

# Swiss economic council

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### SWISS ECONOMIC COUNCIL.

#### SWISS FORTNIGHT IN GREAT BRITAIN, 1959.

On 12th December 1957 the Swiss Economic Council met for its dinner and meeting at the Dorchester Hotel. Mr. M. Wiesendanger was in the Chair. The Council received as guests Mr. A. J. Staehelin, Director, and Dr. John Brunner, Deputy-Director, of the Swiss Office for the Development of Trade, Zurich. About 30 members of the Council were present.

Mr. Wiesendanger offered a very cordial welcome to both guests and greeted in particular also Dr. R. Faessler, Commercial Counsellor, representing the Swiss Embassy. The president referred in his speech to the topic which would be discussed after dinner, namely the organisation of a Swiss Fortnight in London and other cities of Great Britain. Preliminary exchanges of views on this subject had taken place at a former meeting of the Council and on 11th December at a gathering of the Council's Committee arranged at the Swiss Embassy. It had been ascertained on these occasions that the members of the Council were welcoming the idea of organising a Swiss action for the promotion of Swiss economic and cultural exchanges with Great Britain.

After the excellent dinner served at the Dorchester Hotel Mr. Staehelin rose at the chairman's invitation to address the Council. He began his exposé by declaring how pleased he was in seeing again so many familiar faces amongst those present, and recalled the connections which he had been privileged to maintain in his prior capacity of delegate in the United Kingdom of the Swiss Office for the Development of Trade (O.S.E.C.) in the years 1945—1947. His Office, with 1,700 members of all branches of the Swiss exporting industries and subsidised by the Swiss Government, is charged with general economic propaganda. It utilises as means the organisation of Swiss participation at international fairs and exhibitions, its export periodicals, the international press, the film and radio. Various special services of the institution help to further the contact of its members with representatives and overseas clients of the Swiss industry.

Before entering upon the main subject of the proposed Swiss Fortnight, he gave an account of the preparations which the Swiss Office for the Development of Trade had made at the International and Universal Exhibition of 1958 at Brussels, with which the Federal Council had entrusted it. The Swiss pavilion at the said exhibition aggregates 55,000 square

feet of covered surface on an area of approximately 110,000 square feet. The pavilion, whose construction has been nearly completed, reposes on a slope in the centre of the foreign section, is surrounded by high trees, and is composed of beehive-like hexagonal elements, built of wood, steel, aluminium and glass, and grouped around a pond with terraces. There will be a general cultural section, collective exhibits of the textile, watch-making, mechanical and chemical industries, the touristic, Swiss railways and transport sections, agriculture and not-to-be-missed Swiss restaurants. In the course of the next few months the decoration of the halls and installation of exhibits will take place and it is hoped that the pavilion will be ready for the opening of the exhibition on 17th April 1958. The Swiss Federal Chambers have allotted a credit of 7.6 million SFr.; the contributions of private industry will very likely equal this sum. Mr. Staehelin cordially invited on behalf of Minister de Salis, Swiss Commissioner General, the members of the Swiss Economic Council to come to Brussels during the exhibition, which will be open for six months, and he felt confident that Switzerland would make an honourable showing with its pavilion.

Proceeding, Mr. Staehelin explained the outline of the organisation of the Swiss Fortnight in Great Britain. He reminded the members of the Council that after the successful Swiss Architecture and Book Exhibitions held in London in 1946 no major Swiss action had been undertaken, partly due to currency and import difficulties in Great Britain. With the import trade having been liberalised to a great extent,

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it is now held in Switzerland that the time may have come to engage in a broad Swiss goodwill action. In the autumn of 1957 the idea had been discussed at Zurich with representatives of the Foundation "Pro Helvetia", the Swiss National Tourist Office, the Swissair and export organisations. There is a manifest interest of the cultural and touristic institutions and the consumer goods industries to combine efforts for the realisation of the project. Swiss Weeks had been organised under the auspices of the Swiss Office for the Development of Trade in Stockholm in 1955 and in Düsseldorf in 1957.

In 1953 an elaborate British Week had been held at Zurich with a number of cultural features (theatre plays, concerts, lectures) with a central commercial exhibition. At the inauguration of the said British manifestation Mr. Duncan Sandys extended a hearty welcome to Switzerland to follow suit with a Swiss action in Great Britain. In recalling the preliminary discussions which had been held in London and Zurich Mr. Staehelin declared that the date for the Swiss Fortnight to be held in London, Manchester and Edinburgh was provisionally fixed as 29th September — 9th October 1959, a period still far off — necessarily so for careful preparations. For the time being it is contemplated to arrange by the Foundation "Pro Helvetia" in London an exhibition of Swiss paintings, a small general exhibition "Glimpses of Switzerland", combined with a book and poster show. If possible concerts of Swiss composers' works will be organised and eventually broadcast, lectures by Swiss scientists may be given and documentary films shown.

In the economic sphere the main purpose of the Swiss Fortnight would consist of making the British

public better acquainted with available Swiss goods such as textiles, fashion and clothing, shoes, watches, household goods, foodstuffs, wines, etc., by means of window displays in department stores and leading retail shops, and with fashion shows in London's West End. Simultaneously suitable propaganda for tourism in Switzerland would be carried on. Similar economic and cultural actions, but on a smaller scale, would be organised in Manchester and Edinburgh.

After having referred to these desiderata Mr. Staehelin thanked the members of the Swiss Economic Council for their sympathetic reception of the project and for any practical support which they might lend to the fulfilment of what might appear to be an ambitious programme. Time would show what could be realised with the help of all concerned.

Thereupon the chairman asked Dr. Brunner to explain the portent and the working of the Swiss Weeks held previously in Stockholm and Düsseldorf. Dr. Brunner as chief of the exhibition department of the Swiss Office for the Development of Trade was able to show with photographs and detailed data how the said actions had been realised and at what cost.

The general discussion which followed the two exposés bore out the unanimity of the Council to give its support and advice for the execution of the programme expounded, and it was decided to leave the co-ordination and financial arrangements of the goodwill action in the hands of the Swiss Office for the Development of Trade, Zurich.

The chairman, Mr. Wiesendanger, thanked Messrs. Staehelin and Brunner for having come over to London to make contact and closed the meeting at 9.30 p.m.

ST.

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