

Commercial news

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COMMERCIAL NEWS

Swiss Industry to help in the development of Brazil.

The first plant for the manufacture of heavy electrical equipment at Sao Paulo, in Brazil, has just been founded. This is the "Industria Eletrica Brown Boveri S.A.", its founders being the well-known Swiss firm of that name in Baden. The parent-house has invested 300 million Cruzeiros (U.S.A. \$4,370,000) in machinery and industrial equipment, which sum represents three-quarters of the cost of this new plant. The personnel of the Brazilian firm will be trained by a Swiss essential staff, and a great many Brazilian nationals will serve as probationers in the firm in Baden. The new factory in Sao Paulo is a valuable technical and financial contribution, on the part of Swiss industry, to the Brazilian five-year plan for the development of electric energy, a plan which provides for an increase from two to five million kilowatts in the national potential, from 1956 to 1960.

International prizes for Swiss Chemists.

The Fourth International Congress of the FATIPEC (the Federation of Associations of Technicians belonging to the Industries manufacturing paints, varnishes, enamels and printing-inks, of continental Europe) was held in Lucerne in the autumn. It was organised by the Swiss Union of Varnish and Paint Manufacturers. For the first time, this Congress awarded two FATIPEC prizes for the best work done in respect of chemistry and of technology. These two international awards went to members of the staff of Swiss firms manufacturing varnishes and artificial resins.

A colour film about Swiss vacherin cheese.

All gourmets who have visited the French-speaking parts of Switzerland are acquainted with the so-called "Mont d'Or" Vacherin, a speciality of the Jura, which figures among the most appreciated of Swiss after-dinner cheeses. In order to be able to wage a successful struggle against the difficulties of production and of distribution, most of the manufacturers of this particular cheese, *i.e.*, about eighty cheese-making dairies, formed an Association a few years ago. This Organisation has just shown a colour film devoted to the making of the Vacherin, a very delicate operation requiring particular skill and care and very high quality milk. The manufacture of the Jurassian Vacherin has been carried out, at an artisanal stage, for more than a century.

Record for the Swiss Gotthard line.

Perishable foodstuffs require very rapid transport, and this fact raises some difficult problems for the railways, especially on the Swiss Gotthard line, on which traffic has been increasing steadily during the last few years. No fewer than a hundred thousand wagon-loads of foodstuffs had already passed along this line by November last. 1957 will have been the first year in which this figure has been surpassed.

French order for Swiss Industry.

As the result of satisfactory experiments carried out on the French line of Chamonix-Montanvers with a rail-car manufactured by the Ateliers de Construction Oerlikon, in Zurich, the "Tramway du Mont-

Blanc Company" has now ordered three similar rail-cars and a snow-plough, from the Swiss firm concerned, for service on its line running from Le Fayet to St. Gervais and Bionnassay. These are 640 h.p. machines for adhesion and rack drive capable of climbing gradients of 24 per cent at the rate of 15 kilometres per hour. Worthy of note is the fact that the line runs along a mountain route which is twelve and a half kilometres in length and has a difference of level amounting to 1820 metres.

A South African order for Swiss Industry.

At the end of 1956 Cape Town gave an order to a Swiss firm for two groups of steam-alternator turbines of 30,000 kilowatts and 3,000 revolutions per minute, together with a condensation plant, for the new Athlone Power Station; it has now ordered a third similar unit from the same firm, namely, the Ateliers de Construction Oerlikon, at Zurich. The turbines are of the two-cylinder type, with preheating. This order was obtained despite very strong foreign competition.

Switzerland's biggest electricity sub-station.

The biggest sub-station for the distribution of electric current in Switzerland, at Mettlen, near Lucerne, work on which was begun in 1939, is being continually developed. The seventh stage of this job was finished recently. This plant covers a superficial area of 70,000 square metres and is divided into two

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sections, one for 225,000 volts and the other for 150,000 volts. In view of its importance and its functions, it can be compared to a turn-plate, for not only do the important Swiss transmission lines for electric power in the North-South and the East-West cross there, but so do also the lines coming from the Gotthard and the Lukmanier, Alpine massifs which are rich in electric stations. It is also to the sub-station at Mettlen that there comes the electric energy imported from abroad, prior to being distributed between the various users' networks. This plant, which is of very great importance, was built and is run by five big electric companies and by the Swiss Federal Railways.

B.T.C. Places £3m. Contract.

The British Transport Commission has placed a contract, worth about £3m., for 45 main-line 1,550 h.p. diesel-electric locomotives with the Birmingham Railway Carriage and Wagon Company. The 1,550 h.p. locomotives will have Sulzer diesel engines made in this country by Vickers Armstrongs — and Crompton Parkinson electrical equipment. This order brings the total number of locomotives for British Railways equipped with Sulzer diesel engines to 123.

A pipe-line for wine in Switzerland.

The experiments made in Switzerland in regard to the transportation of milk by means of subterranean canalisation through pipes made of polyethylene have proved successful. For this reason an important Swiss firm of wine merchants, on the banks of Lake Lemman, has now installed a pipe-line of the same kind, which connects its modern cellars with those of the wine-growers in the region where the wine is produced. This pipe-line is 1,200 metres in length, having a difference in level of some thirty metres; it should prove possible to run a yearly vintage of from 700,000 to 1,000,000 litres through this pipe. The wine, flowing at a speed of one metre per second, will leave the wine-growers' cellar upon reaching maturity and will arrive directly in the bottling department of the firm's cellar. The pipe-line, which was installed last Spring, makes it possible to economise in the cost of transport, and this without in any way affecting the quality of the wine. The cost of installation can be paid-off in five years. This experiment is a contribution towards rationalising work in a branch of trade in which a compression of costs is as necessary as it is difficult to realise.

Television becomes more popular in Switzerland.

In Switzerland the number of owners of television sets who pay the Administration of the PTT for their licence has now attained the figure of 30,000. At the end of November there were nearly 26,000 sets in private homes and about 4,000 in public establishments.

1958 Swiss Industries Fair.

The 42nd Swiss Industries Fair will be held in Basle from 12th to 22nd April, 1958. More than 2,300 exhibitors will take part, spread over seventeen trade groups. There will be a particularly well organised display, with an appeal to all the markets of the world, of goods produced by the machine and metallurgical industries, the machine-tool industry and that specialising in tools for the metal-working industry, the electrical industry and the watchmaking and textile industries. The interest felt abroad for the Swiss National Fair is clearly demonstrated by the fact that no fewer than 30,000 foreign visitors came to the Fair in 1957. Next year the exhibition space will be increased still further, as a new machine hall is at present in the course of construction which will bring the total exhibition space to some 1,400,000 square feet.

Genuine Swiss Cheese.

Certain kinds of Swiss cheeses are so popular that a number of countries have now begun to manufacture them — a fact which is liable to lead some customers into error. For a long time past exporters of real Swiss cheeses have had recourse to printing the word "Switzerland" on both sides of the round cheeses. In order that this red stamp, which guarantees the Swiss origin of the product, should be seen still more clearly, the exporters now cover the cheeses with a thin layer of artificial resin, thus protecting the cheese and its guarantee of origin, and improving the looks of the article. This new method has been introduced in respect of exports to North America.

Georg Fischer awards.

Five years ago, the big Swiss metallurgical plant of Georg Fischer Ltd., at Schaffhausen (Switzerland), situated close to the famous Rhine Falls, celebrated its 150th anniversary. To mark this jubilee the firm established a Foundation, called "The Georg Fischer Award", with the intention of giving prizes and subsidies, every two or three years, for the encourage-

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ment of artists who are either residents or natives of Schaffhausen. This Foundation is endowed with a capital amounting to-day to 100,000 Swiss francs (U.S. \$23,310). Prizes of a total value of 5,000 francs (U.S. \$1,166) were awarded this year, for the second time, to five Swiss artists, one being a painter, one a sculptor, one a composer and two writers.

A memorable date for the Swiss textile industry.

It was 125 years ago, at the end of November, that the little town of Uster, in the pre-Alps of Zurich, was the scene of serious riots, of a social character. The introduction of mechanical looms had angered the workers in the textile industry, who feared that they would be deprived of their daily bread by these new-fangled machines. A crowd, which had gathered at Uster in order to celebrate the birth of the Zurich democracy, became over-excited and proceeded to commit excesses by setting fire to the factories. These events, however, did not prevent the progress of mechanisation in Swiss industry in general, and in the textile trade in particular. Moreover, as is well known, the great development that took place in mechanisation procured earnings for an increasing number of workers and contributed to a very large degree to the expansion of the textile industry. It is interesting to note that the Uster region now owes its prosperity to the textile industry on the one hand, and to the textile machines on the other.

Switzerland and GATT.

Having drawn up the draft for a new Customs Tariff, Switzerland has now declared that she is ready to negotiate on customs matters with the members of the GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade), in order to become affiliated provisionally with this Organisation, in the capacity of an associated country. Up to the present, some fifteen countries have stated their readiness to enter upon customs negotiations with Switzerland. These are more particularly those countries which are her immediate neighbours, the Scandinavian countries and those of the Benelux, as well as various Asian countries. The attitude adopted by the United States in regard to this matter is not known as yet, and will depend on the results of the other negotiations.

Imports and the Swiss Domestic Market.

The steadily increasing volume of imports has had the effect, together with other factors, of causing the profits of the Swiss balance of payments, which in 1953 still amounted to nearly one-and-a-half thousand million francs, to disappear entirely. The balance for the first six months of 1957 was unfavourable. As a result there has been a very heavy loss of substance for the Capital Market. The trade balance, for its part, was unfavourable to the amount of two thousand million francs at the end of last year. These figures bear witness to the fact that Switzerland practises a liberal commercial policy which leaves the door wide open to foreign products. Thus, one can never accuse Switzerland of having protectionist tendencies, even when she highlights her own production, as she is now doing on the occasion of the Lausanne National Fair, known as the "Comptoir Suisse", which is being held at the present time. It may also be recalled that during the "Swiss Week", which takes place this month, all the retail firms in this country make a

point of exhibiting goods which have been manufactured in Switzerland.

Swiss index figure for wholesale prices.

The index figure for wholesale prices, which comprises the principal non-manufactured foodstuffs and the principal raw and auxiliary materials, was up at 223.5 at the end of November 1957, as against 100 at the end of August 1939. It rose by 0.3 per cent in comparison with the figure for the end of October, chiefly because of the increase in the price of milk, which came into force as from 1st November.

Swiss index figure for retail prices.

The index figure for retail prices was up at 181.1 (August 1939 = 100) at the end of November 1957, as against 180.5 at the end of October 1957 and 177.2 at the end of November 1956. In comparison with the figure for the end of October it rose by 0.3 per cent, chiefly because of the increase in the price of milk which came into force as from 1st of November.

At the end of the month under review the index figures for the following six groups of expenditure were: foodstuffs 199.2, heating and lighting 150.1, cleaning 209.7; the figures for clothing (223.3), rents (134.1) and divers (162.1) suffered no modification.

Temporary reduction of certain customs duties in Switzerland.

The prices of apples and pears being extremely high this winter in Switzerland, because of the poor crops, the Government has decreed a temporary reduction in customs duties on the oranges and mandarins imported into the country. This measure is profitable to the consumer, as it reduces the price of this fruit by ten centimes (U.S. \$0.02) per kilo.

Furthermore, and for the same reasons, import duties on dried fruits have been decreased by half from September 1957 to January 1958. The customs rates of 40 and 50 Swiss francs (U.S. \$9.3 and 11.6) respectively per 100 kilos on apricots and other dried fruits now only amount to 20 and 25 francs (U.S. \$4.6 and 5.8).

Nuclear problems in Switzerland.

Negotiations took place recently in Ottawa, between Canadian and Swiss Government representatives, with a view to the conclusion of an agreement on co-operation in the domain of the peaceful utilisation of nuclear energy. This agreement will contain, *inter alia*, provisions regarding the delivery by Canada of uranium to Switzerland. We learn from other sources that the French authorities have made arrangements to be supplied with four tons of heavy water of Swiss production.

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