

Our fatherland [continued]

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of time worked in factories, from 48 to 44 hours per week. This Initiative, contrary to what one might have expected, is meeting with a mitigated approval, even on the part of the Trade Unions. Mr. Steiner, a National Councillor and President of the Federation of Swiss Trade Unions, expresses his opinion on this subject in the journal "La Lutte Syndicale." He considers that a reduction in working hours would only prove to be a social benefit if it were possible to carry it out without any loss in earnings, and if it would not hamper any future improvement in wages. Moreover, the moment for such action would appear to have been badly chosen. It is of primary importance that Switzerland should be in a position to defend her place on the world markets, and in order to be able to do so it is necessary for her to shorten delays in deliveries, which are apt to be prejudicial to her interests. At the present time, there are more than 100,000 foreign workers employed in this country and any reduction in working hours would result in this number being increased.

Mr. Steiner raises another argument. In his article, he writes that in a great many branches of commerce and of trade, and more especially in that of agriculture, the wage-earners are engaged in their work for more than 48 hours; this explains, by the way, why there is such a flight of man-power from the land, towards the urban centres. One must not, therefore, only think of the workers in industry, where the 48-hour week is established by law.

SWISS CHEMIST REVOLUTIONIZES THE IRAK ECONOMY

An idea born in the mind of a Swiss chemist is now proceeding to revolutionise the date-growing economy of Irak. This country, which is the greatest date producer in the world, frequently finds itself faced with the painful problem of over-production. This situation, which has been causing anxiety for some time past, both to the authorities and to the management of the great fruit-growing company, the Date Association, aroused the attention of Mr. Mohrlar, a Swiss professor of chemistry and head of the UNESCO's Mission for Technical Aid, in Irak, who discovered that while, on the one hand, Irak allowed thousands of tons of dates to go to waste each year, this country, on the other hand, was obliged to import 80,000 tons of sugar.

Dates, of course, contain 81 per cent. of sugar. Mr. Mohler, who was formerly the Director of the Municipal Laboratory in Zurich, knew all about the research work that had been done in Switzerland in regard to sugar derived from fruits. He also knew that only Switzerland possessed the necessary refinery installations suit-

able for production on an industrial scale. In co-operation with the fruit-growing company, he despatched three tons of dates to Switzerland and, a few weeks later, the Swiss laboratories sent back one tone of liquid date sugar.

This product immediately proved a great success in Bagdad, especially among the confectioners, who, in the East, are as important as are butchers in the West. The date industry has announced the creation of a first native refinery. Thus, the initiative of this Swiss chemist has not only started a new industry in Irak, but it will also contribute towards the solution of the distressing problem of date over-production, and, at the same time, of that pertaining to the under-nutrition of the Irak population.

OUR FATHERLAND

(By E.M.)

(Conclusion)

TICINO. (Second part.) To Locarno, which you reach from Lugano by first retracing to Bellinzona, a famous church is usually the first sight to visit: the Madonna del Sasso (or "Our Lady of the Rock"), perched on a spur of rock, between two ravines, 500 ft. above the lake. It is easily reached by a funicular and from the station a short pathway leads directly to the buildings. From the sunny terraces is an incomparable view of the town and across the lovely Lake Maggiore.

Locarno is a good deal quieter than Lugano, but it has nevertheless plenty to offer for visitors. It is only a short way to Ascona, the famous and most Bohemian of Swiss resorts, with a good beach and the best golf course in the canton. Originally a small fishing village it has kept its typical Tessin character, in spite of the large numbers of tourists flocking there annually. From Ascona, it is only a further step to Ronco, a charming and very picturesque village perched high up the hill, overlooking lake and the road leading to Brissago, the frontier town, well known to all Swiss for its famous cigar. And the same road leads to Stresa in Italy, where it is easy to visit the two lovely islands of Bella Isola and Isola Madre.

From Locarno one may visit the loveliest valley in the canton, the Maggia. A train runs to Bignasco—one of those small trains that seem to wander absent-mindedly through the streets, like a tram, until the suburbs are reached—and from Bignasco mounts the Val Luavizzara, the line more and more winding, until reaching the terminus of Fusio. If anyone wished to know what kind of village the people of 300 years ago beheld, go to Fusio and you will find an almost untouched specimen there.

Near Bellinzona is the valley of Verzasca, a lonely and wild gorge, through which flows the turbulent river of the same name. An excellent motor road leads through solitary and austere villages up to Sonogno, which lies at the head of the valley and is a good fishing centre. Most of the people in the valley have that stern, weather-beaten look, which comes from the constant fight with the elements in this isolated region. The winter is so rough that the greater part of the inhabitants are forced down into the plains.

North of Bellinzona is the village of Giornico, which boasts the early Christian basilica of San Nicolao. This remarkable structure is a small but beautiful example of early Church architecture, with its Romanesque walls and arches, its sacrificial altar and its carved lions. It is the finest and most interesting building of its kind in the Tessin.

We now come to the conclusion of our endeavours in depicting various interesting aspects of our Fatherland and we terminate with a summing up of Switzerland, as expressed by a well-known English writer and admirer of our land and people: "The Swiss are proud of their country. They like to hear it praised. To give them their due they are glad to share it with the foreigner, and the motive is not simply a mercenary one, as institutions like the Pestalozzi village in Trogen, and as the wonderful hospitality extended again and again to the stranger and the refugees, have proved so often. When going there we observe with admiration a civilised, a pleasing and amiable people whose amiability lies largely in the absence of strain, a people who know nothing of that bitterness which results from privation and misery. Switzerland has been built up out of the strength of certain convictions bred into the very soul of the nation, and by her willingness to learn. She has managed to avoid falling into a pit of unprincipled greed in which the unscrupulous pursuit of wealth tends to end. Deterioration threatens Switzerland just as it threatens all nations, but so long as she clings to her ancient virtues she is safer than most."

SWITZERLAND'S ECONOMIC SITUATION IN THE MIDDLE OF 1951

In spite of certain rather pessimistic prognoses, economic activity in Switzerland continues at a high level. The American recession whose repercussions, it was feared, would be felt all over the world, was much less serious than expected and its effects were hardly felt at all in Europe.

Not only has the activity of Swiss industry as a whole been maintained at a high level, but in many fields it has even been increased. This was the case, in particular, in the cotton industry, where the employment index has risen 29 points in the space of a year, from 111 to 140, and in the embroidery industry, which continues to work full time and has more orders on its books than it has ever had during recent years. Since the end of last year there has been a marked improvement in the chemical industry as well as in the paper, leather and rubber industries, in the timber industry in general and in all the trades dependent on the building industry. The metal and machine industries, which are so important in Switzerland, are working to full output. Towards the end of 1953, there was a slight falling off in orders, the only effect of which actually was to shorten the delivery dates, which were admittedly rather long. But during the second quarter of the year this industry, for the first time since June, 1950, recorded a slight increase in the number of orders.

The situation is therefore good on the whole; this however does not mean that there are not black spots in the picture. Throughout the watch-making industry the employment index has fallen during the last year from 132 to 109 (1938 equals 100). As this is one of the leading industries of the country, there is no denying the seriousness of this decrease. President Eisenhower's recent decision to raise the import duty on watches has increased the fears felt for the immediate future of this industry, for the United States, which receives on an average 12 per cent. of our exports, absorbs a third of them where watches are concerned.

In the field of textiles, the silk and rayon industry shows a slight falling off as compared with the second quarter of 1953, while the wool textile industry is even below its employment index for 1938. Although the activity of the clothing industry also shows a slight falling off as compared with last year, it nevertheless continues at a comparatively high level.

One of the main factors contributing to the maintenance of the period of great industrial activity in Switzerland is certainly the present boom in the building industry. During the first half of 1954, the number of houses built in Switzerland exceeded that for the same period last year by a quarter. The number of applications for permits to build, which also exceeds the figures for last year, leads us to believe that this intense activity will continue. There is also an appreciable increase in building for industry.

The number of visitors staying in hotels, in spite of the rather inclement weather, was somewhat greater than that of last year. This had its effect on the number of passengers on the railways which was 3.6 per cent. greater during