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NEWS FROM THE COLONY

FEDERATION OF SWISS SOCIETIES IN THE U.K.

The Federation of Swiss Societies in the United Kingdom held its 9th Annual General Meeting in the dining room of the Embassy Residence on Friday, 17th May. The President of the 24 member-societies and the Delegates to the Commission of the Swiss Abroad and their deputies had been invited to this annual reunion. Not all of them had been able to come. Apologies had been sent by Professor Inebnit (Swiss Club Yorkshire), Mr. Hartmann (Benevolent Society of

Scotland), Mr. Wirz (Swiss Club Edinburgh), Mr. Sehn (Swiss Club Manchester, who was, however, represented by Dr. Bolliger), Mr. Kunz (S.N.T.O.) who was represented by Mr. Schmid, Mr. Aeschmiann (Swiss Club Guernsey) and Mr. Schneebeili (London Swiss Benevolent Society) who had apparently not received the invitation.

The retiring President, Dr. Hans Egli, was pleased to welcome Mrs. Gyssler (Swiss Welfare Officer) and Mr. Pachoud (Swiss Philatelic Society) who had not previously taken part in these functions. Dr. Egli also welcomed the Ambassador and Dr. Jurg Iselin, Minister Plenipotentiary, and thanked the Embassy for their hospitality.

Dr. Egli's Annual Report, which was exactly a paragraph long, was dealt with just as economically and so was the Treasurer's Report, which showed that the Federation had received an income of £175.75 from the contributions of member societies. These contributions varied from £52.50 (City Swiss Club) to £1.05 for the smaller societies and served to pay for the part of the expenses of the delegates of the Swiss community in Great Britain to the Commission of the Swiss Abroad. These delegates are Mrs. Mariann Meier for the South of Britain

(Deputy Father Paul Bossard) and Dr. Hans-Ruedi Bolliger for the North (Deputy Mr. Otto Hartmann). Their responsibility is to discuss with representatives of the Government in Berne problems of interest to the Swiss abroad. Such problems are, for example, Military Tax, Voting Rights in Switzerland, With-holding Tax, Old Age Pensions and social facilities.

The Commission for the Swiss Abroad had held two meetings during the year under review; one during a highly successful 51st Assembly of the Swiss Abroad in St. Gall last August and the second one in Berne last March. These meetings were chaired by Dr. Louis Guisan, State Councillor, in the presence of officials of the Secretariat for the Swiss abroad and the Section of the Political Department specially concerned with the 300,000 Swiss living abroad. As always they served as a platform allowing the concerns of the latter to be sounded and made known to authorities in the Motherland. Details on both these meetings will be supplied in a forthcoming issue by Mrs. Mariann Meier, Delegate from the South. Dr. Bolliger, who also attended them, gave a short account to the Federation of Swiss Societies in the U.K.

The first meeting was attended by 37 delegates from abroad and 17 personalities from Switzerland. Themes discussed were: Political rights for the Swiss abroad (with a strong majority in favour of the plan to allow Swiss abroad to vote in their country of origin when they are on a visit); Information (delegates were informed of a new tape service provided by the Swiss short-wave service and told of the continuing difficulties of "Echo", an 8-times yearly publication for the Swiss abroad); With-holding Tax (delegates voiced their concern at the "injustice" of being taxed on their Swiss holdings).

The second meeting was attended by 35 delegates from abroad and 12 from Switzerland. The questions discussed were mainly the same as on the previous occasion but the topic of military tax was raised (it will now be imposed for only three years to Swiss young men abroad) and the meeting was told that 13,000 applications had been received to the Old

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Age Pension 1973 offer. The total number of Swiss abroad who sacrificed 7.4 per cent of their gross income for a safe retirement was about 40,000, or about an eighth of the Swiss population abroad. The second meeting also dealt with renewing contact with the 2,000 Swiss living in Russia and in eastern Europe.

Mrs. Meier then briefly reported on the meetings of the Council of Solidarity Fund and of the Commission for information of the Swiss abroad.

The re-election of the officers of the Federation was the next item. Dr. Egli said that, at just 75, the time had come for him to step down. He invited the meeting to elect Mr. Bernhard Simon, Vice-President, as his successor. The meeting did so without hesitation and passed a vote of thanks for the services rendered by the outgoing President during his tenure of office. Mr. Ernst Tangemann was elected Vice-President. The Honorary Secretary, Mr. Virgil Berti, offered to stand down was "persuaded to carry on".

Mr. Simon having taken the chair and praised the activities of his predecessor, the meeting proceeded to elect the auditors and then dwelt at some length on the four-party agreement regarding the special quarterly issues of the *Swiss Observer*. In an apparent gesture to concern the Swiss community with efforts done on its behalf in the field of information, the authorities in Berne had thought fit to include the Federation in an agreement providing for the regular publication of a Special Issue of the *Swiss Observer*. The agreement, which has not yet been finalised, it mainly concerned with the cost-sharing of this new venture between the Publishers of the *Swiss Observer* and the Political Department. The Secretariat of the Swiss Abroad and the Federation were invited to be parties to this agreement. Some participants at the meeting expressed doubt at the justification of having the Federation sign an agreement with which it was not directly concerned. The situation was made more confusing by the fact that no one knew exactly what the agreement was. Mr. Marcel Ney, Director of the Secretariat of the Swiss Abroad, who had come from Berne to attend the meeting,

impressed on the attendance that Berne was making a great effort, spending a fair amount of money at a time of official austerity, to produce four special issues of the *Swiss Observer* for the benefit of all the Swiss people of Great Britain and similar issues in the remainder of the English-speaking world. Mr. Ney added, in effect, that this should get some recognition in the planned agreement. After some discussion the meeting decided to voice its gratitude and appreciation for the efforts done by Berne in supplying us in Britain with official information, to have the officers of the Federation (Committee) sign the agreement on behalf of the Federation and send a copy of the text to all its members. The first step of this process was duly carried out with an unanimous vote of gratitude.

Mr. Ney then told us of the Agenda of the forthcoming Congress of the Swiss Abroad, which is to take place in Neuchatel on the weekend from 22nd to 25th August and have as its central theme "Social Insurance and the Swiss Abroad". Mr. Ney called on the Swiss of Britain to come in force to these annual gatherings whose success relied to a great extent on the number of compatriots who joined in.

As "other business" an item was raised by Mr. Virgil Berti, President of the 1st August Committee, who called on Swiss residents in London to be more numerous at the 1st August Celebration, which will again be held this year at the Wimbledon Town Hall. He said that the function had become almost an exclusively young gathering. This had meant a rejuvenation of the programme and a curtailment of the official and ceremonial aspects of this patriotic event. Mr. F. A. De Maria, President of the Unione Ticinese, took the opportunity to draw the attendance's attention on the pink brochures he had brought with him on the history of his association. The Unione Ticinese is celebrating its Centenary this year, and this will doubtless constitute the highlight of the Colony year.

The meeting, having been officially closed, the Ambassador invited us all for drinks in the adjoining reception area. Later we were offered a delicious supper consisting of rice and émincé and a crusty

red wine from the Valais which we enjoyed seated in various groups in the Embassy's cosy armchairs. This appendage to the A.G.M. of the Federation of Swiss Societies was at least as important in view of its enjoyable character and the opportunity for renewed contact.

THE SWISS OBSERVER THIRTY YEARS AGO

The 1944 Volume of the *Swiss Observer* is one of the thinnest in its history. The publication came out in reduced form once a month owing to war-time circumstances. But the pace of colony life was still lively. As an example, the January numbers advertised the City Swiss Club, "The Dansant", an event which has belonged to the past for a long time. It was to take place on Saturday, 19th February, from 3.30 to 6 p.m. at the Dorchester Hotel. The Chapman and Dorchester Hotel Band were to provide an entertainment which cost only five shillings.

Also reported in that issue was the previous Christmas celebration uniting the two protestant parishes. A packed church heard Pastor Marcel Pradervand deliver a vibrant sermon on Luke, Chapter 2 and the verses: "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all the people". This message was eagerly received by an alien Swiss parish living in a country plunged in war. Handel's Sonata was played on the organ accompanied by two violins. A male voice choir sang *O nuit calme et sereine*. These and the presence of a large congregation were things which the Swiss church has not enjoyed so often since those days. The Reverend Paul Rad spole on behalf of the German-speaking congregation on the "peace that surpasseth all understanding" before this heart-warming service was completed by a welcome cup of tea.

Four days before the service at Endell Street, some 60 to 70 persons attended the Christmas celebration of the *Schwyzzerchraengli* at Kingsway Hall. The event was aptly reported by "Mariann".

The first event of the new year was the A.G.M. of the Nouvelle Société Helvétique. A hundred members heard Mr. A. Girardet, Chargé d'Affaires, give a talk on the war-time role of the Swiss in Britain and the Nouvelle Société Helvétique. His patriotic call, printed in extenso by the *Swiss Observer* was followed by a piano and violin duet whose performers were Mr. Revilliod and Mr. John Suter. This musical programme was completed with items contributed by the Swiss Choral Society.

The next A.G.M. was that of the Swiss Mercantile Society. Meeting at Brown's Hotel, Dover Street, on 12th February, it was chaired by Mr. J. J. Boos. The Legation was represented by its Commercial Attaché, Mr. E. de Graffenried. The meeting was told that it had 249 active members, 23 Honorary Members and 56 Contributing Members. The Employment Department, which was



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