

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: - (1965)

Heft: 1480

Artikel: The image of Switzerland in the world

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-692829>

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The Swiss Observer

FOUNDED IN 1919 BY PAUL F. BOEHRINGER.

The Official Organ of the Swiss Colony in Great Britain

Advisory Council: R. J. KELLER (Chairman), GOTTFRIED KELLER (Vice-Chairman), DR. E. M. BIRCHER, O. F. BOEHRINGER, J. EUSEBIO, A. KUNZ, A. STAUFFER, G. E. SUTER.

EDITED BY MRS. MARIANN MEIER WITH THE CO-OPERATION OF MEMBERS OF THE SWISS COLONY IN GREAT BRITAIN

Telephone: CLERKENWELL 2321/2.

Published Twice Monthly at 23, LEONARD STREET, E.C.2.

Telegrams: FREPRINCO, LONDON.

Vol. 51 No. 1480

FRIDAY, 25th JUNE 1965

THE IMAGE OF SWITZERLAND IN THE WORLD

by

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In a few months, the Assembly of the Swiss Abroad will take place in Solothurn. Its theme will be a most diverse and far-reaching one. It could be useful to consider its significance — may the following thoughts induce contemplation.

The Image of Switzerland in the world: (*The term "Präsenz" or "Présence" is a difficult one to translate adequately into English. For want of a better one, the word "image" has been chosen.*) First and foremost this is purely an idea of a condition. Several questions immediately rise to the surface, mostly concerned with the practical: Is there actually such a thing as an Image of Switzerland? To what extent and in what manner has it been realised? We shall leave these questions aside for the moment in order to describe the condition as such: Visualising our image in the world means in the first place that our country is personally represented in other countries by fellow-citizens of ours, that Switzerland's cultural and economic achievements are shown there, that her characteristics and her importance are known to the nationals of the foreign state.

We talk of representation in other states, not in other parts of the world or with other peoples. We prefer the political, rather than the geographical or ethnological aspect — our world is in the first place a political world.

There is no better illustration of this fact than the race which is going on in space.

As the subjects of this political world are in the first place states, our Image has to be realised within them. Their existence is taken for granted, at the same time also that of Switzerland as an independent State.

Thus the idea of the Swiss Image in the world comprises the tacit avowal of her value as an independent Small State.

And for this reason, the theme of the next Assembly in Solothurn is a highly political theme.

We said at the beginning that the Image of Switzerland is in the first place purely the conception of a condition. This is, however, always closely tied with the wish to realize the Swiss Image ever better. We only speak of it when it is considered insufficient. By whom? On the whole, we inside Switzerland have rarely any compelling reasons for such feelings. The Swiss abroad are our indispensable watchmen in this matter. It is they who, in the course of their daily lives outside our frontiers, sense even negligible changes of currents and hardly visible whirlpools which, if ignored, could mean danger. And now it is the Swiss abroad who have sounded the alarm.

Shall we give this alarm our attention at all? Is the Image of Switzerland in the world a necessity? To this, instead of an answer, two short hints.

Even a superficial look at the political events of our time makes us realise that to be "present" abroad is of vital interest to our country. If the Great of this world are not one fine day to deny our rightful existence, they must be convinced of our importance and conversant with the motives of our actions. This demands that they know and understand us at all. If we focus on Europe in particular, it becomes evident in the light of undeniable tendencies towards closer economic and political co-operation that we need a large number of eloquent advocates of our peculiarity. In addition, a look at our foreign trade statistics clearly shows the extent of our dependence on exports to all those who grasp economic relations more easily than political ones.

All over the country we already find many compatriots who look up when they hear the words "The Image of Switzerland". This number grows daily. But how can we convince those who still doubt that the Swiss abroad are justified in sounding the alarm? The opinion poll amongst hundreds of Swiss in foreign lands on the Image of Switzerland in the world, undertaken by the Secretariat of the Swiss Abroad, will give us many valuable hints and facts when we discuss the problem at home. Facts have the advantage of speaking a generally more intelligible language.

The significance of the Assembly in Solothurn will not least lie in the fact that it will stimulate effectively a public discussion of vital questions for our country, a discussion which must no longer be put off. All those who give their opinion in the poll and take part actively in the next Assembly, will therefore render a highly welcome service to our country.

* * *

To this should be added a few remarks by the new Director of the Secretariat for the Swiss Abroad, Mr. Edmond Mueller, who, also in the "Echo", reminded us that in 1919, when the Secretariat was founded, Switzerland's population numbered four million and the Swiss abroad 400,000. In 1965, with nearly six million inhabitants at home, only 270,000 Swiss live abroad. The earth's population has doubled, but Swiss representation abroad has been reduced to less than a quarter in half a century. These figures show the necessity of improving our "presence" in the world and the Swiss image abroad.

(By courtesy of "Echo", periodical of the Swiss abroad.)