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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), G. BODMER (Press Attaché Swiss Embassy), O. F. BOEHRINGER, J. EUSEBIO, A. KUNZ, C. NATER, R. M. SUESS, G. E. SUTER.

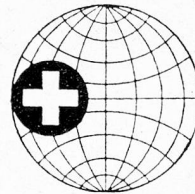
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“FIFTH SWITZERLAND”



TACKLE AND TALK — TITHES AND TIME

The message for 1968 on “Freedom and Co-responsibility”, which appeared in our double Christmas number ended with a statement that there was not one of us who had not been given tackle or talk, tithes or time to be used in full co-responsibility, and that 1968 would give us a new chance. It is astonishing how many people take new year’s resolutions only to drop them again, some sooner, some later. A number of the readers resolved to join the Solidarity Fund, and it is gratifying that quite a few have actually put their good intentions into deeds. The appeal which was made by the Swiss Ambassador has brought forth over 100 new members, which may be considered very fair. But there are still large groups of compatriots who, with very little effort, could join. Perhaps some of the members themselves could do a bit more canvassing and use their persuasive talk on fellow countrymen and women to convince them of the treble purpose of membership: to save, to insure against loss of means of livelihood and above all, to show a sense of solidarity with Swiss in other countries and continents where political unrest, strife and war have ruined flourishing careers. The Fund’s records contain vivid pictures of cases in which unfortunate members were hit and, thanks to the Fund, were able to start again with the compensatory sum. Over three million Swiss francs have been paid out already to well over 300 Swiss. In the near future, a further reminder will be sent out by the Embassy, and yet another chance will be given to many whose economic circumstances could well stand a savings deposit to the Fund — it need not be as much as a tithe.

Much has been written in the columns of the “Swiss Observer”, about the activities of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad in Berne. If we recall but briefly what their aims and objects are, we may reach a few new readers who have not yet been briefed. The New Helvetic Society in Switzerland created this special organisation for the benefit of the confederates living outside Switzerland in 1916. It was the London Group of the N.S.H., the first member group abroad, which gave the impetus to the creation of the ASO. It runs the Secretariat at 26, Alpenstrasse in Berne, which acts as a clearing house. The most important organ is the Commission of the Swiss Abroad, their own

“Parliament” on which Swiss Colonies have their specially appointed representatives. In Great Britain, it is the Federation of Swiss Societies which elect two delegates and two proxies. Twice a year they represent the community in the U.K. at the Commission meetings in Switzerland. That “Parliament” has developed into a more and more important body, and they have been responsible for getting legislation passed and regulations altered, all in the interest of the Swiss abroad. Modifying the military exemption tax, abolishing (for Swiss abroad) the special permit needed to buy property in Switzerland, are but two examples. The Constitutional Article for the Swiss Abroad, which was put on the statute book by the Swiss electorate in October 1966, was the crowning of many years of hard work.

The Commission consists of 80 members and deputies and is presided over by Councillor of States Louis Guisan. The Executive consists of mainly *Inlandschweizer* who deal with urgent business between meetings. Their next full meeting will be held on 9th March when one of the tasks will be to pass the annual report compiled by the various departments of the Secretariat. Another item on the agenda is the preparation of the Assembly of the Swiss Abroad in summer. It will be held in Schaffhausen from 23rd to 25th August. The theme has already been announced “*The relationship of the young Swiss abroad to Switzerland*”. What can their contribution be towards the strengthening the image of their country of origin in their parents’ country of adoption? What criticism have they to voice with regard to their elders’ representation? What suggestions can they make? They, too, are called upon to give of their time and tackle. Remember once again Johannes von Mueller’s words “Once the time has passed when our fathers might possibly have founded a greater republic, nobody will hinder you to have the best”.

At the annual gathering of the Swiss abroad, the Great Britain contingent is usually on a very modest scale. We should like to point out that *everybody* is welcome, and there is plenty to do apart from attending meetings. The plenary sessions are of interest to all and sundry, and social events and a family outing form part of the whole assembly week-end

The financial means available to the Secretariat of the Swiss Abroad come mainly from three sources. The *Bundesfeierspende* is a large sum apportioned to organisations serving the Swiss abroad every 6 or 7 years from the traditional annual collection on the Swiss National Day. The "Foundation for the Swiss Abroad" is in charge of this fund. The second source is an annual subsidy from the Confederation. The third and very important source consists of donations from friends and subscribers. The "Friends", mainly individuals, pay an annual minimum of 10 francs, whilst the "Subscribers", mostly firms and companies, pay larger sums, possibly not every year.

No appeal for funds has been made for a considerable time. But unless some effort is being made, the ever-increasing work will have to suffer. And for this reason, the members of the Commission have been asked for their support. No general appeal has been launched. But as the delegate for Great Britain — South, the writer feels that this request should be published. Perhaps this is our chance to contribute something positive to show our willingness to share the responsibility. And money is not necessarily what is needed from this end — we all have friends and relations, and/or business connections in Switzerland, and all we have to spend is time and effort to convince *them* of the value of the organisation. If you feel that you don't know enough to persuade them, send names and addresses to the "Swiss Observer", and the Editor who is one of your delegates, will be only too pleased to pass them on. But please, add your name and address for reference.

It is so easy to sit back and pretend lack of time, money and abilities. But we have all been given some tool to tackle a job which needs doing, or the gift of the gab to convince others or a few extra shillings, or time, or may be even more than just one of these gifts. Perhaps 1968 is different after all, and the New Year resolutions are not going to be shelved.

MM

NEW HEADS OF DEPARTMENTS IN THE CONFEDERATION

At the beginning of the year, the following communiqué was issued: "The Federal Council has decided on the following distribution of Departments as per 1st July: Federal Councillor Bonvin will take over the Department of Communications and Energy. Federal Councillor Gnaegi takes over the Military Department. Federal Councillor Celio will become head of the Department of Finance and Customs. The remaining Departments will stay under their present direction. The moment of the change-over has been fixed for 1st July, because the Federal Councillors who change their Departments, have important business pending which they have to complete by the end of the June Session, above all the preparatory work and directives for the Governmental Report."

TWO IMPORTANT NEW YEAR MESSAGES

On 27th December, the traditional New Year Message by the President of the International Red Cross Committee in Geneva was published. In it, Mr. Samuel A. Gonard said that the experiences made during the past year had again shown that the activities of the Red Cross were becoming more and more urgent. In 1967, the Red Cross had to fulfil big tasks and often encountered almost unsurmountable difficulties. Work was carried out above all in Vietnam, in the Near East, Yemen, Nigeria, Greece and the Congo. Nevertheless, the Red Cross was able again and again to help many needy people in countries hit by unrest and war.

On 1st January, Swiss radio and television broadcast the traditional New Year Message by the new President of the Confederation, Federal Councillor Spuehler. He wished his speech to be an address in the real sense of the word, a beginning of a conversation from which reciprocal understanding should result, if not unanimity. In the exchange of statement and reply, which takes place between People, Parliament and Government, were contained the rules governing the daily development of Swiss democracy. Ultimately, it would depend on the honesty and resoluteness of this exchange whether the State's actions were right. The President said that the Federal Council did not fear this exchange, and he himself would wish to have all those included who disagreed, yet who in the end, may have the same fundamental attitude. We should be careful, though, not to denounce too quickly.

Federal Councillor Spuehler referred to the past year which had been marked by wars and crises. One began the new year without any real reason for hope. In the centre of international problems was still that of peace, a problem for generations. The Federal Council, therefore, full of deep anxiety, agreed with conviction to the Pope's request to have the First of January as the Day of Peace.

Finally, the speaker put the question concerning the topicality of our thoughts and actions and asked all citizens to examine the big problems facing Switzerland in that light. The Federal Council, on their side, would endeavour to do what was right and possible, but to let what was not right fall victim to criticism. He welcomed the Press, inasmuch as it primarily served the people and not its owners to act with dignity as mediator between Government and People.

[A.T.S.]

CO-OPERATION BETWEEN LAUSANNE AND GENEVA UNIVERSITIES

The new Geneva Observatory, which also includes the observation department of the Institute of Astronomy at Lausanne University, was recently inaugurated. The purpose of this new observatory is to assist in the training of students, to enable some of them to become research workers and above all to facilitate the development of research on the ground and in space. It is situated in a remote spot away from the main traffic routes — as is indispensable for the correct functioning of precision instruments — on the boundaries between the Cantons of Geneva and Vaud, so that the dome housing a telescope belonging to the University of Lausanne is situated on the territory of Vaud. This is an excellent example of co-operation, in the fields of culture and research, between the universities of two neighbouring regions.

[O.S.E.C.]