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SWISS ECONOMIC COUNCIL

Farewell Dinner to Ambassador Dr. R. Faessler

To say farewell and God-speed the Swiss Economic Council arranged a dinner in honour of Monsieur R. Faessler, which took place on Thursday, 16th February, at the Dorchester Hotel, Park Lane, W.1.

Mr. M. Wiesendanger was in the Chair, and there were twenty-eight members present. Towards the end of the dinner the Chairman extended a hearty welcome to Dr. R. Faessler, congratulating him on his promotion to Ambassadorial rank. He referred to the many services rendered by the Commercial Counsellor during his séjour in London, and expressed the Council's appreciation of the splendid work he had so efficiently rendered on the occasion of the "Swiss Fortnight". He wished him every success in his new sphere of activity. Mr. Wiesendanger also greeted Dr. Faessler's successor, Monsieur Marcel Heimo, Monsieur H. Gallusser, of the Swiss Embassy, and Mr. A. Stauffer, formerly editor of the "Swiss Observer".

Dr. Faessler, in his reply to the Chairman's address, thanked the Council for having given him the opportunity of saying good-bye. "The Council", he said, "has been a valuable organisation within the Swiss Colony, and often helped the Embassy and its Commercial Counsellor, and occasionally the Swiss Trade Delegation." He continued by saying, "When I arrived in London at the beginning of 1954, there were still a number of import restrictions for Swiss products in force, and we on our side were not wholly innocent in this respect either. In order to exercise a certain amount of pressure for our negotiations, Switzerland, too, maintained contingents for certain British products. However, in the framework of OEEC and the European Payments Union — later turned into the European Monetary Agreement after the pound sterling became convertible in December 1958 — it was possible to achieve an ever increasing liberalisation for the mutual exchange of goods. Unfortunately, the efforts to create a greater European Free Trade Area were unsuccessful. On the other hand, Great Britain and our country are now members of the EFTA, a fact which will result in the gradual abolishment of import duties within the next few years. It was unfortunately not possible to achieve complete liberalisation within the Stockholm Agreement for one of our most important exports — watches. We arrived, however, at an understanding which, although not wholly satisfactory, is nevertheless acceptable. I want to take this opportunity to express my very special thanks to the Swiss watch importers for their constant support and their willingness to help me with advice and action. The Swiss watch importers are the group of the Council with whom I maintained the closest professional contacts.

"The wide liberalisation of the mutual exchange of goods has, in the opinion of certain members of the Council, deprived the latter of its reason of existence. Personally, I cannot agree to this viewpoint. Even if the actual work of the Council is now considerably reduced, the friendly ties between the members should make it possible to keep this organisation alive, which, if the need arises, can render as great services as in the past. It would be easy to let the Swiss Economic

Council die, but difficult to create it anew! The justification for the Council's existence has been well proved during the preparations for the "Swiss Fortnight" in October 1959, when many of its members rendered valuable service to the Embassy. It would have hardly been possible to achieve such a great success with this manifestation of Swiss achievements in industry and culture without their help.

"Lately the suggestion was made in the Swiss Economic Council that a Swiss Chamber of Commerce should be created in its place. This idea seems indeed a fascinating one. I fully agree, that a well organised and financially well founded Chamber of Commerce could take over many tasks from the Embassy, being free from certain rules, and execute them better than we could. However, in view of the almost complete liberalisation of the exchange of goods between Switzerland and the United Kingdom, a Chamber of Commerce operating on the basis of the old principles would no longer be of much value. A new aim would have to be found, which, however, might prove very expensive. I am thinking for instance of market research for medium and small Swiss firms, which, if they had to proceed individually, would be beyond their means. I am aware that a special committee of the Council is now studying these very questions. The Embassy, and especially my successor, are, of course, always willing to assist as far as possible in an advisory capacity. However, the decision whether or not a Swiss Chamber of Commerce can be created in London, and whether the necessary financial means can be found, must rest with the business community of our Colony."

Monsieur Faessler's address was heartily cheered. Other speakers were Monsieur Heimo — who expressed the hope of following in the footsteps of his predecessor with the help of the Council — Messrs. R. de Cintra, O. Rohn, L. Jobin — who thanked M. Faessler on behalf of the Swiss watch trade — Mr. J. Boos, and Mr. A. Stauffer — who was taking leave of the Council.

The Annual General Meeting of the Swiss Economic Council will be held on Thursday, 13th April 1961, at the Dorchester Hotel, Park Lane, W.1.

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