

A social Swiss Centre in London

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A SOCIAL SWISS CENTRE IN LONDON — NOW ? N.S.H. — Discussion Strongly in Favour Of It.

A recent open discussion on the question of a Swiss Centre in London organised by the New Helvetic Society, London Group, showed that there is a tremendous active interest in this question and a startling consensus of opinion in favour of an immediate start being made to realise this old dream that has been so much talked about not for years but for decades. Despite appalling weather conditions and traffic chaos nearly a hundred members of our Colony were present, representatives of all elements and societies. It soon became clear that they had not just come for curiosity but because the question to be discussed seemed vital to them and was close to their heart. Everyone who spoke was in favour of the idea of establishing a Swiss Centre as soon as possible, at least a modest social centre for a start, pending the realisation of the more ambitious scheme, elaborated some time ago by the Council for the Study of Swiss Problems and approved in principle by a resolution of the Swiss National Council last Autumn. The upshot of the discussion was that the Council of the N.S.H. London Group was requested unanimously to have concrete proposals elaborated with a view to the establishment of a social Swiss Centre as soon as possible. A small sub-committee of the Council is to be entrusted with this laborious task and it is hoped that positive progress may be reported before the end of the year.

Dr. Egli, the new President of the London Group, opened the discussion. He revealed that preliminary soundings amongst members of our Colony had shown that the present time seemed particularly favourable for the pursuit of the idea of a social centre, pending the bigger scheme which would serve commercial purposes as well as the social needs of our Colony. The realisation of the larger scheme will certainly take many years, but the desire for a social meeting place with a good restaurant and a library with current Swiss periodicals, etc., is urgent. Its establishment would in no way prejudice the bigger scheme, but on the contrary provide the living nucleus for it, when and if it can be realised. What so many other foreign colonies in London have succeeded in doing years ago, some of them smaller than the Swiss Colony, cannot be beyond our own capacity.

Mr. Renou, an outstanding advocate of the idea

for many years, gave an exhaustive outline of the problem as it stands now. The plan of a Swiss Centre as it is sponsored by the "Swiss Council" is foremost an industrial and commercial proposition. This scheme providing a centre and a meeting place for the business world would require a capital of several hundreds of thousands of pounds. A motion proposing such a centre has been accepted in principle by the National Council, but no credit has been voted as yet. Taking into account the severe restrictions in building and the necessity of finding the private capital, this scheme cannot materialize before 1952 if it will materialize at all. But in the meantime, there is an urgent need for a "Maison de Suisse" and the N.S.H. is well qualified to do the preparatory work. When our plans are sufficiently advanced, other groups and societies should be invited to join us in order to co-ordinate all efforts. The "Swiss House" of the S.M.S. renders invaluable service, but it is not a "home" where friends can be invited. The "Swiss Club" in Charlotte Street enables many Swiss societies to spend pleasant evenings there, but it cannot answer all our requirements, nor could a revived "Foyer Suisse" which is attached to the Swiss Protestant Church. The "City Swiss Club" has a fund for the creation of a Club House of its own. This does not exclude our joining forces but it will require negotiations. Other societies are without a home and would welcome the opportunity of uniting with us in an endeavour to create a "central home." It is up to them to tell us what they require. But it is our responsibility to take the lead.

Let therefore the N.S.H. take the initiative and show the way with no other object but to realise, within the walls of the "Maison de Suisse," our motto: *Un pour tous, tous pour un.*

Mr. Staehelin as Representative of the Swiss Trade Office is well aware of the need for such a meeting place. He urges the N.S.H. to go ahead, and to make a modest beginning. *Mr. Ferrari* thinks the scheme with a restaurant a good business proposition. *Father Lanfranchi* welcomed particularly the possibility to get a centre for the less exalted Swiss people in the Colony who often don't know where to go. *Miss Reutiner* hopes that Pro Helvetia, if approached, will grant a subsidy for a reading room. *Mr. Ferraris* would like to start at once and take over an existing club; members could contribute with furniture, and improve the place by their own efforts. *Mr. Renou* would prefer a large house which actually may be

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cheaper than a small one. We shouldn't aim at something cheap but at a place worthy of our homeland.

The *Chairman* suggests first to ventilate the plan in order to get precise ideas what the people want, then to refer the matter back to the Council who would entrust the working out of the scheme to a smaller body, and finally, with a detailed plan in hand, to appeal for support. *Mr. Berti* asks if membership be envisaged or if the home will be free to anybody. *Mr. Andrea* fears that a membership fee may close the door to the more modest elements in the Colony. *Mr. Renou* thinks a membership essential for control and licencing purposes. *Father Lanfranchi* would like to see the fee as low as possible. *Mr. Aubaret* is convinced that the Legation would firmly back the plan; he seconds the motion requesting the Council to go ahead. *Mr. Suter*, Hon. Vice-President, is delighted to hear that we will have the support of the Legation. The backing of the Swiss societies is equally necessary. A membership fee of a guinea wouldn't be a high one and the house would be practically open to all as a member could always introduce friends.

Mr. Störi thinks that the "Swiss Club" in Charlotte Street would be glad to support our plans financially and otherwise.

After nearly two hours discussion the meeting unanimously urged the Council to go ahead as expeditiously as possible.

Following the debate, *Mr. Tall* gave a fascinating lantern-slide lecture about his climbing expedition in the Bergell mountains last year. The audience was deeply impressed not only by the beauties of the multi-colour pictures taken with an "Alpina" but also by the physical prowess of the lecturer himself.

E.S.

CITY SWISS CLUB.

Thé Dansant.

About 160 members and friends attended the Thé Dansant arranged by the City Swiss Club, on Saturday, March 29th, 1947, at the Dorchester Hotel, Park Lane, W.1.

The Swiss Minister and Madame Ruegger, who intended to be present, had unfortunately to cancel their visit at the last moment owing to the illness of the Minister.

It seems as if the bad habit of starting late, so prevalent in pre-war years, is once again to make its re-appearance. As advertised and circularised, this function was supposed to start at 3 p.m. At this time, apart from the excellent Dorchester Band, which was ready for action, about twenty people put in an appearance. It was well past 3.30 p.m. before the party began going.

An excellent tea was served and the dance band enticed young and old on the floor by their vivacious playing.

It was a very jolly afternoon which was greatly enjoyed by all who were present, and if it passed all too quickly, the blame is to be passed on to those who arrived late, and thus deprived themselves and others from a full time entertainment.

ACADEMY CINEMA

Presents PONTCARRAL COLONEL D'EMPIRE (A)

During the German occupation, as leader of the film resistance movement, Pierre Blanchard wanted to make a film that would sustain his countrymen's courage. He went back in the history of his country to an almost equally dark period — the years after Napoleon's defeat, when France lay prostrate in the hand of a weak and unworthy ruler. He chose the tale of Colonel Pontcarral who, when Napoleon fell, refused to lower his flag.

So cleverly was the story told that, even though the script was closely scrutinised by the Gestapo, the Germans did not realise the film's contemporary significance. The moral that escaped the Germans did not, however, go un-noticed by French audiences: each showing of the film not only provided laughs at the expense of the German occupiers, but also helped to keep alive in the hearts of the spectators the hope that France would, as before, rise from her present humiliation and regain her true greatness and glory.

"Pontcarral Colonel d'Empire" is directed by Jean Delannoy, who also directed the Cocteau picture, "L'Eternel Retour," and who is considered one of the best of the new young French directors whom the war has brought to the fore.

"Pontcarral Colonel d'Empire" will commence its run at the Academy Cinema on Tuesday, April 1st. In the same programme will be "The Way We Live," directed by Jill Craigie — the documentary that was saved from relegation to the obscurity of the vaults by the championship of the Press.

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