

News from Switzerland

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evening a cheerful and pleasant reunion. The usual supper consisting of a Servela, bread and a cup of coffee has also proved to be most popular.

The Club membership is steadily increasing and we now have 60 members. Meetings are held every third Sunday of each month at the Riverlea Cabaret, Hamilton, at 8 p.m. All Swiss resident in the Waikato, who are not yet members, are heartily invited to join the Club, where they will be most welcome. The life membership fee is £1, in addition to the annual subscription to the Swiss Society of New Zealand.

OBITUARY NOTICES

It is with very deep regret that we announce the passing away of several of our compatriots, whose names are mentioned below, and we would like to extend to their relatives our most sincere sympathy.

Mr. Albert Kalin, Hawera.
Mr. Arthur Kuriger, Hawera.
Mr. Albert Meier, Waitara.
Mrs. Anna Notter, Kapuni.
Mr. John Zeier, Waitara.

CORRECTION

Owing to an error, it was stated in the August issue of "Helvetia" that Mr. Bachmann resigned from the Committee of the Swiss Society in New Zealand (Inc.), whereas the person referred to was Mr. Alois Bucheler and NOT Mr. Bachmann.

INQUIRY FROM A SWISS FARMER WISHING TO COME TO N.Z.

In order for a married man to come to New Zealand, and be granted the necessary Entry Permit to do so, it is essential for him first to have living accommodation assured, and it is practically impossible for any such person to fulfil this condition if he does not already have friends in New Zealand. This is the case for one of our compatriots, 33 years old, married with two children, who is now working in India as Joint Manager of the Agricultural Department of an old-established Swiss firm. He is a "Maschinenschlosser," but after his apprenticeship he went for two years to the Agricultural College ("Landwirtschaftliche Schule") in Rutti, Switzerland. He would like to work in New Zealand on a farm, and if this hope materialises, then when he gained enough knowledge of the local conditions it would be his intention to buy a farm.

As it is not excluded that one of the readers of "Helvetia" would like to help, their attention is drawn to this case. The address of the Swiss citizen concerned will be supplied by the Consulate of Switzerland, G.P.O. Box 386, Wellington.

NOTICE TO ALL MEMBERS

The Secretary wishes to inform all members that Miss Doris Peyer has been elected to the position of Treasurer for the Society.

As the subscriptions were due on the 31st March last, the co-operation of members, who have not yet paid, would be greatly appreciated. (Membership fee remains at 15/- a year.)

Address of Treasurer:

Miss Doris Peyer,
48 Moa Road,
Pt. Chevalier,
Auckland, W.3.

NEWS FROM SWITZERLAND

Home Affairs

The navigability of the Upper Rhine, that is to say, that part of the Rhine which flows between Basle and the Lake of Constance, has once more been brought into the light of public interest through a statement of the present position contained in a Report of the Federal Council, submitted to Parliament. The Council of States proceeded immediately to discuss this problem, and took cognizance of the Report of the Federal Council in a favourable sense. No further Resolutions had to be passed. The purpose of the Report was merely to set forth the present position of this development project.

From this Report it once more became apparent that, in this matter economic, traffic, technical, financial and political aspects are to be found. The fact that the Rhine is also the frontier stream between Switzerland and Germany, gives rise, moreover, to international questions.

Up to the end of the last century, the Rhine, between Basle and Lake Constance, served chiefly as a navigational way. With the improvements brought to road traffic, the importance of transport by water declined. Then, later, when the progress of technique made it possible to exploit the forces of the Rhine through the construction of big electricity works, an improvement occurred in the prospect for navigation along the Upper Rhine. This was due to the fact that the weirs built in the proximity of the electricity plants, dammed the Rhine along

wide stretches, thus creating more favourable conditions for navigation. Locks had to be built, of course, at the works, so as to enable the ships to surmount these obstacles.

Since then, the navigation of the Rhine, below Basle, has been developed on a large scale, this with the active participation of Switzerland. The majority of heavy goods, such as coal, oils and cereals, in order to get to Switzerland, are conveyed from the sea by waterway. For a highly industrialised inland country like Switzerland, this convenient connection with the sea is highly important from the economic aspects, as in this way transportation is simplified and freight comes considerably cheaper.

For a long time past, the realisation of these facts has inspired the wish to make it possible for navigation, on a big scale, to be extended to Lake Constance, via Basle. Austria, also, being as she is a riparian State of Lake Constance, is extremely interested in this project. Great interest also exists in South Germany. And, in Switzerland, it is the Eastern regions which hope to obtain, from the opening up of this waterway, cheaper freight rates than those which they have to pay for the transport of goods from Basle, by rail or by road.

On the other hand, of course, the Federal Railways and the motor carriers trade will suffer the loss of receipts from the transport of those goods which will be shipped along the Rhine directly to the places where the said goods are to be used.

A State Treaty with Germany, concluded in 1929, provides that new discussions on this matter shall take place as soon as economic conditions would appear to be favourable for the carrying out of this development project. The latest Report of the Federal Council to the Federal Chambers serves the purpose of examining the question of the profitability of such a venture, at the present time.

Compared with 1929, the necessary conditions have changed during the intervening thirty years in so far that various power stations have been erected since then along this part of the Rhine. Moreover, another four power stations must be transformed before any navigational ways can be started upon. Furthermore, it is considered that the work of regulating the Rhine between Basle and Strasbourg, which is now almost completed, should first be finished and its results put to the test.

Shipping to Basle has developed tremendously during these last thirty years. At the same time, however, competition between rail and road transport has become very acute, and the question must be freshly examined as to how competition on the part of a waterway extended as far as Lake Constance, will work out.

A new factor has come into being, meanwhile, in that the possibilities for the peaceful utilisation of atomic energy in a probably not too distant future, will mean a complete change in the necessary conditions for the construction of hydraulic plants for the production of electric power. It is not possible, however, to say today whether a utilisation of atomic energy will lead to a decrease or an increase in those transports which would come into question for conveyance by water.

More recent projects for the creation of a waterway which will serve to connect Lake Constance with the Danube, lend a new aspect to the problem of navigation along the Upper Rhine. All these things show that one cannot possibly count on any decision being taken in the near future, but, nevertheless, the satisfactory fact emerges that the plan for making the Upper Rhine navigable has not lost any of its interest or importance.

An "Automobile-silo" is Being Built in Basle

Basle, which ranks as the second town in Switzerland, is cramped for room and the problem of parking for motor-cars is proving a terrible "headache" for the authorities. A big private concern has had the idea of building an immense garage of the American type, several stories high, called "automobile-silo." This building, which is now being put up right in the centre of the town, will make it possible for 400 vehicles to be garaged there, that is to say, as many as can find place on the four principal parking spots in the town. All the parking operations and conveyance of the vehicles to the various floors, will take place automatically with the help of tele-guided trolleys and lifts. This is the first installation of this kind in Switzerland, and it will be put into service very shortly. Should the experiment prove satisfactory, other towns in Switzerland will doubtless have recourse to a similar solution for their parking problems.

Audacious Swiss Project

In October next, work will be started on the construction of a concrete bridge, having only one span crossing the Rhone at St. Maurice. With its length of 116 metres and its weight of 15,000 tons, this concrete bridge made in one piece will be the longest in the world. Its useful width will attain nearly 17 metres, which means that it will be wide enough for four separate runways. Another characteristic of this original technical solution, which is the work of an engineer in Lausanne, is the rapidity with which the bridge will be built. The builders, indeed, hope that it will already be finished in the spring of 1957, that is to say, in less than six months time.

Road Tunnel Through the Great St. Bernard

Lausanne, Switzerland.—An agreement has recently been reached between a Swiss and an Italian committee for the construction of a road tunnel through the Great St. Bernard; the realisation of this project will be of special importance to western Switzerland. The planned tunnel is to have a length of more than four miles and will be linked on either side, from Bourg St. Pierre in the Entremont Valley and from St. Rhemy in the Aosta Valley, by covered access roads 2090 yards long. The costs of construction, which have been estimated at 43,000,000 Swiss francs, are to be divided evenly between Italy and Switzerland.

Basel 2000 Years Old

Basel, Switzerland.—Switzerland's second-largest city, with almost 200,000 inhabitants, is preparing for a number of festivities to celebrate its 2000th anniversary. From the middle of August, 1957, until autumn this unique historical event will be commemorated by a colourful programme of activities, in which the neighbouring Rhine communities, Augst and Kaiseraugst, will also participate. In the vicinity of these two villages lies the nucleus of the modern Rhine city of Basel, which has risen in the course of the centuries to one of Europe's most important railway junctions, the Roman town of Augusta Rauracorum, founded in the first century B.C., whose imposing ruins are still a main attraction today. Basel itself grew out of the Celtic settlement of Robur and was incorporated to the ancient Augusta Rauracorum by the Roman Emperor Valentinian I. In spite of its history dating back to pre-Christian and pre-Roman times, and its preservation of the medieval character evident in today's old town rich in monuments, Basel is an extremely progressive city known for her interest in art and modern architecture. In this connection it should be mentioned that in the jubilee year four new hotels, among which the ultra-modern "International" with more than 1000 rooms, all with baths, will open their doors in time for next year's Swiss Industries Fair (April 27 to May 7, 1957). The reopening of the completely renewed and enlarged Hotel Victoria-National has been scheduled for the autumn of 1957. These modern constructions will add a total of 500 beds to Basel's hotel accommodations.

Swiss "Gondola" Aerial Cableway for Disneyland

Gerlafingen, Switzerland.—An aerial cableway by the Von Roll Iron Works at Gerlafingen was recently inaugurated in Disneyland near Los Angeles in the presence of the Swiss Consul-General of that city. It is a "gondola" teleferique

with light-metal cabins seating two persons each, as operated in many of Switzerland's famed winter and summer resorts. This aerial cableway connects two Disneyland districts, Fantasyland and Tomorrowland, the terminal—a typical Swiss chalet—being situated on a man-made mountain.

According to reports by the Swiss Department of Economy Switzerland's population has surpassed the five million limit this year. The Canton of Zurich with its 849,000 inhabitants, has risen to the most populous canton, replacing the Canton of Berne which has ranked first thus far.

Interesting Swiss Experiment in Road Building

In North-west Switzerland a new section has been opened of the important arterial road linking Switzerland with Austria. This road passes along the south of the Lake of Wallenstadt—whose shores are very precipitous and where there is danger of sheet-ice in winter. To meet this danger, an interesting experiment has been made: electric road-heating points have been set up on the four bridges of the new road. This electric heating installation will function experimentally during the coming winter. It is hoped that all sheet-ice will be done away with and that motorists will be able to drive in perfect safety.

The Construction of the Highest Dam of the World Progresses

Switzerland needs a great deal of electricity—to meet this need it is constructing numerous hydro-electric dams in its mountains. It is now more than five years since the beginning of work on the dam of the Grande-Dixence in a side valley of the Rhone. This dam, with a height of over 900 feet, will be the highest in the world. The dimensions of this undertaking are vast—the mass of the dam will represent more than six million cubic metres of concrete. Situated at a height of more than 6,000 feet, it will hold back an artificial lake of about 400,000,000 cubic metres of water. This dam will by itself produce one-tenth of the energy Switzerland needs today. An interesting landmark in the work of building the dam was reached the other day, when the completion of the pouring of the second million cubic metres of concrete was celebrated. It is estimated that it will take the 1,000 workmen another ten years to complete this dam—the greatest single concentration of volume ever brought about by man.

Switzerland's Watch Exports in 1956

For the first three quarters of this year the export of watches from Switzerland has amounted to nearly 830,000,000 Swiss francs; that is, almost 100,000,000 francs more than last year. It is expected that the maximum figure registered in 1953 will be exceeded this year.

Swiss Agriculture has Suffered from Bad Weather this year

The very bad weather this summer has wrought havoc amongst most of the harvest. As a result, Switzerland has had to increase considerably her grain imports: by the end of September, these had reached more than 600,000 cwt. Two-thirds of these cereals came from Canada. During the same period in 1955, Switzerland imported hardly one-sixth of this quantity, home production providing the rest.

The vine-harvest has also suffered very badly. It is estimated that, for the whole of Switzerland, the yield will be scarcely 500,000 hectolitres of wine. The average annual yield over the last five years has been considerably more than 800,000 hectolitres. In certain parts of the country, about 80 per cent. of the grapes were destroyed by the extreme cold at the beginning of the year and the high rainfall during the summer.

Natural Riches in Switzerland.

Switzerland, it is generally known, is a country poor in natural resources, the only natural wealth, which is abundantly exploited, being water. Yet, in one of the mountainous regions of Switzerland there is a Swiss industry which is very little known, although it plays an important part. This is a mine of natural asphalt, which has been exploited for more than 200 years. Natural asphalt is chalk entirely impregnated with bitumen. It has many uses, chiefly in the building industry. It is used for resurfacing roads so that they stay dust-free. There are many roads still surfaced with asphalt in spite of the coming into use of reinforced concrete—and this is why the asphalt mine in the Val de Travers is still being exploited—in fact, it is being developed. About 25,000 tons a year are extracted, according to demand—for asphalt cannot be stored. The mine is worked only by Swiss and provides hundreds of families in the mountains with their livelihood.

Considerable Development of Insurances in Switzerland

In 1954, the Swiss people spent almost three thousand million Swiss francs in insurance premiums, including contributions to the Old

Age Pension and Survivors' Insurance, and to public and private pension funds. The Swiss people devote, on an average, the equivalent of a month and a half's income to insurances, viz., approximately two hundred francs per household. Private insurance contribute to the extent of more than half to the paying in of premiums. The other half goes to State institutions; the Swiss National Insurance Fund in case of Accidents, the Old Age Pension and Survivors' Insurance founded by the Confederation, insurance and pension funds belonging to the Confederation, the Cantons and the Communes. From all this it will be seen that a great deal is done in Switzerland for social security, and that the charges and the responsibilities relating to them are divided opportunely between private persons and the collectivity.

A Norwegian Order to the Swiss Industry

An aluminium plant is now being constructed in Norway, near Arctic Circle, the equipment of which is being carried out partly by a Norwegian firm and partly by the "Societe suisse pour l'industrie de l'aluminium" (Swiss Company for the Aluminium Industry). It is also a Swiss firm manufacturing machinery, the Ateliers de Construction Oerlikon, which will furnish the necessary redressors used to keep the furnaces going during the first part of the construction work. The order in question amounts to several million Swiss francs.

Switzerland Ready to Join GATT

Up to the present, it has not yet proved possible for Switzerland to adhere to the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), and she has therefore had to be satisfied with sending observers to the various conferences. It would appear, however, that a certain change has occurred in the situation, and that it is now possible that an adherence to this international organisation may take place shortly. This is why the Swiss Government has now taken the necessary steps with the General Secretariat of the GATT.

Swiss Telephone Service Working in High Altitude

It is not known, in general, that, since July, 1955, one-tenth of the telephone calls between Zurich and Berne, on the one hand, and the Tessin, on the other, have taken place by means of radio-telephony, relayed over the Jungfrau-joch. Some years ago, already, the Swiss Administration of Posts, Telegraphs and Telephones conceived the idea of deflecting half of its tele-

phone traffic across the Alps, by means of wire-less telephony. Thus, five years ago, work was started on the Jungfrauoch, for the establishment of a station for guided-wave telephony, which was put into commission fourteen months ago. The plant is situated at an altitude of nearly 4,000 metres. Access to it is gained by means of a one kilometre long gallery (partly excavated out of the ice), and an underground funicular of 420 metres, helps to overcome the difference in the level, which amounts to 250 metres.

Geneva-Cointrin Airport to be Enlarged

The rapid technical progress in commercial aviation requires a corresponding adaptation of airports. Thus, the airport of Geneva-Cointrin is to be enlarged very shortly in order to make possible the landing of long-distance jet aircraft, which are to be put into service in 1959. The airport of Geneva-Cointrin which, until 1948, was the only Swiss airport on which four-engined aircraft could land, is equipped with a runway for blind landing which is almost two kilometres in length. This runway, however, will have to be made almost twice as long. As it is situated only a few yards away from the French frontier, there were two possible solutions open to the Swiss authorities: the prolongation of the runway on French territory, or else an exchange of territory which should make it possible for the runway to be established entirely on Swiss soil. It was this latter solution which was given preference by the Federal authorities, and negotiations for the exchange of about a hundred acres of terrain could be concluded successfully, as a result of the comprehension shown by France. Thus, the new inter-continental airport of Geneva-Cointrin will remain an entirely Swiss concern, whilst at the same time rendering useful services to France.

Situation of Swiss Economy

Industrial activity in Switzerland increased still further during the second quarter of 1956, and, as a result, there were also greater difficulties in regard to the labour market. Switzerland was obliged, therefore, to continue to have recourse to foreign manpower, which was employed principally in the building trade and in agriculture. The lack of workers in these two branches of Swiss economy has entailed a fresh rise in wages. Generally speaking, price indices have gone up a little, although this increase appears modest in comparison with that which has taken place in other industrial countries. In so far as foreign trade is concerned, imports, stimulated by an abundant demand for commodities on the Swiss market, have increased to a greater degree than has been the

case up to the present. The favourable evolution of world economy showed itself in the Swiss balance of revenues, by an increase in the movements of business affairs transacted between Switzerland and foreign countries. As for tourism, the results registered have been very satisfactory. Foreign visitors proved more numerous than formerly and the Federal Railways have also had better results than the previous ones. The growth of the national income, associated with the progress to be observed in employment, as well as the affluence of tourists, have acted as a stimulant on the retail trade. Thus it will be seen from these few points that we have just mentioned that the situation of Swiss economy appeared in a favourable light last summer.

Switzerland Buys Russian Timber

Swiss importers of timber have succeeded, after lengthy negotiations, in concluding a private agreement with the official Soviet Organisation for the exportation of timber. The first consignments of Russian timber from the Lake Ladoga region arrived a short time ago in Switzerland. Swiss consumption of timber has increased considerably during the last few years, whereas Switzerland's usual suppliers of this commodity, namely Austria and Germany, have been obliged to restrict their deliveries.

CORRESPONDENCE: Please address to the Secretary,

Mr. E. Gilgen,

P.O. Box 2875, Auckland, C.1.

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