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THE ACTIVITIES OF THE SECRETARIAT FOR THE SWISS ABROAD IN 1970

The Secretariat for the Swiss Abroad has just published its 52nd Annual Report. The staff at the Secretariat is composed of 16 people. Added to this are six people in charge of the Solidarity Fund of the Swiss Abroad. These 22 people are thus the devoted servants of the interests and worries of the 300,000 denizens of Fifth Switzerland.

The 1970 Annual Report describes with details the many facets of the work of this small cohort and the present situation of the Solidarity Fund. One wonders how so few people can achieve so much. The following are the paragraph headings of the Report—they will give an idea of the range of activities of the Secretariat:

A survey of the events of 1970 and a particular reference to the death at 89 of Gonzague de Reynold, first President of the Commission of the Swiss Abroad of the Nouvelle Société Helvétique; the activities of the Commission of the Swiss Abroad in 1970; the care of Swiss societies abroad—a care including such services as films, talks, contributions to club rooms and Swiss houses, the mailing of cheap newspapers and service to the readers of "Echo" and other Secretariat publications; Information, a section containing such items as relations with the Press, short wave services and the co-ordination of cultural ventures abroad; Counsel and social care; Social insurance; The Assembly of the Swiss Abroad; finally, the Youth Service with the subheadings information, co-ordination, direct contacts, camps, grants, education, Swiss schools abroad and the care of the young Swiss Abroad in the course of their military training.

The profit and loss account shows that, among other items "Echo" has cost 208,000 francs to produce and has brought in 171,000 francs, thus leaving a net loss of 37,000 francs. 42,153 francs were spent on organising the Assembly for the Swiss Abroad, 18,400 francs on social services, 25,199 francs on visits to the various colonies abroad, 123,141 on the youth service and 38,172 francs on Swiss schools abroad. The total expenditure of the Secretariat for the Swiss Abroad in 1970 was 692,788 francs.

The main sources of income were a 105,000 francs federal subsidy, 15,711 francs of donations from the Friends of the Secretariat, 47,590 francs of voluntary contributions and 275,000 francs from the Foundation for the Swiss Abroad. The Secretariat undoubtedly runs on a small budget and its 16 employees are modestly paid. However, the job has its rewards. For Mr. Tony Rihs, director of the youth service,

whom we met at the Hebden Bridge Landsgemeinde, the rewards of this relatively badly paid job was the possibility of journeys abroad and the contacts made in the camps which he organises and leads for young Swiss abroad.

For the Solidarity Fund of the Swiss Abroad the year was marked by continued efforts at enlisting new members. This propaganda hasn't always been successful (as a matter of fact, the publicity made in the S.O. did not bring forth one single reply) but the financial situation of the Fund remains favourable, owing to the currently high rates of interest.

The Fund gave compensation to five members in Algeria, Morocco and Tanzania amounting to 62,500 francs. It had to consider 12 applications for compensation and accepted five of them. The membership stood at about 14,000.

Among the various items of the Annual Report, let us mention the meetings of the Commission for the Swiss Abroad. The members of the Commission met on 7th March in Berne and on 28th August at Zofingen. The Swiss in Great Britain were represented by Mrs. Mariann Meier (South) and Dr. H. R. Bolliger (North).

Aside from statutory problems, the Commission discussed legislative questions regarding the Swiss Abroad. Most of them were raised in the circular distributed last year on a potential revision of the Constitution. The central problem was that of implementing the Article 45 bis on the Swiss living abroad. The project of a new federal law on assistance to the Swiss Abroad had been submitted to a committee of experts.

The Commission noted the satisfactory administrative simplifications regarding military registration abroad. It plans to submit the project of a law permitting the Swiss Abroad to take part in federal votes under special circumstances. As our former Editor has said, our interests are indeed well taken care of by the Organisation for Swiss Abroad in Berne.

Another item to mention is the *Vortragsdienst*. There, the Report mentions the visits of Mr. Jean-Claude Nicole to the Swiss communities of Belgium and Luxembourg. Other distinguished speakers whose travels were sponsored by the Secretariat were Mr. M. Ney, Director of the Secretariat, the writer Paul Eggenberg, Miss A. Weitzel of the Womens Voluntary Service and the journalist A. Tschäni. The Secretariat also circulated a number of films and took pains to pick the best of a burgeoning Swiss production.

The Secretariat nurses its good relations with the mass media. As a result most of the activities regarding

the Swiss Abroad and the Solidarity Fund get a good coverage in the Swiss Press. It also co-operates with Switzerland's largest daily, the *Tages Anzeiger*. It devotes considerable space to the affairs of Fifth Switzerland. Another problem for which the Secretariat shows great concern is the rehabilitation of the the Swiss who have been expropriated overseas. They have grouped themselves in the ASSAOM (*Association des Suisses apoliés d'Algérie et d'Outre-Mer*) and the Organisation for the Swiss Abroad is currently trying to adduce more understanding of their fate in Parliament and in the public services.

The most important Swiss realisation abroad during 1970 was the opening of the Swiss Hospital in Paris, which is to serve the 28,000-strong Swiss community of Paris. It is situated at Issy-les-Moulineaux and has 96 beds.

On perusing the 52nd Annual Report of the Secretariat for the Swiss Abroad one can have no doubts on the valiant efforts and the sense of service of this worthy organisation. The work of the Organisation for the Swiss Abroad is difficult and often frustrating. The official interest for the Swiss Abroad has never been so great and the services instituted to serve them have never been so efficient and dedicated. But this falls at a time when the cohesion of Fifth Switzerland is becoming weaker and when the concern for the homeland of the Swiss Abroad is in the main dwindling. The people at Alpenstrasse are well aware of that. They have a completely selfless attitude to their job. They are there for us, Swiss Abroad, and will be at our service whenever their assistance is needed. On the other hand they know that no amount of propaganda on their part will create this need and from time to time, they are bound to feel that the potential of their goodwill and service is incompletely put to use by the people they serve.

(PMB)

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