

What is the Swiss centre?

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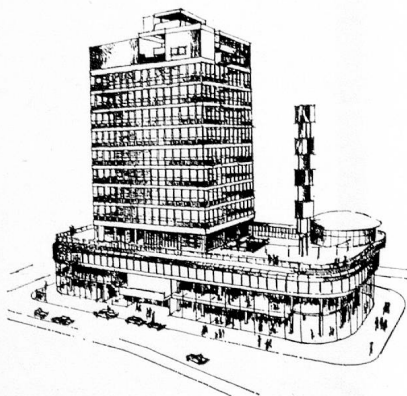
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WHAT IS THE SWISS CENTRE?



The Swiss Centre has often been discussed in these columns in reference to the Swiss Forum. Little has ever been said about the organisation of this proud showcase of Switzerland, projecting the Swiss emblem over the west end and an object of envy for many foreign communities in London. Mr. A. E. Ford, the Secretary and a director of Swiss Centre Ltd., has kindly enlightened us on the interests that were behind the creation of the Swiss Centre.

Swiss Centre Ltd. was a company expressly founded to set up and manage a "Swiss Centre" some eight years

ago. The tower block at Leicester Square was built according to its specifications. Swiss Centre Ltd., whose registered office is at 99 Gresham St., has a 99-year renewable lease on the property. This means that it has a title on the building subject to ordinary leasing agreements binding it to the realty company responsible for financing the building.

The purpose of Swiss Centre Ltd. is to "project Switzerland" and it is the concern of the company's management that the various organisations who are its tenants should satisfy this purpose. The majority of the companies with offices in the Swiss Centre are Swiss. Much space is taken up by the Swiss Bank Corporation, Swissair, the Swiss National Tourist Office and Swiss Fair Ltd. The capital of Swiss Centre Ltd. is £535,000, 74.5 per cent of which was contributed by the Swiss Bank Corporation, 14.95 per cent by the Swiss National Tourist Office and 10.55 per cent by Swissair.

With the legal purpose of projecting Switzerland, the company must necessarily be selective in its choice of tenants. Following the definite abandonment of the Swiss Forum, there is a vast empty concrete shell to let above the Swissair offices. The business which will occupy this area will have to satisfy requirements and Swiss Centre Ltd. is ready to forego immediate gains

in order to ensure that the image of Switzerland which the Centre seeks to present is upheld. The company has, after all, lost considerable revenue during the two years when the Swiss Forum was in suspense.

Despite the commercially wasted premises of the Swiss Forum, the Swiss Centre has been doing exceedingly well so far and has fulfilled its commercial and prestige purpose. Owing to the non-realisation of the Forum, it has failed in its cultural role, which was a fundamental aspect of the Swiss Centre in its original conception, but this was of course not within the Company's control.

The complete plans of the Swiss Forum had been laid down for many years. It was budgeted at £300,000. The Swiss Government was ready to supply £200,000 if the remainder could be raised among the Swiss Colony and through private sources as a result of the positive vote of Swiss Parliament last year. After considerable efforts by the Embassy, the Swiss business community in Great Britain and the Swiss societies, the required £100,000 were eventually available. But by this time, however, the general rise in costs had pushed the minimal expenditure for the project to about £400,000. Furthermore, the rent and caretaking necessary for the Colony Room embodied in the Forum was far higher than what

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the dwindling Swiss Colony could afford.

£400,000 seems a very high figure for fitting out premises for which the groundwork has already been done. Yet it must be remembered that the Swiss Forum had to be fitted out in specialised ways, since it was to serve a variety of purposes, ranging from a Colony gathering centre to a commercial exhibition hall. Swiss Centre Ltd. had offered to let the empty shell of the future Swiss Forum to the authorities concerned in Berne for a token rent, but has in fact never received a penny for the premises. The negotia-

tions for the now defunct Forum involved innumerable trips to Berne by the persons directly concerned with the project. They went to the highest level and discussed the Forum with members of the Federal Council. Mr. Willy Spuhler, former President of the Confederation, eventually became President of the Forum of Switzerland Foundation.

Swiss Fair Ltd. is a separate entity with a lease on the basement of the Swiss Centre, enclosing a vast and highly successful restaurant, and on the area on the ground floor housing a number of shops offering quality Swiss

products. The company's capital is £1,146,592. The main shareholders are the Swiss Bank Corporation (69.77 per cent) and the Zug-based "Swiss Fair in Gross Britanien" (28.46 per cent). Other companies with a stake in Swiss Fair Ltd. are: Ciba-Geigy (1.45 per cent), Omega (0.15 per cent) and Watches of Switzerland (0.17 per cent).

The Swiss Centre Restaurant is doubtless the most familiar side of the Swiss Centre to the public at large. We hope to give details of its remarkable success in a future issue.

(PMB)

NEWS FROM THE COLONY

THE CITY SWISS CLUB ANNUAL DINNER AND DANCE

The 115-year-old City Swiss Club held its 106th Annual Dinner and Dance on November 19th. The event took place as usual in the ballroom of the Dorchester Hotel. Members and the many guests enjoyed a five-course menu that was resplendant by its exquisite *contrefilet Dôle du Château*. There appeared to be fewer participants than the year before, which according to actual count included only 12 members. This year one had the impression that there were more members but fewer guests. All in all, we counted about 140 participants. The sharply increased cost (rising from £3.25 to £3.50 to £4.15

in two years) must have had an influence. Also, the wine had gone up to £3. Prices are shooting up and the Swiss business community are not necessarily keeping up with inflation.

Mr. Walter Bion, President of the City Swiss Club, welcomed the gathering and particularly the ladies. He welcomed Dr. A. Weitnauer, our Ambassador and Hon. President of the City Swiss Club. His other distinguished guests were the Turkish Ambassador and his Lady, Mr. and Mrs. Zeki Kuneralp, Mr. and Mrs. Otto Rohn, who were representing Mr. and Mrs. R. Suess, unable to attend, and two distinguished guests from Switzerland, Mr. and Mrs. C. Frei. Mr. Bion ended his welcome address by urging us to

"dip deeply in our pockets" in making the Tombola a success. Its proceeds were to be devoted, as usual, to Swiss charities.

Dr. A. Weitnauer rose to address the gathering and said that he remembered many of the members present from his earlier short posting in London as Economic Counsellor in the early 50s. He said that he had never lost touch with the Swiss community in London (thanks to the Swiss Observer) and reiterated his attachment for this great city. He paid tribute to his neighbour Mr. Kuneralp, who had spent much of his youth in Switzerland. Dr. Weitnauer told his audience that Mr. Kuneralp had a remarkable mastery of Bernese, in fact he was fluent in the

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