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SWITZERLAND, EFTA, EEC AND ALL THAT

The late afternoon sun was spewing its dazzling light across Fitzroy Square into the Society Room at Swiss House, when Monsieur Jürg Iselin, First Counsellor at the Embassy, rested his three-inch thick European folder on the committee table of the Swiss Mercantile Society, reassured his apprehensive audience that he wasn't going to read it all through, and began his conference on the respective positions of Switzerland and Great Britain versus European integration. As one who had been head of the Integration Office in Berne, Monsieur Iselin was particularly qualified to speak on this vast and inexhaustible subject.

He began by broadly outlining the differences between EFTA, or European Free Trade Association, and the EEC, or European Economic Community. The first was no more than a pragmatic association of seven member states (U.K., Switzerland, Austria, Portugal, Denmark, Norway and Sweden) agreeing to lift custom tariffs on mutual trade on industrial goods (and to a lesser extent on other goods as well). The objectives of EFTA were to favour European and international trade for the benefit of all. None of the members foreswore their independence and they were free to establish the tariff barriers they pleased against the outside world. The European Economic Community (or Common Market) was a far more ambitious organisation. It grouped the six countries France, Germany, Italy, Belgium, Holland and the Luxemburg. They had agreed at the Treaty of Rome in 1957 not only to lift all internal custom barriers within themselves, but to present a common barrier towards the outside world. They were moreover to integrate their agricultural, social, fiscal, monetary and transport policies in the course of a development that would eventually lead to a politically unified Europe. Whereas EFTA explicitly preserved the independence of its member states, the EEC and the spirit of the Treaty of Rome were oriented towards a supra-national Europe. This was obviously a capital difference as far as Switzerland was concerned.

Monsieur Iselin then spoke more in detail of each of the two organisa-

tions. He reminded us parenthetically that, although EFTA and EEC were the best-known European institutions, there were others which were at least as old. He named the Council of Europe, founded in 1949 and more directly concerned with the political and cultural heritage of Europe, the Western European Union, which grouped the countries of the EEC and Great Britain and was primarily concerned with common defence problems, and made mention of the oldest European Institution of all, the Organisation for European Economic Co-operation (OEEC) which gave way to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) which, as it stands now, is a consultative body with extra-European members.

EFTA celebrated its tenth birthday on May 3rd last. On that occasion the responsible ministers and officials of member countries met in the new EFTA headquarters in Geneva. The final communiqué of their Meeting was extremely optimistic. It pointed out that in ten years of its existence, trade between EFTA countries had augmented threefold, a far greater boost than the rise of world trade. The objective of increasing trade within EFTA had then been fully attained. The other aims, which were to promote a free trade area in the whole of Europe and reach an agreement with the EEC had not been reached on political grounds. Besides Great Britain's well known attempts at negotiating entry in the EEC, Austria had also sought a special relationship with the Community and Denmark, Norway and the Irish Republic had sought full membership. Finland was at present an associate member. EFTA could then be said to work very well, despite some individual difficulties and the unilateral actions undertaken by some members which went against the spirit of EFTA.

The idea of a European Economic Community to eventually become a United Europe sprang from the mind of Jean Monnet, the "Father of Europe", and began to make headway in 1950, at the time of the creation of the Council of Europe. The first supra-

national institution binding the six countries of the present EEC was the European Coal and Steel Community. The Six agreed in 1952 to lift all barriers on the exchange of coal and steel and adopted a common policy on these commodities. Very soon the "Europeans" were pressing for a deepening of the Community. But in August 1954, the French National Assembly rejected any developments that would lead to a defence community as well. However the foreign ministers of the Six met the next year at Messina and, under the guidance and inspiring force of Paul Henri Spaak, Belgium's foreign minister (and a man for whom Monsieur Iselin appeared to have the greatest admiration despite his serious sinew of not fully respecting the meaning of Swiss neutrality!) agreed to remain open to a wider development of the European Coal and Steel Community. Two years later the founding treaty of the EEC was signed in Rome. On March 25th 1957, the European Community and the European Atomic Energy Community (Euratom) were legally born. The ECSC, Euratom, and the EEC were all eventually merged under one common authority, whose executive body was the Commission of the European Communities. This Commission initiated all new policies and these were to be sanctioned by the Council of Ministers.

Thirteen years later, the Treaty of Rome had only partially been realised. Among the accomplishments, we could count the lifting of all internal tariff barriers and the establishment of a custom's union (the tariff with respect to the outside world had been fixed as the arithmetical mean of the tariffs of each individual country—a good way to please everyone), freedom of labour movements and an almost completely free movement of capital within the Community, a practically completed common agricultural policy. There still remained to devise and implement common fiscal, social, monetary and transport policies.

Monsieur Iselin then compared the respective positions of Switzerland and Great Britain.

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Switzerland could not become a member of the EEC because the Community politically prevented neutral countries from entry. The President of the Commission, Mr. Jean Rey, had expressed pessimism over the entry of neutrals at a recent conference in London. The EEC conditions of freedom of labour movement also went against Switzerland's interest. Whether Mr. Schwarzenbach had his way or not, it was inconceivable that Switzerland should offer unrestricted entry to all foreign manpower. But trade figures showed surprisingly that Switzerland was yet more dependent on the EEC than Great Britain and Monsieur Iselin maintained that Great Britain had a compelling *political* interest to enter the EEC, in that the only remaining ground where Britain could exercise her influence and her greatness was Europe.

The best Switzerland could do was to apply for a close relationship with the EEC, a possibility left open at the December EEC conference at The Hague, where it was formally agreed to start negotiations with Great Britain. These negotiations will begin on June 30th. They may last very long and Mr. Jean Rey believed that it would take at least two and a half years to hammer out all the technical details which would permit Great Britain to join the Common Market. Monsieur Iselin thinks that Switzerland may apply for special relationship at a definite stage of the negotiations with England.

Britain's chances of entry are now considered to be favourable. The position of France has now markedly changed and the Six are now readier to invite Britain. The strongest opposition to entry may yet prove to come from within this country. As the recent white paper on the "cost of entry" has shown, this cost could vary from £100m to £1,100m. Great Britain will have an ex-

ceptional burden of import levies on agricultural products. She will moreover have to adapt her fiscal system and introduce value added tax, all things which will be exceedingly costly. Switzerland, quite apart from the problems of labour and neutrality, would have quite a job in adapting her agriculture and her particular defence to the conditions of entry in the EEC. She too would have to pay an initial heavy cost.

The sun had settled behind the Georgian buildings of Fitzroy Square. Monsieur Iselin closed his folder and ended his masterful exposé. A heated applause broke the awed silence reigning in the dim Society Room at Swiss House.

(PMB)

COMMENT

EPILOGUE TO THE VOTE ON JUNE 7th

All the Swiss in responsibility must have sighed with relief on Sunday evening, June 7th, when it was known that the Schwarzenbach Initiative, aiming at repatriating 309,000 foreign residents in Switzerland, was rejected in a nation-wide referendum. It was a close win, however. 54 per cent of those who went to the polls—and they turned up in record numbers—voted against the Initiative and 46 per cent in favour. This is a staggering result when one considers that every party (except fringe movements like the Vigilants in Geneva and Schwarzenbach's own party in Zurich) strongly recommended a rejection of the initiative. And not only the parties, but the unions, the churches and almost the entire Press. In fact there has never been so much briefing, admonestation and preaching in some Swiss papers than at this time. They took the greatest pains to disclose and develop the complete Schwarzenbach dossier so that readers really needed a good dose of ill-will and political carelessness to go to the polls ignorant of the implications of the Schwarzenbach Initiative. The fact that 46 per cent of voters *did* vote for Schwarzenbach in spite of all this massive propaganda staged against his initiative from all sides just shows that neither the Press, the parties and the churches have any measure of influence in curbing votes that spring from ingrained feelings and emotions. It is by no means the first time that the doubtful influence of the Press in a period of national decision was demonstrated and it is most probable that nearly all those who rejected the Initiative would have done so any way. The results in Geneva were most significant. Although the town and the Canton rejected the Initiative, there were a majority of supporters in the electoral wards of Les Paquis, Les Acacias et La Jonction, all parts of Geneva with a strong working class population. These people have then voted, almost deliberately, *against* their parties and

their unions. A commentator has written that the workers, the lower paid and all those who feel that they have been left behind by the wave of prosperity in recent years made no distinction between the foreign labour issues and the other social problems. In voting with Schwarzenbach they were not only expressing a primary dislike of their foreign mates, but standing against the Capital and the rich (i.e. those who benefit the most from foreign labour) and expressing their general social grievances.

The participation to the referendum was of 74 per cent, the highest participation since the referendum of 6th July 1947 in which national old age pension was approved by the people participating at 79 per cent. On June 7th Schaffhausen held the record with 87.3 per cent and six other cantons had average participation of over 80 per cent. Berne, Fribourg, Lucerne, Nidwald, Obwald, Schwyz, Solothurn, and Uri were the cantons and half cantons who accepted the Schwarzenbach Initiative. The greatest surprise of all came from Berne, which (with its Jura-ssian industries) has compelling interests in keeping its foreign element. The other cantons on the list all have very few foreign workers (less than the 10 per cent limit) and a theory put forward by a commentator to explain this vote was that, if Schwarzenbach had his way, these cantons would get the excess of workers forced out of the industrial cantons and thus be favoured in their economic development.

The pro-Communist Labour Party was the most outspoken opponent of the Initiative, not so much out of concern for the welfare of Swiss industrialists as that of seasonal workers, who helplessly live under the care and mercy of their employers and whose already pitiful plight would have been worsened as a result of the massive repatriation of foreign residents.

Women were not allowed to take part in this referendum because, as readers know, they may only vote in cantonal issues, and this only in a minority of cantons. However unjust this state of affairs it was perhaps a boon in this vital referendum, for the good reason that women often tend to vote emotionally, that they have at least as many emotional complaints against foreigners as the men. There are therefore very good reasons to suppose that if women had had their say, then Schwarzenbach would have had his way.

(PMB)

SWISS NEWS

POLITICAL

Although political life was overshadowed by the imminence of the 7th June vote in Switzerland, there were other events worthy of note. The Council of States and the National Council were in unusual disagreement over a new housing bill. The National Coun-