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Asbestos & Health: Europe

Notes of a meeting 28th April, 1971

Present: Mr. D. W. Hills
Mr. M. F. Howe
Mr. R. H. Pearce
Dr. S. Holmes
Mr. E. B. Gates

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1. Mr. Howe proposes to visit the main countries of Western Europe and Scandinavia to contact the asbestos manufacturers' associations known to be concerned about the asbestos and health issue, to stimulate those associations to positive action, to assess the weight of adverse publicity and to discover the attitudes and intentions of the respective governments.

2. In those countries where appropriate bodies already exist (namely Benelux, France and Germany) Mr. Howe thought it appropriate for the A.I.C. to offer to send a representative - himself or Mr. Howard or Mr. Cross - to all their committee meetings; further, he considered it would be valuable to try and induce those bodies to arrange a joint conference of their associations which three or four A.I.C. representatives would attend. If it proved impossible to induce those bodies to arrange such a conference, then it would be desirable if second-best for the A.I.C. to arrange a one day or two day conference in London to which those bodies would be invited.

3. Mr. Howe summarised the present situation:

3.1 Benelux

A body already exists in Brussels - the Comite d'Information de l'Amiante (?) - under the chairmanship of Mr. van Haagen of Dutch Eternit. This body is reasonably efficient, though its secretary Dr. Lepoutre (the medical adviser of Belgian Eternit) is insufficiently orientated towards public relations aspects. This body engaged

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Hill, Knowlton (who have found Dr. Lepoutre difficult to deal with) but have now given notice of termination of the engagement. After fairly active original contact with the A.I.C. this Benelux body has not contacted the A.I.C. much recently.

3.2 France

3.2.1. A trade association exists - the Chambre Syndicale de l'Amiante - with an effective secretary in Mr. Robert Join who is evidently much constrained by a severely limited budget. There seems some room for hoping that French manufacturers may be more positive in their attitude fairly soon.

3.2.2 There is also a Comite de Recherche de l'Amiante (?) undertaking work closely similar to that of the A.R.C. The secretary is Dr. Avril, medical officer of S.A.F.F. This body has no direct connection with the Chambre Syndicale mentioned in 3.2.1. above.

3.3 Germany

3.3.1. It is important to recognise that the Wirtshaftverbandasbest (WVA) does not include any asbestos cement manufacturers who have their own corresponding organisation. Representatives of the latter attended the last annual meeting of the WVA, but the two bodies are otherwise far apart.

3.3.2. Mr. Howe has consistently urged the WVA to form something along the lines of the A.I.C. and after their last meeting the WVA decided to set up a sub-committee to deal with information aspects. This sub-committee is chaired by Mr. Schmidt, secretary of the WVA; he suffers from being simply a paid secretary with no status or authority, and from lacking any real depth of experience or commitment to the asbestos industry. Questions directed by Mr. Schmidt to the A.I.C. to date have been superficial. The most hopeful sign in the German situation is perhaps that the WVA have bought and used the German version of "Why Asbestos?" and that in doing so they have worked closely with their German Asbestos Cement counterparts - this may portend closer co-operation in future.

3.3.3. Mr. Hills mentioned here information from Graf von Rex about a government-sponsored body comprising manufacturers and unions

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who may well recommend (have recommended?) people <u>Not</u> to use asbestos at all; Mr. Hills mentioned also the Rex view that conventional asbestos is quite likely to be banned in Germany in 2/3 years, though "Tilon" materials are expected to be approved.

3.3.4. Mr. Howe understood that the WVA had approached Hill, Knowlton but seemed unwilling to spend the money required. In this connection, Mr. Howe stressed that the provision of literature by itself was not enough: it was most desirable also that the WVA should have the sort of advice about public relations which a firm like Hill, Knowlton alone could provide.

3.3.5. Mr. Howe stressed also the urgent need for greater co-operation between the WVA and the German asbestos cement manufacturers if asbestos interests in that country were to avoid a situation such as that which has developed in New York where recent legislation - if meticulously enforced - would prohibit the use of all asbestos building products and not simply the asbestos spray against which the legislation was originally directed; Mr. Howe said that if the German asbestos textiles interests were defeated in the asbestos and health battle, then the defeat of the German asbestos cement interests would be likely to follow quite quickly.

3.3.6. Mr. Howe observed that relations were strained as between Graf von Rex on the one hand and Mr. Schmidt and Mr. Merkel on the other.

3.4 <u>Scandinavia</u>

A meeting was held in Oslo last summer between representatives of asbestos cement manufacturers from Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Finland. Apart from the Swedish brake lining firm of Svenska Bromsbandfabriken, asbestos cement is the only form of asbestos manufacture in Scandinavia - the area is otherwise an export outlet for other European countries, notably ourselves. At the Oslo meeting the representatives from Norway, Sweden and Finland favoured the formation of a Scandinavian A.I.C., but the Danish representatives (from Dansk Eternit) were opposed to the idea. Their opposition stemmed from the view that the situation in Denmark is different from and better than thmk elsewhere in Scandinavia, insofar as especially good relations exist with Danish factories, unions and Press and these good relations might well suffer if Dansk Eternit were

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associated with the sort of outside body proposed. Mr. Howe said that this view of internal Danish relations was probably correct: the Danish Press had contained well-balanced articles on the subject, save only for alarming reviews of the asbestos element in G. R. Taylor's "Doomsday" book. Mr. Howe had urged the Norwegian, Swedish and Finnish interests to proceed to the formation of a Scandinavian A.I.C., but had not received any response at all. There is thus no A.I.C.-type organisation in Scandinavia at present.

3.5 <u>Sweden</u>

3.5.1. An association of asbestos cement manufacturers - Skandinaviska Eternit - exists but has no interest in the ship-yards where the main concern has been expressed in relation to asbestos and health.

3.5.2. Most of the information about the concern of the shipyards has come through Clase, agents for TAC who have a very considerable interest in the supply of asbestos insulating board (other suppliers to the market being Danish manufacturers and Cape). Because of their consequently close contact with the shipyards Clase knew well in advance of the meeting early in April organised by a Swedish government body concerned with the health of work people, and knew very quickly also of the ban on the use of any asbestos materials at the Gotaverken shipyard. Mr. Lunt and Mr. Sleeman had attended that meeting on behalf of TAC and Mr. Witte had attended (with much shorter notice) for TBA. Mr. Howe recommended that TBA secure a copy of the report by Mr. Lunt and Mr. Sleeman, and observed that Mr. Witte had done a good job at the meeting in contesting the statement of Captain Sunstedt. The latter is clearly violently opposed to the continued use of asbestos materials: Dr. Holmes hopes to see him in two/three weeks time and Mr. Howe hopes to see him also later.

3.5.3. Following the April meeting mentioned above, the TAC feeling currently is to make their own asbestos and health representations in the market, but Mr. Hills supported Mr. Howe in thinking this mistaken: recognising that the A.I.C. permits/requires its constituent members to maintain

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relations each with their own customers, the members should look to the A.I.C. and the A.R.C. for help and advice, and should avoid any plagiarising of A.I.C./A.R.C. publications. It was felt that relations between interested parties in Sweden and this country are such that the A.I.C. could reasonably hope to intervene directly on its own behalf.

3.6 Norway

Mr. Pearce mentioned the apparent lack of concern of Bagges in dust-suppressed materials, and cited our being obliged currently to supply non-dust-suppressed "Fortex" cloths to that market because of their greater concern about flexibility than about dust-emission. From this it appeared there is not current concern about asbestos and health in Norway. Mr. Howe thought this could be mistaken: he said that Norsk Eternit are quite interested in the subject, and that factory regulations of some sort exist in Norway relating to asbestos which might possibly provide a basis for general legislation in other Scandinavian countries.

3.7 Italy

Mr. Pearce mentioned a recent report of crocidolite yarns being dry-woven in unventilated areas in an Italian factory, and Mr. Howe agreed there appeared to be no current concern in Italy about asbestos and health.

4. It was agreed that TBA would provide a copy for Mr. Howe of any reports which might be useful to him as Chairman of the A.I.C., but would avoid (or, at any rate, indicate carefully) any matter in such reports which is confidential to TBA's separate commercial interest.

E. B. Gates