

Political rights for the swiss abroad

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— the principle of which we want to uphold unswervingly — and then to see to it on the political level that, based on such an article, the necessary measures in favour of the Swiss abroad be taken by way of legislation and administration. If we succeed in getting a short article of competence into the Constitution which would allow the legislative and executive authorities to find adequate solutions of our problems in a better way than hitherto, we can serve the cause more than with a special comprehensive constitutional statute which would be so controversial as to jeopardise its own success."

Dr. Schuerch said that the one thing the Commission (ASK) could not afford was to get a proposal into parliament which would not receive the necessary majority there or in a plebiscite. If ever a constitutional article needed unqualified support by the people it was one concerning the Swiss abroad; for such an article would symbolise an act of faith by the mother country towards her children abroad. Therefore, we would be advised to isolate controversial questions for the moment and to submit the principle, plain and simple, to the Swiss Sovereign for acceptance.

Therefore, Dr. Schuerch felt, the other points should not be incorporated, but should be dealt with individually as and when they arise. Precisely the question of consulting the ASK shows that a specific article would not fill the bill. The Commission must consolidate its status as democratic parliament in order to reach a position which would give it the right to be consulted and to have a say in any matter affecting the Swiss abroad. Serious work and pertinacity were needed to reach this goal, but Dr.

Schuerch affirmed that the leaders of the ASO were willing to strive for the realisation of our wishes.

The speaker then suggested several forms of such a general article. It might seem sufficient to say "The Confederation consolidates the position of the Swiss abroad and fosters good relations amongst them and towards their homeland". On the other hand one could say that the Confederation should consider the Swiss abroad in its legislation and that it should take the necessary measures in conjunction with the ASO to consolidate their position and foster good relations, within the framework of Constitution and international law.

It would be possible gradually to win over political forces at home for some new legislative and administrative decrees, and that would in the long run be easier and more successful than to fight for a comprehensive article all at once. The Swiss citizen, Dr. Schuerch said, did not trust such global solutions — he did not buy the cat in the bag. He was willing to accede a principle right to his compatriots abroad, but he would want to safeguard his prerogative of dealing with individual problems as they arose.

Dr. Schuerch concluded by expressing his hope that in two years' time we might have such an article commended by the Federal Council to Parliament, perhaps even already accepted by the people. We, the Swiss abroad, have been asked to support the efforts of the ASK. The Commission will, as ever, work hard towards the realisation of an article and will not relinquish the principle even if the original proposals have been modified.

Mariann.

POLITICAL RIGHTS FOR THE SWISS ABROAD

This is by no means a new question. Already in 1874 the Swiss Colonies of Milan and Mulhouse wanted to take part in the voting on the revision of the Federal Constitution. The Federal Council refused this request because according to the law voting took place at the place of residence. In 1907 the Swiss went to the poll regarding military re-organisation. For the same reason the Swiss abroad were again barred from taking part. In 1925 the Federal Council altered its attitude and allowed voting to Swiss from abroad whilst temporarily in Switzerland. Thus, some 500 Swiss from abroad cast their vote in a plebiscite on the so-called "Krisenartikel" on 26th June 1935. They voted in whatever commune they had deposited their passport. Two years later these rights were again withdrawn.

At the Assembly of the Swiss abroad in 1947 it was the London Swiss Colony which asked for voting rights for Swiss abroad temporarily in Switzerland ("Aufenthalterstimmrecht"). Though, in March 1961, when the Swiss Societies in U.K. were asked for an opinion in the matter, most of them were against it, but stipulated that the ASK (Commission) should be consulted more freely.

When Parliament reconsidered the Swiss law of 1872 regarding elections and polls in 1951, it was felt premature to settle the political rights of the Swiss abroad, but the Federal Council was asked to study the question.

The ASK (the private Parliament of the Swiss abroad) has now taken the first steps towards the realisation of such a wish, Dr. Halbheer, the Director of the ASS (Secretariat of the Swiss abroad) reported in an excellent speech at the Assembly at Sion. He knows from his close work

with the Swiss Colonies abroad what a lively interest they take in the happenings at home and he feels it is understandable that Swiss who have been paying military tax or doing military service should feel badly about not being allowed any political rights. He mentioned over 150 young Swiss who came to Switzerland every year for their "Rekrutenschule".

The majority of the Swiss in foreign lands do not wish to make use of political rights from their place of residence abroad. It is only a few Auslandschweizer close to the borders who would be in favour of this. At Sion, one of the Swiss delegates from France reminded the Assembly of a proposal which was still lying in Berne regarding voting by correspondence. Dr. Halbheer was of opinion that only a minority would want this, but that all of them would welcome effective representation at home and would possibly appreciate an "Aufenthalterstimmrecht", the right to vote when in Switzerland.

Some forty National Councillors and half as many Councillors of State constituted a group of Swiss parliamentarians disposed specially well towards us Swiss abroad. This group has been re-activated and they see no difficulty in the realisation of such a project. As one of them, National Councillor Ph. Schmid-Rudin, until recently Central President of the Swiss Mercantile Society in Switzerland (SKV) and a champion of our cause for decades, wrote in the "Schweizerisches Kaufmaennisches Zentralblatt", it seemed to him such an innovation would be easy to introduce and he considered it fully justified.

Nobody expected far-reaching consequences of such voting rights. Much more influential would be an effective representation of the Swiss abroad in the mother country

itself. It seemed strange, Dr. Halbheer said, that the 600,000 foreigners working in Switzerland influenced merely by their presence the ratio of representation in the National Council whereas the 265,000 Swiss citizens abroad had no influence whatsoever.

We Swiss abroad know full well that we are a long way from having our own representative in Parliament, though some are incurable optimists who seem to have forgotten how slowly things mature at home.

To-day the most effective representative of the Swiss abroad is the ASK, which is more and more consulted by the authorities. This forum of the Swiss living away from home has developed into a recognised body, and its executive, the Secretariat, keeps close and well-founded relations with Parliament and the Federal Authorities. The ASK is making a demand to be consulted compulsorily in any questions touching the Swiss abroad.

As one of the recent examples of close co-operation Dr. Halbheer gave the Solidarity Fund, which was able to delegate its President, as an expert on to the parliamentary commission. The ASK is also consulted in all questions relating to the Old Age and Invalidity Insurance for the Swiss abroad (AHIV) and the big subject of Technical Assistance.

The ASK was **not** consulted, however, in the unfortunate decree regarding the purchase of land by persons not resident in Switzerland, which has created much indignation and bad feeling.

The ASK has also asked that the Swiss abroad should be allowed to have a representative in parliamentary commissions which dealt with questions of policy concerning Swiss citizens abroad. Whilst agreeing to the demand for consultation, the Parliamentary Group is against having a representative on all parliamentary commissions, though there is no reason why such a representative should not be co-opted in individual cases.

What the ASK is now asking on our behalf is that we should be granted voting rights in Federal matters when temporarily in Switzerland. We would have to deposit our passport and a declaration by our consular agency that we were registered and of good reputation. This could be done wherever we are in Switzerland, and our voting papers would afterwards be sent to our respective commune of origin. During military service the Swiss from abroad would be allowed to vote by correspondence. We should not be allowed to sign any initiatives or referendum demands.

The second request concerns the compulsory obligation of the Swiss Federal Authorities to consult the ASO (Auslandschweizer Organisation) in all questions affecting the Swiss abroad.

There is no doubt that our interests are well taken care of by the ASO and it is up to us to support their efforts and to strengthen the Commission by sending well-briefed delegates to its meetings.

Mariann.

Nouvelle Société Helvétique

Tuesday, 16th October 1962, at 7.45 p.m.

"Russia and Black Africa through Swiss Eyes"

Dr. ERIC METTLER,

Chief Correspondent, "Neue Zürcher Zeitung"

talking about his observations on his journeys through Russia and many African countries in answer to questions.

Refreshments are available as usual before the meeting from 6.45 p.m. onwards

A NEW FEDERAL COUNCILLOR ELECTED

On Thursday, 27th September, the Federal Assembly, that is the National Council and the Council of States combined, met to elect a new Federal Councillor in place of Federal Councillor Bourgnicht, who had resigned for reasons of health. It has since been announced that Monsieur Roger Bonvin from Sion has been chosen as the new Federal Councillor. Rarely, if ever at all, has there been so much speculation as to who would emerge as the successful candidate, nor indeed has there ever been such a difficult election in which several ballots were needed. Unfortunately, the interesting reports reached the editor too late to be made use of in this issue as all material for one number has to be ready a week before publication date. But she hopes to give detailed information and to present a true picture, in the next issue, of the interesting happenings preceding the election of Monsieur Bonvin to the highest office open to a politician.

SWITZERLAND PRESENTS HER CASE TO THE COMMON MARKET

On Monday, 24th September, at 5.30 p.m., the Swiss delegation met the Council of Ministers of the European Economic Community in Brussels in order to state Switzerland's case. The delegation of seven was led by Federal Councillors Wahlen and Schaffner. Monsieur Wahlen read the declaration in French. A summary of its text will follow.

At a press conference immediately on his return to Switzerland Federal Councillor Wahlen emphasised that at the presentation of the Swiss case as well as at the informal meetings afterwards, a very friendly atmosphere had prevailed. Interest, understanding and sympathy had been shown for the Swiss position. The Chairman of the Council, the Italian Minister of Industry and Commerce, had assured the Swiss delegates that the declaration would now be examined with due care. No date for the resumption of discussions, leave alone negotiations, could be fixed as agreement with Great Britain would have to be arrived at first. This Switzerland fully understood, and in the meantime much preparatory work could be done. Many a hard nut would have to be cracked before any measure of success could be achieved. Should the negotiations between Great Britain and the Common Market collapse, the whole EEC would be severely weakened and it might change matters. In a radio interview on his return, Federal Councillor Schaffner stressed that the Swiss declaration had been remarkably well received, probably because it did not ignore the difficulties, but dealt in a constructive and realistic way with the problems which would have to be solved by both presumptive partners. This did not give the green light for the negotiations, however, but it was at least a good beginning. Our declaration was based on the right principles, and, if used wisely, a framework of European integration could be built up which would enable us to be both good Europeans as well as remain good Swiss.

Mariann.