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SWISS MERCANTILE SOCIETY.

The monthly meeting held at Swiss House on 12th November drew quite a good attendance, the Legation being represented by Messrs. Lepori and Consul Huber.

Mr. Meier informed us that Mr. J. J. Schneider had left hospital and would soon go to Seaford for reconvalescence.

Our President then referred feelingly to the passing away of Mr. Cesar Campart who had, during many years, been a most active and well loved personality of our Colony and in whose memory the meeting stood in silence.

No change in membership was reported but we learnt of the approaching return to Switzerland of Mr. J. H. Meier, and our best wishes accompany him into the future.

Mr. V. Umbricht has promised to address us at our next meeting on the commercial negotiations between Switzerland and England which will take place in December. Should these not have reached report stage in time, the monthly meeting will be followed by Swiss films lent by the Swiss National Tourist Office.

During the short interval before the arrival of the speaker of the evening Mrs. M. Meier appealed for household articles and clothing, both in a good state of repair, as well as sweets and food for the Swiss Benevolent Society.

At this point our President introduced Mr. Stanley H. C. Woolrych, O.B.E., who had been H.M. Consul at Strasbourg and Information Officer of the Foreign Office. He knows Switzerland well, having attended the College Cantonale de Lausanne and visited Switzerland frequently since. He addressed us in a direct and lucid manner on

The Council of Europe

which, he said, was started by Mr. Churchill's speech in Zurich in 1946, in which he dealt with the question of European Unity, at a time when the man in the street on the European Continent was gravely disillusioned with the fruits of extreme nationalism. The central point of Mr. Churchill's speech was that Europe could not stand up to Russia and her satellites on a basis of isolationism. In 1948, 1,000 representatives of 10 nations met at the Hague and signed the Charter of the Council of Europe. This by now includes 15 nations, covers rather less than half of Europe, and has a population total of 255 million. Switzerland, Austria, Finland, Yugoslavia, Spain and Portugal are not members of the Council.

The Council is not a European parliament. It has only power to advise its member governments on the lines of policy agreed upon at Strasbourg. Nevertheless it has already done some remarkably good work. It has produced the Convention of Human Rights, a statement of them minimum amount of personal freedom, and has concerned itself with unemployment refugees, housing, etc.

The federalists wanted at the outset to turn Strasbourg into a European federation, but only six nations favoured this course. They were France, Western Germany, Italy, and the Benelux countries (Holland, Belgium, Luxembourg). England would not join a European Federation because she could not ignore her obligations to the other members of the British Commonwealth. Here Mr. Woolrych specially mentioned that England could not, for instance, tie up

its army in Europe when it may be wanted for the defence of Australia.

As for the Schumann plan, under which the production and marketing of coal and steel is pooled, it was interesting to note that the six countries which favoured a European Federation were also those which adopted the Schumann plan. This is already a fact to-day and has its H.Q. at Luxembourg. Although England is not a party to the Schumann plan, she maintains a close link with this organisation with the object of collaborating with it.

Dealing with the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation centred on Paris, Mr. Woolrych said that General Eisenhower saw clearly that a German contingent was necessary to the defence of Europe. Yet there were considerable obstacles to the formation of a European Army. It should be realised that while NATO troops would return to their own countries when not required for the maintenance of peace, not so the contingents of the European army. The necessity of placing such an army under a unified command constituted the main difficulty. Germany feared that her endorsement of the principle would prevent the unification of Germany for all time. No good German wishes that to happen. France or rather those Frenchmen following de Gaulle, will not consent to the French army joining a European force without strong guarantees preserving a certain measure of overriding autonomy over its own contingent, should France need that.

In the speaker's view it was axiomatic that Europe will survive only if free nations of the West stand by one another. All have to play their part in the process of unification. He held that though the slow progress was a danger and discouragement, one could not reasonably expect quick results. One had to bear in mind the long historical background of each nation. What is generally described as the White Civilisation had its cradle in Western Europe. This cradle needed preserving if the civilisation was to be preserved. The fact that the delegates of 15 countries met at Strasbourg every year, to discuss matters of common concern, was a tremendous step forward. The private contacts between the leading politicians were in themselves invaluable for the furtherance of international understanding.

A brief but interesting discussion brought this very instructive meeting to a close before 9 o'clock.

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