

# Switzerland in the UK

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# Switzerland in the UK

## BBC snub to Ambassador over his 'Nazi gold' protest

The BBC has completely ignored a formal protest made by Swiss Ambassador François Nordmann about a TV programme severely criticising the role of Switzerland during the Second World War.

No reply had been received at the time of going to press – nearly three months after the letter had been sent. *This is what the Ambassador told the BBC's director general, John Birt.*

*Dear Mr Birt*

The broadcast about Switzerland during the War demonstrated a level of bias and aggressiveness against my country which borders on intellectual dishonesty.

The one-sided way in which witnesses' accounts, deeply moving in themselves, were treated and presented in support of a preconceived thesis is a travesty of history and of the reality of the situation in my country.

Permanent and armed neutrality, which governed all Switzerland's actions, is a status involving clear rights and obligations which are enshrined in international law in the Hague Convention of 1907.

From the very outset your report makes this out to be a purely moral issue: "between good and evil, Switzerland chose to remain neutral," states Israel Singer.

In fact the choice was between good – to remain sheltered from the conflict, to survive within its frontiers – and evil – to be invaded, occupied and to enter the War.

The picture which you paint of the Swiss army is nothing but a caricature (the scene with the soldier leaving his farm and the group entering the "national redoubt").

In fact 800,000 men were ready to conduct partisan warfare if Switzerland had been invaded in spite of everything; the Gotthard tunnel would have been blown up.

Switzerland's will to fight – like that of the Finns,

according to a German report – is a key factor which enabled Switzerland to stay out of the War.

You quote Pilet Golaz and the debate on "adaptation". But you do not mention the spirit of resistance embodied by General Guisan, who is not even cited in the programme – and an architect of which was one of the witnesses you present virtually anonymously, although he subsequently played a leading role in the international stage.

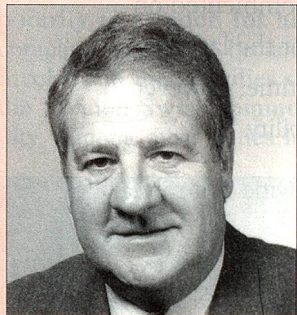
You pass over Switzerland's commercial and eco-

organising the international gold market on its territory, Switzerland was also responding to international demand for its currency – particularly from the Allies.

The question of whether the Swiss National Bank should have been satisfied with Nazi assurances in this respect is one of the issues to be examined by the nine independent experts of the Commission chaired by Professor Bergier.

But the report published by the American Presidential Task Force, which asserts

### Queen awards hon. CBE to Swiss banker



The Queen has awarded an Honorary CBE to Rüdi Mueller, chairman of the UBS in Britain. The citation states it is "in respect of his outstanding contribution to the London financial market."

Mr Mueller, from St Gall, said the award reflected the commitment and determination of all those at the Union Bank of Switzerland who had done so much to take the bank to where it was today.

A former director of the London Stock Exchange, Mr Mueller is the first non-British citizen to become a director of the Royal Opera House.

### Now accusers turn on the UK

The Holocaust controversy spotlight suddenly turned from Switzerland to the UK last month when British banks were accused of confiscating an estimated £700 million belonging to Jews persecuted by the Nazis during World War II. The charges, made by the Holocaust Educational Trust, called on the British government and banks to publish lists of all victims' accounts and to return the money, with interest, to the heirs.

A joint statement from the Foreign Office and the Department of Trade and Industry said the claims were being taken 'very seriously'.

conomic relations with the Allies, which had a strategic value, thus presenting only one side of the coin.

Switzerland, landlocked and enclosed within its valleys, mountains and central plateau, was at the mercy of the Third Reich with respect to its supplies which were transported from the port of Genoa.

Strict rationing was imposed; conversely, you present the image of a land of plenty.

The gold reserves which Switzerland held in the United States were confiscated from summer 1941. By

that the gold taken from concentration camp victims was delivered to neutral countries, explicitly states that the latter could not have known this.

Your appalling montage which tends to lend substance to the argument that Switzerland profited as a result of trade in gold fillings from teeth is thus a gratuitous, malevolent and absolutely false accusation.

You do not quote a single figure in support of your assertions that Switzerland

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## Tribute to 'a staunch friend'

Following the election of Bernie Simon as honorary vice-president of FOSSUK at the recent annual general meeting, Mariann Meier paid this tribute to her colleague

I suppose I have known Bernie Simon longer than anyone here, and have definitely worked with him more years than anyone present.

So I can vouch for his tremendous commitment, not only to the Manchester Swiss Club he joined in 1957, having come to Britain the first time in 1954.

He has been one of the pillars of that club and held various offices, not least that of president. He was greatly involved in the 700th anniversary celebrations in 1991, and has also written the club's history, published in the Swiss Review a couple of years ago. Even today he represents the Manchester Relief Society.

In 1973 he moved temporarily to London for his company, Ciba, and became involved in the activities of the London Swiss community. Among other duties he

became a Council member of the New Helvetic Society.

In 1974, as successor to Dr Egli, he was elected president of FOSSUK, and for 10 years he put in a great deal of hard work.

With his customary energy, determination and thoroughness he devoted himself to the development of FOSSUK and its member societies.

In 1979/80 FOSSUK became the proprietor of the Swiss Observer, founded in 1919, which for a time incorporated the Review. Bernie spent a great deal of time and effort solving the difficulties which had arisen with Berne, but our efforts were of no avail, and it closed down in 1984.

From 1982 up to this spring he was a delegate to the Commission, now the Council, of the Swiss Abroad, in Berne. It was dur-



Mariann Meier and Bernie Simon at the FOSSUK agm

ing the last two of my own 22 years as delegate for GB South that we worked together, and I could witness his ability, his intelligent way of deliberating in both German and French, his courage and wise counsel as representative of our community.

Apart from our hon. vice-

president, Hans Egli, there are few of our compatriots alive who have given so much of their time and effort as Bernie Simon.

Bernie, we admire your commitment, we love your Basle wit and outspoken frankness – which some people may call rudeness! – and we value you as a staunch friend.

## Swiss passport promise for children of Swiss mothers

Some far-reaching changes in the Law on Citizenship, particularly applicable to Swiss living abroad, were described by Minister Thomas Füglistner, head of the Service of the Swiss Abroad, who was guest speaker at the agm.

He said the most important of the proposed amendments to the law was the right of children born to a Swiss mother before July 1, 1985, but now living abroad, to apply for citizenship.

What the minister called "simplified citizenship" would be available if the applicant could demonstrate close ties with Switzerland – such as

knowledge of one of the national languages, regular visits to Switzerland, close contacts with Swiss citizens or active participation in a Swiss society. Age would not be a barrier.

However it would still be required that one parent had kept their Swiss citizenship or had recovered it.

● The meeting agreed to support a resolution adopted by the Council of the Swiss Abroad opposing modification to the AHV/IV proposed by the Federal Department for Social Insurance which would be detrimental to the interests of Swiss living abroad.



Dr Rudolf Wyder, Minister Thomas Füglistner and Ambassador François Nordmann seen together on the FOSSUK platform

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## Letters to the Editor

### Changes at the Swiss Centre

It has greatly surprised me that no mention has been made in the last two issues of the Swiss Review of the closure of the Mövenpick restaurant at the Swiss Centre in London's Leicester Square earlier this year.

Just days before its closure in February two members of its staff told me that it was due to impending heavy rental increases and that the whole Swiss Centre, including Swissair and the Swiss Tourist Office, may be closed as well.

I would expect that many readers of your excellent Swiss Review would be very interested to know details of the circumstances of closing this popular meeting place for the Swiss in London and would wish to know whether the above offices have been closed down as well and, if so, where are they relocated. – **Werner Aeschlimann, Warlingham, Surrey.**

● Urs Eberhard, director of Switzerland Tourism, replies: *75.5 % of the shares of Swiss Centre Ltd were sold in April 1995 to the English company British Land. Switzerland Tourism remained the only Swiss shareholder with a minority share of 24.5 %.*

*An existing Swissness Deed guarantees the name "Swiss Centre", the Swiss flags on*

*and around the building and other Swiss attributes such as the Glockenspiel and the Wappenbaum.*

*The lease of Mövenpick expired at the end of 1996. The increased rental prices on Leicester Square and a very strong bidder for the space made it impossible for Mövenpick to remain in the Swiss Centre.*

*There still is a Mövenpick Marché Restaurant at London Victoria which serves a wide range of Swiss dishes and drinks. It is a very lively place and certainly worth a visit.*

*All the other Swiss tenants*

### 1st of August in London

Eight hundred guests attended the 1st of August celebration in Golders Green, London, on July 19 – making it the largest national day get-together in the UK.

Said committee president Chris Dyke: "Plenty of good food and good wine, coupled with a great band, led to at least 100 people still madly dancing at midnight."

"Perhaps the presence of nearly 150 children at such an event is a sign that interest in Switzerland and its traditions is once again on the increase – let's hope so!"

*such as Swissair, Bally, Watches of Switzerland and Switzerland Tourism still give the Swiss Centre the "Swiss Look".*

*Only the restaurant will be completely different but it will attract a huge amount of new customers and will certainly help to keep the Swiss Centre on the list of top attractions in London.*

### Quilting query

I am trying to find information on Swiss quilting styles, patterns and techniques. I am interested in discovering, particularly, regional variations and, where possible, historical connections, as well as modern styles.

Do any of your readers quilt in traditional Swiss styles?

Are any books available – I can find none here in London. The nearest is a recent publication on French Provençal quilting which is, you will agree, little relevant to Switzerland.

If any of your readers can help and would like to write to me I will be most grateful.

– **Carmen Keller-Lange, 217 Beaconsfield Road, Enfield, Middlesex EN3 6AY.**

● *We suggest you contact Rudolf Brun-Brücke at the Genossenschaft Schweizer Heimatwerk (Centre Suisse de l'Artisanat), Heimethuus, 8023 Zürich.*

## 20 from UK at Congress of Swiss Abroad

More than 600 participants, included about 20 from the UK, met in Lugano at the end of August for the 75th Congress of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad. UK delegates were Rosemarie Breitenstein, Ursula Ditchburn, Margrit Lyster, Lisa Hall and Joe Broggin, who compiled this report:

This year's main topic was Switzerland's cultural presence abroad.

Speakers pointed out that decades of uphill struggle in projecting the undoubted achievements of Swiss regional culture abroad are not yet over.

Targeted strategies in correcting deep rooted and historically ill founded stereotypes about the Swiss among the less informed world media are disproportionate to the considerable efforts so far undertaken by the cantons and the government.

Cultural highlights of the congress included a concert by the Orchestra della Svizzera Italiana and an art exhibition of works by Swiss artists living abroad.

UK delegate Dr Ursula Ditchburn was congratulated for initiating and co-staging this important exhibition.

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## The full text of the Ambassador's letter to the BBC

From Page 1

enriched itself thanks to the War.

The whole programme is very short on facts. GNP capita actually dropped, declining from 1772 to 1636 Sfr from 1939 to 1946.

Admittedly Switzerland emerged from the conflict with her economic capacity intact, a convertible currency and her population unharmed. But at no point did you speak of Switzerland's contribution to the reconstruction effort in Europe by means of the Swiss donation – a collection of private and public funds intended for humanitarian aid, from 1944 to 1948, amounting to 200 million francs or 1.5% of GNP at that time.

Some black spots remain: the exportation of arms and industrial products to Germany. Irrespective of economic factors which have always made Germany the principal client nation of Switzerland, industrial deliveries in wartime were the condition sine qua non for the country's survival – that is, the supply of coal and foodstuffs.

Switzerland's part in the German war effort was less than one per cent of the production at Germany's disposal. Yet an occupied Switzerland would have contributed much more to the Nazi war machine. This was not in the interests of the Allies, as stated in Note No.

11 of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office Archives published in 1996.

The issue of the refugees is unquestionably the most painful. The President of the Confederation presented Switzerland's official apologies on this subject in 1995.

You carefully avoid mentioning this. Neither do you say that Switzerland took in 235,000 refugees (including 30,000 Jews), both civilians and soldiers, from 1943.

You do not mention the cases in which individuals contributed, clandestinely, to saving their country's honour, apart from Grüniger whose name has been cleared. Karl Lutz does not figure in your report – no more than Gertrud Kurz, the mother of the refugees.

Another sensitive chapter is the restitution of the Jewish assets deposited in Swiss banks. You present the assertion of your witnesses as established facts and cast discredit on the legal explanations of your banking expert.

You fail to mention the efforts undertaken in 1962 and the international audit currently in progress under the aegis of the committee chaired by Mr Paul Volcker.

Crimes were committed; errors have been acknowl-

edged. Errors of judgement, with grave consequences, are to be deplored. Individuals and societies indulged in dubious activities, frequently motivated by profit and selfishness. As in every society, as in every war.

**'An outrageous scenario, disseminating hatred and casting discredit on a whole country'**

To state from that fact that the Swiss people knowingly exploited the misfortune of the Jews in Eastern Europe in order to enrich themselves after turning them back is defamatory.

Nothing permits the assertion that a deliberate plan existed in this respect, implicating all of the authorities and the Swiss population. In fact, by your constant juxtaposition of images you suggest that Switzerland was, as such, an accomplice of the Nazis.

You show Berne, or an Alpine landscape, followed by images of Berlin, Vienna or Munich covered in Nazi flags and banners. How many television viewers know that these shots have nothing to do with Switzerland? The funeral of Gusloff is presented as if it took place in Davos.

The existence of a Nazi Party in Switzerland is not contested, but that it was tiny, that some of its members were prosecuted and executed, and that the Left acted

as a counterweight – of all this, not a word in your treatise.

Finally, I categorically reject the allegations which you make relating to the transit of deported Italian Jews via the Gotthard and Zurich. The historian Raul Hilberg firmly excludes this in his History of the Destruction of the Jews.

The itineraries of all the trains counted, with the exception of three, have been retraced. Swiss territory was not used. It is highly unlikely that a stop at Zurich station could have taken place.

You give undue weight to a single and uncorroborated witness statement; there also the intention to cause harm is evident. Your short disclaimer will not do.

On a sensitive subject, the BBC would have had the opportunity to make a contribution in keeping with its reputation for objectivity and intelligent reporting.

It chose to present an outrageous scenario, disseminating hatred and casting discredit on a whole country by exploiting a register of emotions, insinuations and calumnies, interspersed with witness accounts, which Goebbels would not have disowned.

*Yours sincerely*

François Nordmann

## 'You are all our ambassadors': Dr Wyder

The role of Swiss club members as unofficial ambassadors for their country was stressed by Dr Rudolf Wyder, director of the Secretariat of the Swiss Abroad, at the agm of FOSSUK held in London in June.

"You represent Switzerland in your daily life," he said. "That has never been more important than it is at present. One of the reasons the Swiss government does so much to keep you

informed, through the Swiss Review and other means, is so that you can explain the Swiss position to people in your country."

Minister Thomas Füglistler, head of the Service of the Swiss Abroad, described the various measures the Swiss government and banks were now taking "to shed the light of truth and render justice".

He told the meeting: "The task of re-appraising our own history during the Second

World War is difficult, indeed. But there can be no doubt that we are tackling this problem with the utmost seriousness.

"Our country has instituted, and is instituting, measures to create clarity and justice which are unique on the international scene.

"We therefore expect that this comprehensive process which we have initiated be acknowledged and recognised."

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## Swiss artist dies in Devon

Swiss artist Simon Juon, who made his home in Britain 46 years ago, has died after a short illness.

His artistic style, characterised by broad spontaneous brush work, embraced landscape, portrait and still life.

Simon Juon was born in Russia in 1918 of a Swiss father and Russian mother

The family returned to

Switzerland in 1920 and he was educated in Berne, where he attended the city's university to study medicine.

When World War 2 military service disrupted his career he abandoned his studies in favour of art.

Following a course at l'Ecole des Beaux Arts in Lausanne he went on to become a successful self-employed designer and manufacturer.

In 1952, with his wife and two children, he emigrated to Britain, and 18 years ago retired to Barnstaple in North Devon.

There he accomplished his lifetime ambition of becoming a full time artist, and his work was widely exhibited and much enjoyed, particularly by the North Devon community.

A modest man who was well loved and respected by everyone who knew him, he is survived by his wife Claudine, two sons and four grandchildren.

## Tyne-Tees members honoured

Swiss Club Tyne-Tees has congratulated one of its members, Mrs Jacqueline Filkins-Merz, on becoming Dean and Professor of Health at the University College of St Martin, Lancaster.

Fellow member Donald R Barr-Wells has been awarded the Medaille Belmond of the Alliance Française de Paris, in recognition of 40 years' service to the Alliance Française de Newcastle-upon-Tyne.

Club founder Mrs Nelly Scott-Niederberger has been unanimously re-elected president of the club for the next three years.

Mount Kilimanjaro, at 5,896m the highest peak in Africa.

The trip was a 65th birthday present from her husband, Philip.

## Xword winner

The winner of the crossword competition in the last Swiss Review UK supplement was Annemarie Freidli of Chessham, Bucks.

The prize: two £89 return tickets between Luton and Zurich offered by Edelweiss Air.

● *The correct solution was:*

**Across:** 1. Flums. 5. Buchs. 8. Aosta. 10. Delle. 11. Noose. 12. Aigle. 14. No way. 16. Ear. 18. Trident. 19. Arolla. 20. Egg. 22. Basel. 24. First. 26. Aarau. 27. Ouchy. 29. Needs. 31. Eland. 32. Eiger. 33. Stans.

**Down:** 1. Furka. 2. Urn. 3. Saane. 4. Ascona. 5. Baden. 6. Col. 7. Seedy. 13. Geils. 15. Wiler. 16. Eté. 17. Rag. 21. Gersau. 22. Broye. 23. Layer. 24. Funds. 25. Tasks. 28. Cog. 30. Era.

## Birthday gift

Lucerne-born archeologist Dr Ursula Strebi-Jones will talk at the Swiss Church in London on October 29 about her adventure earlier this year when she climbed

### Dr. Louis Guenin

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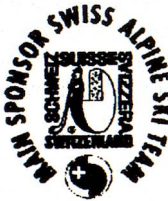
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## Conference on French-Swiss literature

A conference on contemporary French writing in Switzerland was organised recently by the Institute of Romance Studies at Senate House, University of London.

It was set up by a Swiss, Véréne Grieshaber of University College and sponsored by Pro Helvetia and the Swiss Cultural Fund in Britain.

Eminent scholars of various British and Irish universities took part, and not only their profound knowledge of modern French-Swiss writers but also their masterly command of the French language were most impressive.

Authors covered were C F Ramuz (*La Séparation des Races* – the meeting of two cultures across the language divide), Ch. Albert Cingria, Edmund Fleg (*The Jewish Question*), Blaise Cendrars, Jean-Luc Godard (as writer and film producer), Yvette Z'Graggen and Jacques Chesex.

The second day ended with a fascinating forum. Two contemporary Swiss authors, Marie-José Piguet and Amélie Plume, read from their works. This was followed by an animated discussion.

Ambassador and Madame Nordmann attended one of the sessions on the first day, and the Cultural Counsellor and Madame Schaetti on the

second afternoon.

The conference terminated with a *vin d'honneur* offered by the Swiss Embassy, another opportunity for informal discussions and fruitful intercourse.

Altogether the conference was a remarkable success, for which the organisers and sponsors are to be congratulated.

Mariann Meier

## Concert aids Lucerne link

International concert organiser Olivier Eisenmann from Weggis on Lake Lucerne made a return visit to play in Lucerne's twin town of Bournemouth in August. He was accompanied by his flautist wife Verena.

Music has played a big part in the Bournemouth-Lucerne twinning. It was two years ago that Dr Eisenmann, whose speciality is 19th century romantic

composers, was first invited to the town by the Bournemouth Twinning Association. Last November the Dorset Youth Wind Orchestra gave an open air concert in Lucerne.

The twinning association encourages links between local organisations, and a youth centre at East Howe in Bournemouth makes an annual exchange with youngsters from Lucerne.

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## COMING EVENTS

**Midlands Swiss Society:** Baschundora curry meal, Sutton Coldfield (November 15); New Look Samichlaus and international "bring your own" Christmas food (December 6). Details from Alice Phillips on 0121 458 3874.

**Manchester Swiss Club:** Annual dinner dance, Stanneylands Hotel, Wilmslow (November 15). Details from Mrs Marianne Reutter on 01260 273 681.

**Southern Area Swiss Club:** Flower arrangements and tips (November 7); Christmas party at Farnborough Community Centre (December 12). Details from Vreni Rudkin on 01252 547 948.

**Tyne Tees Swiss Club:** Monthly club meetings at the Three Tuns Hotel, Durham (October 25, November 29); Swiss Samichlaus party at

Whitehill Hall (December 6). Details from Mrs Nelly Scott-Niederberger on 0191-5190956.

**Aberdeen Swiss Club:** AGM and Christmas dinner (November 22). Details from Susanne Weir on 01224 586 018.

## President in Scotland

FOSSUK president Jeffrey Long celebrated August 1 by travelling to Scotland for a round of visits to Swiss communities.

After an overnight stay in Dunfermline Consul Alan Stewart drove him to join Aberdeen Swiss Club for their traditional celebration, which was attended by members from as far away as Aberdeen and Inverness.

From there they drove to Pittenweem to attend the celebrations of the Fife Swiss Club.

Said Jeffrey: "Many old

friendships were renewed with members of the club and others from Edinburgh and West of Scotland Swiss Clubs who also attended. We enjoyed cervelat and Bratwurst, Swiss wines and delicious sweets, listened to the piper and also to Ursula Ditchburn playing the accordion.

"At 9pm we all set off to join the town's torchlit procession. The piper led our contingent, and there were children with lamps and balloons. It was quite a spectacle to see the procession stretched out for perhaps a mile on the high road encircling the harbour - torches ablaze all the way round.

"Then a replica of a Viking ship was burnt in the harbour, followed by a superb firework display."

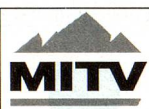
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Reports of Swiss society activities and coming events, and articles and correspondence for the 'Switzerland in the UK' section of the Swiss Review, should be sent to the editor, Derek Meakin, at Europa House, Adlington Park, Macclesfield SK10 4NP. Tel: 01625 859444; fax: 01625 858 313.

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