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NEWS FROM THE COLONY

NOUVELLE SOCIÉTÉ HELVÉTIQUE

The Nouvelle Société Helvétique held its Annual General Meeting and Dinner on Thursday, 20th March, at the Prince of Wales Hotel, Kensington. The proceedings of the A.G.M. were conducted smoothly by the President, Mrs. M. Meier. No particularly new issues were raised and the usual A.G.M. chapters were dealt with speedily. The meeting ended with the election to the Committee of a new member, Mr. Paul André Ramseyer, First Secretary to the Embassy. There followed a period of "socialising" at the bar. This was enjoyed by what seemed to be a record attendance. The dinner was ample and to the honour of Mr. Steven Longhurst, General Manager of the Prince of Wales. It began with prawn cocktail and continued with a sturdy British fare of roast sirloin of beef, Yorkshire pudding, roast potatoes and buttered French beans. This was crowned with cassat Napolitaine and coffee.

These annual dinners offer the President a regular opportunity to welcome distinguished members of the Swiss community and distribute compliments all round. In her after-dinner speech, Mrs. Meier welcomed in particular the new Number Two at the Embassy, Minister Fritschi, and deplored the departure of two *Basler*: Ambassador Juerg Iselin and Consul-General Fritz Adams. She welcomed, among other compatriots, the Rev. Stefan and Mrs. Stefan and Mrs. Languillat as representatives of the Swiss Churches. She expressed appreciation for their valuable work and referred to the close links between them and the Nouvelle Société Helvétique. The Society has used resources inherited from the war days to finance new furnishing and carpeting in the church and instal a grand piano which enabled it to patron concerts and cultural evenings.

The Speaker said she would have liked to welcome Mr. Marcel Ney, Director of the Secretariat of the Swiss Abroad in Berne, but he had been unable to attend. She defended the Federation of Swiss Societies in the U.K. and the Nouvelle Société Helvétique against recent criticisms and pointed out that the Presidents of a good many societies were present at the dinner.

She ended by informing the attendance that the new assembly of the Swiss Abroad, to take place during the third weekend of August, in Basle, would be concerned with the theme: "The Swiss Abroad as ambassadors of culture". Her closing words were: "Let us remember this role and work towards fully earning the title".

Our Ambassador, Dr. Albert Weitnauer, then made a brief address in which he recalled that this was his fifth such annual dinner. Drawing from his historical knowledge, he spoke of an obscure farmer in the Toggenburg who produced a commentary on Shakespeare still of interest today and mentioned in the "Brockhaus". On another subject, he recalled that 30 years ago, Switzerland was considered the poorest country in Europe. Today, it had become the richest in the world.

Mr. Bernhardt Simon, President of the Federation of Swiss Societies, sprinkled his reply for the guests with some pungent remarks. He was followed by Consul-General Fritz Adams, the subject of so much praise during the evening that he could not escape from the duty of standing up. He said that he had performed his task in Zurich to the best of his ability and stressed that whatever success he might have had was "made easy with a community like yours".

P. M. B.

SWISS BENEVOLENT SOCIETY: THE PRESIDENT'S REPORT FOR 1974

Dear Friends and Compatriots,

We have pleasure in presenting the 105th Annual Report on the activities of the Swiss Benevolent Society. During the last year, we have again endeavoured to offer professional and financial help to the Swiss people living in the London Consular District who found themselves facing difficulties which they could not resolve on their own.

The total number of clients has dropped somewhat because, as we shall explain later, we no longer handle the cases of repatriation of young people stranded in London. However, the number of residents with whom we are in touch has gone up; the families have stayed stable at 41 and people living alone now stand at 187, involving altogether 302 persons. As in the past, there are some whom we have known for a long time, others were brought to our notice by the Swiss Embassy, the Swiss Churches and, increasingly, by English social services. Some also approach us directly.

It is worth pointing out in this connection that, over the years, the nature of the work of the Society appears to have changed and we have now reached a point where 50 per cent of our clients receive no financial help from us at all. They approach us for a variety of reasons, either for advice on problems concerning themselves or their families or

for support if life becomes too difficult to cope with alone. Some of them, even after a long time in this country, still feel very lonely and, rightly or wrongly, believe that they are being disliked as foreigners. It is a help to them to appeal to a Swiss organisation. In some cases, we are able to provide all the support they need. In others, with their agreement, we involve local social services and welfare organisations in an endeavour to help them to make their lives more bearable.

This aspect of the work not only tends to be very time-consuming but it is also relatively exhausting. Some people manage to call at our office, but many are unable to do so and have to be seen elsewhere. Thus 219 out of 569 interviews took place in people's homes, hospitals, etc., some of them well out of the London area. Certain clients we see only sporadically, others, during periods of stress, have to be visited at regular intervals, sometimes once a week or occasionally more often. Try as we might, we never manage to make as many calls as we would wish as the amount of administration work is also considerable.

As for the 57 pensioners, they have again received a substantial proportion of our resources, material and otherwise. We continue to distribute at regular intervals the Swiss Old Age Pension to those who prefer to receive it spread evenly over the quarter rather than as a lump sum every three months.

Most of the regular grants made by the Society go to the pensioners, but mainly for reasons of illness, younger people may also be in need of a supplement to their income. This is normally limited by the fact that, like all charities, we must insist that they apply for all benefits that are due to them from official sources. Thus a limit is set to the amount of regular support that we may give.

Both pensioners and other applicants are at times in need of casual grants to meet some heavy expense or to tide them over if some reason prevents them from pursuing their normal activities for any length of time. This help is sometimes given exclusively by the Society but occasionally in conjunction with other organisations. In every case, the Executive Committee takes great care in examining each request and trying to find the solution that is most suitable.

One time when extra help is particularly welcome is Christmas and we have been able to send out 132 parcels for the benefit of over 200 people. Thanks to the generosity of the Frauenverein, the Réunion de Couture, Swiss firms and individuals, the parcels were again most attractive and have given great pleasure. As grocery vouchers have proved very acceptable in the past, we have continued to distribute them to allow people to choose for themselves what they most wanted for their Christmas dinner. The whole operation was ably guided by Mmes. N. Burri and B. Kaluza, helped in the packing and distribution by Mmes. G. Gyssler, M. Harhalakis, W. Reutlinger, P. Whiting,

R.-M. Zumofen, Mr. and Mrs. R. P. Glarner and Messrs. Ch. Hill, W. Lockyer and L. Smith. All the parcels in the Greater London area were again distributed personally and these visits were much appreciated.

Our contributions towards holidays are down this year, mainly because a number of the older pensioners do not wish to stay away from home any more and at the most go for day-outings. Contributions to these are quite naturally less costly than a real holiday. However, these holidays are not reserved entirely to the elderly and we can also consider applications from younger people who are in need of a break.

Help for children's holidays in Switzerland, mainly under the Pro-Juventute scheme was given to 14 youngsters. This is a significant drop from the previous year, due entirely to the smaller number of applications received as we were able to accede to all requests for support.

Repatriations no longer form part of our duties. With the new Law on Assistance to the Swiss Abroad which came into force on the 1st January 1974, it became obvious that our handling of this matter would only duplicate with the work that the Embassy has to do in this respect and whilst we are still at their disposal, should there be any need for our intervention, it was decided that the routine could be handled more efficiently by one body only.

This new law is an interesting innovation from two points of view. The first is that all assistance given to Swiss people living abroad is now concentrated in the hands of one central organisation. This eliminates the differences and discrepancies which occurred when help was granted by cantons and communes to their citizens and it greatly speeds up the treatment of each application. The second important point is that the law can provide help in some cases when people are in receipt of assistance from the host country and even forsee preventive measures. During the course of the year, we have assisted a number of clients in making their application through the Embassy and in the cases known to us, the response has been both rapid and adequate. It is also worth noting that, when the law was in preparation, a draft was submitted to the Swiss welfare organisations abroad for their comment.

Some rooms in the house at Conway Street are let, mainly to youngsters, and the general running of the place and dealing with the various problems that crop up in a community where people of different outlooks and temperaments live under the same roof takes up a great deal of time and, not infrequently, patience.

Our property at Belsize Grove, housing the Swiss Hostel for Girls, needed

substantial repairs during the course of the year.

The Executive Committee met regularly once a month to deal with the applications for help and other business. In May, Mr. and Mrs. F. Adams invited us to their home and again in December, the meeting was held at Asmara Road, this time unfortunately by way of a goodbye celebration. We extend our grateful thanks to Mr. and Mrs. Adams, not only for the two pleasant evenings and the splendid dinners, but for giving us the occasion to meet outside the formal surroundings of the office and we wish them all the very best in their new post.

The relations with the Welfare Office for Swiss Girls continue to be most pleasant and beneficial to both organisations. We particularly wish to thank Miss R.-M. Zumofen, the social worker, for a most agreeable collaboration.

Mrs. M. Lyster again did the relief work during Mrs. Sharp's holidays and we thank her for her efficient help.

We very much regret to have to report the death of two of the most faithful former members of the Executive Committee. Mr. J. Zimmermann, Secretary to the Society from 1952 to 1968 and member of the Committee for many more years, died in August and Mr. G. Godet passed away in December at La Neuveville, having retired from the Executive Committee earlier in the year. Both men were in close touch with our clients, Mr. Zimmermann through his function and Mr. Godet through his faithful visiting. They and the Society have a great debt of gratitude towards them.

We are grateful to our Honorary President, His Excellency the Swiss Ambassador, Dr. A. Weitnauer for his continued support and the interest he has shown in our activities. The Embassy were represented at our Executive Meetings by the Counsellor, Dr. B. von Tscharnier and the Consul-General, M. F. Adams.

We also wish to thank all those who have supported us in our work during the course of the year: the Swiss Federal Authorities, the Swiss Embassy in London, the Swiss Churches, the Swiss Societies in London, the *Swiss Observer*, our Honorary Auditors, English social workers of both private and statutory bodies and quite particularly the many individual friends and supporters on whose interest and contributions we depend more than ever. Last but not least, we thank the British Authorities for their hospitality and assistance.

To terminate, we wish to thank our Social Worker and Secretary, Mrs. A.-R. Sharp, for the way in which she has carried out her manifold tasks.

On behalf of the Executive Committee
M. Schneebeli, President

MODERN SWISS MUSIC

A concert of modern Swiss music was given at London's Cockpit Theatre on 19th March by the British Ensemble "Dreamtiger" with the Swiss pianist, Lise Martine Jeanneret performing as soloist. "Modern" would certainly appear to be an understatement and the term "music" hardly appropriate. Most of the works given in British première were more aptly described as a succession of disconnected and haphazard noises produced by various instruments — piano, cello, flute and saxophone — invariably used in the wrong way. I would say that the pianist used the keyboard for about a quarter of her stint. Most of the time she was perched fully extended (she was indeed quite small) over the strings of her grand piano, scratching and plucking them with a variety of implements ranging from a comb to a wooden stick.

Miss Jeanneret also resorted to a sheet of paper to produce weird staccato sounds from the instrument, above which towered two large microphones. With the help of electronic interference and the production of ghoulish sounds monitored from a console by the main composer, Mr. Erid Gaudibert — she was able to act as a symphony orchestra all by herself.

Similar, though less ambitious noises were produced by the wind instrumentalists. A final piece called "Interno Inferno" by Jean Derbès was performed in darkness with the musicians moving about the stage in statuesque postures while the projectors flashed their lights on the audience. The music varied in rhythm and presumably in meaning. For one brief and hopeful moment, it took the accent of modern jazz and gave the uninitiated a moment of satisfaction.

But the *Financial Times'* music correspondent, whose account was the only one we saw in the national Press, was far from amused. He said that the works performed were utterly

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