

Federation of swiss societies in the United Kingdom

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FEDERATION OF SWISS SOCIETIES IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

In Place of "Presidents' Assembly"

On 5th October a new organisation for the Swiss community in Great Britain has come into being. It is not, fortunately, an addition to the already existing variety of Swiss societies and institutions of our Colony. It is merely a replacement of the "Assembly of Presidents of the Swiss Societies in Great Britain" by a more closely knit Federation with a widened range of responsibilities and a more pronounced personality of its own.

The need for this change has arisen in connection with renewed efforts for the creation of a Cultural and Social Centre in the magnificent new building in Coventry Street between Leicester Square and Piccadilly to be known as "Swiss Centre". This big project was conceived by the initiators — the Swiss Bank Corporation, the Swiss National Tourist Office and Swissair — as a business centre in the first place with offices for themselves and other Swiss concerns, as well as a Swiss restaurant, in this unique position in the very heart of London. While these aims are on the point of realisation, some room has also been reserved for a Cultural and Social Centre in this most beautifully appointed building.

This additional use, however, requires large capital sums for adapting the premises, decorating and furnishing, as well as a responsible organisation to ensure its proper functioning. While the technical administration can be left to the company responsible for other parts of the building, the co-operation of the Swiss Colony in London is indispensable for bringing life into the centre.

How can this unique opportunity be properly utilised? The requirements are threefold: capital, a responsible administration and people determined to animate the Centre and to make a success of it. They are all inter-dependant. In fact the last mentioned requirement is the most important and has to be ensured before the questions of finance and technical administration become acute. The natural choice for the administration lies ready at hand: Swiss Fair Ltd., the organisation responsible for the Swiss restaurant and market place. The capital can only be raised with Governmental assistance and by a joint appeal of Swiss Fair Ltd., the Swiss Societies, the Swiss Economic Council and the Government. Swiss Fair and the Swiss Economic Council are waiting to do their part and the Government is favourably disposed towards the scheme. But before its financial assistance could be justified it must have guarantees of the co-operation of our Colony in the form of agreements already negotiated. They can be

signed on our behalf only by a juridical entity representing the Colony enjoying its confidence and therefore capable of ensuring its wholehearted support.

This was the main reason for the formation of a properly constituted "Federation of the Swiss Societies in the U.K." in place of the loose Presidents' Assembly. As the building is nearing completion this change had to be achieved as a matter of urgency. After intensive negotiations of a Special Committee appointed by the Presidents on 28th June the Rules for a Federation were approved on 5th October and immediately put into force by the Federation's formal inauguration. The members of the Federation's Committee are E. Bonvin (City Swiss Club), J. P. Christen (Swiss Economic Council), H. W. Egli (Nouvelle Société Helvétique), A. Kunz (Swiss National Tourist Office) and X. Speckert (Swiss Benevolent Society), with Dr. Egli as President.

Not all societies were yet in a position of joining there and then, particularly not those in the provinces and in Scotland. But practically all London societies and institutions have done so, and it can be confidently expected that all others will follow shortly, thus making the continuation of the Presidents' Assembly unnecessary. This is a valuable achievement, even apart from the question of the Swiss Centre, as it makes the proper co-ordination of the societies' activities and the financing of our delegates to the Commission of the Swiss Abroad, where needed, much easier.

But the chief gain is that we have become capable of entering agreements, in particular the basic agreement with Swiss Fair and the Swiss Economic Council, already negotiated with the benevolent participation of the Swiss Government. In fact the first thing the constituent meeting of the Federation did, was to authorise its Committee to sign this agreement, thus enabling the Government to come to a decision regarding the financial assistance to be provided. Also the joint appeal for funds can be launched with our participation as soon as the agreement is concluded.

The exact conditions for the utilisation of the Cultural and Social Centre by our societies can only be revealed when the agreement is signed. They will doubtless prove eminently satisfactory for them. In the meantime, we shall reproduce in the next issue the full text of the Constitution or Rules of the new representative organ of our Colony.

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