

The first Winston Churchill memorial lecture

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THE FIRST WINSTON CHURCHILL MEMORIAL LECTURE

Within less than two months, two prominent Conservative politicians, Mr. Heath and Lord Butler, spoke before packed audiences at the *Aula* of the University of Zurich, a clear demonstration of the deep interest public opinion in Switzerland takes in the latest trends of British politics.

At the beginning of December 1966, the Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Edward Heath, as a guest of the "Schweizerisches Institut für Auslandsforschung", took the rostrum to proclaim full acceptance by his Party of the Treaty of Rome, without any other restrictions than the grant of an adequate transition period. Referring to his own negotiations with the Authorities of the European Community, in 1961/2, he said that the plea for British membership then was dictated mainly by political motives and it was for political reasons that the negotiations had broken down. But conditions had changed since President de Gaulle's veto. *Vis-à-vis* the United States and within the Commonwealth, Britain's position was no more the same; the front of supporters of a European policy was steadily strengthening in the country.

Lord Butler, accompanied by Lady Butler, came to Zurich on the invitation of the recently created Winston Churchill Foundation to hold the first Winston Churchill Memorial Lecture, on 24th January, the second anniversary of the great statesman's death. He was also entertained to luncheon by the President of "Pro Helvetia", Dr. Michael Stettler, and later on he gave a press interview at the instance of the Mayor, Dr. S. Widmer, in the Foyer of the Zurich Press Association.

The Memorial Lecture in the evening, was introduced by the Rector, Professor W. Bickel, who in his presentation of the guest of honour referred to his long political career and his achievements in the field of educational reform. A representative of the students, very movingly, paid tribute to Winston Churchill, praising him as the greatest resistance fighter to whom the younger generation felt deeply indebted. A commemorative tablet was inaugurated on the walls of the *Aula* where Churchill, on 19th September 1946, had made his memorable speech, concluding with the words: "I beg you that Europe arise".

In his speech "Churchill's Personality and Europe" Lord Butler gave an actual life picture of the motives guiding Churchill to make his appeal for the recreation of a European family from Zurich. After the British electorate's verdict in the summer of 1945, he was free from Government responsibility and his main preoccupation was then to give new courage to the war-stricken and Sundered nations of Europe; he felt the urgent need to create a new optimistic and solidary atmosphere without going into constitutional details of what an European Union should be. His vision of a partnership between France and Germany was intentionally vague, but his vision of a new Europe included the whole continent and should be sponsored also by the Soviet-Union, which alone would eventually lead to a reunification of Germany.

But Britain lost her leadership when later on actual steps for uniting Europe were taken. The ideas sponsored by "continental-catholic" Statesmen like Adenauer, Rob. Schumann and de Gasperi were something alien to the British mind which could not admit a solution involving a curtailment of sovereign rights. The relations to the United States and the Commonwealth had a heavier weight than the integration in Europe. Thus the Conservative

Government supported the creation of an European Army including a German contingent, which was urged by the Americans, but it was divided on the question of British participation.

It could not be denied that the movement starting from Messina and ultimately leading to the Treaty of Rome was underrated by the Conservative Government. But, as Jean Monnet had rightly anticipated, if the British are not easily persuaded by theories they will be convinced by facts. The year of 1961 was the turning point in the British attitude towards Europe: de Gaulle's veto was a bitter disappointment for the British, considering what they had done for France in the war. Lord Butler wished godspeed to Mr. Wilson's new approach to the Governments of the Community (he arrived on the same day in Paris). The Commonwealth could no more be an impediment to Britain's membership in the European Community, it would rather work to the advantage of the Commonwealth countries, several of whom had already made arrangements with the Common Market or found new outlets for their products. The more the Member-Nations of the Community could be persuaded that Britain was prepared to accept the political implications of the Treaty of Rome, they would also understand Britain's difficulties; provisions for a transitional adjustment period were absolutely essential; and Lord Butler concluded that the EFTA-Nations would certainly be kept informed of the progress of Britain's negotiations.

The Winston Churchill Foundation, constituted on 9th December 1965, under the presidency of National Councillor Dr. Bretscher, counts on its Council many personalities of public and academic life from all parts of Switzerland. It aims at keeping alive the memory of the life and activities of the great British statesman and at promoting the study of the historical part he played in the period of the world wars and its significance for our civilisation. In order to make his impact on his contemporaries a living force in the future, the Foundation will arrange periodically memorial lectures at one or other Swiss University and set up a special library under the custody of Zurich University, comprising not only Churchill's own works but also any literature relating to his personality and time, as a research centre for students. It will also provide for the publication of the full text of each Memorial Lecture. (By a Special Correspondent.)

THE BEAUTIFUL SIHL FOREST

Just half an hour from busy Zurich by train or car, in a southerly direction, lies the thousand-year-old Sihl Forest, a haven of peace. Boasting Europe's oldest forest conservation law, which made of it a natural preserve for the pleasure and use of city dwellers back in the early Middle-Ages, the woods are a favourite excursion spot for the people of Zurich. Passionate walkers take great delight in the fine pines and firs, the resinous scent in the air, and the untouched flora and fauna. On a thickly wooded rise stand the ruins of the legendary Schnabelburg, site of the tragic ending of a medieval regicide named Walter von Eschenbach. The hike southward from the Schnabel up the Albishorn (3,135 ft.), culminates in a sudden panoramic view of the Alps and pre-Alps in the heart of Switzerland. The entire area calls to mind Salomon Gessner, eighteenth-century idyllic poet who was also Zurich's municipal forester. After hiking through the region, one returns tired but enriched to the Forest House Inn, a historic old hostelry in which Goethe and other prominent literary figures are supposed to have stayed.

[S.N.T.O.]