

Zeitschrift: The Swiss observer : the journal of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK
Herausgeber: Federation of Swiss Societies in the United Kingdom
Band: - (1975)
Heft: 1709

Artikel: Federation of Swiss societies in UK
Autor: [s.n.]
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-689140>

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FEDERATION OF SWISS SOCIETIES IN UK

Tenth annual general meeting at the residence of the Swiss Ambassador on 2 May:

M. B. Simon, the President, welcomed all those present, particularly the Ambassador as Honorary President, whom he thanked most warmly for allowing the meeting to be held in the Residence and for the refreshments he was providing; the new Minister, Dr Fritsch; Consul-General Jaques from Manchester; and Consul Glauser.

Before opening the proceedings the President conferred upon the former President, Dr Hans Egli, the Honorary Vice-Presidency of the Federation, in appreciation of all the services he had rendered it since its foundation, and presented him with a replica of a Georgian silver meat skewer in the form of a paper knife. Dr Egli expressed his thanks.

Mr Paschaud proposed that the minutes of the 1974 AGM be approved, Mr Grob seconding, and this was carried unanimously.

Mr Jaccard proposed that the President's Annual Report be approved, Mr Asch seconding, and this was carried unanimously.

In a discussion of the accounts, Mr Asch pointed out that, without the once-only Swiss Sports Committee donation and allowing for an extra £70 for the expenses of the Delegates to the

Commission of the Swiss Abroad which was to be added to next year's accounts, there would have been a deficit of £95; he asked how such a loss would be met in future.

The President explained that the Committee felt this year was exceptional in that there were two new Deputy Delegates; it would shortly be considering whether to increase or set a ceiling on the financial support for the Delegates' visits to Switzerland.

Dr Egli, recalling that some years ago the meeting had positively decided to meet all the Delegates' expenses, suggested that for the time being things should continue on the same basis as before, even at the risk of having to draw on the capital of £765.

The President said that, while the Committee was not alarmed by the situation, the trips were becoming dearer and the societies would have to think seriously about their contributions, since £765 was not a large sum; the Nouvelle Société Helvétique had decided to increase its contribution to £40, which was encouraging.

Mr Schmid having confirmed that the accounts had been audited and found correct by Mr De Maria, they were approved unanimously.

Dr Bolliger said that the Assembly of the Commission of the Swiss Abroad

in Neuchâtel last August had been successful. The main theme had been Switzerland's social institutions, particularly those affecting the Swiss abroad.

1974 had been the last chance for them to join the AVS. Between 30,000 and 40,000 Swiss abroad were now full members, approximately 10 per cent. One would have wished there could have been a specially favourable arrangement for them, with correspondingly smaller benefits.

At the meeting in Berne on 8 March the subject of the vote for the Swiss abroad had been discussed. The proposal had now been before all the cantonal parliaments and parties and with very few exceptions had been approved. The lower house of Parliament would probably pass the law in the summer and the upper house in the autumn, and it might come into force late this year, though the whole system of voting in Switzerland was under review and might be revised.

The subject of Swiss nationality had also been discussed. Whereas a Swiss male marrying a foreigner immediately conferred a Swiss nationality upon her, the foreign husband of a Swiss woman had to wait three years and must have lived in Switzerland for at least five years before acquiring Swiss nationality.

Although the whole matter was only in the preliminary stages, a strong



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attempt was under way to give absolutely equal rights to women with regard to Swiss nationality.

The President invited the societies to send their views on the subject either direct to the Delegates or through himself. The Editor of the *Swiss Observer* agreed to Professor Inebnit's suggestion that the problem should be put before that paper's readers so that distant clubs could discuss it and send in a collective opinion.

On the subject of information, Dr Bolliger stated that from now on over 300,000 Swiss registered abroad would receive the Official Communications four times a year.

In the ensuing discussion, Mr Jaccard recalled that about 15 years ago he had suggested that the Swiss abroad might pay half the normal AVS contribution in return for half the benefit, but this had been rejected on the grounds of administrative complications.

He was sure many Swiss would avail themselves of the opportunity to join if they could afford the contributions. The President doubted whether this question could be reopened.

To Mr Asch's question as to whether the Swiss authorities could negotiate with the British authorities either tax deduction on contributions or reduced taxation on the eventual benefits, Dr Bolliger replied that this was under discussion; he doubted whether Switzerland and the UK would be the first to conclude such an agreement, though similar arrangements were being made within the EEC.

The President then read Mrs Meier's Report in her absence. The main themes were (a) information — the *Echo* was in need of more subscribers — and (b) the Solidarity Fund — the new Constitution had been introduced; regrettably, membership of the Fund had only increased marginally since the end of 1974.

Father Bossard, reporting as Deputy Delegate on the meeting concerning the young Swiss abroad, said the main problems discussed had been military service and going to study in Switzerland. On behalf of the meeting the President thanked the Delegates for all their work.

The President suggested the election of two auditors be done by confirming the present auditors, Mr Berner and Mr De Maria, in office. This was formally proposed by Mr Burri, seconded by Mr Schneebeli and carried unanimously.

Discussion on the theme of the Auslandschweizertag to be held on 29/30 August in Basle

*Theme: "The Swiss Abroad as
Ambassadors of Culture"*

Explaining the theme, Dr Bolliger remarked that more financial help from Berne was needed for cultural events for the Swiss abroad, or perhaps the Swiss as individuals did not think culture was necessary. Father Bossard said that, viewing the subject from the opposite angle, the Swiss abroad might be

considered Ambassadors of Culture to Switzerland. Thanking Dr Bolliger, the President expressed his conviction that the occasion in Basle would be a memorable one.

Other Business

The President drew attention to a misprint in No 18 of the Federation Rules: "two trustees" should read "three trustees".

Referring to a suggestion that the Federation should take out a third party insurance for the societies, he asked all societies interested to let him know by the end of the month.

The President made the suggestion of the establishment of a "Swiss Professional Register" as at present there were no means of finding out the profession of the more prominent members of the Swiss community. The meeting agreed with this suggestion and it was agreed that each society would supply such a list to the Federation.

The President thanked Consul Glauser for his willingness to act as a clearing house to avoid clashing dates — any functions contemplated by the societies should be notified to him.

It would therefore be possible in future to enquire from the Consulate in London about the various functions held by the Swiss Societies in the UK.

The President further suggested that at present the only information within the Federation's documentation about the individual activities of the various Swiss societies was very sketchy and he therefore asked all Presidents to



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send to the Secretary, Mr V. Berti, a copy of their latest annual report and/or any rules or other background material in order to improve the Federation's knowledge of the individual societies' activities. Mr Asch suggested that the President of the Federation should automatically become an ex-officio member of all societies.

The President reported that the Committee had not yet selected its fifth member and he proposed that such a member need not be a President of a society. On Professor Inebnit's proposal, seconded by Mr Jaccard, the meeting agreed to this proposal unanimously.

Mr Jaccard, explaining that certain remarks in his speech at the Swiss Mercantile Society's Annual Dinner-Dance had been intended for that particular gathering, regretted that they had appeared in the *Swiss Observer* without having been placed in the correct context.

Mr Schmid stated that the Swiss National Tourist Office had not been informed or consulted about the recent Dutch VAT the Swiss Centre and did not consider it to be in Switzerland's interests.

Mr Berti stated that the First of August Committee were faced with serious financial problems. They did try to be Ambassadors of Swiss Culture by presenting, for example, Swiss choral groups but could not afford actually to bring one over from Switzerland. Inflation had eaten into the donations

from Swiss firms and the only society to support them regularly was the Swiss Mercantile Society. This autumn the societies would be invited to tell the Committee what its future terms of reference were to be.

Mr Burri appealed to everyone with influence to obtain more support for the *Swiss Observer*; the Presidents could help to provide material by supplying well in advance details of all their societies' meetings.

Professor Inebnit drew the attention of the meeting to the 27th Landsgemeinde (report last month) of the Swiss in the North held at Hebden Bridge on 15 June. He gave notice of his intention to use this platform to discuss Swiss political and social problems.

Dr Bolliger expressed the view that discussion on such problems would not be desirable, particularly bearing in mind the type of friendly gathering which normally included many English friends and visitors.

Furthermore, discussions of political problems of another country at an informal meeting of this kind should in his view be avoided at all costs. The meeting endorsed Dr Bolliger's view.

In closing the meeting the President reminded all representatives present of the fact that the Federation was in existence to help solve problems arising to the individual societies, but was only able to provide the assistance if the Committee of the Federation are kept informed accordingly.

WELFARE OFFICE FOR SWISS GIRLS IN GREAT BRITAIN

The Annual Report of the Welfare Office for the year 1974

During the past year a considerable number of changes have occurred in the Welfare Office. Miss Zumofen, who started work in December 1973, appreciated at an early stage the need for good public relations.

Not only were the majority of Swiss girls in England unaware of the existence of the Welfare Office but many hostels, agencies, youth centres and other social organisations for foreign girls needed reminding of our existence and as a result Miss Zumofen visited more than 50 such organisations during the year.

In co-operation with the Swiss Church a very successful competition was organised amongst the members of the Youth Club, to design a publicity card for the Welfare Office for distribution to language schools, English and Swiss au pair agencies and young people both here and in Switzerland.

These have proved a great success and we are most grateful to Father Bossard for kindly undertaking the printing of the cards.

During the year the Welfare Office was invited to join Committees of the following organisations:

International Youth Welfare: Our Co-operation with this organisation is rather limited because of Switzerland's policy towards foreign workers.

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