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Swiss from abroad gather at Einsiedeln

Special Report

In the year 828, Meinrad, a monk on the Reichenau, went to the Etzel, and 7 years later, he retreated further into the "Sombre Wood". He lived a hermit's life there until 861 when he was murdered. Two ravens followed the two assassins to the Lake of Zürich and took them to the judge. They were duly punished for their heinous crime. The two ravens are depicted in the coat of arms of Einsiedeln.

The monastery on the site of the hermit's abode was founded nearly 70 years later by Eberhard, and today the Monastery and its Abbey Church are the most important place of pilgrimage in Switzerland. The Church is one of the most outstanding Baroque buildings in the country and houses the famous Black Madonna. The library contains 150,000 volumes and 1,300 manuscripts, as well as 1,200 incunabula of the 12th century. The *Stiftsgymnasium* has 350 pupils.

This then was the venue of the 56th Assembly of the Swiss Abroad at the end of August. It was attended by some 450 people from all parts of the world, plus a number of inland Swiss, official guests and the press. It was not a record, but more than expected. From Britain there were the two delegates, Mrs Mariann Meier (South) and her deputy, Father Paul Bossard, and Dr. Alex Lang (North), the President of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the U.K., Mr. Bernard Simon and his wife, the NSH Vice-President and Mrs. René Glarner, Consul Horace Jacques and a number of others, a total of about 20.

The programme was very varied. It included a guided tour of Einsiedeln and a meeting of the Friends of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad. There were several "question hours" on subjects like education, military service, social insurance, citizenship, Solidarity Fund and a special meeting of young *Auslandschweizer*, among them six recruits.

The Congress was officially opened by an organ recital at the Church, followed by the Organisation's new President, National Councillor Dr. Alfred Weber, and a number of local dignitaries. Girls in national costumes served wine, and the local band entertained the gathering on the wide terrace outside the Monastery.

Saturday was the day of the plenary session held at the Village

Centre, a former orphanage. Dr. Weber opened the session, and he was followed by the President of the *Nouvelle Société Helvétique*, Dr. Philippe Abravanel. The main theme "Information of the Swiss Abroad" was introduced by Mr. Marcel Ney, Director of the Secretariat for Swiss Abroad in Berne. He gave a historic survey of how Swiss abroad used to be informed, and how the "Echo" and the "Review" were born, the former the illustrated monthly of the Organisation (in three languages), the latter the periodical which is sent to all Swiss registered abroad four times a year, in Great Britain incorporated in *The Swiss Observer*. This was followed by an excellent slide show by the Deputy Director of the Secretariat, Mr Lucien Paillard, showing how the papers are produced.

Radio link

Then came a direct shortwave transmission from Dakar where members of the local Swiss community talked on common problems. This event was organised by the Swiss Shortwave Service, now to be called *Swiss Radio International*. A talk by a member of the "Tagesanzeiger" which carries a weekly edition mainly for Swiss abroad, and two short films brought the morning session to a close.

The afternoon session opened with a speech by Mrs. Mariann Meier, London, on the 20th anniversary of the Solidarity Fund. After a short historic survey, she pleaded for more support and handed a "Goldvoegeli" to the Fund's President, Dr. Gustav Schelling. Her predecessor as President of the London Group of the *Nouvelle Société Helvétique*, Mr Fred Suter, had put down a "Vreneli" at the Assembly in 1958 when the Fund was founded. This gesture should remind the Swiss abroad of the original idea of the solidarity on which the Fund was based.

The retiring President of the Organisation, Monsieur Louis Guisan, and his wife were then honoured after 11 years of chairing the Commission of the Swiss Abroad. He said that he had received more than he had given. In his time of office he had experienced that the Swiss abroad were tenacious, attached to their homeland and eager for liberty.

This charming ceremony was followed by the highlight of the afternoon, the speech by Switzerland's Foreign Minister, Federal Councillor Pierre Aubert. He talked about the new Canton Jura (at that time not yet decided) and Switzerland's position vis-à-vis the United Nations. He referred to the "Review" and the total revision of the Federal Constitution,

and he promised that the Swiss Abroad would be heard in this connection.

Lighter side

The evening was devoted to a dinner, some folkloristic entertainment and dancing, and the Sunday began with an ecumenical service at the *Jugendkirche*. The local male choir gave an outstanding performance. After the church service, the party went on an outing around the attractive man-made Sihlsee, followed by an open-air *apéritif*, communal luncheon and finally coffee at the Village Centre. Another successful Assembly had come to a close.

Five meetings

The real work, however, had been done at several working meetings which had taken place before the official opening of the Assembly. The delegate to the Commission took part in five such meetings: Commission of Information (at which "Echo", "Review" — special issue of *The Swiss Observer* — and other matters of information were discussed). Co-ordinating meeting (at which problems and difficulties with the production of the "Review" were under discussion), the Council meeting of the Solidarity Fund and subsequently its AGM.

"Little Parliament"

The most important of these meetings, however, was that of the Commission of the Swiss Abroad, the "Little Parliament", at which Mrs. Mariann Meier represented the Swiss in Great Britain South and Dr. Alex Lang those in the North. It was held at the beautiful "Fuerstensaal" at the monastery. The two most important matters on the agenda concerned the total revision of the Federal Constitution and citizenship of children born to Swiss mothers married to foreign fathers. The text of two resolutions passed on these subjects will appear in the next special issue of *The Swiss Observer*. The new President of the ASO, National Councillor Dr. Alfred Weber, was in the chair for the first time.

He said in his opening speech that the Swiss abroad were well aware of the characteristics of Swiss democracy, diversity, yet unity, traditions and isolation, yet open to the world. They were, however, usually anxious for quick solutions, and that was not the way of Swiss democracy where the "Sanctus Trampus" prevailed, "*die Politik der Kleinen Schritte*". It is the task of the Com-

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POUNDSAVERS — POUNDSAVERS

Little Parliament meets in idyllic surroundings

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mission to adapt the one to the other and to represent the Swiss compatriots abroad as a united force.

On 21st September, the London Group in conjunction with the Federation of Swiss Societies in the U.K. held a meeting at the Swiss Embassy, at which delegates gave their reports and a discussion took place. In order to comply with the wishes and intentions of the new President of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad, the community in Great Britain, too, must decide just how its voice can become of greater importance and impact on Swiss public opinion. It is necessary, therefore, to study information which appears in *The Swiss Observer* and to attend any meetings organised by Swiss societies and clubs where such matters are being discussed.

MM

SWISS MINISTER FOR FRENCH PROTESTANT CHURCH

The French Protestant Church in Soho Square has a new Minister to replace the Rev. Calude Vanderlinden. He is a Swiss national. The Rev. André Sprunger, 48, comes from Moutier, in the Jura Bernois.

The French Protestants of London therefore have two Swiss as Ministers: Mr. Sprunger, and Raymond Renou, the former Minister of the French-speaking Swiss Parish in London. Mr. Renou will remain in London to assist the Rev. Sprunger.

with management consultancy and the exchange of technologies. Before studying theology at Lausanne and Oxford, the Rev. Sprunger had gone through a commercial apprenticeship and no doubt acquired qualities which have served him in good stead as a minister!

We wish him and his wife a long and fruitful stay in London.

PMB

S. AFRICA EXPERIENCE

Having just returned from over 15 years of pastoral work in South Africa, the Rev. Sprunger, who is married and has one son, aged 18, is most happy to be back in Europe. He expects to be able to work with the large community of Huguenot descendants in Britain.

In South Africa, the Rev. Sprunger was missionary for a number of years in a remote area populated by the Tsonga tribe. His pastoral work also took him to Johannesburg where he also found time to engage in business activities.

The Rev. Sprunger was the first person to have the bright idea of exporting meat from Botswana to Switzerland. He was also involved

Requests for Penfriends

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