

The week at home

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THE WEEK AT HOME.

by MAX NEF.

It has been learnt, with great satisfaction, in Switzerland, that the Second International Conference on the peaceful utilisation of nuclear energy, will once more, be held in Geneva, in September 1958. The relevant invitations have just been sent out by the General Secretariat of the United Nations. Thus, once again, the representatives of 88 Governments, of the most divers political tendencies and philosophies of life, will meet in our country in order to clarify, by means of peaceful discussions, economic and scientific questions, and, in this way, contribute towards a better understanding between the peoples of this world. A first conference of this kind took place in Geneva, in August, 1955. According to general opinion, its success justifies a repetition.

Concurrently with the scientific efforts that are being made in the domain of nuclear energy, the legal and legislative aspects of this particular sphere are now being studied in Switzerland. Thus, the Draft Bill for a Constitutional Article, whereby the legislation governing nuclear energy will be proclaimed as appertaining to the Confederation, is being submitted to Parliament. In particular, the Confederation will be invested with the competency of issuing appropriate regulations in regard to protection from radio-active radiations. The Council of States has already approved the Draft Bill. It is expected that the

National Council will do likewise, during its September Session, so that it is very possible that the Popular Referendum may still take place this year.

In order to gain time, the Authorities have already drawn up a Draft Bill for an Implementation Act for the aforesaid Constitutional Article, and have circulated it to the Cantonal Governments and to the Organisations and Institutions which are interested in this matter, in order that they may decide on what attitude they wish to adopt. The greatest attention has been devoted, in this Draft Bill, also, to the question of protection from radiation. Numerous precautionary measures are provided for, in order to anticipate the harmful effects on health of nuclear energy, both in research and then, later on, when utilised for economic purposes.

Last year, the Federal Council set up a scientific Committee of Experts, whose task it is to supervise the radio-activity which exists in the air, the precipitations and the waters in Switzerland this, for the purpose of being able to warn the population, in plenty of time and to institute the necessary measures and instructions. This Committee has just submitted the first Report on its Activities to the Federal Council. From this Report it would appear that the network of observation stations and the programme for the necessary surveys and enquiries must be extended further. At the same time, certain results have already been achieved, which deserve attention. For instance, the Committee declares that the existing degree of radio-activity to be found in the air does not, as yet represent any menace to the health of any living creatures. In regard to the possibility of unfavourable effects on the inherited propensities of entire strata of the population — so the Report states — any additional amount of radiation should be avoided. Further on, the Report goes on to say that the radio-activity to be found in rain-water has already attained a degree which might have harmful effects. In those regions where such water is used for drinking purposes, without it having first trickled through the earth and thus become filtered, the Control Committee recommends that precautionary measures be taken. On the other hand, at the present time, the degree of radio-activity to be found in the waters of the rivers and lakes gives no cause for anxiety.

The research work of the Control Committee for the supervision of radio-activity in Switzerland, is now to be extended also to the soil and to plants. The effects of rain-water on these will be made the subject of special and careful examination.



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