

Home affairs

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HOME AFFAIRS.

By MAX NEF.

During its last session in the Old Year, the Federal Council decided that, on national as well as international legal grounds there was no question of any withdrawal of the concession for the erection of a power works at Rheinau, below the Schaffhaus falls of the Rhine. Thus, the building project has finally been approved and, in accordance with the stipulations laid down in the concession construction work must start already this month. There was very strong opposition encountered, so to speak at the last minute, from circles connected with the National Trust and the Society for the Protection of Natural Beauties. It was unable, however, to change the legal situation and it only remained for the Federal Council to pronounce the authorisation which had already been granted, as being final.

Viewed from the standpoint of the production of power, there are other projects which are far more important, as for instance in respect of the Engadine and another in that of Avers, but these are still at the stage of preliminary talks between the states. Work is being carried out with regard to various reservoirs in the Grisons, in the Tessin and the Valais, as also the so-called "river power plant" in the Central part of the country, on the Rhine and on the Aare. These power-stations which are now being constructed will, when they are completed in four or five year's time, have a capacity of production amounting to approximately three thousand million kilowatt hours of electric power, which will be placed at the disposal of the country. The total amount of electric power which it will then be possible to generate will approximate 16 thousand million kilowatt hours.

Already to-day, the quantity of electric power produced by means of our own hydraulic power is half as much again as was the case in the last year before the war. Consumption, however, has increased to a greater extent than the supply available, so that there still exists a certain shortage in electric power. In view of the fact that the quantity produced is subject to marked fluctuations as a result of its dependence on weather conditions, it is necessary to have a large capacity for reserve in the hydraulic power plants, in order that it should not prove necessary to have recourse to restrictions in the use of electricity, as was the case during the war years. The considerable increase in the demand for electric power is, primarily,

the consequence of the change over from coal to electricity on the part of so many industrial concerns during wartime, when coal imports from abroad ceased to arrive. Moreover, hot-water installations for houses, and cooking ranges, were also changed over to electricity, and since then this custom is growing increasingly wide-spread, and heating arrangements for additional use and the transitional seasons have also been switched over to electricity. Owing to the shortage of raw materials and the lack of man power during the war years and in the immediate post-bellum period it proved impossible in Switzerland for the erection of new power plants to keep pace with the growing demand for electricity.

About eighteen months ago, it was believed that the principal difficulties had been overcome and that the supply of electricity power was assured even in case of a draught. However, the new economic wave of prosperity which started afresh just then caused a considerable increase in the consumption of power, amounting to as much as 20%. The couple of dry weeks which occurred in the late Autumn gave rise to fresh anxiety in regard to the supply of electric power in Switzerland. By drawing upon so-called thermic installations, wherein the generation of electricity takes place on the basis of solid or fluid inflammable material, and by importing electricity from abroad and by utilizing other sources of reserve, it proved possible to surmount these difficulties.

From all this, however, it is quite evident that it is absolutely necessary for a further exploitation of



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Swiss hydraulic forces. And, finally, this is the only really abundant raw material which this country possesses. Viewed from a long term standpoint, there is no reason to fear any difficulty in finding potential markets for our electricity, for any surplus in production can easily be made profitable by way of exports, which may be considered as assured for many a year to come. Exports of electricity make it possible to obtain, by way of compensation, coal and other raw materials from abroad which are required by our industry. Last year it proved possible to export some ten per cent of our total production of electric power. Deliveries took place mostly during the summer months, when production is greater and the demand smaller than in the winter.

The favourable prospects for an assured market for electric power, have the effect of dispelling any difficulties regarding the financing of the construction work for power plants, although the entire amount of capital required runs into some hundreds of millions of francs.

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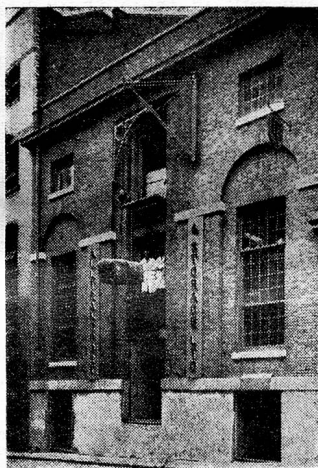
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