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# AGM OF THE SWISS MERCANTILE SOCIETY

The Society held its 85th Annual General Meeting on 10th April.

Reporting on the activities of the S.M.S. during the past year, the Chairman, Mr. A. Jaccard, stated that following the purchase of Swiss House in 1972, the building alterations and renovations as well as the erection of an extension at the rear had been started in July last.

As the building had to be completely vacated, alternative accommodation had to be found for the College. This problem was temporarily solved when part of Bedford College in Regent's Park was put at the Society's disposal during the University's summer vacation.

After lengthy search and several abortive attempts to secure other premises, the Society was fortunate in being able to rent a disused school in West Chelsea from the Greater London Council. Although the location and the state of the building were far from ideal, it did enable the College to carry on its programme without interruption.

Due to the needs of the local population, a third move became necessary at the end of the year, since when the College has been housed at the former Coopers' Company's School building, Mile End, spacious and

comfortable premises recently acquired by the Inner London Education Authority.

There appeared to be every likelihood that the S.M.S. would be able to remain at the Coopers' School until Swiss House became ready for re-occupation in September next.

Thanks were expressed to all who had made the whole building programme feasible, including the Federal Government, the S.K.V., Swiss banking circles, trade and industry.

After lengthy negotiations with the Department of Education and the Inland Revenue, and when the necessary amendments to the Memorandum and Articles of Association had been agreed at an Extraordinary General Meeting in October, the Swiss Mercantile Society Limited obtained recognition as a charity from 12th December, 1973. This would result in income tax relief and reduction in local rates.

Appreciation was expressed to H.E. the Swiss Ambassador, Dr. Albert Weitnauer and his staff, for their continued interest in and support of the Society's activities, and to the Central Secretariat of the S.K.V., in particular to the Central President and General Secretary, Mr. Richard Maier-Neff and

Mr. E. Ruchti, the Central Secretary in charge of commercial education.

In the absence on business of the Chairman of the Education Committee, Mr. F. O. Hausermann, the report on the College was read by the Secretary, Mr. W. Burren.

Despite the upheaval caused by the removal to temporary premises, the attendance could be considered very satisfactory, the number of full-time students admitted during the year being 638, with an average monthly attendance of 253, compared with 656 and 257 respectively in 1972.

It was gratifying that the total number of candidates who sat for the diploma examination rose to 409 from 393 in the previous year.

The curriculum in the main followed the customary lines and the high standard of tuition was fully maintained by a staff of 16 well-qualified lecturers.

The programme was, as usual, enriched by full-time excursions to places of historic and cultural interest, class visits to commercial undertakings, theatre parties, etc. In the field of sports, students matched their prowess in football and tennis with English teams and amongst themselves.

Due to the location of the

CITY SWISS CLUB

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temporary premises and the re-arrangement of terms, it was only possible to hold a reduced number of evening classes.

The preparatory courses for the Cambridge examinations, mostly recruited from day-students, were, as usual, well attended.

With the return to the Society's own premises, which are more centrally situated, it was hoped to resume evening courses on a full scale. The number of classes held last year was 24, with a total attendance of 426 students, as against 31 classes and 575 students respectively in 1972.

A total of 208 candidates sat for the Lower Cambridge examinations, of whom 158, or 76 per cent were successful.

Of 18 students who obtained the coveted Cambridge Certificate of Proficiency in English, one obtained a first-class pass, a great achievement, considering that less than one-half per cent of all candidates are awarded this distinction.

Mr. S. Baumgartner, Manager of the Swiss Commercial Employment Service in Zurich, visited the College on two occasions during the year, when he gave professional advice to students regarding their future careers.

Those wishing to obtain commercial employment here on completion of their studies were again assisted by the Society. As a result of this service, 17 young compatriots were able to obtain posts with English firms. Many more could have been placed if they had been willing to stay for at least one year, instead of only a few months as some

were prepared to do.

Mr. O. Grob, Hon. Member and former President, was appointed temporary Chairman to elect the members of the Council and the Committees.

A vacancy had been caused by the resignation of Mr. L. A. Simon from the Education Committee, on which he had served for a number of years, due to business and private commitments. Thanks were expressed to him for his services.

The Chairman, Mr. A. Jaccard, agreed to serve for one more year to see the work at Swiss House through to a satisfactory end and the Society safely re-installed there.

He was warmly thanked by Mr. Grob for his untiring efforts during the long period of reconstruction, which had entailed a great deal of time and many worries.

Mr. Jaccard was duly re-elected with sustained acclamation.

The Chairman pro tem also singled out for special mention the Chairman of the Education Committee, Mr. F. O. Hausermann, and the Secretary, Mr. W. Burren, and thanked all the other members of the Council and Committees for their continued support of the Society's aims and aspirations. They were all declared duly re-elected, with the addition of Mr. F. Vaterlaus, replacing Mr. Simon on the Education Committee, and Mrs. A. R. Sharp elected to the General Purposes and House Committee.

The proceedings then terminated.

W.B.

Switzerland's reasserted neutrality was not solely due to German pressure, but also to the radical changes of the European diplomatic scene. But the Reich was the first to profit by the new Swiss stand. Germany knew that she had nothing to fear in the way of economic sanctions from her southern neighbour.

Germany's efforts in pressuring Swiss opinion to its side were dashed at the moment of reckoning, when Colonel Henry Guisan was elected as Switzerland's military leader in preference to some of his pro-German rivals. During that early period, these political efforts took the form of governmental pressure and moral support to various fascist and pro-Nazi groups. The organisations involved in these efforts were the Foreign Organisation of the National Socialist Party, the League for the "Deutschtum" Abroad, and the SS Espionage Services. The work of these organisations remained fairly muted, however, because a more aggressive form of action could have influenced Swiss opinion in the wrong way.

Archives from the first two years of the war show that the Germans seriously doubted the will of the Swiss to defend themselves vigorously and indicate a certain ignorance of the strategy imagined by General Guisan known as the "National Redoubt", the aim of which was precisely to defend the country to the last mountain. Declarations by German generals also prove that Switzerland, like Norway, Holland, Austria, Sweden and other peripheral countries was definitely considered as a future part of the Reich.

This fundamental fact underlies all discussion on whether or not Hitler was actually prepared to invade Switzerland. The fact is that Switzerland was considered by the Reich as a satellite that would be integrated to the new empire at a convenient moment.

The "Bonjour Report" had dwelt at length on the great fright of a possible invasion on the Swiss side. The Swiss authorities were fully aware of the strategical realities prevailing before the invasion of France. Moreover, relations with the Reich had gradually deteriorated with the Germans exerting commercial pressures, obtaining a virtual Press censorship and intensifying their help to Swiss Fascist organisations. After the invasion of France, when the threat of an invasion was put back, the Germans discovered documents in the captured headquarters of the French forces at la Charité-sur-Loire proving that Switzerland, a neutral country, had made military contacts with France on 10th May. This continued to kindle Swiss fears on the likelihood of an invasion and induced General Guisan to ask for several secret meetings with Walter Schellenberg, Head of the SS Espionage, to convince him of Switzerland's determination to fight off any invasion.

Two factors eventually moved the Germans into abandoning their intention of invading Switzerland. The first was,

## Switzerland and the Third Reich

One of the most publicised problems facing students of modern Swiss history is to determine how close Nazi-Germany ever was to invading Switzerland during the early stages of the second world war. This topic is the subject of a recent doctoral thesis by a young historian, Daniel Bourgeois, published under the title *Le Troisième Reich et la Suisse, 1933-1941*.

This book studies an aspect of the war which has not been dealt with to the same extent by Professor Edgar Bonjour in his monumental work "The History of Swiss Neutrality". It was, moreover, not based on the same material. Bourgeois had to rely on German Archives because Swiss war-time Archives are not yet open to the public. They were made available to Professor Bonjour only because his report had been officially commissioned.

Using Nazi Archives presented great difficulties of interpretation owing to the mixture of wild dream, cynicism and blunt realism shared by the Nazi officials

who drafted the documents. Other difficulties are inherent to the political organisation of war-time Germany, which consisted in several, and often antagonistic, administrations. The fact that many archives relevant to the period under study had been destroyed didn't make the task any easier.

Bourgeois distinguishes the pre-war period (1933-1939) and first war years, in particular the critical period between the springs of 1940 and 1941.

During the pre-war period, which saw the new dictatorship in Germany develop its imperialist programme, Hitler strived to detach Switzerland from the Europe inherited from the Treaty of Versailles. He tried to induce the Swiss to be more understanding towards the new German State. Bourgeois recognizes that he was largely successful. At the outbreak of war, Switzerland was free from previous collective security agreements and returned to a position of integral neutrality. The author stresses that