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NEWS FROM THE COLONY

SWISS MERCANTILE SOCIETY

Towards a European Market open to the whole World

At the Monthly Meeting of the Society, held at Swiss House on Wednesday, 11th May, the Chairman Mr. A. Jaccard, welcomed as guest and speaker Monsieur M. Feller, Economic Counsellor at the Swiss Embassy, whose address on:— “ *Towards a European Market open to the whole World* ” touched on a subject very much in the forefront of the news. With Great Britain, after a lapse of three years, again probing the possibility of joining the Common Market, the future role of EFTA, of which Switzerland too is a member has also come into the lime-light.

The question whether the economic integration of Europe will grow steadily closer and ultimately lead to the federal union of Western Europe, also poses problems for Switzerland. It was those which Monsieur Feller closely examined in his discourse, seeing how our country would fit into the pattern of a future European market.

Being a landlocked country with scant natural resources, Switzerland had since the earliest times been dependent on foreign trade for the marketing of its products to provide a livelihood for a large proportion of its population.

It had been the pioneering spirits of our manufacturers which in the 19th and 20th centuries opened up to Swiss products not only the European markets but also those of the world's most distant regions. Switzerland's interests had consequently long lain in free trade, as she had often had to defend herself against the effects of economic nationalism and protective tariff barriers of other states. Switzerland's economic dependence could best be gauged by the fact that the output more than nine-tenths of some of its main industries, such as watches, chemicals, embroidery and textile machinery, were exported. She had constantly to adapt her products to the world markets and, thanks to the quality of her work and to her many trading connections, Switzerland to-day enjoyed one of the highest standards of living in Europe, a full third of her national income deriving from foreign trade and invisible exports.

Switzerland's economy was already integrated to a high degree with that of Europe and the rest of the world. This was evident from the branches and the manufacture under licence abroad of innumerable Swiss concerns. Conversely, many international concerns had set up similar establishments in our country.

Since Switzerland's geographic position and lack of indigenous minerals and other raw materials made her products expensive, she was obliged to import foreign raw materials, semi-finished and manufactured goods as cheaply as possible and for that reason had always avoided burdening herself with high import duties. Swiss customs duties were, in fact, still among the lowest in the world today.

That free trade was no mere slogan and that our country was always ready for international co-operation was proved by her joining the Organisation for European Economic Co-operation (OEEC), which in the years 1948 to 1958 had lifted nearly all the trade restrictions within Europe and re-established the free exchange of goods and payments between the European countries. Unfortunately

nothing had come of the promising attempt to develop this Organisation into a free trade area embracing all member states.

As the attempt to form a large European free trade area within the OEEC had proved abortive, Switzerland, along with other member states who for many reasons had not joined the Common Market of the European Economic Community (EEC), joined EFTA which had been founded as a free trade association of seven autonomous states to prevent the disintegration of that part of Europe which had as yet been unable to reach agreement with the EEC.

The marketing opportunities which EFTA, with 90 million consumers, offered for economic development lay in the fact that the national income of its member states amounted to two-thirds — and the foreign trade to almost three-quarters of that achieved by the EEC, comprising Germany, France, Italy, Belgium, Holland and Luxembourg.

Out of the thirteen national market areas, two large markets were developing in Europe to-day, those of the EEC with its 165 million inhabitants and EFTA with 90 million. Competition by reciprocal discrimination between these two trading blocks would dangerously weaken Europe, whilst mere co-existence would prevent the best use of economic potentialities and be a depressing feature of European inadequacy.

The threatened split in Europe's trade policy could be prevented in good time by the building of a bridge between the EEC and EFTA. Both organisations had in fact been formed with the ultimate aim of an ever closer union of the European nations. This could eventually lead to the creation of a free European market of some 300 million consumers, which was in fact being advocated by all the EFTA members including Switzerland, and the majority of EEC members.

Although that would be the biggest free trade market area in the world, free from internal trade and travel barriers, this area should not shut itself off from the outside world, out of consideration for the developing countries. The best economic aid consisted in widening the marketing areas of those countries. Due regard would also have to be given to the United States, which at great material sacrifice had helped in rebuilding the European economies ravaged by the War.

It was expected that a large European market would increase the prosperity of its member states and thus facilitate the growth of aid for development.

Experience had shown that protectionist measures weakened rather than strengthened the productive potential of the domestic economy of a country and this would also apply to a European market.

Effective economic collaboration was possible without surrender of any national sovereignty. On the other hand, nothing prevented closer political or military ties with other member states for an all-embracing European market to succeed, as had in fact been visualised by the pioneers of Pan-Europeanism.

Whilst Switzerland welcomed the closer union of former belligerents, she could not herself participate in political mergers. Her well-tried and long-established neutrality made it impossible for her to assume political obligations in a European Community. This in no way signified an unfriendly attitude towards political aspira-

tions of others but abandonment of Switzerland's traditional policy of neutrality would in no way strengthen a European partnership.

For similar and partly different reasons, other EFTA members were finding it difficult to join the EEC (Great Britain's Commonwealth connexions, Austria's neutrality, Sweden's freedom from alliances).

It was in the economic sphere that the EEC and EFTA countries had the best chance of achieving a common object, the creation of a large European market freed from trade restrictions, and this aim should be pursued vigorously and without undue procrastination.

The general wish was for our continent to be strengthened and this could only be realised if a future European market comprised all the European countries, large and small. The inclusion of the latter, the majority of which for understandable reasons did not favour political union, was nevertheless of vital importance and the steady influence they could exert might be a decisive factor in reaching unanimity.

The old maxim, "United we stand, divided we fall", was never more applicable to Europe than today. The common goal of the six of the EEC, the seven of EFTA and the five countries at present remaining aloof should be for Europe to be unified economically into a large free market of 300 million consumers, leaving it to each country and group of countries to find its own political solution.

Following his talk, Monsieur Feller answered questions put to him by an audience which had eagerly followed his talk. A vote of thanks for a most interesting and an animating address, proposed by Mr. O. Grob, was cordially endorsed by all present.

WB.

TO THE "LANDSGEMEINDE" ON 19th JUNE!

The eighteenth "Landsgemeinde" of the Swiss in the North of England will take place on Sunday, 19th June. This traditional gathering will have its usual form: Meeting at 10.30 a.m. at the Memorial Park at Hebden Bridge (about half-an-hour's train ride from Manchester). Walk through the attractive countryside of Hardcastle Crags (about one hour, or half-an-hour for those who like to drive part of the way). There will be a picnic lunch and a barbecue for those who apply beforehand. At 2 p.m., Prof. Jean P. Inebnit from Leeds will conduct the "Landsgemeinde", the historic review of Switzerland's federated Cantons. At about 4 p.m., walk back to Hebden Bridge where High Tea will be served at the Civic Hall in the presence of local dignitaries. Advance application is essential. Please write immediately to:

Mrs. H. Monney,
327 Wellington Road North,
Heaton Chapel,
Stockport/Cheshire.

SWISS FOLKLORE EVENING

The London Group of the Nouvelle Société Helvétique will present a Swiss Folklore Evening as one of its Golden Jubilee Year events. This will be held at St. George's Hall (YMCA), off Tottenham Court Road, on Monday, 4th July from 7.30 - 10 p.m. It will be given by "ECHO ROMAND", a folkloristic group of singers and dancers from Berne. See next issue for details.

PERSONAL

We have just heard that Mr. and Mrs. René A. Marchand, late of 6 Hayes Road, Bromley, Kent, and now of Chez René, 2572 Sutz, Biel, Switzerland, celebrated their Golden Wedding on 4th June. We send them our best wishes and hope for many happy returns of the day.

* * *

We send hearty congratulations to Mr. H. H. Baumann, of 22 St. Catherine's Court, Bedford Park, W.4, on becoming a proud great-grandfather of a little girl born on 20th May.

* * *

We wish to congratulate the Rev. and Mrs. J. C. Stuessi, of Rue Jordil 6, 1700 Fribourg, on the birth of a baby son Philipp Johannes on 25th May.

DIAMOND WEDDINGS

We have been informed that Mr. and Mrs. A. Zimmermann of 552 Uxbridge Road, Pinner, Middlesex, celebrated their Diamond Wedding in April. The same applies to Mr. and Mrs. J. Zimmermann of 35 Emu Road, Battersea, S.W.8, who got married at the same time.

The two brothers Adolf and Jack came to London from Grindelwald in September 1902. Both were in the hotel trade and joined the Union Helvetia. Their intention was to stay here a few years in order to learn English and then go back home again. However, two charming young English girls had other ideas about the two Swiss, and it came about that sometime around Easter 1906, they all got married, and they are together still.

There is quite a little Zimmermann Colony; Mr. and Mrs. Jack are already great-grandparents.

We send our heartiest congratulations to the two happy couples and wish them many more years of well-being and prosperity.

BIRTHDAYS

We have just heard that Mr. W. E. Schneider, of Woodcote, Loudhams Wood Lane, Chalfont St. Giles, Bucks, celebrated his 75th birthday on 16th April. Belatedly, but none the less sincerely, we send him our best wishes. This also applies to Mrs. H. Kriesi who was 74 on 4th April.

The following of our subscribers of long standing will be celebrating their birthdays all in Switzerland: 9th June - Mr. E. Gysin (76), 22nd - Mr. C. H. Willi (83), 26th - Mr. Max Schneider. We also know that Mr. J. Gallo will be 74 this month. Another date to remember is the 21st June 1910 when our Publishers' firm was founded.

Many happy returns to all our readers who celebrate a birthday in June.

OUR NEXT ISSUE

The "Swiss Observer" is published every second and fourth Friday of the month. Our next issue will appear on 24th June. We shall be glad to receive reports and articles not later than Wednesday, 15th June. Short news items only can be accepted later.