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this aluminium foil amounted to from 13 to 22 yards per minute, the modern rolling-mills made by the Neher firm have an output of from 440 to 600 yards per minute. To-day the annual production of this commodity exceeds 4,000 metric tons and exports go to all parts of the globe.

#### Economic importance of the Gotthard line

During the first nine months of this year the railway line which passes through the St. Gotthard Tunnel made possible the transport from Italy to Switzerland of 100,000 wagons of food, some of this being for direct imports and some in transit. The figure shows Switzerland's importance for European railway traffic.

#### Increase in electricity output in Switzerland

Last August the production of the Swiss electricity plants attained 1,218 million kilowatt-hours, as compared with 1,078 Kwh. in August 1959. Calculated per working day, this production has increased by 12 per cent in one year.

#### Swiss stamp in honour of UN

On 24th October Switzerland issued a large-sized 5-franc stamp in honour of the United Nations. This new vignette, which is in blue, represents the European seat of the United Nations — which is, of course, in Geneva — with Lake Lemman and Mont-Blanc in the background.

## LABOUR PROBLEMS

By CHOPARD

The Swiss Federation of Trade Unions, which is the most important employees' organisation in the country, recently held its triennial Congress, in Basle. This is in no way a spectacular event. But, in a world full of "alarums and excursions", it is perhaps just because of this that it deserves to be mentioned as being something which belongs to Swiss continuity. During the course of this Congress, the Federation of Trade Unions confirmed its adherence to democratic institutions and to a social and economic régime which, however, makes it possible to improve employees' conditions, in a constant manner, without any recourse to force or to State interventions which limit individual freedoms in an arbitrary manner. At the same time, the Congress expressed certain criticisms and demanded that social insurances should be developed at a more rapid rate and adapted better to the increase in the general prosperity. These, however, are only natural criticisms, due to the fact that the social conscience is always in advance of actions and, more especially, of the legislative machinery. This machinery is very slow in a democratic country like Switzerland, where the Law is not the expression of the will of a dictator, of a clique, or of Parliament alone, but of the will of the people, in their entirety.

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This is not merely a phrase. In Switzerland, the citizens are called upon to take a decision on most of the social laws. The legislator cannot reduce the number of working hours, or increase the benefits paid by social insurance, without the express approval of the majority of the citizens.

Although the Federation of Trade Unions is the most important of the employees' organisations in the country, possessing as it does more than 430,000 members, it only includes a little more than one-third of the total number of wage-earners. Concurrently, other employees' organisations number approximately 220,000 adherents. It will be observed that, taken as a whole, only four wage-earners out of ten in Switzerland belong to trade unions. This means that a large proportion of employees benefit passively from the efforts of the trade union movement. The non-organised employees enjoy, in the same way as the trade union members, the improvements brought to social legislation and institutions as a result of the efforts of the trade union movement.

No objective exigency would appear to justify this dispersion of Swiss trade unionism, particularly as the progressive attenuation of the differences existing between employees and executives makes it no longer necessary to have two distinct organisations. But, perhaps the tradition of trade union pluralism is more in conformity with our federalism than is the trade union unity which has been realised in Austria, Great Britain, Sweden, West Germany and elsewhere.

## MOUNTAIN CLIMBING

By W. STETTBACHER

After my traverse of the Matterhorn last summer, I had tentatively arranged with my guide, M. René Marcoz, of Verbier to visit this summer the region of the Gran Paradiso, Italy, and perhaps also to scale one or two of the famous Aiguilles (Needles) in the Mont Blanc region.

The poor summer of this year made this a particularly fortunate choice, because the Aosta Valley is well known for its dry climate with record hours of sunshine. My eyes were focused on the two best-known Peaks in this area, the Gran Paradiso, 4,061 metres high, and the Grivola, just under 4,000 metres. I have seen these two giants many times from a great distance when standing on the summits of the "Viertausender" of the Wallis, and they also figure prominently in Alpine history.

I left London in the night of 14th July, flying in one of the legendary Comets. To watch the fast and steep take-off after a short run, the rapid climb to a great height by the surge of jet power that lifts the plane smoothly, the high cruising speed of 865 kilometres at a height of 28,000 feet, was in itself a unique experience. Other travellers were going through the customary routine, i.e., apéritifs, cold meal, which I find unattractive, particularly at 3 a.m., purchases of duty-free cigarettes, liqueurs, etc., but I preferred to watch the ever changing scene below, culminating in the rise of the sun on the distant horizon.

I was going to join my guide at Bourg St. Pierre on the following Sunday morning. I passed the night from Saturday to Sunday in this small mountain village, near the Great St. Bernhard Pass, to get acclimatised to the higher altitude, and to see a former guide of mine who lives there, and with whom I made some great climbs nine and ten years ago. The declining number of tourists had forced him to give up this occupation in favour of a steady and gainful job with a local hydro-electric works. I had intended to stay at the Hotel Napoleon, where the great Emperor once slept, but declining tourist trade had resulted in its closure a few years ago. I was referred to an excellent nearby "Pension de Famille".

On Sunday morning, in glorious weather, I greeted my guide on arrival of the first Motor Coach of the Swiss Post, which was to take us over the Great St. Bernhard Pass to Aosta. Below the summit of the Pass, on the Swiss side, we passed the entrance of the new Traffic Tunnel, on which work is now in progress.

On the summit of the Pass, with its world-famous Hospice and Hotel, we made a customary halt of about 20 minutes. Near by stands the monument of the patron saint of mountaineers. A temple of Jupiter stood at this spot when the Roman Empire was at its zenith.

The Great St. Bernhard Pass is one of the most famous of all Alpine Passes. To-day, the Hospice of St. Bernhard is mainly known for the St. Bernhard Dogs romping about, and for the athletic looking Monks looking after them, but already Caesar used this Pass, and many great Emperors from Charles the Great up to Napoleon went this way. For Kings and Emperors, this crossing was merely an episode on their way to history; but for their soldiers, who followed with difficulty, the steep paths over unaccustomed heights were a way of terror, and when they at last reached Aosta and civilisation after a descent of more than 2,000 metres (in height), many must have felt to be near death. After this terror of the Alps, they were hardly fit to worry about the terrors of the battlefields, to which they were led by their Emperors.

Even in our times, a difference in height of 2,000 metres will strongly affect a human being. One feels such a difference, no matter whether one goes on foot or in a Cadillac. It is not only necessary to get acclimatised to heights, but also to lower lands. The descent from the summit of a Pass like the Great St. Bernhard is nevertheless one of the most impressive alpine experiences.

About 600 yards below the summit, we passed the Italian frontier post, and following some very steep zig-zags we motored down past the exit of the new Tunnel, and through some charming villages like Etroubles, St. Rhemy.

The Aosta Valley has justifiably been given the name of the "Pearl of the Alps". It covers about 3,240 square kilometres and has over 100,000 inhabitants. Although it is part of Italy, it has a certain amount of political autonomy. It is an imposing valley through which the Dora Baltea flows and from which to right and left branch thirteen lateral valleys, with a vast frame of the highest mountains of Europe.

From the central valley, attractive for its smiling towns and villages, for its castles and monuments of every period, one can

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