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COMMERCIAL NEWS

The new Swiss Customs Tariff will soon be ready.

The Director of the Division for Commerce of the Federal Department of Public Economy has just announced that the new Swiss Customs Tariff will soon be ready, and that it can be submitted for the approval of the Government, at the beginning of 1957. It will replace the existing prescriptions, which date from 1902, and are, obviously, behind the times. The new Customs Tariff will facilitate Switzerland's negotiations with those countries with which she has economic relations, and will also render easier all steps taken in view of the creation of a European Market, or a European Zone for free trade.

Good news for the watchmakers of Switzerland.

Whilst the American watch manufacturers would appear to be ready to launch a new campaign against the importation of watches, Germany has just taken a measure which has met with the approval of all interested circles and, more especially, of the Swiss watchmakers. At the time of the economic pourparlers which took place in Bonn, during the month of October last, the German negotiators refused to liberate the importation of watches costing more than 100 German Marks. This measure seemed all the more inequitable because, up to then, the importation of unfinished clockwork pieces and the furnishings required by the German watchmaking industry, had been entirely liberated. The German Government has now decided to liberate entirely the whole watchmaking branch, in this way carrying out the promise made by its Minister for Economy, during a recent inter-ministerial Council held by the O.E.E.C. in Paris. Swiss watchmaking circles welcome this happy decision and hope that those rare European countries which still maintain the application of the quota system to watchmaking products will follow the example set by Germany.

Hungry Switzerland.

The domestic harvest of cereals has been very poor this year, in Switzerland, and there is a considerable deficit, in comparison with last year. However, the Federal Wheat Administration fortunately increased its imports of foreign cereals, just as soon as it was able to foresee that the harvest would be a bad one. Thus Swiss purchases of wheat from abroad, more particularly from the United States and from Canada, are twice as great as those in 1955. At the present moment, the provisioning of Switzerland in bread cereals is assured, and the state of her stocks is quite normal.

In the Swiss Metal and Machine Industry.

The metal and machine industry seems to be the one to have benefited most by the period of prosperity in Switzerland in 1956. Enough orders have been received, it is reported, to keep the industry going full swing for another eight months. Although more orders have been received by nearly all factories classified under this heading, the biggest increases have been noted in heavy industry. However, competition from abroad has cut seriously into Swiss export prices. The export price index for machines

has dropped sharply for machines as well as for precision instruments and equipment, which have suffered a reduction amounting to twelve per cent. The scarcity of skilled workers is also causing concern among Swiss machine manufacturers. For some time the lack of industrial engineers and craftsmen has been felt and it is feared that the situation may be a permanent rather than merely a temporary one. This scarcity of qualified personnel is attributed both to the drop in the birth-rate between the two world wars and to the technological progress coupled with the increased economic activity of the past few years. The Swiss machine industry, aware of the need to increase professional training, is planning to set up a fund to help promising young men acquire technical training. It is also hoped that the situation can be remedied to some extent by employing more apprentice draughtsmen, a large number of whom, experience shows, decide to enrol in technical schools after completing their apprenticeship.

A Swiss Creation.

The Swiss ribbon manufacturers — most of whom are established in Basle — have just launched quite a new article on the market. This novelty consists of silk ribbons embroidered with charming flower motifs, which can stand being boiled in the wash. Experiments made with white popeline fabrics, ornamented with ribbons, have given most satisfactory results, so that it is anticipated that this Swiss creation will meet with great interest abroad.

Motorization in Switzerland.

At the end of September, more than six hundred thousand motor vehicles were registered in Switzerland — about one for every eight inhabitants. In one year, the number has risen by nearly a hundred thousand. A break-down of the figures shows 370,000 automobiles, 235,000 motorcycles, motor-scooters and autocycles.

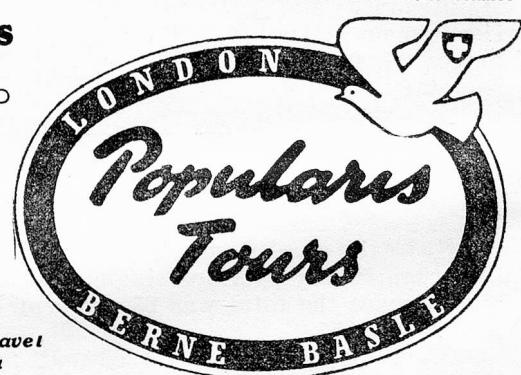
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