

# The "Parliament of the Swiss abroad" in session

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# The Swiss Observer

FOUNDED IN 1919 BY PAUL F. BOEHRINGER.

## The Official Organ of the Swiss Colony in Great Britain

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"FIFTH SWITZERLAND"



## THE "PARLIAMENT OF THE SWISS ABROAD" IN SESSION

LUGANO, 25th AUGUST 1967

Twice a year, the Commission of the Swiss Abroad meet to discuss problems affecting the Swiss communities outside Switzerland. Created by the Nouvelle Société Helvétique, the Commission and the Secretariat in Berne are the two most important bodies directly concerned with the well-being of compatriots living outside Swiss boundaries. In 51 years, the *Auslandschweizerwerk* has earned the thanks of the Swiss abroad and the respect of the authorities at home.

The Commission consists of 21 inland members, 48 elected members and deputies and 13 co-opted members from outside Switzerland. The value of this "Parliament" of the Swiss Abroad lies above all in the fact that it is a non-governmental organisation. The more interest we Swiss abroad take in its activities, the more support we give it, the more secure and independent it will remain. Its achievements are well known; we should just like to recall the success in getting the military exemption levy partly abolished for Swiss citizens abroad, in cancelling the obligation of procuring a permit to purchase property in Switzerland and, only last autumn, in getting an Article expressly concerning the *Auslandschweizer* anchored in the Swiss Constitution.

One of the most important functions of the Organisation is to advise the authorities on matters directly affecting the Swiss abroad. At present, this concerns the new *Règlement Consulaire* drafted by the federal authorities and submitted to the Commission for consideration.

At the meeting in Lugano, the delegates discussed the relevant articles, and there was a lively debate. The *Règlement* refers to the competence of Swiss diplomatic missions and consular posts, their relations both with the federal authorities and the countries to which they are accredited. It defines their jurisdiction, their part in looking after Swiss concerns and protection of foreign interests. It covers registration of Swiss nationals, Swiss nationality and marriage contracts, confirmation of signatures, legalisation of documents, attestations, certificates and archives. But it was the articles concerning the relation of Embassies and Consulates with the Colonies, which was of special interest to the Commission, a possible help to existing

Colony newspapers and periodicals in communities where Embassy or Consulates do not send out bulletins. The old problem of reaching the "isolated" Swiss was brought up, and ways and means were suggested for submission to the Department concerned, whose representatives Minister F. Bieri (Chief of Department for Administrative Concerns) and Monsieur M. Jaccard (Chief of Section for Matters concerning the Swiss Abroad), were present. Their comments were non-committal, especially to the question of making addresses known to Swiss institutions and periodicals; great circumspection had to be used in this matter.

Another point which caused some discussion was what was considered "failing in one's duties as a Swiss citizen". Who was to judge? Clarification was required. No discussion ensued with regard to assistance to private Swiss citizens deprived of their liberty, nor concerning dual nationals or letters of protection, State functions, and the various other duties assigned to an Embassy or Consulate. Under registration, the difficulty was pointed out of making all Swiss, especially the young ones, register on arrival in a foreign country. This instruction clearly set out in the passport is, unfortunately, not adhered to sufficiently. Some questions were asked with regard to deposits, the safe keeping of wills and other relevant matters.

Suggestions and comments are now being sent to the Federal Political Department, so that they can be considered when the new *Règlement* is issued. It will replace the one of 1923; since then, two new international conventions have necessitated a revision. The new one will contain only 35 articles as compared to 104 previously.

The delegates — a total of well over 40 members and deputies (Great Britain being represented by Mrs. Mariann Meier (South) and Dr. H. R. Bolliger (North)) — then discussed matters concerning the expansion of the organisation as a whole. More Swiss societies, especially farther afield outside Europe, should be encouraged to join the *Auslandschweizerorganisation* and to organise themselves in regional groups with direct representation on the Commission.

Another matter of importance brought up was the organisation of the Secretariat in Berne. This has for

some time been without a director, which has been found little satisfactory, especially by some of the more active communities abroad, whilst fully appreciating the valuable work done by the staff. The Commission was informed that a suitable candidate was on the point of being engaged. Members left the appointment in the hands of the Executive Committee of the Commission, trusting that the right choice would be made, which would relieve the President of some of the work.

The Solidarity Fund and its desirable and much-needed expansion were debated. More will be said about it in future issues of the "Swiss Observer". In order to remain independent, it needs more members to spread the risks more evenly.

The spring meeting of the Commission was fixed for 9th March in Berne. The next Assembly of the Swiss Abroad should take place in either Schaffhausen or Vevey/Montreux at the end of August 1968. The theme suggested is "The Young Swiss Abroad and their Relationship with Switzerland". The Youth Service has done some excellent work, especially with their summer and winter camps, and it is felt that the young Swiss have a valuable contribution to make.

Two pleas voiced at the end of the meeting were for more consideration to be given to the Italian language (by a French-speaking member) and for records of Swiss church bells and of the National Anthem, both to be available for First of August Celebrations.

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## FEDERAL NEWS

### China protests

On 5th August, the Embassy of the People's Republic of China protested to the Federal Council with unusual vehemence. The subject was the Tibetans living in Switzerland, "rebellious bandits" and "members of the former exploiter class". The protest note demanded a change of attitude and to "stop serving American and British Imperial and Indian reactionaries".

The Federal Political Department rejected the protest note whose tone and contents were unacceptable. There was considerable objection to the protest in the Press, and the Federal Council, too, approved the attitude of the Department. It then transpired that a first note of protest had already been received on 30th June but had been kept secret.

The "Schweizerische Tibethilfe" is based on private initiative, and 90% of its funds are used to help Tibetan refugees in Asiatic countries, over 1 million francs in 1965. The whole scheme has an entirely private character and is very much according to Swiss tradition to help wherever there is suffering, regardless of race, political opinions or religion. There is a Tibet Institute at Rikon (Toesstal), and this organisation, too, declared its opposition to China's interference. They say that the deliberate effort by the Chinese to destroy a great culture is going on, and that a great deal more assistance is needed by the unfortunate victims. In Asia alone, there are some 80,000 refugees. The Indian Government has given valuable help, also international organisations like the Red Cross, but there are still some 20,000 refugees in camps. The Swiss organisation was founded in 1960, and amongst its activities is the construction of children's homes in Western India and trying to bring together separated families. North of New Delhi, a village and artisan centre was built for 500 refugees, and two projects under way are for a poultry farm and a cloth factory.

In Switzerland there are at present 377 Tibetan Red Cross refugees, living in twelve different centres, a number of children at the Pestalozzi Village at Trogen and a good few adopted by Swiss families — a total of about 570.

In July, five Tibetan Lamas arrived in Switzerland, especially chosen by the Dalai Lama to look after the spiritual welfare of their countrymen. They will teach the Tibetan language at the Tibet Institute at Rikon and watch that Tibetan culture and religion will be kept up.

Later in August, the Chinese protested once more and called Switzerland a "centre of Anti-Chinese activities". That note was handed to the Swiss Ambassador Dr. Rossetti in Peking. Federal Councillor Spuehler said that the Swiss Government had "had enough" and that no more notice would be taken of any further protests which would be treated with the contempt they deserved. The Swiss Confederation want to entertain normal relations with China but are not prepared to discuss the affairs of a private organisation.

### Federal Councillors travel far

Federal Councillor Spuehler in the Far East, Federal Councillor Gnaegi in Moscow, Monsieur Spuehler in Canada and U.S.A., Monsieur Schaffner in Paris and Stockholm . . . There has been some protest about such travelling, although the advantages are recognised, especially a certain relief for Swiss diplomatic missions. The main criticism concerns the cost of so many journeys at a time when the federal budget is not exactly favourable.

But there is no doubt as to the value of such high representation. Federal Councillor Spuehler officially represented Switzerland at the Centenary Celebration of Canada, and he was present at the official Swiss Day at the World Exhibition. The Swiss delegation consisted of a number of personalities deliberately chosen by the Federal Council to represent the four languages and cultures of Switzerland. He also attended the Swiss National Day Celebration in Washington where he had talks with Secretary of State Rusk. On his return to Switzerland, he said that he and his delegation had been able to help the Swiss *présence*, that Swiss capital would be welcome in Canada, that the example of Switzerland's four languages and cultures living peacefully together was making a deep impression in Quebec, and that Switzerland's participation at the World Exhibition was of considerable value. He also stated that Switzerland's neutrality was well understood in Washington, and that her services, especially in Cuba, were much appreciated. The question of calling up Swiss residents in U.S.A. was also discussed, and assurances given that such call ups would be deferred as long as possible, and that a new *visum* type was being considered for young Swiss students. Finally, the question of import duty on watches: The efforts at Congress level to reintroduce the escape clause regulations are of greatest importance to Switzerland. President Johnson had abolished the clause as from 1st January last, with the result that duty sank from 65 to 40%. This had been mainly thanks to determined action by Swiss representatives in U.S.A. and the Kennedy Round.

On 17th August, a Swissair "Caravelle" left Zurich on its first inaugural flight Zurich-Moscow-Zurich. The official delegation of 29 people included Federal Councillor Gnaegi, Head of the Department of Transport and Communication. It was stressed that it was not an official State Visit but a good-will tour. A return visit of similar kind took place to Switzerland on 27th August. The Russian delegation of 30 people was received by the