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NEWS FROM THE COLONY

The Swiss Catholics nearly lose their Church

The John Southwark Centre in Great Peter Street, Westminster, was nearly wrecked by fire one weekday at the beginning of May when a plumber forgetfully left a candle burning in the loft of the building while taking an 11 a.m. break.

The John Southwark Centre is the new Church and Meeting Place of the Swiss Catholics in London. As the place, which is rented from the Archdiocese of Westminster, is still under transformation, Father Paul Bosshard, Chaplain of the Swiss Catholic Mission was not on site to see the fire break out. He is temporarily housed in a modern bachelor's apartment in a neighbouring block, at no small cost to Westminster Cathedral. The plumber was busy improving the water system.

The candle which he had left alight while taking his morning cup of tea set fire to a heap of polystyrene panels used for heat and sound insulation. Within seconds, the whole loft was ablaze. Providentially, Father Bosshard, who was at that very moment working on his sermon for the Sunday Mass of 14th May in his model apartment, felt the need to consult a work of theology which had already been moved to the John Southwark Centre. He crossed the street and climbed to the upper floor of the Centre. It was then that he heard a crackling sound above. He climbed another flight of stairs and was met by an eruption of suffocating and noxious fumes billowing from the loft. Father Bosshard rushed like lightning to the telephone and summoned the immediate aid of London's fire brigade. Up again with a fire extinguisher, he fought valiantly against the smoke and the flames until his implement had run out. Fortunately, the first of six fire engines were on the spot within five minutes. The firemen rushed their high powered hose up the stairs and quickly brought everything under control.

They told Father Bosshard that if they had been called a few minutes later, there would have been no salvation for the John Southwark Centre. It would have ended its existence as a blackened and charred ruin . . . and the Swiss Catholics would have had to start their search for new premises all over again. Father Bosshard said later that he had been on the verge of being overwhelmed by the smoke and that it took him several hours to clear his lungs and recover fully from the incident. Damages are estimated at £250 and will be paid by the contractors.

TWO SWISS-LINKED FIRMS BLACKED IN THE HULL CONTAINER DISPUTE

The two transport firms blacked in the Hull docks container dispute, Panalpina Northern and M.A.T. Transport Ltd., have close associations with Switzerland. Panalpina Northern is a member of the Basle-based Panalpina World Transport group of companies and is headed by a Swiss managing director, Mr. J. Hug. M.A.T. (Machinery and Technical) Transport, which has a sister company in Basle, was founded by Swiss-born, Mr. Arnold Kunzler.

Mr. F. Daley, Advertising and Public Relations Manager of M.A.T. Transport in London, stressed that the blacking of the firms was a pure coincidence. It was hardly surprising that the firms affected should have Swiss connections, since this was the case of most of the main forwarding firms in this country. Mr. Daley said that the Swiss were leaders in the international forwarding business.

An official at Panalpina in London said that the Swiss-style management of Panalpina Northern Ltd. may have had some bearing on the dispute. The management of the company may possibly shown less patience with the docker's militant action. Panalpina was in fact the only one of the two firms concerned to bring the case to the Industrial Relations Court.

But Mr. Daley said that there was not the slightest connection between the dispute and the fact that the two companies had Swiss affiliations.

"It is pure coincidence. You can be sure that Mr. Walter Cunningham (leader of the striking dockers) has

never heard of Mr. Kunzler", he said.

The reasons why the two particular firms were blacked were simple: They were the two main undertakings with groupage depots in the Hull area and were therefore obvious targets.

Mr. Daley said that M.A.T. had no intention of going to the Industrial Relations Court and were leaving the door open for negotiations. Although the Hull depot had been affected by the blacking, the firm's activities in other parts of Britain were unaffected. Mr. Daley said that no single firm could campaign alone for an end to the British docker problem, and added that the whole matter would soon have to come to a head. Mr. Daley said that the entry of Britain into the Common Market would be beneficial to the trade and force "some proper competition".

The origin of the container dispute has been discussed at length in the Press. Groupage operations used to be carried out with rail ferry wagons. For the past five or six years, vast metal crates of standard dimensions, the so-called containers, have come into increasing use. The crux of the problem is that they are filled by transport firm employees, who are not registered dockers. Goods from various areas are channelled to groupage depots, conveniently "stuffed" in containers, and then transported to specially designed container ships with the minimum of handling. The new operations drastically reduce the necessary docker labour force, which is why they have reacted by blacking container firms in various ports.

One could justifiably ask why transport firms do not hire dock labour. Miss Sylvia Streit, Secretary to M.A.T. General Manager, Mr. P.

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