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OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE "BRIDAL CAROUSEL" AT THE

NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION

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Among the basic facts of life which every couple getting married in Ireland this year should know is that because of our size, location and history, Ireland almost more than any other country lives by trade. When we send our goods abroad, say to the U.K., U.S. and Sweden, we can only expect the local consumer to buy them if they appeal because of price, quality or by being different. The home market is exactly the same. WE can't, nor should we, rely on chauvanism. The high tariff barriers to foster home industry and to ensure that Irish people buy Irish goods were a help in the past, but are now gone.

Each Bride and her intended husband - if she asks him - will set her own criteria for the furnishing and the products she wants for her home. It is the responsibility of the manufacturer to find out what her needs are, by careful research of this market, and to make goods to suit her needs. But his responsibility doesn't end there, today's Bride-to-be is almost certain to have a job. She will not have the time nor indeed the incentive to go looking for Irish manufactured goods to meet her needs. The manufacturer must package them, merchandise them, and advertise them. If the Irish manufacturer does all this, then we can reasonably expect the Irish consumer to buy quality Irish.

The products in this exhibition have been manufactured primarily by small firms, many of which are developing rapidly. The 4000 manufacturing firms which have less than 100 employees provide about 40% of the jobs in Irish industry, and thus make a major contribution to our economy. Most large firms start small. Small firms are, therefore, a seed bed from which the large firms of the future will come. They are often young, dynamic and innovative. They are likely to be started by people who want to create something unique, and are confident in their ability to succeed. They provide a valuable outlet for innovators who would find the atmosphere in large firms too constraining.

Despite all these advantages, small firms suffer from disadvantages when they try to market outside their own immediate locality. The costs of exhibiting and advertising may be a major constraint on the firms growth. An Exhibition, such as this, is therefore an invaluable aid for the smaller firms. It provides a testing ground in the centre of Dublin at nominal cost where the exhibitor can get reaction from a large number of people to his product. It can provide encouragement, and orders which will generate rapid development or it can pin point where modifications in design, or presentation are required. The fact that products are on exhibition from Dublin, Galway, Kilkenny, Wicklow and Meath indicates that small firms are grasping the opportunity offered.

Some years ago some prophets of doom forecast the demise of the clothing industry in the EEC. It was thought that the products of a labour intensive industry such as clothing would be imported from the developing countries. In fact, the industry in Europe has shown remarkable resistance as consumers demand product differentiation i.e. something special or out of the ordinary. This type of product usually requires a high level of knowledge, skill and sensitivity to local market needs.

The apparel industry in Ireland has almost 23,000 employees i.e. 11½% of employment in manufacturing industry. Its output has remained stable since 1969. Exports accounted for 34% of this output in 1972 and competing imports accounted for 28% of home consumption. Every year since 1960 we have been nett exporters of clothing and footwear. It is inevitable that, with the freeing of trade, the volume of imports will increase. However, the rise in market share by competing imports from 25% in 1971 to 28% in 1972 is disturbing. A greater emphasis on marketing is required in order that Irish manufacturers hold the maximum share of the home market - because they should be able to identify best what the Irish customer wants. Retention of home market share though, less glamorous than exporting, is at least as valuable. I have, therefore, great pleasure in opening this exhibition which I know will contribute to the growth of small firms, and the retention of its home market share by Irish industry, and the happiness of the Irish bride.

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