

Home affairs

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HOME AFFAIRS.

by MAX NEF.

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During the Session of the Federal Parliament, which has just come to an end, the subject of Swiss air traffic policy also came under discussion.

One would be tempted to assume that Switzerland thinks that her position in regard to traffic is destined to play the part of a turn-table in the domain of European air traffic. This idea has however proved to be a mistaken one. Even to-day, the Swiss terrain is still considered as being unfavourable from the technical standpoint of flying, at any rate in so far as any regular air service is concerned.

If, nevertheless, a large number of foreign air lines choose Switzerland for their terminal point, or for intermediate landings, then this is not because of her geographical situation, but because of Swiss economy and of the traffic requirements connected with business. Of course, another condition which is of an essential character is the existence of well equipped airfields, possessing a dependable air-security service. In this regard, Zurich, Basle and Geneva occupy a foremost position. Other airfields have still to be developed.

Time has shown that, contrary to what was assumed earlier, no particular importance can be attributed to Swiss internal air traffic. The public air services and traffic may be said to be of an exclusively international character. In addition to the Swiss air line company "Swissair", various foreign companies also take part in it.

The reason for this lies in the fact that, as a rule, permission to open up a Swiss air line abroad is only granted by the foreign countries concerned, if Switzerland also allows the corresponding foreign air-company to carry out flights on this particular stretch. Thus, at the present time the Swiss flying schedule comprises twenty-seven lines operated by Swissair and forty-one lines served by foreign companies. The number of regular scheduled flights carried out each week by Swissair, is greater, however, than that of the two foreign companies, put together.

The chief advantage of travelling by aircraft is its rapidity, and this can be best utilized in so-called long-distance traffic. Swiss aircraft also participate in overseas flights and have given good proof of their competitive capacity in this respect. The question has arisen, in this connection, as to whether it would not be a good thing if Switzerland were also to go over to the use of jet aircraft, now that this type of passenger service has already been introduced abroad. Quite apart from the fact that any deliveries of this type of aircraft could not take place for several years, it may be anticipated that new and improved types will be produced in the not so distant future. It would therefore seem indicated to follow all developments with the greatest care, without acting with any precipitation.

It was only in the spring of this year that cheaper tourist class air travel was introduced in Europe. Up to the present, the results show an increase in the number of passengers carried, but the receipts have remained the same. Thus, one must be prepared for

a possible set-back, and here also careful tactics should be pursued in regard to the adoption of innovations.

When, soon after the war, the extension of Swiss-air took place, this was achieved through the amalgamation of private enterprise and the State, through their participation in common interests. Swissair's traffic activities increased from year to year, so that the figure for the number of kilometres flown by the company's planes during last year was already double that for 1948. Moreover, the degree to which flying was utilized for commercial purposes also showed an improvement.

Costs, however, have also gone up. Not so much, perhaps, in respect of working costs, as in that of capital requirements. But, at the same time, receipts have also increased. With receipts totalling some 67 million francs and expenditure amounting to 60 millions, the surplus in profits last year was seven million francs, most of which was earmarked for charter fees and for writing-off purposes.

Even if the development in air travel would appear to have slowed down, somewhat, it would still appear as if aviation possibilities are far from having been exhausted. Before the end of this year some more long-distance aircraft will be put into service, thus still further expanding the already successful service across the Atlantic. Here also, the ration between cost and yield is more favourable than in the case of air lines operating within Europe itself.

The number of young pilots available would not appear to be in co-operation with the expansion taken on by air travel. For the present, however, these difficulties would appear to have been overcome.

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