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VISIT OF INSTITUTION OF LOCOMOTIVE ENGINEERS TO BARROW-IN-FURNESS

A meeting of the Institution of Locomotive Engineers was held at Barrow-in-Furness, on 25th to 27th October, during which both the engineering and the shipbuilding sides of Vickers-Armstrongs were seen. Some 170 members and guests took part in this visit, the joint hosts to the Institution being Vickers-Armstrongs (Engineers) Ltd., and Sulzer Bros. (London) Ltd.

The shipyard and engineering works at Barrow together cover an area of about 150 acres and employ some 12,500 people.

With almost 8,000 employees, the engineering works of Vickers-Armstrongs (Engineers) Ltd., deals with a large variety of heavy engineering products, involving the use of some of the largest machine tools in Europe. Important products include marine gearing, steam turbines, cement-making and mining machines, and general engineering machinery of many types, and diesel engines for marine and rail traction applications.

Vickers-built marine diesel engines include Admiralty Standard Range One for submarines, the Vickers-Doxford type of up to 8,000 h.p., and the Vickers-Sulzer type of up to 24,000 b.h.p. Two 10,000 b.h.p. engines of this last-mentioned design are now being built at Barrow.

Of special interest to members of the Institution was the manufacture of Sulzer traction diesel engines, which are now in large-scale production. All three models of the LDA28 range are being produced — the 6, 8 and 12 cylinder versions — which develop outputs of 1,250, 1,550 and 2,500 h.p. respectively.

All these engines are being produced for British Railways diesel locomotives, a total of 603 having now been ordered representing a total of over one million horse-power. Of these engines, over 200 are in service.

The design of the Sulzer traction engine enables it to be produced anywhere in the world where general-purpose machinery is installed, but an outstanding feature of the whole production scheme at Barrow has been the aim to eliminate, wherever practicable, hand fitting both in the intermediate operations and on final assembly. This involves accurate machining, especially of those components which in common traction engine practice require attention by hand, such as scraping.

This accuracy facilitates the maintenance of engines during service, as well as enabling the high rate of production — the planned average is 18 engines per month — to be achieved. A further feature of Sulzer engine production is the pre-setting of all components, which obviates the need for tuning either on the test bed or in service.

One part of the visit was a tour of the shipyard, where, the previous Friday, 21st October, H.M. The Queen had launched "Dreadnought", Britain's first nuclear-powered submarine. The yard also has the distinction of building the largest passenger liner constructed in England. This is the Orient liner "Oriana" with a gross tonnage of 42,500 which will shortly enter service between the United Kingdom, Australia and the West Coast of America.

THE WEEK AT HOME

NEF/PIELKEN

On the first Monday in December, when the ordinary legislature period for this winter starts, the Swiss Parliament will discuss, as it does every year at this time, the estimates for the Federal Budget for 1961, a Report on which was published last week. For the first time in the history of the Confederation, estimated expenditure has exceeded the limits of three thousand million Swiss francs. In spite of this gigantic figure, Switzerland's Budget is balanced, as the various sources of revenue will continue to flow abundantly, in consequence of the steadily prevailing economic prosperity. The most important items of expenditure are in respect of the financing of the construction of national highways, the appropriations for the Swiss Army, especially for the acquisition of war material, and then the, unfortunately, ever increasing subsidies required for agriculture and the large sums required for the carrying out of various social insurance programmes, among these being the newest welfare scheme, namely that of Disablement Insurance. As already mentioned, the estimated receipts in the Budget keep pace with the estimated expenditure. At the same time one cannot overlook the fact that with the steady increase in receipts, there also exists the danger of the State becoming too free in its expenditure policy. This danger, however, exists only in respect of such appropriations on the part of the Government, the amount of which has not been established by Law. These so-called "elastic paragraphs", the interpretation of which can be readily expanded to meet individual cases, are used mostly in regard to State subsidies for Swiss agriculture. In this respect, although the Swiss legislator has established the principles, he has omitted to fix the extent or the ceiling of the State contributions. Thus, the Law declares that, under normal conditions, the production and the existence of the farming classes shall be assured. The Swiss Government must, therefore, pursue a price policy which ensures this principle. In the various Laws on Agriculture there is set down the obligation for the State to purchase all surplus agricultural production. On the other hand, there are no Laws which regulate production as a whole. Thus, when there are record harvests, which can so easily cause marketing difficulties, it may very well happen that the State is obliged to dig deep down in its pockets in order to buy the surplus production of the Swiss farmers.

This particular problem has just proved a subject for lively discussion among the public during the last few days, when the Swiss Cabinet fixed the prices for the coming six months, in respect of the various agricultural products which it might have to take over. These products consisted mainly of milk and other dairy products, fruit and potatoes.

In this connection a Popular Referendum, which is to be held on the Sunday prior to the beginning of the Winter Session of the Federal Parliament, is not without interest. This Referendum has proved necessary as the result of an Initiative against the Federal Decree regulating the price of milk. In the Decree passed by the Swiss Government the milk producers themselves must contribute to a large extent towards the financing of any surplus production of milk. By means of a complicated system, endeavours are made to reach, primarily, those producers of milk who try