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IS THE LONDON COLONY TO HAVE A SOCIAL CENTRE?

Young Swiss students who arrive in London often ask "Where is the Swiss Club?" Similar questions are put by English friends. It is not easy to explain why there should be such a variety of Swiss clubs and societies and why it has not been possible to create a Swiss Centre. Of course, there are several localities which could be called Swiss Centres. There is "Swiss House" in Fitzroy Square, where the Swiss Mercantile Society have their headquarters and run the College at which several hundred young Swiss study English every year. Its premises are used by the Swiss Benevolent Society for their quarterly and by the Swiss Philatelists for their monthly meetings, as well as by the Council of the Nouvelle Société Helvétique and other smaller organisations. There is the Hostel for Swiss Girls in Hampstead, where the Welfare Organisation for Swiss girls have their office. Some fifty or more girls reside in this friendly building, which is also the meeting place for the Nouvelle Société Helvétique and the Unione Ticinese. No doubt, the Swiss Churches are also Centres where our fellow-countrymen can find valuable companionship and Swiss atmosphere. In a way the Dorchester Hotel is a Swiss Centre where the City Swiss Club and the Swiss Economic Council meet, and where a number of Swiss societies hold dinners and dances. Several hotels and restaurants under Swiss ownership or management provide Swiss food and an essentially Swiss *ambiance*.

But nowhere in this vast metropolis is there a common meeting ground where young and old, affluent and needy, fastidious and unpretentious, could meet at any time of the day or evening.

Other Colonies have their Centres — the Casa Svizzera in Milan is an example. Over the years a number of Swiss have worked for the realisation of a social Centre in England. Now that it has been announced that the Swiss Bank Corporation are financing a scheme in the heart of London which should become a Swiss Centre of commerce and trade, a kind of focal point for the sale of Swiss products, an information centre on trade, industry and tourism, it stands to reason that the first reaction is how this opportunity could be used to make it a Swiss Cultural and Social Centre at the same time.

I understand that the promoters are prepared to put some space at the disposal of the Colony on a commercial basis, but ways and means of financing it will have to be found. What are the basic requirements? The minimum is a large hall which societies could hire for meetings, receptions, and film shows. A smaller room with the character of a lounge, possibly where refreshments could be had, should be permanently at the disposal of Swiss. The first-class restaurant is already visualised by the planners, and one can only hope that it will be truly Swiss and not "pseudo".

To provide a room permanently available for our countrymen seems to be the most difficult to procure — for where would the money come from to rent it? Who would be in charge of running it? Much thought will have to be given to the whole idea and every aspect of it must be thoroughly investigated. The building is expected to be ready by the end of 1964, but the sooner the Colony start thinking about it, the better.

The Editor of the "Swiss Observer" will be pleased to put space at the disposal of readers who have some constructive proposals to make. It is hoped that all the societies will discuss the Centre extensively during the next few months, and once the subject has been well aired at all the meetings and get-togethers some concrete suggestions

should come out of the discussions and give the Centre Committee something to work on. Such a committee will no doubt have to be convened as the Swiss Bank Corporation and its Centre officials are hardly in a position to deal with the cultural and social aspects of the Centre.

This is a unique opportunity to realise a project which is more than a dream. The Colony is ageing and the Presidents' Assembly have set up a working party on its rejuvenation. It is not difficult to see that a real live Swiss Centre could play a vital part in this. Such a Centre would also be in the interests of Switzerland, not only the Commercial Centre which is planned. If we let this opportunity slip away because of uninterestedness and apathy on the one hand and too much commercial and material consideration on the other a genuine live Swiss Centre in London will never be achieved and will for ever remain Utopian.

Mariann.

A REPRINT FROM THE "SWISS OBSERVER" OF THIRTY YEARS AGO

"**It is never too late!**" by the Editor, Mr. A. Stauffer.

"Some of the Swiss Societies encounter difficulties in filling leading positions in their administration. There is also the precarious financial position of some of these institutions . . . , it is more than ever necessary to collaborate.

"It is therefore delightful to hear that two of the Societies in the Colony (Swiss Choral Society and Swiss Institute Orchestral Society) have decided to hold their social function in conjunction with each other, and this is, I am sure, only the first step towards a closer relationship or even amalgamation.

"It might interest our readers to know that recently the two Swiss Societies (Schweizergesellschaft Wien, 116 members, and Schweizerverein Helvetia, 78 members) in Vienna have decided to amalgamate in order to fortify their position — which shows that a closer co-operation has become necessary all round. I wish to congratulate the two London Societies for their far-seeing and wise policy."

(Thirty years later, in fact in November last year, the City Swiss Club and the Swiss Economic Council combined in holding their Annual Banquet. Will it not be advisable, sooner or later, for some of our Societies to follow the example of the Swiss Societies in Vienna? — Editor.)

OUR NEXT ISSUE

Our next issue will appear on 14th June. We shall be glad to receive manuscripts and reports not later than Wednesday, 5th June. Short news items can only be included if to hand by Friday, 7th June. All print is to be set one week before publication. We appreciate readers' co-operation.

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