

1966 the year of "Fifth Switzerland"

Autor(en): **[s.n.]**

Objektyp: **Article**

Zeitschrift: **The Swiss observer : the journal of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK**

Band (Jahr): **- (1966)**

Heft 1514

PDF erstellt am: **28.04.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-696749>

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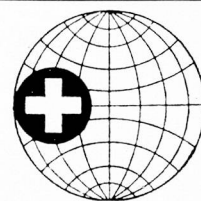
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1966 THE YEAR OF "FIFTH SWITZERLAND"



LOOKING BACK

The year dedicated to the Swiss Abroad is drawing to a close. On balance it has been a good year, and the Swiss communities outside Switzerland have reason to be grateful to the men and women on both sides of the frontier, who have successfully brought to an end the Year of "Fifth Switzerland". The special Article for the Swiss Abroad is safely included in the Federal Constitution, and some noteworthy events have gone into the *Ausland-schweizer* chronicles. Regrettably, lack of space has not allowed us to record all the fine speeches made at the celebration of the Golden Jubilee of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad in Basle in April, or of the Assembly of the *Suisses de l'Etranger* in Berne, a detailed description of excellent exhibition at the Swiss National Museum "Die Fünfte Schweiz im Wandel der Zeit" and the many special efforts made to pave the way for the acceptance of the Constitutional Article.

The Swiss community in London, too, has had its special jubilee, when the Nouvelle Société Helvétique celebrated its 50th Anniversary. On that evening, the history of the London Group was related. Since then it has come to our knowledge that some of the facts presented were not quite correct. We feel we cannot do better than put on record the true events of that time before the end of the Year of "Fifth Switzerland", and we publish below an account by one of the founder members of the N.S.H. and an architect of the Swiss Economic Council of today, Mr. J. Zimmermann, Secretary of the Swiss Benevolent Society.

I feel that I can and ought to put the facts of the so-called "study group on economic questions" and the parts played by the N.S.H., the City Swiss Club, and the Swiss Mercantile Society in true perspective, even if I can speak only for the various movements with which I was personally and actively engaged at the material time.

As a member of the City Swiss Club since June 1914, i.e. eight months after my arrival in London from Italy, where I had spent the previous three years, and as a member of their committee in 1915, I well remember the proposal submitted to them by the Swiss Mercantile Society in June of that year to join together to study the creation of a SWISS CHAMBER OF COMMERCE IN LONDON, each society to appoint three committee members to form the study committee of six.

This study committee, with first Mr. Marcel Paschoud and then the undersigned as Honorary Secretary, set to work immediately; after consultations with the then Swiss Minister, Dr. Gaston Carlin, a Memorandum setting out our intentions was submitted in August 1915, through the good offices of the Swiss Legation, to the "Vorort" of the Swiss Association of Commerce and Industry in Zurich.

A progress report was submitted in 1916 by the Secretary of the London committee and printed by the City Swiss Club for distribution to members, showing that at a General Meeting held in Zurich on 27th December 1915, the delegates of the Swiss Chambers of Commerce had discussed our Memorandum, previously distributed to them by the "Vorort", along with the wider question of Swiss commercial representation in London.

Not only was the need of such a representation fully recognised by the delegates, but its urgency was proclaimed too. The meeting did not view with favour the creation of Swiss Chambers of Commerce abroad, but pronounced for the creation of the post of Commercial Attaché to the Swiss Legation, at the same time expressing the opinion — shared on this side too — that the one did not exclude the other. It was indeed suggested by the Zurich meeting that the study of the problem be continued

with the Swiss Minister, respectively with the new Commercial Attaché whose appointment was to be finally decided by the Federal Authorities.

For the statistical record, the joint S.M.S./C.S.C. COMITE D'ETUDE POUR LA CREATION D'UNE CHAMBRE DE COMMERCE SUISSE A LONDRES held 26 meetings between June 1915 and October 1916, exchanged 26 letters with Dr. Carlin, 22 letters with the "Vorort", and over 50 letters with other correspondents. It met again in 1917 to take stock of the position whilst still waiting for the appointment of the Commercial Attaché, and finally in May 1918 to prepare its final report to the two sponsoring societies.

By then, the Commercial Attaché to the Swiss Legation in London had been appointed in the person of Monsieur Henri Martin.

Early in 1918, the London Group of the N.S.H. had felt that the time had come for them to institute, within their Group, a "Commission for the study of economical and commercial questions", to rank with their other sectional activities. However, after consultations with Monsieur Carlin and Monsieur Martin, they had come to the conclusion that the "Commission" would better answer its purpose and be more easily recognised in Swiss commercial circles in particular if it were made quite free of any organised society or groupment of societies, in other words that decisions, wishes and recommendations of this "Commission" would be more easily received if emanating from an independent body of business men.

This decision led, on 11th June 1918, to the creation of the SWISS COMMISSION IN LONDON FOR THE STUDY OF ECONOMIC AND COMMERCIAL QUESTIONS, comprising besides the Commercial Attaché, Monsieur Henri Martin, twenty-five members representing all the main branches of Swiss industry and commerce in London, with Mr. Gustave Aguet, the Managing Director of Nestlé's, as President, the undersigned being invited to be its Secretary by virtue of his association with the original "Comité d'Etude".

I do not propose to deal here with the recorded activities — very real, very wide, very effective — of the Swiss Commission during many years. Once the economic situation had been stabilised between the two world wars, the Commission became dormant but was reactivated in 1943 under the impulse of the late Mr. Alfred Renou, in a memorable meeting held at the Brown's Hotel. The name was then changed into "COUNCIL FOR THE STUDY OF SWISS PROBLEMS" to include cultural and educational questions as well as the economic and commercial ones. Later on the name was changed once more into the present SWISS ECONOMIC COUNCIL.

We are most grateful to Mr. Zimmermann for putting right the facts about those early and important days. Perhaps one day, the history of the Swiss community in Great Britain will be written, and the more complete the records are, the better.

The Year of "Fifth Switzerland" may be at an end. Our work is only just beginning if we are to start a new chapter in our history with the creation of a Swiss Centre in London.

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