

Zeitschrift: Swiss review : the magazine for the Swiss abroad
Herausgeber: Organisation of the Swiss Abroad
Band: 29 (2002)
Heft: 2

Artikel: Review : greater solidarity
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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-906569>

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Greater solidarity

PABLO CRIVELLI

In the face of opposition from the SVP faction and several members of other parties, both chambers of parliament closed the spring session by approving the setting up of a solidarity fund.

IT WAS PURE COINCIDENCE that the final vote was held only hours before the presentation of the full Bergier Commission report on Switzerland's conduct during the Second World War. Rejection of the project, which was launched in 1997 (at the height of the crisis on dormant Jewish accounts) with the aim of setting up a solidarity fund financed by the proceeds from the sale of the National Bank's surplus gold reserves, would have cast an embarrassing shadow on the historian's work. However, these fears proved unfounded in the course of the session after the CVP made it known that, unlike the FDP, it intended to join the Social Democrats in voting for the

Swiss solidarity fund. Swiss voters will have the last word in the referendum scheduled for this autumn. The legal text on the fund will undergo a public hearing process in opposition to the SVP gold initiative, which wants to use all the proceeds from the sale of gold for the AHV (Old Age and Survivors' Insurance). The counterproposal approved by parliament recommends that the yield on the sale of gold be deposited in a special fund for a period of 30 years. Every year this sum, amounting to several hundred millions of francs, would be disbursed equally among the government, cantons and the Swiss Solidarity Fund. The fund would have a "life" of 30 years, after which the remaining capital would be divided between government, cantons and AHV. While the State Council would rather have seen two thirds go to the cantons and one third to the government, it ultimately gave the nod to the National Council's proposal to allocate at least one third to the AHV. The SVP initiative was rejected by both houses.

Khaki revolution

The State Council debated the Army Reform XXI. The army of the future is to be reduced to 200,000 conscripts, and future soldiers will have to complete 18 weeks recruit school plus seven 3-week refresher courses. The Federal Council proposed a 21-week recruit school but the State Council favoured the shorter and hence more cost-effective variant. Another innovation: every year 3000 young soldiers will be able to complete recruit school as well as all seven refresher courses in a single stretch ("Uninterrupted service").

Civil rights

In future it will be possible with 100,000 signatures to petition for a change in the law and not just a revision of the constitution. The State Council followed by the National Council approved this extension of civil rights. To everyone's surprise, the National Council decided in favour of setting up a parliamentary investigative commission to look into the Swissair debacle. The parliamentary initiative has still to be approved by the State Council.

Translated from the German by N. Chisholm

MAILBAG

Is this correct?

SR 06/2001, AUNS ad

I always read Swiss Review with great interest. In the December 2001 issue I came across an advertisement by the AUNS. Is this really correct? I would have thought that a publication that to many Swiss Abroad represents the main source of information on events in Switzerland would have no room for advertisements by such extremist groups.

*Dr.med.O.Masner, Revnice
(Czech Republic)*

Staying neutral

SR 06/2001, AUNS ad

If you agree to place an ad by the AUNS (Campaign for a Neutral Switzerland) that urges voters to vote No on 3 March, you should also place a pro-UN ad; or at least report the Federal Council's position on this proposal after Mr Tschanz's article "UN membership this time

round?". Quite simply, in order to stay neutral: just as the AUNS would have it!

*Michel Edelmann,
Denia/Alicante, Spain*

Disgusted

SR 06/2001, AUNS ad

As a Swiss resident abroad I regularly read the Swiss Review. I was astonished, indeed disgusted, that you chose to publish an AUNS advertisement in the December 2001 issue. Is it not absurd to ask people who have chosen to live abroad to sympathise with a political group which is known for its racist campaigns, discriminatory conduct and political incorrectness?

Petra Lott, Los Angeles, USA

Less chauvinism, please!

06/2001, "Senior citizens on the rise"

I enjoy browsing through the Swiss Review, but I would be

happier to see Switzerland presented in a less chauvinistic light. Life in Switzerland is often not as perfect as it is described, particularly for Swiss who have lived abroad for any length of time. Regrettably, true integration of young adults who have grown up abroad is on paper only. There are probably no statistics on the number of Swiss who return only to emigrate once more, but the number of dual nationalities in Europe speaks for itself.

*Gabriele Geyer, Krefeld
(Germany)*

Information received too late

SR 06/2001, UN

I received the 06/2001 issue of Swiss Review on 5 March 2002. The date of postage was 1 March 2002! I thought the Swiss Review was created to in-

form Swiss Abroad on current affairs. The issue featured an advertisement which quoted important articles of the UN charter and clearly showed that a country can no longer be neutral if it joins the UN. It would have been extremely helpful if Swiss voters abroad had had the opportunity to compare these facts with the Federal Council's information sheet (page 9) before voting. Shouldn't the Swiss Review inform us a little faster?

Otto Kindschi, Bangkok

Congratulations

As a Swiss living in Montreal, Quebec, I receive the Swiss Review and always read it with great pleasure. Occasionally I pass it on to other interested persons. Congratulations on your admirable work!

*Jérôme Dubois, Montreal,
Canada*