

Home affairs

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HOME AFFAIRS.

by CARL KELLER.

The Swiss Universities reckon that, during the past year, the touristic and holiday movement in Europe comprised some thirty million persons. Moreover, the prodigious development of "social tourism" will become further accentuated this year. An intermediary balance, full of valuable information, was drawn up at the beginning of August: more than 800,000 tourists entered Switzerland, via Basle, in July, in spite of the fact that this summer month proved more rainy than any other, in the history of meteorological returns, since 1864. About one-quarter of the afore-mentioned figure was in respect of travellers passing in transit on their way to Italy or to Austria. This considerable increase in the tourist movement, also affects air traffic. Thus, with an increase of 25 per cent during the course of the first six months of 1956, Swissair has already carried more passengers this year, than during the whole of 1952.

However satisfactory may be this development, the problems which arise out of it must not be neglected. Does it not appear paradoxical that half the beds in the Swiss hotels remain empty, in spite of the fact that the number of tourists has increased by 50 per cent, in comparison with the pre-war period? This situation is due partly to the change which has taken place in the structure of the holiday tourism, and partly to the appearance of social tourism. The latter comprises those travellers who, so to speak, come outside the sphere of the hotel industry, in that they stay in private lodgings — in chalets, in huts and, especially, in tents and caravans on camping grounds — so that they belong to what is called "the supplementary hotel industry". In the Oberland Bernois, for instance, nearly half of the foreign visitors who were here last year, belonged to this category. To this must be added the fact — which may be right or wrong — that the hotel prices are considered to be exaggerated. And yet, they do not correspond to the cost of living, which has increased, on an average by 70 per cent, whereas hotel prices with their increase of 40 per cent, lag far behind.

There is nothing surprising in the fact that our hotels in the mountains are not yet sufficiently modernised, and especially, that they are not in a position to bring about the necessary changes in the way they are run, all by themselves. However, the public powers are ready to intervene: a new Federal Law provides the granting, during a period of ten years, of reimbursable loans, to the total amount of 16 million francs. The Swiss National Tourist Office will receive for its part, an annual sum of three million francs, up to 1958.

Our mountain hotels will not only be helped by means of unilateral measures, but will also be given support and will be reinvigorated by means of a financial policy which will be both "offensive" and efficacious.

It is not yet possible to gauge exactly the import of these new measures. One can, however, obtain an approximate idea regarding the situation if one thinks of the fact that tourist traffic takes second place in our economic balance-sheet, its contribution amounting to nearly a thousand million francs, in the guise of "invisible exports".

For Switzerland, which is above all a country of mountains, the tourist trade forms an integral part of aid to the mountain populations. To the financial assistance already given by the public powers, there is now added the fact that our economy is pursuing new and more varied ways: industrial undertakings are now going to establish themselves on our mountains and, if possible, maintain their position there. A very satisfactory example of this new venture is to be found in the Valais village of Saint-Nicholas, where work has been provided for five hundred men and women workers. These "peasant-workers", as they are called, have already benefited from an improvement in their standard of living, which has now attained a hitherto unknown level.

It is to be hoped that this example will be followed by many others, for the good of our mountain populations and in the interests of the modern evolution of tourism.

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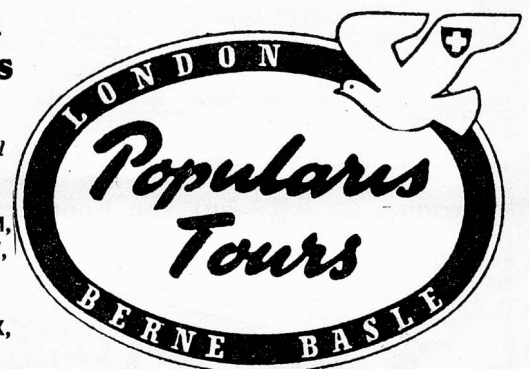
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