

Labour problems

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LABOUR PROBLEMS.

By THÉO CHOPARD.

The United Nations Organisation, the World Bank and other international institutions are all anxious to intensify the financial aid given to the economically backward countries. This need becomes obvious when one realises that 80 per cent of mankind are still under-nourished and that this state of affairs is growing worse because the population is increasing more rapidly than agricultural production. The improvement of living conditions in these countries, however, raises three problems, the first being how to slow down the rate at which the population is increasing, the second, industrialisation, and the third, how to increase agricultural production.

The problem of birth control cannot, in all probability, be solved for some time to come, in view of the fact that all recourse to constraint must be excluded. It is necessary, first of all, that the standard of living be improved considerably and that the populations become fully conscious of their social responsibilities.

Thus, efforts should be directed primarily towards the material means required for the improvement of living conditions, industrialisation being one of them. But how is this to be achieved? By what methods? Critical voices are raised denouncing the *temptation to put the cart before the horse*, and to plan for an industrialisation on European lines in regions where the requisite conditions for the development of a modern industry are non-existent. In spite of this, however, gigantic steel-works have been built at Formosa, in the Philippines and in Egypt. Such spectacular achievements are not rational. The steel produced there is more expensive than the imported steel. The sole effect of this production is to increase the charges of an already poor economy.

Instead of striving to create a big modern industry all at one go, it would be better to begin by trying to improve agriculture. It is estimated that, in the economically under-developed countries, 250 million families are still cultivating their land by means of wooden ploughs, hoes and sickles, just as they did two or three thousand years ago. The equipment of these 250 million families with ploughs possessing steel plough-shares would cost — for this alone — from forty to fifty thousand million dollars. But the use of such ploughs would in itself constitute a revolution and would contribute towards increasing considerably the production of agriculture. These ploughs, and the scythes which would replace the sickles, could be manufactured on the spot by small business undertakings. Concurrently, it might be possible to set up, by degrees, plant for the manufacture of chemical fertilisers and for the manufacture of cement pipes for irrigation purposes. *What is of importance is that help should be forthcoming for immediate requirements*, and should not be inspired by the ambition to imitate — at any price — the industrial countries.

Swiss Aid to Extra-European Countries, which is an institution financed by the Swiss Confederation and its citizens, strives to satisfy immediate requirements. It has neither the ambition nor the opportunity of going in for spectacular investments. It has, however, sent to Nepal, Iraq and Libya specialists who are showing the farmers how to get the best out of their

land with the means at their disposal. They are teaching them how to care for their cattle and livestock, how to make a rational use of their milk, how to build cheaply and with *makeshift materials* — cheese-dairies, better roads, bridges which can withstand the heavy rains, and also how to make farm implements in the villages. Thus, the Swiss Aid to Extra-European Countries *starts its work everywhere right at the beginning*. It is true that this is still very limited, but it has made it possible to gain some valuable experience on which subsequent work can be based.

In the present state of affairs it would seem as if this empiric method is the most efficacious of all short-term methods. It may be assumed, therefore, that the considerable sums which the Western World invests in these still backward countries would be better employed if — *at any rate during the initial stages* — they were to be used everywhere for the purpose of generalising the methods adopted by the Swiss Aid. Industries would be set up, in connection with the extension of their application, but only such industries as are intended for covering the most urgent requirements, and this without any other ambition. This method, moreover, has *the advantage of bringing the populations concerned into an active participation in this effort of reconstruction*, because *its results are immediate and tangible*. The generalisation of these methods, however, not only demands a considerable increase in the financial aid granted by the Western World, but also the sending into these regions of not merely a few hundred, but *thousands* of technicians. In other words, the application of these methods requires a personal contribution, a selfless devotion to duty and the necessity for making this aid into a vocation for the generous-minded youth of the Western World, which is ready to answer such an appeal. It is up to the governments to show generosity and to understand that it is the younger generation which can solve the problem and re-establish, by its personal appeal, the confidence which the preceding generations have lost in the still backward countries.

LETTER FROM SWITZERLAND.

Nuclear Energy: Swiss Achievements and Projects.

More so perhaps than any other industrial country, Switzerland is largely dependent upon other countries for the raw materials she needs and for her power supplies in particular. Although her hydraulic resources are exploited intensively, they satisfy only about 20 per cent of the total national requirements and some 30 per cent of those of industry alone. Furthermore, in spite of the great efforts to make full use of the hydro-electric resources of the country (at the beginning of 1958 there were as many as twenty-three building or expansion projects under way) and the resultant big increase in the output of current, it is feared that these small percentages will fall even lower during the next few years. The situation calls for decisive action, and Switzerland, after studying the question very thoroughly, is now taking steps first of all to increase the output of traditional sources of energy and then gradually to replace them by nuclear energy.

But it is not only in the field of the production of energy that Switzerland is taking care not to be left

behind in the "atomic revolution". Her industry too, particularly the machinery branch, is going resolutely ahead, doing everything necessary to adapt itself to the new technique, and even to take a prominent part in it, as it has succeeded in doing in other fields. In this connection it is worth mentioning that twenty-three Swiss firms took part in the recent "Atoms for Peace" exhibition which was organised during the Geneva Conference and that a certain number of the exhibits had been manufactured according to entirely new methods.

Obviously, however, the financial means at Switzerland's disposal are limited and cannot be compared with those available to the big industrial countries. Less favoured, therefore, than the latter, Switzerland realised that it was only by co-operating in the international field that she would be able first of all to obtain the uranium she requires and, secondly, in exchange for the results of her own experiments, to profit by the work carried out in other countries. Consequently, she concluded agreements concerning these matters with the United States, France and Canada. The first spectacular result of this co-operation occurred last year with the putting into operation of the first experimental reactor to be installed on Swiss soil, the "Sapphire", which had been made in America and assembled at Würenlingen, in the canton of Aargau, for a private concern, Réacteur Co. Ltd. Another reactor, the "Diorit", is at present being assembled in the same power station.

Among the other experimental factories to be set up in Switzerland, mention must be made of those planned by the Federal Institute of Technology (to complete its instructional and research activities) and by two private companies, Nuclear Energy Co. Ltd. in Lausanne (formed by a number of industrial concerns in the French-speaking part of Switzerland) and Suissatom Co. Ltd. (created by the country's four greatest electrical companies). It is interesting to note that while the last of these atomic piles will be the result of joint Swiss-American collaboration, the other two will be entirely Swiss made.

To return to the above-mentioned co-operation, it should be added that Switzerland is also taking part in two projects recently instituted, under the auspices of OEEC, by the European Agency for Nuclear Energy: the first being an experimental hot water reactor at Halden in Norway (the first of its kind in Europe), the second an experimental works to be built at Moll, in Belgium, by Eurochemic — a European company for the chemical treatment of nuclear fuels. Switzerland's contribution to these two projects amounts to some 8 million francs.

For the sake of completeness, it should be added that last autumn the Swiss people and cantons adopted a new article of the Constitution giving the Confederation the necessary powers with regard to legislation in the field of atomic energy.

Switzerland, therefore, seems to have started on the right road; her first achievements, her plans for the future, and the spirit animating both her scientists and authorities, bear witness to her determination to maintain in the atomic world of tomorrow the position she enjoys in the industrial world of to-day.

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