

EARLY DAYS OF CERN IN GENEVA



ANS / JAHRE / ANNI CERN

60 YEARS OF SWISS SCIENCE AT CERN

CONCEPTION

In December 1951 and February 1952 took place, in Paris and Geneva, two UNESCO conferences that led to the creation of a 'Council of European representatives for the study and plans of an International Laboratory and the organization of other forms of cooperation in Nuclear research'.

At that time particle physics was part of Nuclear Physics.

The Swiss representatives, Mr Albert Picot, and Prof. Paul Sherrer, Physicist from Zürich, indicated that Switzerland could be chosen as host of the laboratory.



In January 1952, The «Tribune de Genève» reported the arguments in favour of Geneva: great scientific past, highly specialized manpower, small state, swiss neutrality.



On 4 octobre 1952, during a meeting of the council in Amsterdam, Geneva was chosen by consensus among the candidatures of Arnhem, Copenhagen, Genève and Paris.



The choice of Geneva eliminated any possible ambiguities regarding the mission of the institution to perform work of scientific nature, and not military.

OPPOSITIONS

In Geneva itself, however, there was no such consensus. Part of the public opinion, led by the communist party, raised fears that the laboratory would generate various dangers: hazardous fumes, risk of bombing during a possible new armed conflict, risk to Swiss neutrality.

When Albert Picot presented to the Grand Conseil Genevois, the project of a Laboratory for Nuclear Research in Geneva, the leftist wing opposed it, fearing 'Allegiance of the future scientific organization to the powers of the Atlantic Treaty', while Picot had argued precisely the opposite: 'it is to free themselves from the American influence that European Scientists have decided to join efforts'.

The workers party gathered enough signatures for a referendum proposing to prohibit establishment of any International institute performing atomic or nuclear research.

Happily for CERN, this initiative was repelled by a popular vote on 28 and 29 June 1953, after a bitterly fought campaign during which scientists marched in the streets!

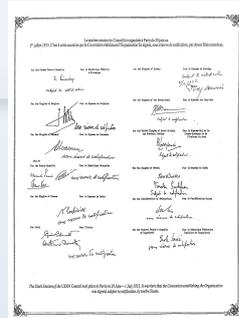


Two days later on 1st July 1953 in Paris, the Swiss delegation was able to sign the convention creating CERN, subject to ratification by the twelve signatory states.

Work started in 1953 before the convention was ratified and CERN was officially born. A small team of physicists and engineers worked in semi-independent groups in various institutes,



While the administration settled in a nice Villa de Cointrin, above, the Magnet group was installed in the 'reactor building' at the recently built Institut de Physique, below, where technical support was provided (right)



FINDING a HOME

Sur le terrain du futur institut nucléaire



Sous la conduite de M. A. Picot, les membres du Conseil européen pour la recherche nucléaire se sont rendus hier à Meyrin pour reconnaître le terrain où s'élevera le Centre nucléaire (voir en Dernière heure) (Photo Freddy Burtrand, Genève)

La Suisse du 30 octobre 1953

An area in the commune of Meyrin was chosen as best site for the laboratory. Albert Picot took the members of the CERN Council in October 1953 to visit the location where the construction of the Nuclear Center would take place, and meet the local population.



On 17 May 1954 the construction of the first buildings began in Meyrin and on 29 September the convention was ratified by the first nine member states.

CERN and the region

The direct impact of CERN on Geneva is difficult to measure, but the spin-off benefits are huge, and the city is undoubtedly proud of its prestigious resident. On arrival in Geneva by road or by air, signs underline CERN's presence.

Since 1965 CERN has grown into the neighbouring region in the Pays de Gex in France to allow construction of the ISR and then the SPS and LEP/LHC. This is a unique example of such duality of hosts and CERN serves as a precursor in legal and commercial matters.

Thanks to the neutral and pacific nature of its host, CERN has been able to welcome physicists from the whole world across all borders, performing together experiments at the frontier of knowledge.

Alain Blondel with many credits to Maurice Bourquin and CERN

