

Swiss Spotlight

Objektyp: **Group**

Zeitschrift: **The Swiss observer : the journal of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK**

Band (Jahr): - **(1959)**

Heft 1340

PDF erstellt am: **21.09.2024**

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SWISS SPOTLIGHT.

By PIERRE BÉGUIN.

During the course of the last few years a group of business men in the French-speaking part of Switzerland has set up a project for a road tunnel which is to pass under the Alps, exactly under the col of the Great Saint Bernard, which connects Italy and Switzerland. This project belongs exclusively to private initiative, to which the Cantons of French-speaking Switzerland are giving their support. The Confederation has nothing to do with it. It will not furnish a single centime for the realisation of this undertaking. Although the work of boring the tunnel of the Great Saint Bernard has not yet started, plans are already being made on the Swiss side for an addition to the original project. Thus, a Swiss-Italian finance company has conceived the project of introducing a pipeline into this road tunnel — to be precise, right under the road itself — which will make it possible to bring raw petroleum from the Port of Genua, that is to say from the other side of the Alps. One or two oil refineries are to be set up in Switzerland, which will produce, more especially, oil fuel for machinery, heating, etc., as well as all the by-products of petro-chemistry.

This project has been able to take on substance because of the fact that our southern neighbour, Italy, has recently secured for herself the exploitation of various oil-fields in Sicily, in Egypt and in the Middle East. The particular position occupied by Italy, owing to the fact that she no longer possesses any colonial interests, enables her to play a role in this domain. Although she belongs to the Western world, she enjoys the favour of certain countries which intend to shake off the influence of the Great Powers.

This is why a big Italian company is now offering to let us have its petroleum, which could be brought into Switzerland by means of a pipe-line in the road tunnel of the Great Saint Bernard. This petroleum would be refined in Switzerland. It would come much cheaper than the oil which we now import, in various forms, as transport by pipe-line is far less expensive than by rail. Moreover, the Swiss market would no longer depend entirely on the big Trusts, so that the liberal law of competition could be applied once more.

Furthermore, the establishment of oil refineries in Switzerland would provide some interesting possibilities of work, which would be very welcome in a region of Switzerland where industrialisation is relatively backward in comparison with the rest of the country.

Finally — and this aspect of the question should not be neglected — it is intended to prolong this pipe-line towards the North, more especially towards Germany. Thus, Switzerland would become, in this respect also, a transit country, as she already is in regard to railways and to road traffic. She would then have a part to play, at any rate on this limited technical plane, between two important members of the six countries that are members of the European Common Market, namely Germany and Italy. By means of this somewhat unforeseen, roundabout way, she would perhaps get into touch with this European economic organisation. Such a "rapprochement" might have favourable economic and even political consequences. The evolution of this project will be followed with keen interest.