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News from Switzerland

A SECOND SWISS SUBMARINE LEAVES FOR AMERICA

The mesoscaph PX-15 built for an American firm in the Giovanola works at Monthey (Switzerland) under the supervision of the famous oceanographer Jacques Piccard, left the works by rail for Antwerp, where it will be shipped to the United States. This submarine, which will weigh 130 tons and measure almost 48 feet once completed, will be used first of all for submarine exploration by drifting in the Gulf Stream. A First mesoscaph, built by the same firm, was one of the attractions at the Swiss National Exhibition in 1964. (OSEC)

A SWISSAIR NOVELTY

Early this year, the Swiss airline company Swissair started offering its passengers a new plastic attache case in polystyrol for carrying the many small articles one always accumulates when travelling. This very elegant and useful new accessory, designed and manufactured in Switzerland, is available in red, black, or red and black. It is issued free of charge to first-class passengers and sold for a moderate sum to tourist-class passengers. But it is not intended to be sold on the open market and will thus be obtainable only by Swissair passengers.

SWISSAIR CONFIRMS ORDER FOR TWO BOEING 747s

Swissair has now placed a firm order for two Boeing 747 high capacity jets for delivery in the first half of 1971. This follows negotiations with the Boeing Company which were opened early this year; the intention of buying aircraft of this type was originally announced at the airline's annual general meeting in April. The aircraft will be operated between Switzerland and New York.

In the Swissair configuration the Boeing 747 will have a crew of nineteen and transport 353 passengers including thirty-two in first class, plus 22,000 lbs. of cargo, at a cruising speed of 495 knots.

Operating these high capacity jets it will be possible to cope growing passenger and cargo traffic with a relatively small increase in aircraft movements and thus ease the situation at airports. The Boeing 747's Pratt & Whitney JT9D-3 fan engines are expected to produce less noise than existing engines, due to new construction principals and despite greater performance.

PRICES AND COSTS

According to the Swiss Index of Consumer Prices, the loss in the purchasing power of money amounted to 3.5% in 1967, as opposed to 4.6% during the previous year. It should, however, be pointed out that the rise in the index was caused mainly by the increase in rents, the increase in the main groups of foodstuffs and clothing being less than 1.4%. The evolution of the wholesale price index, which only increased by 0.7%, also shows that the rise in the cost of living tended to slow up. Personal consumption increased by 2.6 % compared with the previous year, which is equivalent to a rate of increase of 0.3% compared with the period 1965/1966; public consumption increased by only 3.1% during the last annual period (previous period: 5.4%). The gross national product, which corresponds to the overall annual value of goods and services, amounted to S.Fr. 68.2 billion.

From 1966 to 1967, the increase amounted to 1.7%, compared with 2.8% for the previous period. This slowing up is accounted for by the slight decrease in private building and the number of people employed in industry, as well as the fall in foreign demand.

SWISS CONTRIBUTION TO SPACE TECHNOLOGY

Swiss engineers and manufacturers have designed and constructed the most modern aerodynamic tunnel in Europe for a German air and space navigation research institute. This tunnel is designed to simulate supersonic speeds of up to 10 mach (10 times the speed of sound) especially for the study of the strains to which space vessels are submitted on re-entry into the terrestrial atmosphere.

MERGER IN THE SWISS TEXTILE INDUSTRY

Five Swiss textile firms have just joined forces to form a holding company known as Arova Co. Ltd., at Schaffhausen, where the head office and one of the factories are also located. The manufacturing programme of the new firm includes the production of string and rope, the dressing of polyester fibres, the twisting of sewing thread, the dyeing of yarns for carpets, the weaving of tarpaulins and furnishing fabrics, the manufacture of pressurised inflatable hangars, the working of plastic foil, etc.

This new group, under one management and equipped with a research department, will impart new life to a number of old activities which risked being left behind by the development of new products.

RECORD NUMBER OF VISITORS TO THE SWISS TRANSPORT MUSEUM

Last year, the number of visitors to the Swiss Transport Museum in Lucerne reached the all-time high of over 355,000. The Transport Museum is still the most popular museum in Switzerland and it also comes first among 100 similar museums in Europe. The expansion of its premises, planned several years ago, began in 1967 with the laying of the foundation stone of the first planetarium in Switzerland.

OUTPUT AND EMPLOYMENT

The index of industrial output (1958=100) amounted to 162, which represents an increase of barely 1% over the previous year, whereas the rate of growth in 1966 was 5%. The biggest increase occurred in the graphic arts, where the rate of 10% was higher than that in 1966; there were further increases, although smaller than before, in the chemical industry (+3%) and watchmaking (+4%), both of which go in for exports on a large scale. It is mainly the groups connected in one way or another with building that showed a decrease; although falling off slightly, building nevertheless remained at a high level. The final gross figures for agricultural production were 5.9% higher than in 1966. The drop noted in the textile branches in 1966 continued to make itself felt (—2%) in 1967.

No slackening off, however, occurred in the labour market; full employment was maintained practically throughout and the number of foreign workers issued with permits varied but little compared with the previous year, totalling about 648,000 in the month of August, the peak period of the year.

SWITZERLAND AND ELECTRONICS

There is a great deal of talk today of Swiss achievements in the field of electronic watches but it is only fair to call attention to the part played by certain related industries which contribute to the success of Switzerland's electronic products. Some time ago, a Neuchatel firm, specialising in the metallurgy of precious and rare metals produced a platinum cobalt alloy of very high magnetic power, which Swiss industry previously had to buy abroad. The new Swiss alloy Pt-Co satisfies the highest standards and is used in the manufacture of magnetic clutches, various magnetic drive mechanisms, magnets for micro-motors, etc.

Other industries, also called on to miniaturise their instruments, will be able to use this new source of supply to solve the problems raised by the need for a strong magnetic source in a small volume.

“SCHLITTEDA ENGIADINAISA”

Many of the ancient beloved customs of the Engadine Valley have been doomed to extinction, partly because so many young people prefer life in the cities. However, one such custom has survived to this day—the famous “Schlitteda Engiadinaisa”.

This picturesque wintry sleighride, a tradition going back many centuries, does not take place on a set date but on various Sundays in January and February in the larger settlements of the Engadine Valley. It is the Festival of the Unmarried. The young men ask the girls of marriageable age to go with them on a sleighride. A long row of horse-drawn sleighs, many of them heirlooms made by local artisans, enlivens the snowy scenery.

Of course, on this day the couples don their traditional Engadine costumes—the girls fire-engine-red skirts and charming bonnets, the young men clothes dating back to the Biedermeier period of the early nineteenth century, consisting of black trousers, colourful waistcoats, woollen jacket and top hat.

Towards evening, when the sleighride is over, the entire village takes part in a swinging dance. This gay sleighride often turns out to be a couple's first ride into the future and has always been the social highlight of the winter for the inhabitants of the Engadine Valley. There is a truly Latin “joie de vivre” in this festival. The fascination which emanates from the “Schlitteda” has been handed down from generation to generation.

SUCCESS OF ENGINEERING CONSULTANTS FIRM

The firm of Bonnard & Gardel, Engineering Consultants Co. Ltd., in Lausanne, has just won an important new order abroad. The Algerian National Transport and Hydrocarbon Marketing Company (Sonatrach) has just awarded this company the tender for the planning of the living quarters on the pumping station and terminal centre of the Haoud el Hamra oil pipeline at Arzew.

CHEESEMAKING PLANT AS A SHOWPIECE

Fifteen regional and Swiss organisations have formed a co-operative in order to create a showpiece cheesemaking plant in Gruyere. They have taken into consideration not only all the technical aspects of cheese production but also the touristic attractions of the picturesque, medieval little town of Gruyere (Canton Fribourg).

The main object of the plant is to produce the highest possible quality of cheese. At the same time the many tourists who visit Gruyere will be given an opportunity to watch closely how Gruyere cheese — one of the finest varieties of cheese — is produced.

POSTERS IN ZURICH

At present (Autumn 1967) Zurich, the biggest town in Switzerland, has permanent or temporary hoardings or space for some 14,000 posters, which represents a coefficient of 32.3 posters per 1,000 inhabitants. Consequently, Zurich is one of the leading towns for the density of its posters, not only in Switzerland but also in Europe, since Switzerland herself, with an average of 19.8 posters per 1,000 inhabitants, has one of the highest densities of posters in Europe. It should however be pointed out that there are no giant-sized posters in Switzerland, like those found in other countries; and that the standard size of poster used in Switzerland (90.5 x 128 cm) — which corresponds to the “golden section” — makes it possible to put up a larger number of posters for the same area. In Zurich each week, over 6,000 new posters are pasted up over the old ones; each poster is left on display for two weeks. (OSEC)

RESEARCH AGREEMENT

Brown, Boveri Co. Ltd. at Baden and the North American Rockwell Corporation at El Segundo, California, recently set up a group for the purpose of studying the possibilities of building a production centre in the United States for the construction of plant for power stations, in particular steam turbines and generators manufactured according to the Brown, Boveri technique.

Laugh a little . . .

Three-year-old Fritzli arrives at his grandfather's place, showing off his new trousers. Grandpa is very surprised that the trousers are so extremely short, and he asks: “Fritzli, haesch Mini-Hoesli a?” Grandson thinks this is a very silly question and answers: “Nei Grosspapa, das sin mini!”

—From ‘Uesi Chind’ Nebelspalter

The Mini-skirt fashion causes us men to utter the same remark as in long past times, when sailing craft were replaced by steam boats: “Wonderful, now we don't have to wait for the wind to blow!”

—Nebelspalter