

Swiss national Day Celebration

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SWISS NATIONAL DAY CELEBRATION

on FRIDAY, 31st JULY 1959
at WIMBLEDON TOWN HALL

There are many anniversaries which are celebrated amongst Swiss at home and abroad, but I am sure none is so consistently and with so much feeling kept, as is the birthday of our country. Wherever Swiss dwell in foreign countries, they forgather on that day to be in thoughts with the land which is so dear to all of them.

As in recent years, so this year, the Swiss community held its National Day celebration at the Wimbledon Town Hall, which was as usual decorated with the cantonal escutcheons; the flower display in front of the stage was especially effective.

Shortly before the start of the programme, Monsieur J. J. de Tribolet, First Counsellor of Embassy, representing the Swiss Ambassador and Madame Daeniker — who were spending that day with the Swiss Colony in the Channel Islands — His Worship the Mayor of Wimbledon, and Mrs. Clarke, the President of the 1st of August committee, and Mrs. Streit, and members of the Embassy with their ladies, took their seats. The Mayoress and Mrs. Streit were presented with bouquets in the Swiss national colours.

By the time the programme was well on the way, the large Hall was almost full to capacity. The younger generation was — as on previous occasions — very much in preponderance. Many of the regular Swiss residents are at this time on holiday, which no doubt accounted for the relatively small number of older members of the Colony being present.

The programme this year was shorter than usual, the Corale of the Unione Ticinese and the Swiss Accordion Group being unable to appear owing to the absence of many of their members abroad. It started with an opening March, followed by Prayer led by the Rev. C. Reverdin, then Monsieur J. J. de Tribolet gave the patriotic address. He greeted the many English friends present, especially His Worship the Mayor of Wimbledon and his wife, and delivered patriotic greetings from the Swiss Ambassador.

"It is fitting", he said, "that I should open this celebration by reading the message which Monsieur P. Chaudet, President of the Swiss Confederation, has addressed to all Swiss abroad on this 1st of August 1959." (Consul E. Ribi then read out the message.) M. de Tribolet continued by saying "Let us ponder over that message and in particular his remark that your attachment and fidelity calls for no less fidelity from home. The Swiss at home have many burdens of which those who live abroad are not always fully aware. Gone are the happy days of the 19th century when we could afford to look at the origins of our Confederation in a romantic way, gone too is the European balance of power that let us pursue a policy of neutrality based on principles, which ceased to be valid after World War II.

"The balance of power to-day is on a world scale. Switzerland has become a sector of that huge front along which our civilization faces an ideology entirely foreign to our political conceptions. We have no guarantee that Switzerland might not be involved in an armed struggle, should war break out. We only know for certain that, unprepared, we would offer an easy passage to armies anxious to circumvent Western defences. Since we are still fiercely determined to remain neutral, we are faced with complex military and economic problems."

The speaker then referred to the military and economic problems which are facing our country to-day, he mentioned the scientific and technical developments, especially the tremendous possibilities opened to industry through nuclear physics force.

"In the financial sector", M. de Tribolet said, "our difficulty is to harness State resources, and yet not harm the spirit of private enterprise, nor hurt cantonal sensibilities." Amongst other problems, he said that it was our country's moral duty to fight for Western civilization, and to take a share in that common burden of helping the under-developed countries; he was glad to say that our people tackled this problem manfully, doing as much as they could do.

"Our democracy is not a parliamentary democracy", he continued, "where citizens can leave the country's affairs in the

hands of professional politicians. If the rank and file of our people do not keep their interest in politics alive, the country must suffer. Can we remain indifferent when, as our problems grow more and more difficult, the number of citizens who go to the poll decreases every year?"

Referring to the duties of Swiss abroad, he said what was wanted from us was that by our personal behaviour in all walks of life, we should honour the Swiss name. M. de Tribolet then referred to the "Swiss Fortnight" taking place in October next, and the "Solidarity Fund" which the Swiss Government has launched.

In conclusion the speaker said, "I am sure you all approve of the principle 'One for All, All for One'. 'All for one' means that Switzerland should do something to help its children abroad; she is doing it. 'One for all' means that each Swiss abroad too should contribute his share. That duty is also consistent with the feeling of joy and thankfulness which fills us to-day, a feeling which I hope will be foremost in our hearts to-night and indeed all our lives."

The First Counsellor's address was much applauded, and then followed the reading of the Swiss Pact by Pastor Carl Huber. Madame Lilia Marcet-Filosa, pianist, Professor at the "Conservatoire de Genève", was then introduced to the audience. She played with much competence six dances romande by the Swiss composer Jaques-Dalcroze, which were much applauded.

When the lights were lowered two colour sound films were put on the screen, showing lovely views first of the Bernese Oberland and the Valais and other parts of our beautiful country. No doubt, many of these fine pictures must have awakened nostalgic feelings in the hearts of the onlookers. The loud applause was a sure sign how much this performance was enjoyed.

Yodelling has now become an established fact of a 1st of August programme. Miss Maria Dubacher, of Uri, accompanied by Mr. P. Brunner, gave a number of yodelling songs; dressed in her becoming national costume she sang gaily and with much feeling, and received the applause which was due to her. The programme ended with the singing, by the entire audience, of the "Cantique Suisse".

Before the hall was cleared for dancing, Mr. F. Streit, President of the 1st of August committee, thanked the various performers for their collaboration in the programme, the Mayor of Wimbledon for having put the Town Hall at our disposal, Mr. O. H. Ernst, General Manager of the Swiss National Tourist Office, for providing the films, and the Swiss firms which by their donations enabled the committee again to hold this celebration.

The Mayor of Wimbledon, Alderman Clarke, then spoke a few words conveying the greetings of his Borough to the Swiss community. Then dancing began, hundreds of happy couples, young and old, joined in the dancing; it was a scene of merriment and jollification which was delightful to watch. Conspicuous amongst the revellers was Mr. Bossert, who, in spite of being well into the seventies was hopping like a youngster. At 1 a.m. the National Anthem was played and another 1st of August celebration came to its conclusion.

In summing up, I can say without hesitation that the evening was a success, and that those who worked so hard deserve grateful thanks.

May a kind Providence protect our beloved homeland in years to come. Switzerland to-day is a nucleus of what Europe to-morrow — and the whole world later on — might be, and we are ready to sacrifice everything rather than that this little oasis of sanity in the heart of Europe should be destroyed, and in this spirit we will remember the "Rütli" oath, and that motto from which spring our whole achievements, political, economical and cultural, and of which we have a right to be proud to-day —

ONE FOR ALL, ALL FOR ONE!

ST.