

The magical telephone dial

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THE MAGICAL TELEPHONE DIAL

By E. MERZ (Auckland).

Among the series of articles published by me during 1949 under the title "Switzerland Today," our readers will doubtless recall a brief reference made regarding the automatic telephone system in Switzerland. This mechanical system connects the entire country—you simply dial any number, say, from Zurich to Geneva, and you obtain instant connection, without the intervention of the long distance office. I explained the system of the automatic street-telephone; that on entering the box, you find a printed schedule of about 20 different districts, each district having a key-number such as 051 Zurich, 063 Berne, etc. Each region has a different tariff and a pay-box is provided with three different sized slots; one slot for ten cent pieces, one for twenty and one for fifty cents. Whatever tariff is indicated you insert, say, 70 cents, dial 051-442246 and you are immediately connected with your party.

When using the phone in an hotel or restaurant you pay the cashier at the nearby desk, who, upon termination of your conversation, instantly reads the charge from a most ingenious automatic meter the exact charge payable. "Toll-call" charges of subscribers, private or large businesses, are also automatically recorded at centres, and no mistakes or omissions are possible.

Recently I chanced to read some more detailed informations regarding this modern miracle telephone: For instance, in Zurich you may dial No. 11 and the most amazing services are at your disposal. If your doctor doesn't answer his phone, No. 11 will tell you where he is. Desperate expectant mothers have been aided countless times in their search for doctors or ambulances. No. 11 tells you of any football games next weekend; conditions at your ski resort; whether a parade or festival is cancelled because of rain. This number will tell you the time-tables on ships, trains and planes. Another vital service is the network of SOS telephones on remote alpine routes, mountain peaks and skiing slopes. And of course it will give you the weather forecast at any time.

Number 11 in Zurich handles 7,000 to 9,000 questions during the day, and about 1,500 every evening. These unusual services are all supplied by highly trained girls. Before the telephone company hires them, they must pass examinations which includes dictation in four languages. They must spend eight hours a day in training for six months, studying their country and Government until they know every aspect by heart. After this course, they begin work as operators. However, the on-the-job instruction continues throughout the first year of employment.

The latest Swiss miracle is Ipsophone, a robot device installed on a rental basis. It records incoming messages when the owner is out, answering the phone and asking the caller for his message. When the owner returns, he merely turns on his Ipsophone and listens. Also you can call your own home (from as far away as you like), recite a secret code signal to Ipsophone, and it will repeat back for you all the messages it has taken. If you are worried about eavesdroppers, you can change the code as often as you wish.

All these unique services in a "telephone wonderland" for visitors, is a mechanical miracle developed to meet the many needs for the thousands of visitors, as well as our own people.

SURVEY OF THE SWISS ECONOMY

The year 1951 will enter the history of Swiss economics as one of unprecedented boom. Exports were 23 per cent. higher than in 1950, and represented in volume 150-200 per cent. of the 1938 figures. Dwellings were being built at the record rate of 28,000 a year, whereas the pre-war maximum had been 20,400 in 1932. New hydro-electric schemes were absorbing 200m. francs, and public services added their share to the already over-burdened building trade. No wonder then that Switzerland is recording a new peak of over-employment (in October, 1841 unemployed and 4690 vacancies), which necessitated the temporary employment of 200,000 foreign workers. No wonder either that the gross national income is rising at a fast rate, and may have swung between 20 and 21 billion francs in 1951, as compared with 19 billion in 1950 and 18.2 billion in 1949. Per capita Switzerland's national income amounts to some £330, which compares very favourably with the £200 and £220 in France and the United Kingdom respectively (U.S.A.: over £600). At the beginning of 1952 there are many signs that prosperity will continue for some time to come, even though the United Kingdom and France have had to introduce import restrictions. The Swiss industry is overloaded with orders from countries in the throes of rearmament, and the building trade is still working to full capacity.

Are there grounds in the circumstances to sound a warning? The present boom entails indeed very serious dangers: New dwellings are already exceeding demand by some 10,000, and a recession appears unavoidable within two or three years. High exports can only be warranted so long as they can secure a counter-part, whereas at present the State is extending increasing credits to EPU in order to balance the surplus run with member States. The importation