unfortunately, was lacking in liveliness. A full report will appear in a future issue of the Swiss Observer.

The highlight of the afternoon was the address by Federal Councillor Fritz Honegger, in which he referred to the economic role of the Swiss abroad and to the mutual giving and taking between the emigrants and the homeland.

Dr. Weber closed the official part of the Assembly by thanking all those who had contributed. He announced that the 60th Assembly would take place at Sierre in the Valais at the end of August next year. The theme would be "The Swiss Woman as Representative of Switzerland Abroad."

On the Saturday evening participants sat down to dinner in the spacious "Landhaussaal," which had been transformed from a lecture hall to a dining room for several hundred people.

Sunday brought rain which accounted for some confusion regarding the outing to Schloss Waldegg - built by Schultheiss Besenval in the 17th century - preceeded by an ecumenical service at the Jesuitenkirche.

Lunch was served at Bad Attisholz. Again the organisation was somewhat at fault, and the expected folklore entertainment did not materialise.

But the spirit of companion-

SOLOTHURN, together with Fribourg, joined the Swiss Confederation in 1481. At that time, the Eight Old Cantons were at loggerheads with one another, and danger of civil war threatened.

The Hermit of Ranft, Niklaus von Fluë, came out of his seclusion and preached to the unhappy cantons to re-unite and to strengthen the Union, which had by then grown to ten members. The "Stanser Verkommnis", one of the milestones in the history of Switzerland, formed the basis for unity and was to resist differences in the future.

The state of Solothurn has had a chequered history. Burgundians, Alemans and Raurachians made up the origins of the people of Solothurn. There is no uniform language either - Bernese and the dialects of Aargau and Basel-land influenced it. And yet there is a real and unique Solothurn spirit.

Throughout the canton's

history, political tolerance and a willingness to compromise have been marked characteristics.

When the Hapsburg Duke Leopold I besieged the town in 1318, floods pulled away the bridge occupied by the enemy. The Solothurn people quickly pulled the Hapsburg soldiers out of the wild Aar, and the Duke never forgot this kindness.

Later, in 1831, the patrician regime was ousted and democracy was established. The aristocrats did not retire in anger but accepted defeat gracefully, and a happy mixture of enlightened citizenship and conservative traditions of the Ancien Régime evolved.

That, together with the legendary Gemuetlichkeit and love of life and festivities, makes up the present Solothurn spirit. To this we add political stability and a great sense of family, specially in the country, and we have the Solothurn characteristics.

The history of the canton has been depicted in a chronicle pageant by the Solothurn author Silja Walter, a nun at the Convent of Fahr. On Saturday evening, August 22, the première of the "Jahrhunderttreppe" was performed on the monumental flight of steps outside the Baroque Cathedral of St. Ursen (1763/73). Nearly 500 participants to the Assembly of the Swiss Abroad attended the magnificent spectacle.

The music was by Alban Roetschi, who had the difficult task of illustrating the historic times of Schultheiss Wengi, the imaginary world of his predecessor Schoelli who digs in the grave of history, and the modern days of anti-nuclear demonstrations at Goesgen.

The pageant was a great success and the many professionals and amateurs, schoolchildren and students deserve as much praise as author and composer.

ship and friendship, the essential characteristics of any Assembly of Swiss from abroad, reigned supreme, and it was a happy crowd that dispersed that Sunday evening.

Mariann Meier

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EACH year the Swiss Benevolent Society and the Swiss Churches in London attempt to make the festive season a bit more pleasant for those compatriots who, for many different reasons, are finding life a great struggle.

In order to achieve this goal they depend very greatly on the goodwill and support of the Swiss Colony and they hope that this year again they will be able to bring some pleasure to those in difficulties.

Gifts should reach them by the end of November at the latest. Gifts in kind should be sent to the Swiss Benevolent Society and cheques and money orders can be forwarded to the following addresses:

- Swiss Benevolent Society, 31 Conway Street, Fitzroy Square, London W1P 5HL.
- Father P. Bossard, Swiss Catholic Mission, 48 Great Peter Street, London SW1P 2HA.
- Rev. Urs Steiner, 1 Womersley Road, London N8 9AE.

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