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Kontraktauslandschweizer

EMIGRATION is a problem which occupies Swiss communities abroad as much as their organisation at home, and is gaining more and more in importance.

Swiss emigrate by contract with a firm at home or with an organisation with international undertakings, including humanitarian help and development aid, or for reasons of education and training. There is a new term – "Kontraktauslandschweizer".

If one leaves the country only for a given time the relationship with the local Swiss community abroad as well as with the place of temporary residence is bound to be different and often only superficial. But these new emigrants are of as much importance to Switzerland as the classical type, most of whom left to settle abroad and became valuable representatives of their country.

The emigrants for a limited period return home with much information, know-how and a wider horizon, all of which is very important to Switzerland.

The new structure of Swiss emigration was the main theme of the Assembly of Swiss Residents Abroad in Solothurn in August. The problem was looked at from every angle by representatives of the Organisation of Swiss Residents Abroad, its secretariat and representatives of the Federal Departments

responsible for Swiss emigration and Swiss communities abroad.

Going back in history we were told that the first emigrants were the mercenaries whose wish it was to return with a well-lined purse. Their lives abroad were often adventurous.

Next it was the farmers who left home because the land did not produce enough to feed large families. They often faced long and difficult journeys and spent years of hard work and even deprivations before their efforts were crowned with success. There are still old Swiss farming families in New Zealand and Canada.

Many Swiss citizens emigrated to the USA, and a large number of them were successful. The stories of "rich uncles in America" were no myth, and there are many mansions in Switzerland to prove their success.

Often the wealthy repatriated Swiss founded museums and other institutions such as a home for the blind. They often used their fortunes for the common good.

Many Swiss made a success abroad which also left a signifi-

cant mark at home. In the first half of the last century Basle silk manufacturers established themselves abroad, and later St. Gall linen merchants.

The Wohlen straw hat industry became a name in many countries. In Florence it was established in 1843, and there is still a descendant of the family in the business.

A diary was found with details of an agreement between a Winterthur cotton magnate and his nephew who went to Egypt in 1875. It contained interesting details regarding a certain sum to be put away as savings and going home every four years.

In 1856 the Basle chemical firm of Geigy was established in a small way in Japan, mainly for textile colouring, and seven years later some seven Swiss were employed there. Insurance companies began to have their agencies abroad, such as the Swiss Re-Insurance and Helvetia Fire Insurance.

In 1898, the Swiss Bank Corporation opened its offices in London where Sulzer Brothers and others had already been established for 40 years. Buehler Brothers opened a branch in Paris in 1891, and the Swiss Hotel Association in New York in 1897. The office of the Swiss Federal Railways was opened in London in 1894.

Today there are more than a hundred firms with branches abroad with an estimated total of between 9,000 and 10,000 Swiss employees. In addition, international organisations and development aid projects employ between 12,000 and 13,000 Swiss nationals. The numbers have been going down slightly, often due to the immigration policy of foreign governments.

These figures, of course, do not include diplomatic and consular staff as these have extra-territorial status – that is, they are considered as living in Switzerland.

Sixty per cent of people working in Swiss firms and organisations outside Switzerland were born abroad, and only 40 per

cent are immigrants. The traditional countries for Swiss emigrants are still the USA, Australia, New Zealand and India. Among new territories which have become very popular are the Arab countries, Panama, Hongkong, Japan and Thailand.

A characteristic of these new emigration territories is that there is rarely a Swiss to be found who has been there longer than eight years. Within eight years, in fact, one-fifth to one-sixth of staff are replaced.

These new colonies are different and there is little room for the old type of sentimental patriotic get-togethers. Working luncheons and meetings at sport are more their style. There are some laudable exceptions, however, where a new modus vivendi has been found and the newcomers are integrated into established Swiss communities.

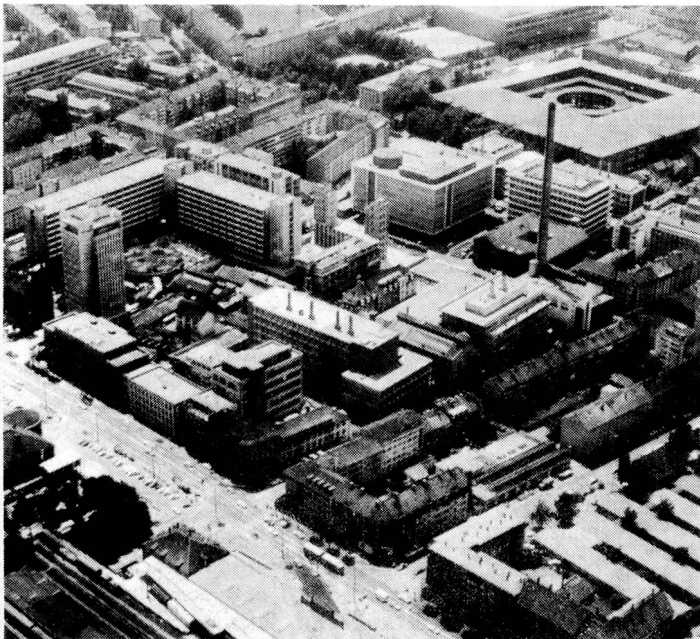
Naturally the needs for information vary. For the short-term Swiss emigrant politics, economics and sports are of more importance than cultural news. His aim is to get back to Switzerland and re-integrate with the least possible delay.

For Switzerland this repatriation often has repercussions. People have to be re-admitted to sickness insurances, children into the educational system, and so on.

That this process should be completed as rapidly as possible is in the interest of the economy, quite apart from any moral duty that the State has towards repatriates. Most of them remained in the AHV (old-age and invalidity insurance), for this is vital in order not to lose any of the benefits later.

Incidentally, it has recently become known that wives of husbands who are compulsorily insured in the AHV in Switzerland while working abroad for their Swiss firms, are not covered unless they were insured separately before the age of 50.

At the meeting in Solothurn the question of working permits abroad was among the points considered. It was said that



Ciba-Geigy, now one of the world's leading multinationals, has played a leading part in encouraging Swiss specialists to work overseas. Geigy started it all by opening in Japan in 1856.

