

News from the colony

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NEWS FROM THE COLONY

SWISS ECONOMIC COUNCIL

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT (Abridged) 1964/1966

I have pleasure in submitting to you on the occasion of the Annual General Meeting of the Council my fourth Annual Report, reviewing the activities of the Council during the years 1964/1966.

During the period under review all the Council's efforts have been directed to the formation of the:

Institute of Anglo-Swiss Trade Promotion

In view of the uncertainty and the state of our investigations in Spring 1965, it was decided to postpone the Annual General Meeting for the time being. But now, eighteen months later, we have reached a point where your Committee has decided to submit to the Council, at an Annual General Meeting, an up-to-date position of our investigations for consideration and decision.

Review of the Past:

The creation, thanks to the initiative of the Swiss Bank Corporation together with the Swiss National Tourist Office and Swissair, of a Swiss Centre in the heart of London, has, of course, quite naturally automatically raised the desirability of giving the Centre a true Swiss image together with permanent displays and Exhibitions of Swiss goods, fully representative of Swiss Industry, Banking and Commercial interests, and also to include a multi-purpose room for the permanent and temporary members of the Colony by the creation of a Social and Cultural Centre, and last, but not least, the Trade Promotion Centre fostering Anglo-Swiss Trade.

The size of the task to achieve these objectives proved, as was expected, extremely difficult and above all time-consuming.

To date, only the Exhibition, Sales Stores, the Demonstration of Swiss goods and the running of Restaurants in true Swiss style are taken care of and assured by the formation of Swiss Fair Ltd. by a number of Swiss firms mainly in the Consumer Industries. The enormous funds required are at last secured.

The other two projects, the "Forum" being the Colony's multi-purpose room and our own Trade Promotion Centre proved even more troublesome, in view of the difficulties of raising the necessary funds. After lengthy discussions this led to joining forces and in the Autumn of 1965, under the then President of the Confederation, Federal Councillor Dr. F. T. Wahlen, a Joint-Appeal was made by Swiss Fair Ltd., the newly-formed Federation of Swiss Societies in the U.K., and the Swiss Economic Council to Swiss Industry, to raise if possible 1.5 million Swiss Francs.

With the approval of the Parties and the Swiss Authorities it was decided that the total amount yielded by the joint appeal would be shared as follows:

25% but not more than Sw.frs.300,000.—, to the Swiss Economic Council for the financing of the Trade Promotion Centre (*à fonds perdus*).

75% plus any amount in excess of the above-mentioned Sw.frs.300,000.— to Swiss Fair Ltd., mainly for financing the building and maintenance of the multi-purpose room.

An assurance was expected from the Swiss Government for a contribution of Sw.frs.900,000.— sufficient to

finance the Lease of the Forum for 21 years providing the necessary means for building the Forum could be found.

Unfortunately, the response was not up to expectations, and only approximately Sw.Frs.750,000.—, i.e. half the required funds to secure the financing of the whole project has so far been forthcoming.

And now for the future

Your Committee has decided that the time has come to take a decision as to the future.

Although the appeal has so far not yielded the required funds, we are nevertheless confident that the money so far promised will enable us to proceed with our plans, perhaps at the beginning of a more modest scheme.

Your Committee will therefore propose to the forthcoming Annual General Meeting the following Resolutions and hopes to receive your wholehearted support:

1) To proceed with the planning of the proposed Institute of Anglo/Swiss Trade Promotion.

2) To investigate and decide on the appropriate constitution and organisation.

3) To call-in, in consultation with the Authorities in Berne, the Swiss Fair Ltd. and the Federation of Swiss Societies, the amounts promised and due to the Swiss Economic Council.

Your Committee is unanimously of the opinion that the future with all its ups and downs in store will justify the formation of our proposed Institute.

The hurtful Temporary Charge on Imports will come to an end, we hope, in November next, and Import Duties between E.F.T.A. countries will cease on 1st January 1967. Should the U.K. join the Common Market or, in the end, perhaps the two European Groups of Countries amalgamate, then we are convinced this will create problems or even difficulties which may well give our new organisation an excellent opportunity to justify its existence and render valuable assistance to member firms.

My Report would not be complete without expressing to the Board of the Swiss Fair Ltd. and in particular, to their dynamic and understanding new Chairman Dr. O. Michel, the Council's and my own personal thanks for the assistance as well as the patience he has shown in our endeavour to form the proposed Institute. I sincerely hope that the co-operation, now that we are going ahead, will be fruitful and to the benefit of both organisations and the Swiss Centre as a whole.

The Chairman continued his report by referring to meetings and events during the past two years, in particular a "hot off the press" statement in November 1964 on the then newly introduced 15% import surcharge and the Labour Government's plans for the future, given by Mr. E. C. Redhead, J.P., M.P., Minister of State (Overseas). Mr. Christen also mentioned the traditional Annual Banquet and Ball of the City Swiss Club, which was held in conjunction with the Swiss Economic Council in November 1964.

During the period covered by the Report, eight new members had joined the Council, and two had resigned. The membership now stands around forty.

Swiss Embassy

On behalf of the Council I would like to extend my sincere thanks to our Ambassador, Monsieur Béat de Fischer, for his assistance and support. The place of Monsieur Heimo, Commercial Counsellor, was taken by Dr. M. Feller, who, in turn, we learn with regret, is leaving us before the year ends, after only a short stay in London to take up the post of Counsellor and Deputy to the Minister in Brussels. We thank him for his untiring efforts and wish him every success in the future.

Chairmanship

As your Chairman for over five years I feel the time has come for a change of leadership. I sincerely hope the Committee's proposal to proceed with the formation of the planned Institute of Anglo/Swiss Trade Promotion will be approved by the forthcoming Annual General Meeting, in which case, it is my firm belief that this will be an opportune moment for the appointment of a new Chairman who can, with a fresh and vigorous approach, form and start the New Venture.

Mr. Christen next expressed the hope that the Council would accept his Committee's proposal that Dr. H. B. Knuchel, Deputy Managing Director of Geigy U.K. Ltd., be elected his successor as Chairman of the Council. He could warmly recommend him as "the right man for the job"; Dr. Knuchel had been a member for a number of years, also of the Committee, and he was a keen and enthusiastic supporter of a Trade Centre.

In terminating my term of office which I enjoyed at all times, I wish to express my personal thanks to all of you but, of course, in particular to my Colleagues on the Committee for their loyal support and assistance and wish the Council every success in the future.

J. P. CHRISTEN,
Chairman.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Annual General Meeting of the Swiss Economic Council was held on 13th of October, as usually at the Dorchester Hotel, followed by an excellent Dinner.

The proposals of the Committee, contained in the Annual Report reproduced above, were all duly accepted unanimously. Thus the planning of the proposed Institute of Anglo-Swiss Trade Promotion will be proceeded with by the Committee, especially as regards its appropriate rules and organisation. In consultation with the other interested parties, the promised amounts due to the Swiss Economic Council will be called in as a starting basis for the scheme.

The Council also accepted Mr. Christen's decision to lay down the chairmanship at this stage of progress and elected as his successor Dr. H. B. Knuchel, Deputy Managing Director of Geigy (U.K.) Ltd., as proposed by Mr. Christen and the Committee. Mr. Christen's devoted and energetic stewardship during more than five years was acknowledged by a special vote of thanks and prolonged acclamation. Messrs. R. J. Keller and O. Rohn were re-elected Vice-Chairmen and Dr. Speckert as treasurer. Mr. R. M. Suess accepted re-election fully as Honorary Secretary, dropping the proviso "pro tem". Messrs. H. Knoll and M. Wiesendanger having retired from the Committee, three new members were elected to it: Messrs. Theo von Speyr, Max Keller and P. Müller. With the aid of various drawings Mr. Kunz gave the meeting a vivid account of the splendid things to come at the Swiss Centre.

E.

UNIONE TICINESE

An Interesting Evening

In pursuance of their new policy of having monthly meetings, the Unione Ticinese called their members together on Thursday evening, 13th October, to inform them, in an entertaining and at the same time instructive way, of an important problem that is occupying public opinion in the Home Canton.

Proceedings opened with two films kindly lent by the Swiss National Tourist Office. The first one took us on a trip right from the *St. Gotthard Pass to Chiasso*, with stops in the main towns and a view of the spots which attract the modern tourist. The second was a documentary on *Ascona*, the go-ahead lakeside resort, which though close to Locarno, has of late years built up its own reputation.

After the showing of the films, the President, *Mr. Virgilio Berti*, called on our old, but as regards the Society elusive friend, Giuseppe Eusebio, a past President and "socio benemerito" to give a talk on the burning topic of present-day "ticinese" politics, the *St. Gotthard* road tunnel and the related subject of toll charges.

By showing to his audience first how the Canton Ticino belonged to the Swiss Confederation by historical evolution, Mr. Eusebio analysed then how the economical structure of the territory had transformed itself as a consequence both of technical and economic changes affecting the whole of the country over the last hundred years. This led up to the "Rivendicazioni ticinesi" first of 1925 and then to the subsequent "rivendicazioni" which were presented to Berne in 1938, but which before being studied and implemented were overtaken by the outbreak of the last war. The main plank of these last "rivendicazioni" had been the request by the Cantonal authority that a road tunnel should be built under the *St. Gotthard Pass* to enable traffic with the rest of the country to be maintained uninterrupted through the winter months. When the Federal Authorities took over the responsibility for the trunk roads, so as to convert them into motor-roads, the *St. Gotthard* road tunnel was not foreseen. It has, however, subsequently been decided upon, but owing to the anti-inflation measures it would be subject, like other costly stretches of the "national roads" to toll charges.

The Federal Council's intention to ask Parliament to amend the Constitution to enable the levying of these tolls was received as a bitter blow in the Ticino for the benefit to be derived by the Southern Canton of nearness and easier access to the rest of the country without hindrance all the year round is considerably nullified by the imposition of this financial burden. It would be a manner of speaking for the "Ticinesi" a tax in order to be Swiss. The "Ticinesi" rightly consider that their faithful attachment to the Mother Country over the centuries, despite the harsh treatment during the long Bailiwick period, during the even greater economic difficulties of two world wars, the gradual, but painful detachment from practically all commercial intercourse with neighbouring Lombardy, should naturally and as a matter of course call for recognition by the making of every effort by all concerned into integrating them into the Swiss economy, and therefore, avoiding any action which would be contrary to this end, as there road tolls would be.

After a lively question period, following upon the talk, a pleasant evening came to an end.

J.E.