

A protected industry

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vegetables open and the extraction of water can take place more easily and without drying up the produce. As a result of this protective process of drying, it is possible to obtain a product that needs only to be cooked for four or five minutes, and which resembles as closely as is possible a fresh vegetable that one has just cooked. The colour of the product does not change, nor does its consistency, and the vitamins and other oligo-elements are preserved. Furthermore, it is not necessary to cook such products that have been dried by means of congelation for any length of time, whereas those vegetables which are preserved in accordance with the drying methods in use up to the present require to be cooked for fifteen or twenty minutes. For this reason, the concentrated sauces launched on the market a few months ago have obtained the greatest success in Switzerland.

A Swiss cement factory in the U.S.A.

A new cement factory has just been inaugurated in the small locality of Dundee, in the South of Detroit (U.S.A.), this being the most recent branch establishment of the Swiss Financière Holderbank. This plant, the building of which cost 25 million dollars, employs 130 men and has been kept fully occupied since the month of February. It is thought that this plant will be able to exceed, to a considerable extent, an annual capacity of production originally estimated at 8,000,000 metric tons.

A PROTECTED INDUSTRY: The Swiss Watchmaking Industry.

By PIERRE BÉGUIN.

The Swiss watchmaking industry has been enjoying State protection for nearly thirty years. This legal statute, however, will terminate at the end of next year. What has got to be decided now is whether this statute is to be maintained, whether it should be suppressed or whether it should simply be rendered more flexible, in order that it may be better adapted to new circumstances. Discussions on this subject have been going on for many a long month now, both in political and trade circles. The Federal Government has just published a Message to Parliament, in which it makes known its views on the Watchmaking Law.

When, in 1931, the world economic depression spread to our country, the Swiss watchmaking industry found its very existence threatened. The State, thereupon, decreed measures of protection, which have been maintained, and even reinforced during the course of the years. Now, the Federal Government is proposing that they should be made more flexible and is striving, with this end in view, to obtain the agreement of the circles concerned. What is the reason for this evolution?

First of all, the fact should be recalled that watchmaking is, in order of importance, the first among Swiss industries. It employs more than 60,000 workers. It is, primarily, an export trade and thus contributes, to a large extent, towards maintaining the equilibrium of our national balance of accounts.

At the time when the first measures of protection were taken — that is to say, in 1931 — the Swiss watchmaking industry occupied a very favourable position in the world. Switzerland possessed, more or less, the monopoly of high-quality watches. It was

this privileged position that it was sought to safeguard, and it has been safeguarded successfully over a number of years. For one thing, the watchmaking trade was organised by means of very precise collective agreements. For another, the establishment of new firms was made subject to an official authorisation which, for a long time, it was practically impossible to obtain. Finally, it was illegal to export any Swiss-invented machine for the manufacture of watches, and at the same time, it was illegal to export any watch parts.

However, the knowledge that they were safely protected by the State had the effect that the watchmaking firms were not sufficiently stimulated by the necessity of meeting foreign competition. The order which had been instituted led, only too often, to a state of immobility. This disadvantage alone would be a sufficient reason for rendering the régime more supple and for bringing back, progressively, the watchmaking industry to the law governing the freedom of trade and industry.

There is still another reason for modifying the present régime, and that is the foreign competition which is now making itself felt very strongly. Not only France and Germany, but also the United States and, more especially, Soviet Russia and Japan, have become serious competitors. The quality of their watches has improved steadily, whilst their prices are often considerably lower than those quoted by Switzerland.

Thus, it is necessary to take all these new circumstances into account. It would appear that the very best way to engage in the struggle would be to allow the laws of economic competition to function freely, i.e., to do away with certain protective measures and to promote free initiative. This recovered freedom for the Swiss manufacturers should be complemented by allowing them to collaborate with foreign firms. The entire evolution of Europe and of the free world is now proceeding in this direction and the watchmaking industry cannot remain aloof from it.

The Federal Government's Message to Parliament shows that our Authorities, as well as certain important leaders in the watchmaking trade, are in favour of such innovations. However, in order that they may get their way, it will prove necessary to overcome some stubborn resistance on the part of those who would like the legal protection now enjoyed by the watchmaking industry to be maintained.

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