

Difficult times for trade and industry

Autor(en): **[s.n.]**

Objektyp: **Article**

Zeitschrift: **Helvetia : magazine of the Swiss Society of New Zealand**

Band (Jahr): **10 (1944-1945)**

Heft 8

PDF erstellt am: **29.05.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-942767>

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glorious unison the spectators, lining the spacious main thoroughfare, fall reverently down on their knees. The parish priest, carrying the Blessed Sacrament, now pronounces his benediction.

A rather unusual feature is the fact that while the procession winds its way around the historic abbey at Beromunster, the ascension of Christ is figuratively depicted within the church. By means of an artistic device an image of the Redeemer rises towards the ceiling and disappears in clouds of incense. The erection of such an image is also customary in Fribourg, Lucerne, Zug and Schwyz.

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DIFFICULT TIMES FOR TRADE AND INDUSTRY.

The number of unemployed people in Switzerland has remained unchanged during the past years. This has been due to two principal reasons, the carrying out of the plan for agricultural extension on the one hand and the mobilization of large numbers of troops and large scale defense works on the other.

However, the reprovisioning difficulties, particularly in such raw materials as coal, and the partial interruption of exports are today causing much anxiety to many Swiss industrialists. In fact, the plan to meet unemployment problems known in Switzerland as the Zipfel-Plan from the name of its chief author has already found a practical application in many cases.

The plan provides first of all for immediately productive measures, making it possible for factories to keep their employees at the same or a similar occupation as in the past. The military authorities and the Federal Railways have given orders that would have had to be filled some time or the other, but which had been held in reserve to meet an upsurge in unemployment. This farsighted policy is not possible, however, in all branches of the nation's economy. The government could hardly come to the rescue in the same way to the aluminium industry, for in this case it is not orders that are lacking but raw materials. Nor could the same help be extended to the watch making industry, for the state does not need watches as it does railway cars or uniforms for postmen. Thus some enterprises have not been able to avoid laying off workers.

The Swiss labor market will depend in the first place on our commercial relations with the outside world. If Swiss industry is able to get the needed raw materials and if exportation is possible, our workers will again have work. But if the present situation continues, there is no doubt that Switzerland will be confronted very soon with heavy unemployment.

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THE QUESTION OF AN OLD AGE AND SURVIVORS' INSURANCE.

One question which continues to preoccupy the Swiss public opinion, is the problem of a general and obligatory old age and survivors insurance. This is probably the most burning question in our internal policy.

The idea of an old age and survivors insurance dates back twenty years. In 1925, the Swiss people laid the foundation for the insurance by accepting a new article in the Federal Constitution, dealing with the principles of such a social enterprise. In 1931, the first law project for the practical application of these principles was rejected as it was generally considered insufficiently worked out. This first negative decision of the Swiss people in this matter naturally caused a great delay. The present war has again stirred up the problem. A popular initiative was launched to oblige our authorities to concentrate again their efforts on this task. For more than one year now a number of experts have been at work, elaborating a new project which is generally expected to be published before the end of this war. But as in our country parliamentary procedure is particularly slow, and because of the popular vote by which this project will have to be approved, one can hardly expect the full realization of this insurance before the beginning of 1946.