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LOOKING AFTER THE HANDICAPPED IN SWITZERLAND

By Dr. Maria Meyer

It is often difficult for the foreign observer to understand the specific circumstances underlying the organisation of social security in Switzerland. It is in the very nature of the federal structure of the State that well organised governmental welfare services of the Confederation and of the Cantons are supplemented by important voluntary institutions. This applies especially to rehabilitation of the handicapped, where, over the years, efficient special agencies have been created under private auspices going beyond the Cantonal boundaries, thus forming a valuable basis for a national approach to the problem.

Since 1st January 1960, the Swiss Federal Disability Insurance scheme covering the entire population, has been in force. To a certain extent it now constitutes the backbone of the Swiss rehabilitation system. No social insurance scheme, however, can ever do justice to widely varying personal circumstances. For this reason the organisation of voluntary rehabilitation work in Switzerland will probably be of interest both to countries having a well developed social insurance system and to those where such programmes are lacking. In the former, voluntary work supplements the governmental scheme by compensating for certain inequities and by filling gaps, and in the latter it can pave the way for general governmental schemes.

In every country, reinstating the handicapped depends on the general development of medicine, education, vocational guidance, job placement, social work and public welfare policy. If a disabled person is to overcome his handicap as far as possible and be integrated fully into economic and social life, it is mainly difficulties arising in the above-mentioned fields that have to be solved. Rehabilitation of the handicapped develops all the more organically and effectively, the closer the connection is with the basic disciplines involved (e.g. special and general education) and among these disciplines themselves. Rehabilitation must not become a no-man's land between medicine, social work, education, etc. It has to be closely linked up with the various fields and institutions. It is in this way that the handicapped are probably best served in the long run.

The nation-wide Swiss welfare organisation "Pro Infirmis", which is politically and denominationally neutral, has always been working in this sense. "Pro Infirmis" is, on the one hand, an umbrella organisation, on the other hand, it runs twenty-two social services scattered over the entire country.

As an umbrella organisation, it combines twelve specialised associations which are all-Swiss or cover the German-speaking or the French-speaking part of the country. These associations unite all institutions and specialists dealing with specific disabilities (motor handicaps, blindness, deaf-and-dumbness, impaired hearing, mental retardation, epilepsy, speech impediments, problem children). They go into fundamental problems, constitute a clearing house for experiences and a forum for advanced training. They co-operate with the associations of the handicapped, co-ordinate programmes and make systematic studies of how their work can be promoted. By way of these specialised associations, there are combined indirectly more than 300 independent agencies in "Pro Infirmis", such as special clinics, special schools, homes, foundations, welfare associations and some of the associations of parents and of handicapped persons. "Pro Infirmis" has done the groundwork for the setting up of some of these specialised associations; it is represented on their executive committees, and it runs the secretariats of some of its member organisations. Thus it is in a position to let one group benefit from experiences in another sector. With the proceeds from an annual fund raising campaign it promotes work in the less developed fields of rehabilitation and in financially weaker districts.

"Pro Infirmis" works in close association with the organs of the Federal Disability Insurance and it is called on by the Confederation for consultation, thus, e.g. for the allotment of a Federal subsidy to the homes for problem children and other special agencies not covered by the Disability Insurance system. In a general way, "Pro Infirmis" promotes rehabilitation in a wide sense with the authorities and the public. The publication of a monthly paper, a regular press service, lectures, etc., serve to keep the public informed of the problems of rehabilitation of the handicapped.

The twenty-two "Pro Infirmis" agencies in the Cantons are consulted every year by more than 15,000 handicapped persons; to this figure must be added another 2,000 cases investigated on behalf of the Disability Insurance, and many more individuals seeking occasional advice.

4,000 "godparents" (patrons) make regular contributions (at least 10 francs per month) in favour of a specific handicapped child or adult. The personal contacts arising from this mean many valuable relationships between the able-bodied and the handicapped.

Furthermore, the "Pro Infirmis" agencies serve as information centres for all aspects of rehabilitation in their districts and contribute to the solution of general problems. Since they are daily in touch with the problems of the disabled they are highly qualified to recognise causes and needs, and to promote corresponding proposals and plans.

The efficient collaboration, the voluntary integration of the nearly autonomous individual agencies, the consistent implementation of theoretical findings for the benefit of every single disabled person, even in remote districts, are in the interest of the entire community.

(*"Pro Helvetia."*)

PARLIAMENTARY WINTER SESSION

Tradition has it that when the Federal Assembly opens for its winter session, a large Christmas tree in the staircase welcomes members. The idea is much appreciated, but unfortunately, this time the symbol of light was unable to refrain disturbing elements from invading the Council Chambers in the second week, when 25 young Jura separatists of the "Béliers" Group rushed in and broke up the quiet and sedate Government elections. But no more than a minute, and helvetic sobriety was once more prevalent. The well-prepared demonstration of the "Jura Libre" adherents was condemned by all and sundry, except for the Communists. The first week opened with the elections of the two Council Presidents and the budget debate. The double deficit, 434m. francs for the *Finanzrechnung* and 116m. in the total accounts, influenced the discussion, and one agreed that whilst the position was serious, there was no need to dramatise the estimated losses. More sources of revenue would have to be found. The "milk flood and butter mountain" were discussed within the budget of the Department of Economics. And it was pointed out that milk production had been reduced by the farmers and that the butter surplus was being "melted down". Dairy products were recommended in special campaigns, and milk gifts were sent to needy countries. More and better cheese is to be exported. Switzerland still has one of the highest prices for butter and milk in Europe. If the milk position stabilises, no milk control will be introduced.

The National Council agreed to the new Constitution of the Canton of Ticino, the old one having been created in 1830. The discussion touched on the statement that the R.C. denomination was the State denomination of the Canton. Agreement was only given on condition that freedom of religion and conscience were fully granted. The National Council also debated the *Maturitätsverordnung* which deletes Latin as compulsory subject for medical students and accepts the interrupted-study-process. The Government and the Federal Science Council were going to do more work on the subject.

The Council of States accepted — like the National Council before it — the new tobacco taxation law and the revision of the *Erwerbsersatzverordnung*, which will give the soldiers higher benefits for loss of earnings whilst in military service.

In the second week, the National Council critically debated the budget for military buildings and training centres — 347 million francs. Critically, that is in as much as they asked themselves whether Parliament was indeed

still in a position to consider such estimates. The armament programme was also accepted — 461m. spread over a few years. The budget for the Swiss Federal Railways was agreed to. In spite of increased tariffs, there will be a deficit of 15m. francs. The new Communications Minister Bonvin is ready to try and find better co-ordination between road and rail. In both Councils the proposal of the Government to create two parachute grenadier companies was accepted, reluctantly in the large Chamber.

"Like a thriller" said a reporter about the "Buehrle Affair". One Motion, one Postulat, two Interpellations and several *Kleine Anfragen* had asked for an explanation regarding the illegal arms export by the Buehrle concern. Federal Councillor Spuehler had no easy task to answer which he did most fairly and openly. It was a rare thing the way a Swiss undertaking was criticised by a Federal President and by M.P.s, and neither side minced matters, for there is no doubt that the unscrupulous arms deals by one firm had done a lot of harm to the country, and the sharpest legal prosecution was under way. Enquiries were also to be made into arms deliveries of the Geneva firm Hispano-Suiza.

Another subject for debate was the law for the Federal Institutes of Technology (ETH and EPUL) against which the students had started a Referendum. This subject will be dealt with in a separate article in the next issue. The National Council also discussed the preventative measures which the Government had taken to prevent possible aggression against federal property in the Jura. The militia army, it was felt, was not really suitable to keep law and order. Perhaps the proposed intercantonal police force would be better suited.

(By courtesy of "*Schweizerisches Kaufmännisches Zentralblatt*" and "*Basler Nachrichten*".)

SWISS OLD-AGE INSURANCE

The revised AHV regulations became effective on 1st January. Nearly one million pensioners receive an increased allowance already in the first half of the month.

On 1st November the Swiss Railways introduced a new season ticket for the — "NOT SO YOUNG". Men of 65 years (women of 62 years) and over, may now purchase the yearly half-fare season ticket for Fr. 50.— instead of the normal Fr. 290.—. With this season ticket, the holder only pays half-fare for any journey made during the 12 months validity on the Swiss Federal Railways, many private railways, boats and postal motor coaches.

Already before Christmas, over 100,000 of these season tickets were sold to old-age pensioners. Some 750,000 are entitled to purchase one.

We should like to point out an omission in our article on AHV in a recent issue. From 1st January, not only the self-employed will have to pay less contribution, but all those who have no employer liable to pay a share — in other words: also the Swiss abroad.

The new President of the AHV-Equalisation Fund is Mr. Arthur Wehinger, Manager of Zurich Cantonal Bank, in succession to Dr. h.c. H. Kueng. The fund has about 7.6 milliard francs at its disposal.

(A.T.S. and S.N.T.O.)