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The Swiss Economy in 1961

THE BOOM CONTINUES

For Switzerland, 1961 was yet another record year with regard to economic expansion. The net national income, for example, which amounted to S.Fr. 34 billion in 1960, might well, according to the first estimates, approach the 37 billion mark. Most industrial sectors benefited greatly from the general state of intense activity. In the electro-technical industry, orders increased by 25 per cent, compelling this industry to lengthen its delivery dates, as a result of the acute shortage of manpower. A similar trend and identical problems were met in other sectors of the engineering industry. The watchmaking industry—whose products must now pass a compulsory technical check—as well as the chemical and pharmaceutical industries, also profited from the prevailing extremely favourable conditions. In textiles, the situation was almost stable but good. Towards the end of the year, however, certain branches experienced a slight falling-off in foreign orders, allowing them to expect a comparative lull. Finally, building, without reaching the expected volume, which would have cost in the neighbourhood of S.Fr. 8 billion, i.e., 25 per cent higher than in 1960, experienced a particularly busy year, the number of working hours having risen 15 per cent above the figure for 1960. Nevertheless, in spite of this intense activity, the housing shortage in most big towns remains acute.

In the field of large-scale projects, mention must be made of an extraordinary engineering feat: the completion, in September 1961, of the highest hydro-electric dam in the world, the Grande-Dixence, rising some 935 feet above the river bed and holding back over 14 million cubic feet of water; the net average annual output of power made possible by the construction of this huge dam is estimated at approximately 1,600 million kW/h.

THE TREND OF PRICES —

The present state of intense activity prevailing in Switzerland was accompanied, in 1961, but a sharper rise in prices than during previous years. The index of consumer prices, for example, rose from 184.7 in December 1960 to 191.3 in December 1961. One has to go back as far as 1947 to find another such rise, which is to be attributed mainly to the increase in rents and to a certain extent to the rising cost of home agricultural produce.

— AND WAGES

Another result of the 1961 boom is the particularly strained position of the labour market. Not only is unemployment non-existent, but in most sectors the number of situations vacant greatly exceeds the number

of workers in search of jobs. Such a situation is all the more remarkable when it is considered that during August 1961 the Swiss economy employed the record number of 550,000 foreign workers, a figure exceeding that of 1960 by 26 per cent and representing some 22 per cent of the working population! The labour shortage is one of the main concerns of employers wishing to avoid an excessive rise in production costs, especially as profit margins tend to be growing smaller. It is leading to a continual increase in wages—which have been rising even more sharply than consumer prices. Thus, in 1961 the *effective* wages of workers in industry and the building trade rose 1.1 per cent. Wage-earners having thus derived certain material advantages from the general state of prosperity, it is not surprising that the social climate is excellent; 1961 was the first year, since statistics concerning labour conflicts have been kept, during which not a single working day was lost as a result of such a conflict.

FOREIGN TRADE

In 1961 Swiss imports and exports broke all previous records, amounting to S.Fr. 11,644 million and S.Fr. 8,822 million respectively. But whereas the former rose 20.7 per cent from one year to the next, the latter rose only 8.5 per cent. The deficit has therefore increased. The figure for 1961 leads observers to fear that the overall balance of trade, which has been a favourable one for the last ten years (with the exception of 1957), will be heavily in the red.

The deficit was particularly large in trade with EEC (S.Fr. 3,625 million) and especially with Federal Germany (S.Fr. 2,086 million). With EFTA, the balance was a favourable one, as with most overseas countries, except the U.S.A. and Canada. The Common Market has further strengthened its position as Switzerland's biggest trade partner. Trade as a whole (imports plus exports) between Switzerland and EEC (without Greece) represented 53.3 per cent of this country's total foreign trade (as opposed to 51.8 per cent in 1960). These figures were respectively 25.6 per cent (24.4 per cent) for Federal Germany alone, 13.8 per cent (13.5 per cent) for EFTA (without Finland) and 10.7 per cent (9.8 per cent) for the U.S.A. This geographical distribution shows why Switzerland has always been active in favour of a European market without, however, being able to sacrifice her neutrality and her trade with countries overseas. In accordance with this policy, in December 1961, together with Sweden and Austria, she proposed starting negotiations with a view to an eventual *association* with the Common Market.

The *structure* of Switzerland's foreign trade, by *categories of products*, shows a steady rise in trade in machinery, apparatus and instruments (imports: S.Fr. 1,920 million, i.e., plus 37 per cent; exports: S.Fr. 2,927 million, i.e., plus 13.3 per cent). Such a trend is typical of a comparatively small economy with a fast-expanding industry and a high degree

of technical development. Enjoying an excellent reputation abroad for her numerous original achievements and her high quality products, Switzerland is nevertheless obliged to turn to her neighbours for certain specialities indispensable to the development and rationalisation of her industries.

—THE SWISS OBSERVER

Obituaries

MRS EMIL STUDER

By the sudden passing away of Mrs Emil Studer, of 246 Hobson street, Auckland, fate seems cruel when two people had to struggle against adversities and then when the road starts to get smoother death comes and ends a partnership which has knitted just so much closer because the going was not so easy. However, faith also wants us to believe that there will be a reunion in a better place hereafter and so find solace and comfort in believing in God's Will.

Mrs Studer came to New Zealand with her husband 12 years ago where they settled in Frankton, Emil working in his trade in Herbert's Bakery for two years. After that they moved to Auckland where they started up on their own. Unfortunately, indifferent health was a handicap to them at times, but in spite of that they managed to get ahead through perseverance and thrift. They had now purchased a house and planned to celebrate their silver wedding in two years time and take things easier after that.

May we hope in sympathy with Emil and his family that the Divine Planning Authority have better times in store for them. —W.R.

JOHN SCHLAEPFER

Death comes to many of us without warning and with complete disregard to time and place. John Schlaepfer had intended to return from the farm in Pukekohe to his home in Auckland when he suddenly collapsed and died while being driven to the bus stop.

John was a member of that well-known pioneer Schlaepfer family of Ostrich Farm, Helvetia, Pukekohe. Although born in New Zealand he was very much a Swiss. He loved his Appenrell, the home Kanton of his forebears, and he visited it in 1929 and also last year. He was looking forward to visiting it again. Whenever the Auckland Swiss Club staged some function John was there, morally and financially supporting it.

However, John Schlaepfer was not only a good Swiss, he was also a good New Zealander. The funeral in Pukekohe was a striking tribute to the high esteem in which an old established pioneer family with a tradition of integrity is held by the community. —W.R.