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NEWS FROM THE COLONY

THE INSTITUTE OF SWISS TRADE PROMOTION: WHY IT HAD TO CLOSE

The idea of a Swiss chamber of commerce in London springs back to 1918, when an official commission for economic affairs recommended the opening of such an institution. There was a long established British-Swiss chamber of commerce in Zurich favouring the export of British goods to Switzerland and it was only natural that Swiss industrialists should enjoy the same facilities in a country of the importance of Great Britain.

It was not until 1943, however, that the Swiss Economic Council was formed with the intention of founding a Swiss Chamber of Commerce. Although it nearly saw the day in the late 1940's, it was not until it received a final impetus from the oncoming Swiss Centre in 1961 that its materialisation could be envisaged. The promoters of the Swiss Centre thought that such a centre could not be worthy of its name if it did not embody a Swiss chamber of commerce besides a Swiss Forum, a Swiss Restaurant, Swiss offices and other Swiss set-ups. During the three years preceding the creation of the chamber of commerce, to be called the Institute of Swiss Trade Promotion, in 1968, the businessmen of the Swiss Economic Council set about finding the necessary starting capital. Their efforts and their numerous applications towards the very large Swiss companies yielded some 200,000 francs, which was enough to see the Institute off to a flying start.

It was opened on the first floor of the Swiss Centre as a company limited by guarantee, with two offices and a staff of three: a Swiss Secretary General, Mr. A. Schalch, who had many years of previous experience in the chemical industry over here, and two secretaries.

The eventual creation of a Forum of Switzerland was not unrelated to the purpose of the Institute. It was felt that the presence of a kind of conference centre, which apart from cultural events, would serve as a meeting place for British-Swiss business, was a powerful asset to the Institute. The Forum could have been a platform for Swiss trade in Great Britain. The Institute could have organised exhibitions there and thereby obtained a gain in revenue and influence. The fact that the Forum never materialised had therefore some influence in the eventual failure of the Institute.

The Swiss Economic Council had been optimistic on its chances of self-support. It reckoned that a member-

ship of 400 companies each subscribing £25 a year should be enough to allow it to carry out its tasks. There were no limits to the number of potentially interested companies and the expectations of the Swiss Economic Council were not unrealistic. However, the economic climate in England and in Switzerland was to change considerably between the planning stage of the Institute of Swiss Trade Promotion and the time when it began to operate. In the event, it attracted no more than 200 members, which led to the inevitable drying-up of its resources, which was one of the reasons for its closure.

The causes leading to this untimely end are numerous and inherent not only to changing economic circumstances but also to the changing nature of the work of the chamber of commerce. The main task of a Swiss chamber of commerce in London was to help Swiss companies wishing to export to Great Britain. This help was supplied in the form of information and service. For example, an enquiring company would be put in touch with adequate agents. The Institute was expected to know the ins and outs of the British market, the main companies, a host of official regulations, who produces what and so forth. It was getting some 5,000 enquiries a year, which was a lot for one man to tackle, especially if these enquiries covered a wide range of subjects.

A modern chamber of commerce can also be required to carry out more sophisticated services, such as market research surveys. The Institute of Swiss Trade Promotion was however never intended to offer such a service, and was anyway completely understaffed. Some other chambers of commerce are in a position to do so, but the Institute was kept busy enough answering queries on legal matters, tariffs and customs regulations and so on. Most of this information was given free of charge.

In some cases involving some detailed research a fee had to be argued out. But the Institute was basically to suffice itself with income from subscribers, who were to enjoy more ample information, and from promotional services such as trade exhibitions. Be it for the need for a market survey or any other matter relating to trade, it is the *small* company which is the more likely to require the services of a chamber of commerce. The big people don't require legal advice because they have their own legal department, they don't require indications on tariffs since most of them

have been established in this country for a long time and have manufacturing subsidiaries over here. The Institute was most useful to the newcomers to the British market, to the "au pairs" of industry as compared to the "residents".

However, it has been increasingly more difficult for many small Swiss firms to expand their exports. Their productive capacity has tended to become saturated in satisfying home demand and most of Swiss exports actually come from a small number of very large machine tool, electrical and chemical companies. Thousands of mini-undertakings in Switzerland are kept busy in supplying the big firms and, for them, producing for the outside market would require additional labour, which is not readily forthcoming in the over-foreignised Switzerland of today. Small companies are more severely affected by the current shortage of labour owing to the relatively greater importance of each employee.

A large plant with a payroll of many thousands will suffer less from the loss of one man than a family concern of twenty employees, especially if these are hard to find and to train. The overall situation is therefore that small Swiss firms today are less dependant on exports than say, ten years ago. They find it comparatively more difficult to export profitably than the large firms well established in foreign markets. Labour shortages hit them as an additional inhibition to produce more for export and they benefit, in many cases, from the presence of a ready market with the large companies for which they work as sub-contractors.

Another development has been in the diminishing number of independent undertakings and the formation of industrial associations with a common export policy. A small watch firm won't require the services of the Institute, for example, since the Federation of Watch Industries has an office in London doing the same kind of work.

Another possible activity for a chamber of commerce is to stage trade exhibitions and engage in promotional work. But there, the Institute was under-financed and moreover failed to get sufficient support from Swiss companies. The Institute could open up new avenues, but it could not inspire Swiss companies with a taste for risk and unsecured expenses. A small company interested in taking part at some Earls Court trade exhibition would reel at the cost and the Institute's efforts at securing a Swiss presence at this exhibition would have been in vain.

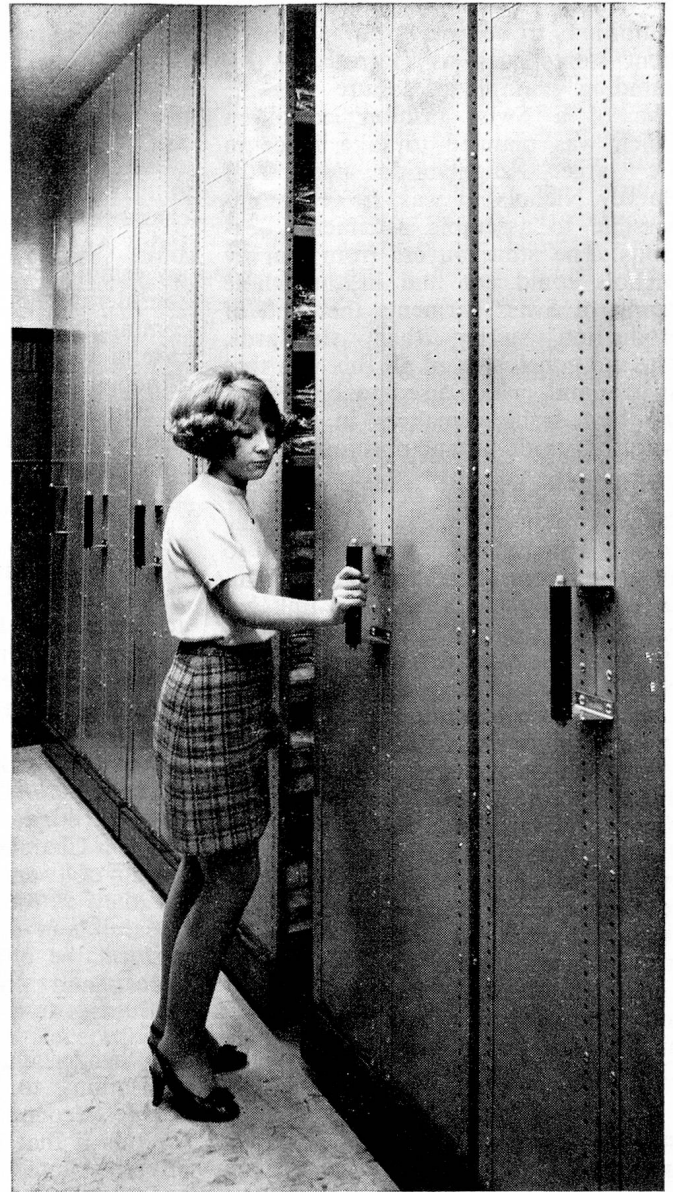
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Another possibility was for Swiss exhibitions to be held in large department stores such as Harrods. A resounding example of failure was the case of a Swiss fashion exhibition which was planned to take place in the large Knightsbridge store of Harvey Nichols. It was, however, impossible to assemble satisfactory exhibits. The store buyers from Harvey Nichols could not find in the whole gamut of Swiss garments the kind of production suiting their standards. The sad conclusion of all this was that Switzerland, which used to be one of the best fashion makers in Europe, is losing its dominant position!

The Chairman of the Institute suggested some time ago that they should issue a regular publication to all its members and potential members. This was to serve as a link between the Institute and its membership and to supply information of benefit to Swiss exporters. Thus the journal of the Institute of Swiss Trade Promotion, which came out every four months, had special numbers of the British electrical industry, on the banking system and the chemical industry. This publication cost the Institute much time and money and its results were difficult to ascertain. Two thousand copies were distributed to members and potential members in Great Britain and Switzerland, not including the copies which were originally distributed with "The Swiss Observer".

The Commercial Section of the Embassy does work similar to that of the Institute, and had been doing so before its inception. The co-operation between the two was excellent and the Institute relieved the Embassy of some of its work. The position of the latter was however advantageous. For one, it could afford to give free services and ask only for token charges for brief market surveys. It enjoyed the backing of the Political Department from which it depended. It shared similar sources of information with the Institute, in particular OSEC. It also had the theoretical advantage of being commercially uninvolved.

It is interesting to note that Switzerland is one of the rare countries applying total liberalism with its chambers of commerce. Official Switzerland is totally unconcerned with their fate across the world. When the Economic Council approached Berne for possible official subsidies, they were shown the rule book which stated clearly that the Swiss state had never given a penny to a Swiss chamber of commerce and was not prepared to make an exception with London. The only official aid to export (besides export credit guarantees) lies in the official aid to the semi-private organisation OSEC, which was recently raised from a paltry 1.5 mil-

lion francs a year to 2.9 million francs. There is some measure of official aid to the Swiss Cheese Union, hotels and the SNTO. Apart from this, Swiss exporters are left to stand on their own feet.

There are long established Swiss chambers of commerce in France, Italy, Austria and Holland. They enjoy established support, the backing of considerably more important business communities and colonies (as in the case of France) and manage to survive although their position is precarious in many cases. This situation contrasts sharply with the practises of other countries.

Britain has high-powered chambers of commerce financed by the Board of Trade all over the world. She even supports national exhibitors at international trade fairs. French chambers of commerce enjoy the joint support of the French Ministry of Trade and a Federation of French Industries. This is also true of the Italians. To make the comparison with the Institute of Swiss Trade Promotion more striking, we can mention the Swedish Chamber of Commerce. It has a staff of twenty specialists. Not only are they entitled to carry out market research and promotional work, they perform the official chores of import-export and draw all the necessary certificates.

Switzerland then leaves export organisations to fend for themselves. Besides economic dogma, the reason for this is that it can be dangerous to ally the State, or the politics of neutrality, with economics. There have been cases during the war where the chairman of a Swiss chamber of commerce abroad has made statements to please the Germans and which were not the voice of the Swiss state.

The total separation between official Switzerland and the Swiss chambers of commerce thus provides for these cases where the interest of Swiss exporters are not the same as those of the country and its security.

The Institute of Swiss Trade Promotion will have to close down at the end of July. Everybody regrets this sad outcome, not least the Embassy, but it has been acknowledged as inevitable. When the Institute was created there were no means of forecasting that circumstances would change so rapidly. Now we are back to square one, and it is for the commercial section of the Embassy to take on the work, or part of the work assumed by the Institute for these past three years. The Swiss Economic Council will have to fix itself new aims.

Mr. A. Schalch is going back to Switzerland where a new job in chemicals awaits him. After so many years

in England and with a British wife the change is going to be a trial. This is certainly one good reason for regretting the closure of the Institute. Mr. Schalch is acknowledged to have accomplished a great job, particularly in expanding the contacts of the Institute and the range of information which it could supply. Given other circumstances and other times, the Institute would have bloomed under his stewardship to something prosperous and essential to Swiss interests in Great Britain. It is just hard luck that the tide should have been flowing the other way and we should here like to conclude by extending all our wishes to Mr. Schalch for this new turn of his career.

(PMB)

THE END OF THE SWISS FORUM

The Foundation for the Forum of Switzerland met three weeks ago in Berne for a final review of the original project of a Swiss Forum in the Swiss Centre serving cultural and social purposes. It was declared unrealisable financially and *abandoned*. The Federal subsidy is therefore lost and other contributions are therefore due to be returned to their donors.

But before this final "full stop" to ten years of effort is marked, the Swiss Colony has been given a few weeks time at the suggestion of Dr. E. Egli, President of the Federation of Swiss Societies, and holder from it of a mandate to discuss the affairs relating to the Swiss Forum with the authorities in Berne, to consider the two remaining possibilities of securing a social meeting place for young Swiss de passage in a central position, and for which some Forum donors might be willing to make available their offered contributions.

One possibility that might arise is at the Swiss Centre itself. It depends on the willingness of Swiss Centre Ltd.

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to let to the Swiss Societies what was always planned to be the "Colony Room" at the back of the Forum on favourable terms. The other possibility is new and was referred to in our report on the AGM of the Federation of Swiss Societies. It centres around the idea of using the planned joint new Church premises for the Swiss Colony's social needs during the week, a solution which Dr. Egli believes would increase the capital costs and burden the Societies with no more than an appropriate contribution to running expenses. If the Church project were to be realised in a central position, then this would be an ideal solution for Swiss social needs. There is a possibility of a site being offered by the Camden Council on favourable terms in a development area just north of Euston Road, diagonally opposite Warren Street Tube Station.

Dr. Egli has convened the presidents of Swiss Societies for an extraordinary meeting at Swiss House on 30th June. This meeting will have to discuss whether it is worth continuing the efforts in either of the two aforementioned directions. What it will have to do is to agree on a declaration, for which Dr. Egli has prepared a draft in advance, to be submitted to the authorities in Berne who hold the strings to the money for the Forum. This declaration asserts that the Societies are pledged to the creation of an alternative solution to the defunct Swiss Forum, either in the form of a Colony Room, or in the form of a Swiss building which would house the activities of the churches and the various societies. It states the Federation's intention to call upon Forum donors to continue leaving their donations in the Embassy's trust with a view to using them in a new project. This draft is along the lines of what was suggested at the Federation's AGM. If the Swiss of London are to persuade the people in Berne to give money for an ambitious project, they must make their involvement quite clear and present concrete plans.

For the time being no such plans exist, although Dr. Egli has been in contact with Swiss Fair Ltd. and will be able to inform the meeting of their position towards a "Colony Room". The Camden Town Swiss Centre is still very much in the haze. The churches do not appear to be opposed to the project, but from the acceptance of a principle to such a weighty commitment there is a long way. The Swiss Mercantile Society has finally opted out of the project and will spend funds available from Switzerland to buy the freehold of Swiss House and recon- dition it completely.

There remains the Swiss Hostel for Girls, the only other Swiss organisation requiring sizeable fixed invest-

ments. We are not as yet informed of its position. So far, our impression is that most people have their doubts on the feasibility of a Swiss building housing three churches of two different denominations, a school of English, possibly a welfare office, a hostel for young girls, rooms for the regular meetings of half a dozen societies.

One visualises a six-storey building, an expenditure more likely to approach £3 million rather than the £300,000 originally available for the Forum. Berne must not only be persuaded to earmark money for a new project, but also to increase its support considerably. Other people feel that it is not desirable to bring set-ups with such different aims under the same roof. I understand that this was one of the motivations for the Swiss Mercantile Society to back out.

At the time of writing this ominous meeting had not yet taken place, but the chances of success of Dr. Egli's grandiose scheme seemed small. This may perhaps be a pity but is a realistic consequence of the dwindling strength of the Swiss Colony in London. There was a time when the Swiss over here had the money to do something big. The chances have been missed, as was the case of the Club House in Charlotte Street. One may take this as a lesson not to make the same mistake again. This is one way of seeing things, and a point which the coming meeting of the Federation of Swiss Societies will endeavour to clear up.

(PMB)

THE 23rd LANDSGEMEINDE OF THE SWISS OF THE NORTH

In the 22 years that the Swiss of the North have met for their annual "Landsgemeinde" on the third Sunday of June it had never rained. Last June 20th appeared to be the exception. It had rained all night over Hebden Bridge and the River Calder was overflowing with murky waters. The rain had reduced to a fine drizzle and the sun was near to splitting the clouds by the time the first few Swiss appeared at Hebden Bridge Memorial Park, the rallying point of this 23rd Landsgemeinde. But the weather had obviously discouraged many from coming.

When the time had come to walk to the civic hall, the Swiss present could be counted on one's fingers. There was Professor Inebnit and Mrs. Inebnit, whom we were very happy to see again after a long spell of ill health. There was also their daughter, Mr. Karl Kaegi and Mr. Jules Amman. These were the only Swiss northerners.

From London, Pastor Marcel Dietler, Mrs. Dietler and their young son Thomas had come to replace Father Bossard, who had been prevented from coming, and had given

your Editor a lift in their car. We enjoyed the presence of Mr. Toni Rihs and Miss Suzan Lanz, two devoted servants of our interests from the Secretariat for the Swiss Abroad in Berne. There were furthermore two municipal councillors with their ladies, Mr. David Fletcher, the *Halifax Courier* reporter and old friends from previous years of the Hebden Bridge Civic Trust and the Swiss Week committee.

We were greeted in the civic hall with a cup of coffee. Fortunately more Swiss came at that stage: Families from Liverpool, Bradford and the Burnley area. Mr. and Mrs. Hanno, English friends of long standing of the Swiss clubs in the north also made a welcome appearance.

Professor Inebnit welcomed us all, and in particular our friends from Berne, following which Mr. Edgar Hubbard, a worthy ex-weaver past 70 years of age and chairman of the Hebden Bridge Urban Council assured us of his happiness to see us once again. Pastor Dietler then invited us to say a short prayer in which our thoughts went to Mr. Berner, unexpectedly ordered to Blackburn Royal Infirmary. Pastor Dietler characteristically chose not to deliver a circumstantial sermon mingling patriotism with faith but gave us a simple and authentic message on the words "Man shall not live of bread alone", which commanded the attention and silence of all those present.

This service was followed by a moment of hesitation concerning the programme for the day. Although the sun had come out at last, it was too wet to have the traditional picnic at Hebden Hay. Councillor David Fletcher invited us on a car ride to the historic village of Hebden Stall, following which we would come back to Hebden Bridge and have lunch.

And a very good suggestion it turned out to be. We got into our cars and, under the guidance of our friends from the Civic Trust, climbed up the steep banks of the Calder Valley to Hebden Stall, which is where the forefathers of the townsmen of Hebden Bridge lived for centuries before they were attracted down below by the advent of the cotton industry. It was during such a climb from the Calder river to Hebden Stall that John Wesley is thought to have been inspired with the words of his hymn "Oh for a thousand voice to praise" and the beauty of this part of Yorkshire must surely have played its part.

The oldest Methodist church still in use is at Hebden Stall. It is an octagonal structure built in the massive grey limestone of the region. We visited the ruins of the 12th century church of Hebden Stall and its eerie graveyard known to contain 100,000 bodies buried in eight hundred years.

We surveyed the neighbouring Victorian church, which had been redecorated with funds bequeathed by a parishioner. We had a quick look at a fifteenth century house which the Civic Trust hopes to recondition and transform into a local museum.

The time had come for us to drive back to the Bridge. We had a lengthy picnic in the civic hall and were ready to start off again, this time to the Hardcastle Craggs car park, where our 23rd Landsgemeinde was planned to take place. Once we were there we lingered before a few cars had been displaced and Professor Inebnit climbed up grandly on a boulder and began to tell the history of the birth of Switzerland in the traditional way of Yorkshire Landsgemeinde. It was not until he had run through the *Waldstätten* and Lucerne, covering quite a bit of history, that a friend from *Glarus* stood up. Professor Inebnit continued his relentless historical progression, drawing forth friends from Berne, Basle, Ticino, Thurgau and Neuchatel but none, surprisingly, from Zurich. A charming representative from Ticino sang a lovely song from home, aided by Emilio, the caterer of the day.

The ceremony was shorter than in previous years. All the people with sturdy feet then set out for a hike up Hardcastle Craggs, a beautiful valley now under the National Trust. We climbed up to the upper end of a projected reservoir which had set the whole Calder Valley astir and which had been fought tooth and nail by Douglas Houghton, M.P. for the area and Lord Saville, the owner of this stretch of Yorkshire moor. We came back to the car park by another route and enjoyed the beautiful and melancholy sight of the moors.

A generous high tea was followed by an address from Professor Inebnit. He regretted the absence of Consul Rolph Born, who was presently in Basle attending the funeral of Mr. E. P. Banderet. Two of Mr. Born's colleagues from the Consulate had passed by in the course of the afternoon but had not stayed for tea. Manchester was not otherwise represented at this 23rd Landsgemeinde. Professor Inebnit furthermore regretted the absences of Mr. and Mrs. Pfluck, Mr. Berner and Mr. Paul Lerch, who could not attend having to submit to an eye operation. He asked Mrs. Lerch to convey to him our best wishes. Likewise, he asked Mr. Rihs and Miss Lanz to remember the Swiss of the North to the Secretariat in Berne.

Mr. Heniwell, chairman of the rural council, then said a few words and recalled his holidays in Switzerland. Mrs. Walton, daughter of Councillor Hubbard was also invited, in her female quality, to say a few words. Finally, Mr. Waring, the scoutmaster in charge of Hebden Hav, the traditional Yorkshire "Ruetli", replied

favourably to Professor Inebnit's proposal that the boy scouts of Chateau d'Oex and Hebden Bridge should do something in common.

When he had finished the speeches had been going for almost an hour. There was a widespread movement of chairs which was temporarily interrupted by Professor Inebnit's intervention. He brandished a letter just received by Mr. Rudolph Gnaegi, President of the Confederation, thanking Professor Inebnit for having sent him the Hebden Bridge Swiss Week programme and conveying his best wishes to us all. Professor Inebnit furthermore urged us all to benefit from the presence of our friends from the Secretariat.

However, it was time for many to go and the 23rd Landsgemeinde came to a close without any evocation of the theme of the coming Assembly of the Swiss Abroad, as was more or less expected. A fine late-afternoon sun shone on the Calder Valley as the Swiss of the North drove home from a friendly and traditional gathering.

NEW PREMISES FOUND FOR THE SWISS CATHOLICS

For the past eight years the Catholic youth club has been enjoying the facilities of the Westminster Ballroom for its weekly events, including a ball every second Sunday attended by up to 300 youths. These premises were privately owned and, all of a sudden, their owner had the incongruous idea of doubling their rent. Despite the healthy profits made at each dance, this was more than what Father Bossard, Chaplain at the Swiss Catholic Mission, was prepared to swallow. He declared that he wasn't renewing the lease.

Fortunately, another opportunity had made itself available at about the same time. The Westminster Cathedral Youth Club at 48 Great Peter Street, which was suffering from a loss of attendance and a correspondingly unsatisfactory financial situation was eager to house Swiss activities. The arrangements were soon made that the Catholic and Protestant German-speaking Swiss youth could use the Youth Club on Sunday evenings. The Swiss retain the priority on these occasions and British members may join in as long as there is available accommodation. During the week priority is given to regular members but the centre is open to the Swiss, again with the proviso of sufficient space.

This, from our churches' point of view was an ideal solution facilitating the contact with the sane elements of the local population of young Swiss people coming over here to learn English. No definite rent has yet been fixed. So far a gentleman's agreement

is to prevail and the Westminster Cathedral Youth Club is to get something between £1,000 and £1,500 a year, depending on the proceeds of fortnightly Swiss dances.

The club has ample space. It has a vast hall suitable for dances, a club room for conferences, a tea room and will be adequate, once it is appropriately decorated, to serve simultaneously for the German-Swiss reformed service and for Mass. A probable solution to the standing problem of premises for the German-Swiss churches has therefore been found. When St. Ann's Church is pulled down the Catholics will only have to cross the road. For the time being St. Ann's is to stay and the borough authorities have not given notice of demolition so far. Mass can now be held there at 6.30 p.m. and the Protestant evening service held at the same time, that is an hour earlier than before in the neighbouring youth club. This club has a new management in which Father Bossard and Pastor Dietler are expected to be elected.

ANGLO-SWISS SOCIETY

The June meeting of the Anglo-Swiss Society enjoyed the presence of Mr. Th. Dudli from the Commercial Section of the Embassy. He came to talk to us of his experiences in Iraq, where he was posted during the most troubled years of this agitated state.

He began with a masterful exposé of the countries history, starting right back with the birth of civilisation. He ended with the successive bloodbaths that accompanied the fall of the Feisal dynasty and the Kassem regime. Mr. Dudli had experienced some of the Baghdad street fighting himself and had gone through some harrowing moments. He ended the spoken part of his exposé with a plea in favour of more understanding of the Arabs in the present Middle East crisis.

He then turned to his projector and showed us a wonderful series of slides with mosques, deserts, Babylonian and Assyrian ruins, pyramids, street scenes, Arab children, views of the Euphrates and many other fascinating and evocative pictures, all of which were accompanied by an educated commentary.

The meeting was followed as usual by a gathering downstairs over a glass of beer. As an aside to the general subject of his talk, Mr. Dudli reminded us of the unsuspected fact that the Arabs had left some traces in Switzerland. For example, the Engadine resort of Pontresina used to be called "Pons Sarrazena" and the names Alaline and Saasalmagel have the Arab "al". Very interesting!