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Facts and Figures About the Swiss Textile Industry

Only one per cent of the total capacity of the textile industry in Western Europe is accounted for by Switzerland. And of the world consumption of spun fabrics, only one third of one per cent is supplied by the Swiss textile industry. Yet there is no clothing manufacturer with a quality production range anywhere on earth who is not familiar with Swiss cloths.

Swiss cloths — whether of wool, cotton, silk or synthetic fibres— are also represented in practically every collection of the leading Parisian fashion designers—Chanel, Courreges, Dior, Cardin, Givenchy, Balmain and the rest.

A fashion magazine recently devoted an article to Pierre Balmain which was entitled (in translation) "Thirty years of haute couture— thirty years of fidelity to Swiss cloths and embroidery".

BRISK FOREIGN TRADE

These remarks pinpoint one of the essential features of the Swiss textile industry: it is not geared to mass production, but to quality and fashion appeal, to exclusive lines and to international export. As a result of this approach, the Swiss textile industry has always had an active balance of trade. In 1975, for instance, the value of yarn exports of all kinds was three times that of imports. Cloths exports were 50 per cent above imports, and for cotton goods—always a Swiss speciality —the figure was even over 100 per cent. The embroidery industry supplied goods worth 163 million Swiss francs to foreign countries even in the worldwide recession year 1975.

The high standards of the Swiss textile industry can also be illustrated by price comparisons in the foreign trade sector. Swiss cloth imports were 22 per cent above exports in quantity, but the value of the exports was 48 per cent above that of the imports. A ton of incoming cotton cloth averaged 20,400 Swiss francs in value, but an outgoing ton was worth 42,600 Swiss francs. Swiss manufacturers of cotton yarns also specialize in high qualities. Exports are here five times the imports in volume, but seven times as valuable.

THE SOARING SWISS FRANC

The Swiss textile industry sells roughly one half of its production abroad. It is therefore quite understandable that it has felt the pinch of the worldwide recession and the high exchange rate of the Swiss franc. These are serious drawbacks on competitive markets, but they are offset to some extent by advantages which help to make future prospects appear rosier, viz.

- Switzerland once more has the lowest rate of inflation of all the manufacturing countries.
- Wage levels have been stabilized.
- Political stability and the absence of labour disputes create a sound

basis.

- There is now no customs discrimination in the Common Market countries.
- The preference for high qualities is a traditional feature and calls for a good deal of know-how.
- Most Swiss textile enterprises today are small or medium-sized, which makes them very flexible and also favours the manufacture of specialities. —S. A. MAGAZINE.

A New Swiss Chemical Plant Under Construction In the United States

Work has recently begun at Bayport (Texas—USA) on the construction of a large chemical plant representing, in its initial stage, an investment of some 30 million dollars. Built by Lonza (Basel—Switzerland), the plant is expected to go into operation at the end of 1977. It will produce basic materials for agrochemistry and the manufacture of pigments and pharmaceutical products. Because of the high exchange rate of the Swiss franc, ever higher shipping costs and other commercial factors, it has become more and more difficult for Lonza to supply the American market from Switzerland; hence the decision to set up a plant in the United States. Looking ahead and allowing for the long period required to carry plans into effect, Lonza is already studying further projects designed to expand and develop its activities on the North American continent.—(SODT)

The Swiss Aluminium Industry in 1975

The Swiss aluminium industry has suffered from the effects of the economic recession in 1975. The production of metal fell off by 27 per cent and that of semi-manufactured products by 24 per cent as compared with the previous year. The rolling mills of sheet aluminium fell 25 per cent short of the 1974 production level. The recession was felt by nearly all the consumer groups. The falling off of orders in hand led to reductions in personnel in most branchesof the Swiss aluminium industry and, in some firms, to the temporary introduction of shorter working hours. In this field, too, the high exchange rate of the Swiss franc has been an adverse factor. While in several industrialized countries, like the United States and Germany, there has been a resumption of demand, recovery in Switzerland continues to be slow. In both the building trade and the transport sector, difficulties may be expected to persist for some time yet. It is estimated that the Swiss aluminium industry, depending in part on these two branches of industry, will show a slower growth rate in the next few years.—(SODT)