INTERVIEW

Trade Fair for Developing Countries

Interview with Dr M. Busche, of "Ausstellungs-Dienst Berlin"

It is six years now that the first Import Trade Fair called "Partners of Progress" has been staged in Berlin. Its original form was that of a pure aid to information, but following actual needs, it gradually changed into a commercial trade fair of the developing countries. The number of exhibitors taking part in these fairs, and the growing interest shown by more and more expert visitors, have both made it clear that this kind of trade show has gained a firm position among German trade fairs and specialised exhibitions. We have asked Dr M. Busche, authorised signatory of the Berlin Exhibition Service (Ausstellungs-Dienst Berlin: ADB), about his experiences with the import show, "Partners of Progress", which is designed exclusively for the promotion of imports from African, Asian, and Latin American developing countries.

QUESTION: The Import Show, "Partners of Progress", which takes place annually in conjunction with the German Industries' Fair, has opened its gates for the sixth time this year. Which were the original considerations that have led to the conception of such a special trade fair for developing countries?

ANSWER: The Import Show, "Partners of Progress", is designed to promoting the Federal Republic's imports from the industrially less developed countries of Africa, Asia, and Latin America. We believe that, for achieving the participation of developing countries in the trade exhibitions, a specialised trade fair service is required, which is not, and probably cannot be, offered by other trade fairs and trade fair organisations of the traditional type. The general motto of this import show is the adage of "aid by trade", whose truth has been proved many times, and it is possible to interpret this slogan by emphasising the fact that aid by trade is of advantage for the two trading partners.

QUESTION: Which kind of development has this kind of trade show taken, measured by the numbers of exhibitors, the breadth and variety of the goods on show, etc., during the years in which it has existed?

ANSWER: In our view, the import show has gone through a highly favourable course of development. In the beginning, it was usual to specialise by exhibiting the products but also the cultural achievements and even information about political developments and conditions of individual development regions or continents. Thus, in 1962, a special African, in 1963, an Asian, and in 1964, a Latin American special regional fair were staged.

But for 1965, we decided to give up regional delimitations, we dropped the designation of the fair as a "special regional show" and re-named and re-styled it as an "Import Exhibition". No fewer than 35 development countries from three continents then took part in this first import display; their number rose to 48 in 1965, and to 56 in 1966.

From 1966 onwards, we have also tried to persuade private enterprise from less developed countries to take part in our exhibitions. We succeeded in gaining for participation about 50 and in 1968 about 220 direct private exhibitors in the Import Fair, "Partners of Progress". The breadth and variety of goods supplied for purchase orders has also steadily grown. In 1968, the show harbours about 10,000 different types of goods as exhibits.

The Commercial Impact at the Fair

QUESTION: Is this Import Fair an event which may be of real commercial advantage to developing countries, showing the way to sales and opening up marketing outlets, or are its uses more or less restricted to an educational exercise, training developing countries for what they could and should do when taking part in "real", conventional trade fairs?

ANSWER: Our import exhibition is of great commercial interest. It is a meeting place where important business contacts are taken up and consolidated. Its greatest value is that sellers can spy out the lie of the land in studying potential
markets, but also actual sales show a gratifyingly high and rising volume. There are big groups of buyers from department stores, purchasing associations, typical wholesaling and import traders, and, last but not least, the innumerable trade brokers and commercial agents who have been turning up here with great regularity and provide proof of the commercial value of our import fair. There is, of course, still an educational element; we try to educate participants in taking part in a more effective and more successful way in future import shows opening their gates in Berlin.

**QUESTION:** One sometimes hears it said of the Import Fair that it is more of a folkloristic display, whose exhibitors prefer the picturesque show to the sales effect. What has been your experience, in this respect, with exhibitors from developing countries?

**ANSWER:** Since we have scrapped the name of "Special Show", the folkloristic element has also disappeared. However, it must not be overlooked that participating countries often — and in many respects with full justification — felt that the special regional shows served as representative demonstrations of their national sovereignty, which had only very recently been gained, their historical dignity, and their cultural achievements, up to and including the 1964 exhibition. The special Latin American event of 1964 was a particularly well-designed show of this kind. But after this, it has been our experience that exhibitors from less developed countries have followed the new trend towards the trade show, initiated in 1965, with a great deal of good will and largely also with definite success.

**QUESTION:** The Import Show, "Partners of Progress", is accessible to the general public. Would it not be more germane to the purpose of this type of fair, designed to foster imports, to permit entry to buyers and potential buyers only, leaving the general public outside?

**ANSWER:** It is certainly true that buyers and potential buyers are the most important visitors and talking partners for exhibitors. Companies and business associations domiciled in the developing countries want to meet them, to build up contacts with them, and to prepare for, or close, sales deals with them. However, the public who also attend the fair in large numbers fulfil there a twofold and highly important mission. In the first instance, European visitors for the first time obtain there a glimpse, a true impression, of the goods on offer and of the economic potentialities and peculiarities of the exhibiting nations. In the second instance, the attendance of the general public makes the exhibition a market test for the exhibitors. The degree of interest displayed by the visitors, enquiries made for certain products, and individual purchases made of exhibits demonstrate to the exhibitor which kind of product may have a real chance to impress the German consumer and be accepted by him, or may have the same but wider effect in a European market. The exhibitor can even find out which kind of adjustment of this production and marketing policies will be required to make his products marketable.

**QUESTION:** Do individual countries and here again individual branches of these exhibitor countries' economies predominate in your Exhibition, demonstrating a trend towards regional and product specialisation running counter to its intended character of a generalised import fair?

**ANSWER:** It is a gratifying observation that our Import Show, "Partners of Progress", has made very well-balanced progress. Yet there is a certain degree of concentration of the fair in the fields of commodities (raw materials), foodstuffs and staple consumer goods, in their widest sense. The import show has become the venue for highly interesting talks about deals in cotton and copper, but also in transistor radios and mosaic building boards, and we also register negotiations about joint investment ventures of German and foreign partners in developing countries.

Some degree of specialisation has become unavoidable; for practical reasons, we had to take the field of tourism ("New Holiday Centres in Three Continents") out of the import show, and we have called into life a completely new kind of annual event serving touristic interests, the "International Touristic Exchange Market".

**Direct Build-up of Contacts**

**QUESTION:** You do not only put at the disposal of the exhibitors exhibiting floors and stands but also perform various advisory and supporting tasks. Which way do the advisory and supporting tasks are being undertaken by the ADB?

**ANSWER:** ADB (Trade Fair and Exhibition Services, Berlin), through its departments for the Promotion of Trade, and for Press and Publicity Questions, offer the following forms of assistance and trade fair service:

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