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HOME AFFAIRS.

By PIERRE BÉGUIN.

"Penury of Technicians in Switzerland".

If Switzerland, a country poor in natural riches, has today attained a state of enviable prosperity, this is due entirely to the labour of her workers, to the cleverness of her industrialists and to the inventive talents of her technicians. It is owing to them that she has organised and developed an export industry from which she derives the greater part of her national revenue.

At the present time, however, a phenomenon is taking place which no one could have foreseen and which may prove very big in consequences, if proper measures are not taken very urgently; this is the penury of technicians.

It is not so long ago that Switzerland trained, year after year, technicians and engineers in such large numbers that not only did they suffice for the requirements of our national industry, but the surplus used to emigrate to other countries. Today the situation has changed completely. We no longer export any technicians, and what is more, our industrial undertakings are obliged to have recourse to foreign technicians. One may cite the case of various large Swiss plants, in which the specialists are perhaps to the extent of a good one-third, composed of foreigners.

This phenomenon can be explained by divers causes. For one thing we have gone so far on the road of social justice that our manual workers, whether specially trained or not, are enjoying far better material conditions, whereas the class to which the technicians and engineers belong has not benefited from the same progress. In this respect the Trade Unions have shouldered a pretty heavy responsibility, for — in their endeavours to obtain social equity — they have acted in such a manner that the interests of the manual workers have been defended better than those of the qualified specialists. This policy has been pursued to such an extent that the efforts of those who study are no longer sufficiently recompensed. Engineers and technicians now find that their knowledge is no longer factually recognised by a considerably superior material position.

On the other hand, modern technique makes demands which grow more and more vast. An industry, in order to be "in the swim", is now obliged to increase the personnel on its technical staff. Thus industry's requirements in a skilled staff have increased, whilst our schools continue to train the same number of technicians. This evolution is very rapid on the industrial plane, but on the scholastic plane it has remained very far behind. Nobody can really be blamed. The reserve practised by our authorities proceeds from a certain prudence, in that our present prosperity is looked upon as being a transient phenomenon, and it is feared that were too many young people trained for technical staff jobs they might find themselves without employment should the present economic boom come to an end. There is nothing that our authorities fear as much as the idea of creating in our country what might be called an intellectual proletariat.

Nevertheless, the facts are there. Our prosperity continues to flourish. Nothing would appear to foreshadow its imminent end. And our industry which has to fight with very powerful competitors cannot hope to wage this struggle successfully if the country does no place at its disposal an adequate supply of specialised and technical forces. We know that this same problem arises in all the Western countries. But with us it has become particularly acute during the last two years. And this is doubly serious for a country which — as we have already remarked — possesses no riches other than its work and its inventive mind.

What measures could bring us out of this dilemma? There are two different kinds. By renouncing the practising of equality to an excessive degree we should promote ambitions and justify the sacrifices demanded by higher studies, by recognising a more marked hierarchy in salaries. Moreover, we should make a great effort to give all young people an equal chance at the start of their struggle in life. The fact of deciding as to whether or not a young man should go in for higher studies should no longer depend on the size of his father's purse. All capacities and talents must have the right to expand. With this aim in view, there should be more scholarships available, so that no talent may remain unused. We will surely succeed in solving this great problem, on which depends the future of our industry, the key to our national prosperity.



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